

In the Darkroom:
International Development Photography and the Naturalistic Enthymeme

Erin Keoppen

A thesis
submitted in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of

Master of Arts

University of Washington

2021

Committee:

Leah Ceccarelli

Sunila Kale

Cricket Keating

Candice Rai

Program Authorized to Offer Degree:

Communication

©Copyright 2021

Erin Keoppen

University of Washington

Abstract

In the Darkroom:
International Development Photography and the Naturalistic Enthymeme

Erin Keoppen

Chair of Supervisory Committee:
Dr. Leah Ceccarelli
Department of Communication

This paper compares the darkroom as a transformative space where film photographers develop negative images to international development organizations that aim to bring light to the nearly 1.2 billion people who live without access to electricity worldwide. Through a visual rhetorical analysis of the uses of light, shadow and nostalgia imbued in two photography collections published by an Indian NGO that trains poor, illiterate grandmothers from villages across developing countries to become solar engineers, I extend the literature on the use of visual arguments by NGOs, a literature that largely focuses on how international development agencies based in the Global North portray development in the Global South. Largely fraught with the violent colonial trope of bringing “light” to the “darkness” and “naive innocence” of the rural poor, these artifacts are not that different from standard NGO visual arguments. This paper points to ways in which such NGOs might better adapt their visual arguments to align with their mission for postcolonial development.

In the Darkroom: International Development Photography and the Naturalistic Enthymeme

For the film photographer, the darkroom is a space of total control. Light and chemicals are carefully measured in order to create a properly developed image that balances between the darkness of shadow and the brightness of the image's highlights. In the darkroom, negative film is transformed into an enlarged positive image in a process early camera inventor Nicéphore Niépce called heliography, or "sun writing." His invention of the photo negative in the early 19th century led to the rapid development of modern photography. Exposing an asphalt-covered pewter plate to light in a portable camera obscura, Niépce captured what may be considered the first recorded image that did not completely fade away with time. This ability for rays of light to project, capture and reflect reality, and the mechanisms of the human eye that can know this reality through vision, have fascinated humans for thousands of years, dating back to the early use of camera obscura technologies in ancient China, Greece, and the Middle East. While largely overtaken by the convenience of digital photography since the 1970s, the nostalgia imbued in analog photography, through both the quality of the images and the process of darkroom development continues to captivate creators and viewers today.¹

In this paper, I explore the qualities of light, shadow and nostalgia saturated in the darkroom not through the history of early photography, but through drawing a parallel between this version of the darkroom and a different spectacle altogether: international development. International development organizations range from large international agencies like the United Nations and the World Bank, to foundations and nonprofit organizations like the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation and Kiva. Arising after World War II, international development efforts have grown out of a focus from the United States and allied nations in Western Europe

¹ "Photography Exposed: How to Develop Film in a Darkroom," *Invaluable*, February 27, 2019, <https://www.invaluable.com/blog/how-to-develop-film/>.

concerned with the economic growth, living conditions, and alleviation of poverty in previously colonized countries deemed least developed by standards such as the Gross Domestic Product and the Human Development Index. Established in the village of Tilonia, in the northwestern state of Rajasthan, India in 1972, Barefoot College is one of the few organizations from the Global South that has been continually named one of the top 20 Social Good Organizations in the world according to NGO Advisor, coming in at #18 in 2021.² Barefoot started out as a new model for development that rejected the work of outside organizations and focused on the integration of village-based knowledge with only modern technologies that could be understood and used by locals without outside assistance. Modeled after Gandhi's vision for the village as the basis for decentralized, egalitarian democracy, the Barefoot campus aimed to bring together the most marginalized rural peoples: women, people from lower castes, and day laborers, in a version of development that highlighted the valuable skills of illiterate, poor populations who have largely been left out of India's postcolonial promise for development. Nearly fifty years later, Barefoot College has expanded outwards not only into several more states in India, but in partnerships with governments, corporations, foundations and other nonprofit organizations around the developing world as a "first-of-its-kind women-centered, global network."³

Barefoot's development programs include improving access to clean water, healthcare, education, agricultural livelihoods, women's empowerment initiatives and solar electricity in rural areas across South Asia, Africa, Latin America, and the Pacific. They are most widely known for Solar Mamas, an Indian government-funded program that sponsors illiterate and

² "Meet the World's 200 Best Social Good Organizations for 2021," *NGO Advisor*, accessed May 20, 2021, <https://www.ngoadvisor.net/top-200-ngos-world>. As of 2021, Barefoot College and Barefoot College International operate as more distinctive operations, the former focusing on the day-to-day of the Tilonia campus and programs, and the latter employing staff from around the world in their global development efforts. This is noted for clarity throughout the text.

³ "Home," Barefoot College, accessed June 8, 2021, <https://www.barefootcollege.org/>.

semi-literate grandmothers from last mile communities to participate in a six-month training at their Tilonia campus to learn the basics of installation, maintenance and repairs for solar home lighting systems through the use of color coding, gestures or signs and “practical experience.”⁴ This approach is unique in that it targets a diverse demographic of women and invests in their abilities to become sustainable and innovative leaders in their own community development efforts. Upon returning home, community partners are meant to assist Solar Mamas in the installation of solar panels in their home and neighboring communities. According to their website as of May 2021, Barefoot has trained 2,200 Solar Mamas from 93 countries who have gone on to install 18,047 households with solar home lighting systems around the world.⁵

Drawing upon the material and metaphorical significance of bringing light to last mile communities, documentary photography has been central to Barefoot College’s ability to spread their message about their approach to development work to the media, donors, and business partners. While Barefoot has produced dozens of short documentary films and hundreds of images of their work over the past 50 years, this paper will focus on the two and only photography books, created by the organization about their work, published twenty years apart in 2000 and 2020.⁶ Through the creation of the photography books, which have both been subsequently displayed as art exhibits that advertise their organization, Barefoot has made

⁴ “Solar,” Barefoot College, accessed May 20, 2021, <https://www.barefootcollege.org/solution/solar/>. Barefoot’s Solar Engineering program is funded by the Indian Technical and Economic Cooperation Programme (ITEC) which has given out over \$2 billion USD in aid, grants and lines of credit to other Global South countries since its inception in the early 1960’s. For further reading on India’s augmentation of soft power via ITEC see, Shrey Khanna and P. Moorthy, “Analysing India’s Soft Power Functioning in the Twenty-first Century,” *India Quarterly* 73, no. 3 (2017): 292-311. In international development practice, “last mile” communities refer to rural, isolated areas, such as villages with no paved roads or lack of communication infrastructure.

⁵ “Solar,” Barefoot College.

⁶ This is not to mention the countless more images taken by outside partner organizations and media outlets which yield in a Google search of “Barefoot College Tilonia” over 25,000 results as of May 20, 2021.

powerful visual arguments for the efficacy of their trademark “barefoot approach” to international development through the aestheticizing effects of photography. Marking their vision for development before the start of their Solar Mamas program in 2000, and then after the spread of the program to Latin America in 2020, these two collections offer valuable insight into the ways in which, even when initiated by NGOs located in the Global South, practices of development are closely linked with the retrograde colonialist practices of representation taken up by development organizations more broadly. While the 2000 book *The Barefoot Photographers of Tilonia* and the 2020 book *Doña Luz: Stories of Latin America Solar Mamas* use different persuasive strategies, they both ultimately depend upon producing, preserving and circulating images of Otherness in order to solicit support from wealthy readers in the Global North. Development photography provides a crucial site for understanding the dynamics of visual argument, in particular, how specific rhetorical choices in visual texts may be appealing the consciousness of the global audiences they intend to activate and unintentionally undermining their own claim to offer a unique postcolonial approach.

Visual Rhetoric

Media studies scholar Henrietta Lidchi argues that development practice is reflected in and influenced by the images produced of it.⁷ Therefore, the practices of representation taken up by organizations could, presumably, tell us much about the practices of development they undertake. Lidchi asks, “Why is a realist, or documentary mode, of representation judged the most appropriate for development NGOs?”⁸ As “prolific cultural producers” NGOs often draw

⁷ Henrietta Lidchi, “Finding the Right Image: British Development NGOs and the Regulation of Imagery,” in *Humanitarian Photography: A History*, edited by Heide Fehrenbach and Davide Rodogno, (New York: Cambridge University Press Logo, 2014), 292.

⁸ Lidchi, “Finding the Right Image,” 292.

heavily upon documentary photography and film in order to articulate their vision of the problems and solutions for complex issues like global poverty in order to engage a variety of stakeholders who may be only distantly connected to their work on the ground. From extending the developmental citizenship project of the nation-state in which they are formed, to securing capital from international donors, to meeting the needs and grassroots mission of the people they serve, NGOs are constantly crafting visual arguments that can illustrate both the urgency of their work and prove that their work really does something in the communities they serve. On top of this, documentary photography, in the published reports, news media and websites where these images appear, is a predominant way in which NGOs assert their authority as knowledge producers on global issues like poverty and gender empowerment.

Rhetorical scholars Damian Smith Pfister and Carly S. Woods write that “... at minimum [documentary photography]... is continually making an argument about its own realism.”⁹ Building off of the work of rhetorical scholar Cara Finnegan, they point to the enthymematic turn in visual argumentation studies wherein scholars identify how audiences “fill in the blanks” about various visual mediums and the arguments made in them.¹⁰ As theorized in rhetorical studies since Aristotle’s *On Rhetoric*, an enthymeme is a “rhetorical syllogism” where a part of the argument (typically the major premise) is left out and must be supplied by the audience, whether that be through “common sense,” culturally specific knowledge or dominant ways of knowing or seeing. Because this argument’s power lies with the audience’s ability to fill in the blank, enthymematic arguments are always interactional, variable and somewhat unpredictable.

⁹ Damien Smith Pfister and Carly S. Woods, "The Unnaturalistic Enthymeme: Figuration, Interpretation, and Critique after Digital Mediation," in "Twenty Years of Visual Argument," ed. David Godden, Catherine H. Palczewski, and Leo Groarke, special issue, *Argumentation and Advocacy* 52, no. 4 (2016): 239.

¹⁰ Cara A. Finnegan, "The Naturalistic Enthymeme and Visual Argument: Photographic Representation in the "Skull Controversy," *Argumentation and Advocacy* 37, no. 3 (2001): 133-49.

Visual arguments made through documentary photography are inherently enthymematic in that the audience must always supply the hidden premises that the images are realistic by the nature of the medium. Regardless of any other arguments that the photographer is intending, there is always the underlying “naturalistic enthymeme” where the audience assumes that the photographs are “true” or “real” on some level until proven otherwise. Philosopher Barbara Savedoff argues that, “We may know that what the photograph seems to show is not real, but we may still see it as real.”¹¹ In the era of digital photography, audiences may automatically assume that some photographs are manipulated through post-production technologies like Photoshop, but still the topos of naturalism in photography remains a shared assumption in public argument. This makes significant manipulations, once revealed, all the more troubling to audiences.

Cara Finnegan’s work coining the term “naturalistic enthymeme” developed from her analysis of the “Skull Controversy” in the late 1930s over the famous photograph taken by government photographer Arthur Rothstein of a cow skull resting on the parched plains of South Dakota during the Great Depression. The image created an uproar when it was revealed by a local newspaper that Rothstein had moved the skull from a grassy location to an alkali flat (which is always dry no matter the drought level) to make the photograph seem more aesthetically dramatic. The national audience, who assumed that the photographic form would have accurately represented the drought and desolation of rural farmers in South Dakota at the time, heard about this manipulation and nearly forced the government’s Resettlement Administration photography project, which documented much of the Great Depression and New Deal Era, to shut down because it “faked” its photographs.

Similar controversies over photographic manipulation have been raised in international crisis reporting. Kevin Carter’s 1994 Pulitzer Prize-winning photograph “The vulture and the

¹¹ Finnegan, “Naturalistic Enthymeme,” 141.

little girl” shows a frail toddler being stalked by a vulture while collapsed on the way to a United Nations feed center in Ayod, South Sudan. Not only was the child unnamed and misgendered, as the “struggling girl” was a boy named Kong Nyong, but critical questions of the ethics in photographic reporting of the suffering of others came to the surface. Outcry over the status of the child summoned the *New York Times*, who had originally published the image along with a feature about Sudan, to follow-up in their publication that “... she recovered enough to resume her trek after the vulture was chased away.” While there was pushback from readers about the ethical obligation of the photographer to help the child, the exploitative nature of taking photographs of people who may not be able to give informed consent and the framing of suffering or poor people as victims has been called into question more broadly in international development circles.¹²

Global North organizations have been widely critiqued for their practices of representation that, even with the adoption of more ethical practices that are said to depict aid and development in more accurate, active and empowering ways, are still steeped in neocolonial legacies of portraying Otherness and poverty in a victimizing manner. Largely unexplored in this literature is the influential work of Global South NGOs, like Barefoot College, as cultural producers that bring their own visions of aid and development to global audiences. Critical development scholar Ananya Roy writes in her 2010 book *Poverty Capital* that in the contesting practices of development, organizations also create contesting “poverty knowledge.”¹³ In order to do the work of economic development, organizations must also generate information about those

¹² “The Vulture and the Little Girl,” Wikipedia, May 10, 2021, [¹³ Ananya Roy, *Poverty Capital: Microfinance and the Making of Development* \(New York: Routledge, 2010\), 31.](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_vulture_and_the_little_girl#:~:text=Due%20to%20the%20public%20reaction,to%20a%20feeding%20centre%20in;AlbertoRojas,“KongNyong,elNiñoqueSobrevivióalBuitre,”February21,2011,https://www.elmundo.es/elmundo/2011/02/18/comunicacion/1298054483.html;“StarvingChildandVulture,”Time100Photos,accessedMay20,2021,http://100photos.time.com/photos/kevin-carter-starving-child-vulture.”</p>
</div>
<div data-bbox=)

who they aim to develop, therefore imbuing circuits of knowledge with circuits of capital. I argue that this knowledge, while steeped in analytical data, is also profoundly visual, allowing organizations to show what was/is really there and what they were/are really doing about it. While more ethical and accurate reporting may have changed the photograph of the child and the vulture, this still does not address the larger underlying questions of what it means to represent and see distant others.

The naturalistic enthymeme points to the ways in which documentary photographs used by international development organizations make their arguments by continually arguing for their own realism, in other words, what was/is really there and what they were/are really doing about it. According to Finnegan, documentary photographs are assumed to be real on three levels: they represent something in the world (representational realism) that was in front of a camera at a particular time and place (ontological realism) and most importantly, through the assumed truthfulness of the device, the image has not been manipulated by a photographer (mechanical realism). Regardless of the visual argument, wherein the audience must also supply “culturally specific assumptions (hidden premises) to the publicly articulated premises of a rhetor,” the documentary photograph is always imbued with some sense of realism.¹⁴

I argue that the presumed naturalism of photography is heightened in international development photography produced by Global South organizations like Barefoot College. Because of their origins and positioning in a developing country “with no help from the outside,” their use of photography has the possibility of articulating both the naturalism of the image as ontologically and mechanically true, as well as of the representation of their development practices as more effective. I will first turn to Barefoot’s 2020 photography book *Doña Luz* which largely fails to

¹⁴ Pfister and Woods, “The Unnaturalistic Enthymeme,” 237.

draw upon the naturalistic enthymeme persuasively because it relies heavily on colonialist tropes in the documentary travel photography genre that contradict their stated mission. I will then analyze their 2000 photography book *The Barefoot Photographers of Tilonia*, to show some ways that they successfully draw upon the naturalistic enthymeme to convey the uniqueness of their mission. However, even that early book fails to live up to the NGO's promise, so I end by turning a critical eye on their centering of Western audiences for their work.

Doña Luz

Doña Luz: Stories of Latin American Solar Mamas was published in 2020 and features professional photographs and stories profiling 15 indigenous women from Mexico, Guatemala, Belize, El Salvador, and Ecuador who were selected by Barefoot College for the Solar Mama's training program prior to 2015. The book was funded in part by Barefoot College and in part through crowdfunding by the author and photographer, French travel documentarian Cédric Houin, who served as a consultant for the creative team at Barefoot College International from 2013-2016. The book is narrated from Houin's perspective as a representative of the organization and reads as a kind of travelogue of his solo journey through the remote areas of Latin America where Barefoot works. While told from his first-person perspective, Houin's image never appears in the book and his methods for reporting the stories and historical anecdotes are left to the imagination. However, his voice is centered throughout the book in long quoted dialogues translated from his conversations in Spanish, and his many internal musings which show that the book is meant to be as much about his experiences as it is the women themselves.

The women profiled in the book were either about to leave their country for the first time to fly to India for the six-month training or had recently returned and were in the process of installing solar panels in their communities. There is a section for each country (Mexico,

Guatemala, Belize, El Salvador, and Ecuador) and within those sections, chapters dedicated to the different villages Houin visited and the people who he met and stayed with. Houin describes in the promotional video trailer for the book that the mission of the women is “to bring solar electricity to their communities and change their course of life.” In the trailer, viewers are invited to “Witness their transformation as solar engineers” and “Discover untold stories of resistance, courage, persistence, empowerment.” Furthermore, viewers are told that, “By supporting the publishing of this book, you [the viewer] bring light to these stories.”¹⁵ However, by centering Houin as the primary agent in this development narrative, the book ends up telling the audience more about the author’s own transformational journey than the women being “transformed” by their development work.

The introduction and conclusion of the book were written by the Director of Barefoot’s Latin America and Caribbean programs, Rodrigo Paris. His introduction gives some context for how the idea for the book came about, as he writes in the opening lines that:

Latin America was halfway through the second decade of the 21st century in 2015. A couple of years earlier, an Indian from India arrived at these lands not to conquer them, but in an act of solidarity and empathy, to help their peoples, their villages, their indigenous. His name, Bunker Roy, the founder of Barefoot College.

Setting out from these first few sentences that the Barefoot approach to development is an “act of solidarity and empathy,” it is then surprising that he writes in the following paragraphs about how as the Director of the Latin America program he “...was entrusted to discover new environments, countries and regions where other women would follow... [the Solar Mama] path of transformation.” He positions himself as an explorer who found the indigenous women in their unknown, undeveloped land. Paris states that:

¹⁵ “Doña Luz,” accessed May 20, 2021, <https://www.barefootcollege-donaluz.org/>.

With a couple of years of work and many miles of experience from the confines of Mexico, the ancient Mayan areas of Guatemala, the Pacific coast of El Salvador, the idyllic magic of Belize or the deep beauty of the Amazon in Ecuador, emerged the idea of this book.... Houin... was commissioned to follow some of the steps that Bunker Roy and later I had taken, and portray the faces of the solar women, their families, their souls, their lives disappeared in gardens of Eden marked by oblivion.

While it is in line with Barefoot's mission to forge new relationships with last-mile communities that have not received adequate assistance from their governments or other development agencies, Paris's introduction leans heavily on the colonialist trope that less developed countries are frozen in the past and are characterized by their captivating natural beauty and the simplicity and truthful innocence evident in the faces of their indigenous peoples. He states that, "In the process of capturing these photographs... the author found and unmasked the humanity of the protagonists," further exacerbating the violent and exploitative trope that indigenous peoples are seen as less-than-human and that through contact with Western explorers and/or audiences, their lives and stories are "brought to light" as meaningful. Furthermore, through Barefoot College, he argues, the women's lives are given a purpose, he writes:

Even if their habitats were still in darkness, they would already have their own light, that of the soul and spirit that through the experience at Barefoot College renews those mothers, grandmothers to return home to fight for a structural change in their family, their community and the rest of their time on earth.

While aiming to support and encourage Solar Mamas to fight for structural change upon returning home from the program is a deeply commendable goal for the program, this characterization again falls into this colonial trope of Otherness. He states that even if the women

are not ultimately able to literally bring light to their communities, (characterized problematically here as “habitats”), the training would at least bring its own metaphorical light to these women to renew their soul and spirit. This message reinforces the violent dehumanization wrought in the idea of Western empires bringing light to “dark” people on “dark continents” in order to justify exploitation and systematic oppression under colonialism. While the bringing of solar lighting to remote areas without access to electricity is clearly a praiseworthy endeavor, this introduction by the director taints the intended messaging of the book and changes how one might understand Houin’s journey as one that falls into centering the white, Western male’s experience of Otherness.

Unsurprisingly, light and shadow are utilized with deep intention by Houin in nearly every image of the collection. He writes in the book about the need to arrive at village destinations before nightfall, otherwise he will lose a day of shooting, as there is complete darkness once the sun goes down. The accompanying stories from each of the women emphasize the need to work during daylight hours as one cannot get much done by candlelight. All of the women are photographed in close-up portraits that work, with the accompanying text, to give a sense for both their need for electricity and the daunting and epic journey before them. Houin uses light to depict the women as shining brightly and emerging from the dark shadows surrounding them.

Catarina is the first soon-to-be Solar Mama who Houin visits in the village of Pal, Guatemala. Houin goes to Catarina’s house in the early morning as she prepares breakfast for her family and tends to her beloved chickens that dart around the dirt floor by her open fireplace. The first picture of Catarina presents her steeped in strips of glowing morning light that filters through the slats of her house (fig. 1.1). The smokey strobe-like light cuts lines through the

dimly lit house and projects straight onto her torso and head, giving her the glowing halo of an angel or deity. She looks down across the frame in a gaze that aligns with the direction of the light. The camera exposes the viewer to Catarina, a beam of light, in the otherwise dark room. In another photo, Catarina is seated by the fire, her full body visible in the background while the morning light cuts across her from above in what appears to be a combination of a lens flare and the smoky or dusty quality of the air, creating specks of light in the foreground (fig. 1.2). Giving a shimmering and textured effect to the otherwise glossy, digital image, Catarina again is captured with a magical, dream-like vividness. While there are some photos featured from throughout the daytime, Houin mainly features those taken in the morning that show the dark of the house and at night, when Catarina's family uses candles. He writes:

Night falls quickly in the mountains of Pal. The first candles are lit around 6 pm. Their trembling flames mix with the glow from the hearth, rendering almost indistinguishable the immediate surroundings. If this lighting is magic for photographers, for these people, it is a symbol of the indifference to their plight. For the first time in my life, I discover life in total obscurity.¹⁶

Other photos of Catarina in Guatemala as well as Maria, Rosa, Beltran and Margarita in Mexico, who all are yet to depart, show the women and their families by candlelight. All of the women either hold candles, light religious altars or are pictured glowing in the reddish-amber light of the candles that some describe having to go out to buy on a daily basis to light their homes. The warm glow of the photos has the quality of an old, yellowed photograph, which gives a sense of a nostalgic past in both the form of the photo and in the setting, a village untouched by the modern infrastructure of electricity. The reddish-amber quality of the light appears like a

¹⁶ Cedric Houin, *Doña Luz: Stories of Latin American Solar Mamas* (self-pub: Dropbox, 2020), 44, <https://www.barefootcollege-donaluz.org/product-page/dona-luz-e-book>.

darkroom studio, where photographers work by a safelight of the same reddish-amber hue so as to not ruin the film with brighter blue or white light exposure (Figure 2).



Figure 1.1



Figure 1.2



Figure 2.

While there are several photos in the collection taken during the day, these photographs taken in the half-light, and lit by candles, are prominently featured on the Barefoot's website, as well as selected as singular prints for sale ranging from \$150 to \$600 by the College. The stories and photos in the book are also used on Barefoot's blog, social media, emails to their subscribers and in a separate promotional website for the book where a hardcopy is for sale for \$60. On the promotional website there is also an option to "Produce an exhibition at your office or in your city!" Under this tab, one can enter contact details to request materials for a pop-up exhibition. Underneath the request form, there are nine uncaptioned photos of a pop-up exhibition of *Doña*

Luz, in what appears to be a gallery or book release party. Because these photos are featured as an example by Barefoot College, it gives some sense for how the collection was designed for reception and what photographs they may select for the exhibitions.



Figure 3.1



Figure 3.2

In the nine shots of a pop-up gallery viewing of example photos, there are dozens of happy, dressed-up people conversing over glasses of wine while viewing an exhibition of *Doña Luz* photographs. The *Doña Luz* photographs pinned on the walls are either in the background or being looked at directly by people who are pictured from the back or side. Most of the people in

the gallery are wearing Western clothes, and a few wear saris or kurtas. From these few contextual clues, it is difficult to get a sense for location or who the people are. In these images, the *Doña Luz* photographs seem to be conversation starters as well as objects of wonder (fig. 3.1, fig. 3.2). While the exhibit has photographs of the women before going to Tilonia and photos of the women after the training with their new solar devices, the three photos that stop viewers are of the women in candlelight. Two people, in separate photos, are looking at the same *Doña Luz* image of three girls posing in what appears to be traditional, beaded clothing behind a candle set in the dirt (fig. 3.2). In the *Doña Luz* image, the candle lights up the girls' semi-clothed bodies, and like the book itself, the photo does not have a caption with the subjects' names. Interestingly, the photo is one of the few images from *Doña Luz* where people aren't wearing Western clothing, yet it is the one most displayed here. In *Doña Luz* there is more context for the photo, as readers can learn in the body of the chapter that the photo is from Houin's stop in the village of Pompeya, Ecuador to meet one of the Solar Mamas, Estella, who has recently returned and is awaiting her solar panels. The girls are her youngest daughter and her friends who are organizing a goodbye celebration for Houin. They wear intricately beaded tops, skirts, and headbands with red designs painted on their faces. Houin writes that it is a goodbye performance arranged for him of a "traditional dance" to Cumbia music. The image looks like it might have been pulled from the pages of National Geographic where "native women" are often photographed in ornate "costumes," sometimes bare-chested and often in the absence of any detailed captions that discuss gender, culture or the otherwise objectifying view historically taken in their publication.¹⁷ Houin, a freelancer for National Geographic himself, won their world-wide Best Traveller Photo Contest in 2012 for his photo of an unnamed Kyrgyz woman and her daughter in ornate traditional

¹⁷Jessamyn Neuhaus, "Colonizing The Coffee Table: 'National Geographic' Magazine and Erasure of Difference in the Representation of Women," *American Periodicals*, Vol 7 (1997).

clothing.¹⁸ In line with much of Houin's other work photographing "major transitions" such as "uncontacted tribes' to 'contacted tribes' in Ecuador, from surviving to disappearing in Afghanistan and Borneo, from illiteracy to literacy in rural India," as his author biography and professional website state, the images and text of Doña Luz read similarly as a National Geographic travelogue, where we are to assume the authentic and realistic assessment of a foreign culture through the traveler's eyes. Interspersed with several moments of uncertainty, failure, and even small criticisms and complaints of the Solar Mama's program, the audience is to understand his arduous and epic journey as giving an honest, accurate account. While Houin attempts to add in details about the political, economic and social infrastructures of the villages and countryside he traverses Mexico, Guatemala, Belize, El Salvador, and Ecuador, there is little discussion of the "structural changes" needed nor the racialized, gendered oppression faced by the indigenous women in the book.

There is one other image from the pop-up gallery that shows people stopping to look closer at the photos (fig. 3.2). It is of two white men, one in a long kurta and the other in button-down shirt and slacks, wine glasses in hand, gazing intently at a photograph of a candlelit altar (fig. 4). As they lean in to study the image, we see the man in the button-down's full reflection overlaid on top of the glass frame of the photo to the point that the photograph itself is obscured. The image is not of the actual photograph from the exhibit, but the man's reflection which shows his inquisitive expression. While the pop-up exhibition is only a fragment of the reception of these photographs, they provide further insight into how Barefoot may have designed this collection for reception as an object of wonder and conversation. This photo of the reception is more about the viewer than it is the subject in the picture hung on the wall.

¹⁸ Houin himself appeared on the cover of National Geographic China in December 2016. "Cover of National Geographic China!" January 17, 2017, https://www.varialstudio.com/journal/blog_posts/NationalGeographicChina.

Photographs from the latter half of the book contrast with the first half by showing the solar devices in use by the Solar Mamas who installed them. Similarly aligned with light, these photos capture the starkly different quality of the blue and white light of the devices in and outside of their homes. Where earlier pictures centered a candle on an altar (as mentioned above), a later photo centers a solar lantern and a television (powered by a solar charging station) that illuminate the religious pictures and statues above them (fig. 4). In one of the last images of the book, a woman who is not identified is also lit by the glow of a solar-charged device (fig. 5).¹⁹ While she is not identifiably one of the Solar Mamas featured, she has received the benefits



¹⁹ There are no captions on any of the photos in the book leaving the viewer to guess at who the other people are.



Figure 4.

of their hard work. She stands outside in the dark, directly below a full moon which aligns with her bowed head in the middle of the frame. She types on a cell phone that glows brightly on her face, positioning her in a progression from moon to woman to solar-charged device. The composition of the photo, similar to several others in the book that depict the illumination of hand-held solar-powered charged devices, communicates to the viewer the transformation that electricity has initiated through Barefoot College. The powerful imagery of hand-held lighting devices and the one-room house now lit by solar power, contrasts with the otherwise dark village and jungle in the background of the photo. This also advances the narrative of the epic and arduous journey of the Solar Mamas who will travel far from the darkness of their homes and with great difficulty bring back light to these remote places.



Figure 5.



Figure 6.

However, it also shows the changes that will come about when the beauty of the candlelit images is replaced with the blue light of electricity and modernity (fig. 6). The images and

quality of the light of the solar devices throughout the latter half of the book are nowhere near as entrancing or beautiful as those taken by candlelight. Barefoot College itself sells and features the images by candlelight just as frequently as those showing the use and importance of their solar devices. This creates a juxtaposition for the viewer who presumably agrees with the important mission of the Solar Mamas program while also enjoying the nostalgic beauty of the dark rooms displayed in the book. This shift draws from a kind of imperialist nostalgia on the part of Barefoot College, as described by cultural anthropologist Renato Rosaldo, as the “particular nostalgia... where people mourn the passing of what they themselves have transformed.”²⁰ While Barefoot College is not destroying the culture of the communities it works in, they are aiming to fundamentally change them. In this sense, imperialist nostalgia is a useful concept in a new era of globalization and capitalism where the work of modernizing and developing indigenous ways of life (even with the purpose of providing resources or infrastructure) is carried out not only by colonial or neocolonial force, but by the more seemingly benign missions of development organizations. The visual arguments made in *Doña Luz* reflect these tensions, as they show the last glimpses of something they ultimately aim to transform. Rosaldo writes that, “In this ideologically constructed world of ongoing progressive change, putatively static savage societies become a stable reference point for defining (the felicitous progress of) civilized identity.”²¹ As a development organization hoping to avoid colonialist tropes and show a different way in which development can be done without destroying indigenous cultures and ways of life, this was not an effective persuasive structure or set of visual arguments for the *Dona Luz* book. I will now turn to their 2000 book, *The Barefoot Photographers of Tilonia*, to show some of the ways that they have more effectively drawn upon

²⁰ Renato Rosaldo, “Imperialist Nostalgia,” *Representations*, no. 26 (1989), 108.

²¹ Rosaldo, “Imperialist Nostalgia,” 108.

visual arguments in order to represent their approach to development, while still troubling how these arguments fall into problematic colonialist tropes that center Western audiences.

The Barefoot Photographers of Tilonia

The Barefoot Photographers of Tilonia: Where Tradition and Vision Meet was the first photography book published by the organization in 2000; there was an accompanying photo exhibition at the Brunei Gallery at the School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS) in London from April 11 to June 17, 2005. Evidence of the exhibit's success was published in the "Highlights of the Year" of the 2005 SOAS Alumni Magazine which features a large candid photo of the Prince of Wales making a private visit to the exhibit. He is greeted joyfully in the photograph by one of the curators, Varda Polak-Sahm, and Barefoot's founder Bunker Roy. This fragment of the exhibit's reception echoes a kind of world diplomacy on the part of Barefoot College. Not only is the organization connected to the prestigious alumni of SOAS, but a member of the Royal Family, who by the implication of his "private showing" at the exhibit, celebrates their work and helps establish their prestige as an organization. The photographs from the exhibition were further circulated on their website, print media, and republished through popular sources like BBC News.²²

It is also clear from the first sentence of the introduction of the book that the intended audience for the collection is Westerner readers. The Barefoot authors write:

For each Westerner the huge country of India is and remains fascinating and intimidating at the same time: a country with a very rich and old culture, one of the leading nations in modern communication, and at the same time deeply rooted in old traditions like the

²² Sanjay Suri, "In Pictures: Villagers' Barefoot College," accessed May 20, 2021, http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/shared/spl/hi/picture_gallery/05/south_asia_villagers0_barefoot_college/html/1.stm.

caste system which blocks the way to education and development for the majority of the poor population.²³

The book itself becomes an object through which Westerners, who are in the same introduction rejected for “enslaving” others with their technology, and then partially redeemed as useful when combined with “centuries old techniques,” can go on a journey of discovering the superior authenticity of Barefoot College. The book allows readers to discover this “fascinating and intimidating” country and learn about how these tensions are harmonized in their superior development work. The photography book itself documents nearly 30 years of Barefoot’s work in Tilonia and surrounding villages at a point just before their global expansion as Barefoot College International.²⁴ Written anonymously by Barefoot staff and curated by Israeli photographers Varda Polak-Sahm and Eyal Perry, the collection is a selection of photographs from an archive of over 100,000 black-and-white and color photos, negatives and slides taken by residents since the college’s inception.

In their forward to the book, curators Perry and Polak-Sahm write, “This collection of naive photography was discovered recently by chance – in a bad condition due to the blistering heat of the Rajasthani desert.”²⁵ While readers do not gain the specifics of how it was “discovered” or by whom, the curators seem to credit themselves as the saviors of the archive. While significantly less present than professional photographer Houin was in the *Doña Luz* book, this framing does still credit “outsiders” in doing the work, in this case, of representing the organization. The photos are presumably intended to communicate Barefoot’s unique and hands-on approach to development and social change, and thus the choice to bring in two Israeli

²³ *The Barefoot Photographers of Tilonia* (New Delhi: Lustre Press Pvt. Ltd, 2000), 6.

²⁴ One section shows their pilot work in Ladakh, Kashmir, India.

²⁵ *Barefoot Photographers of Tilonia*, 9.

curators to do this work weakens their ethos of authenticity and self-reliance. However, the overall strategy of the book is far more effective than the strategy used in *Dona Luz*. In the introduction to the collection, the curators write of the photographs:

This archive is probably unique. It represents 29 years of authentic photographic documentation conducted by anonymous, untrained rural photographers.... It is difficult to refer to them as amateur photographers, since they had never had any contact with magazines, exhibitions, family photo albums, advertisements or any other photography-related mass media... The result of the 29 years of rural photo documentation affords us rare insight into the original nature of photography. The book and the exhibition bring to light a treasure trove of great beauty, and we are truly fortunate that its pearls are not only of high aesthetic value but have preserved impressions of touching humanity, snapshots of life at Barefoot College.²⁶

Seamlessly working into the narrative that Barefoot College itself is unique and untrained and utilizes rare insight into traditional knowledge of sustainability that show the efficacy of their approach to development, the book draws a parallel between the photographs and the organization. Just as Barefoot has aimed to preserve humanity and traditional livelihoods even while introducing modern technology, the photographs stand in for the evidence that their methods work. The photographs are not only evidence for the development work done at Barefoot but the photographic process itself stands in as a metaphor for development. The idea that even the untrained photographer is able to create something of “high aesthetic value” runs parallel to the idea that even the illiterate villager has something to teach the urban professional about development. In addition, the process of preserving and capturing an “authentic” or

²⁶ *Barefoot Photographers of Tilonia*, 9.

“naive” version of reality links to the ethos of the organization to protect tradition while introducing only what can be understood and used by villagers. In the pre-2000 organization, cameras were possibly a new, unfamiliar technology that villagers could indeed master, as evidenced by their “high aesthetic value” photos. While intermittently captioned, anonymous and undated, the images in the book broadly contrast what might be considered the “traditional” Indian village with “modern” forms of technology.

Falling in line with the naturalistic enthymeme, this textual framing also emphasizes the idea that because the photographers are not trained and have presumably never been exposed to other forms of photographic media, they are not manipulating or editing the photos in the way perhaps a professional photographer would. The simplicity of the “one day” photographer infuses a certain truthfulness in the device itself, as audiences can imagine through the “original nature of photography,” the film camera or simple digital camera reproduces what is seen by the photographers, which might not be the case with a more advanced device used and manipulated by a professional. The idea that the camera is more basic, and therefore more like the older versions of film photography adds to the “insight” of the images that give a more “true” or “real” version of Barefoot College through the photographers’ eyes. However, this isn’t without its own pitfalls. The curators write that it is “difficult to refer to them as amateur photographers” as their eyes are so untrained to this type of media that readers may even assume that they are truly like people in the early 1800s who had never seen a recorded image. This plays into the idea that the local people who work at Barefoot College are somehow from an earlier and less advanced time, which decidedly undercuts their work by falling into deeply problematic stereotypes that they hope to dispel in working with rural peoples as equal partners in their own development.

Stretching this argument, there is a seamlessness implied between camera and photographer, both mechanical in their role, that may be extended to the resulting photographs on a representational and ontological level. If the photographers and the device itself are naive, then the idea that the photos have been professionally staged, or that the photographers would be trying to deceive viewers seems less probable. While an outside professional who comes into an unfamiliar village, or any culture that is not their own, might take photos of people and things “out of context” that lack representational value (such as Houin’s photos), the position of the photographers as the very people who are also pictured and deeply embedded in what is really there, imbues the images with a greater sense of realism. The fact that the photographers themselves are as anonymous as many of the people in the photos allows the audience to believe that anyone in the photos could have been a photographer as well.

However, this is also not without its problems. Of the 97 photographs in the book, only seven people are named in the captions.²⁷ While there are around ten landscape photos, in the remaining 83 photos that include portraits or groups of people, names are lacking. While this is largely a constraint of an archive, which “discovered recently by chance – in a bad condition due to the blistering heat of the Rajasthani desert,” we can assume largely lacked indexing, it adds to the sense in which these “unique” and “untrained” images of development are being discovered by not only the curators, but the readers themselves. The collection itself is described as a “treasure trove of great beauty” filled with “pearls... not only of high aesthetic value but [that] have preserved impressions of touching humanity, snapshots of... life.”²⁸ If the curators, and maybe even the readers, are discovering the value of the photos, by nature of the metaphor they

²⁷ There are several other names of participants in the text of the book who are not clearly photographed or identified in the collection.

²⁸ *Barefoot Photographers of Tilonia*, 9.

are positioned as explorers or pirates, looting and profiting off of a treasure chest filled with these rare and natural photographs, the pearls. Again, this does not bode well for an organization that positions itself as taking a postcolonial approach to development work rooted in a community that does not need to be “discovered” by outsiders to find valuable, workable solutions to development problems.

While intermittently captioned, anonymous and undated, the images in the book broadly contrast “tradition” as represented by the appearance of the campus and local people in Tilonia and “vision,” in the form of the people working with modern technology. Several photos depict women as leaders, doers and makers in ways that seem to be constructed for the audience, via the captioning, as surprising or unusual for women in Tilonia.²⁹ One black-and-white photo centers three women working to operate a new hand pump station, observed by a crowd of ambivalent onlookers. Two of the women, in full sunlight, have their faces completely covered, while the other’s long uncovered hair falls to her side as she leans forward in the physical effort required to work the pump. The caption underneath reads: “At the beginning it was provocative and sensational, and extremely entertaining. Women doing men’s work – previously the privilege of experts from distant towns” (fig. 7). Several photographs show women at handpumps, one of Barefoot’s signature projects, with captions such as “The person in charge of this handpump repair job is a woman. The men are her helpers,” further showing how gender roles are reversed (fig. 8). The photos of women, either working at a hand pump, building structures or threshing in the field, rarely show their faces, either due to ghunghat (veiling) practices or through the natural covering of dark shadows in the pictures (fig. 9).³⁰ It is difficult to determine if this was a conscious choice on the part of the photographers to portray the women with more modesty or

²⁹ I refer to women, broadly speaking, across age, caste, marital status and other locally identifiable differences.

³⁰ Ghunghat is observed by some Hindu, Muslim, Sikh and Jain women across the Hindi belt of northern India.

anonymity, if it is an affordance of taking pictures out in the bright desert sun or if these images for some reason appeared to be the more “highly aesthetic” to the curators. In any case, as a result, women’s faces are almost never highlighted in the book. In the instances where a woman’s face is well-lit, the photos are either of a young girl or older woman.



At the beginning it was still provocative and sensational, and extremely entertaining: women doing men's work -- previously the privilege of experts from distant towns.

Figure 7.



(Facing page and above): The person in charge of this handpump repair job is a woman; the men are her helpers.

Figure 8.



Figure 9.

One of the few exceptions to this is a photograph of Lalita, whose name we learn from a long block quote testimony below her picture. She wears bright orange, patterned clothing and a green head-covering and sits at a desk with a similarly vibrant blue and orange tablecloth. In front of her is a large, blocky desktop computer, which she stares at with determination, hands

perched at the keyboard. In the caption she explains her reluctance to partake in continued education at Barefoot College after having “discontinued” her education 15 years previously. In her testimony, tradition and modernity are brought together seamlessly:

In 1991 I started to learn how to handle computers. I was very scared to discard my ghunghat (veil) because before I had not set a foot outside the house. However, when I started to leave home regularly, my fears and doubts disappeared all by themselves. Now, I can mix, interact, with anyone quite freely. I don’t have any problems doing my work. I can handle computers as well as the Xerox machine... I’m no longer afraid; I’ve gained a lot of self confidence.³¹

This image and testimony successfully bring together tradition and vision. Any of the “fears and doubts” that would come up against Barefoot’s education or new technologies “disappeared all by themselves.” Through the photograph, it appears that Lalita still seems to maintain a semblance of her “tradition” by practicing partial modesty in her covered hair, while being able to leave the house and work (see fig. 10).

While the content of the photographs in the book clearly makes arguments for Barefoot’s approach to development, the form and qualities of the images are also salient to the visual arguments made. The “naive” nature of the photographers, who the curators evaluate as having no prior aesthetic training that would indicate their ability to compose, light or focus a photo through their camera lens, allows for a reading of the photographs as unposed and depicting the “truth” of what is really on the ground. Viewers are invited to see the photographs as evidence of the power of the organization and their undisturbed vision of the college is offered as a beautiful testament to humanity “untouched” by editing, framing or outside influence.

³¹ *The Barefoot Photographers of Tilonia*, 85. The testimony is presumably translated into English.



COMPUTERS

"My name is Lalita. Almost 15 years after discontinuing my education, I was advised to learn how to handle a computer. My first reaction was to say NO. However Ratan Devi, another member of Barefoot College, kept on trying to persuade me. I eventually relented. At home everyone was sceptical. How could someone like me with so very few qualifications handle a computer? You'll never manage it, they said. However, Bunker countered that one needed no previous training. You can learn what you need gradually. In 1991 I started learning how to handle computers. I was very scared to discard my ghungat (veil) because before I had not set a foot outside the house. However, when I started to leave home regularly, my fears and doubts disappeared all by themselves. Now, I can mix, interact with anyone quite freely. I don't have any problems doing my work. I can handle computers as well as the Xerox machine. I know that you need some knowledge of English to handle computers. At Barefoot College, Tilonia, our rural women operate computers, and they have passed only sixth, seventh and eighth grades! I have picked up a bit of English. I'm no longer afraid; I have gained a lot of self-confidence. People often ask me what I am doing out here. I then tell them I work on computers at Barefoot College in Tilonia. I must have got my MA, they think. Then I smile and say I have half an MA. They are amazed and say I certainly must be well qualified."

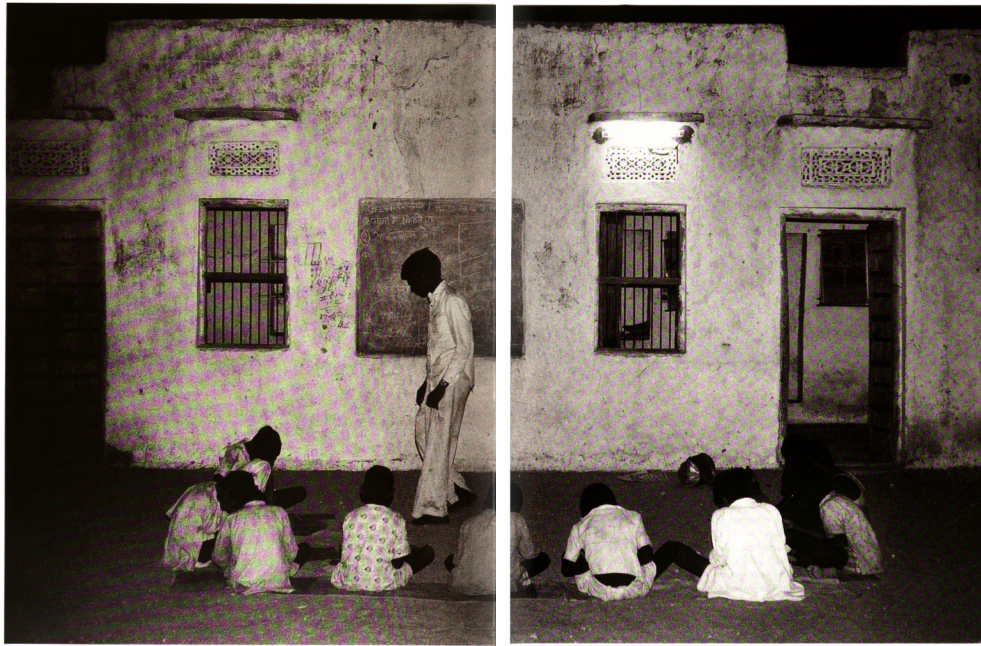
| Lalita |
Barefoot Computer Operator

85

Figure 10.

Of the over 100,000 photos that curators could have chosen for the book, they selected a striking number that were taken at night or otherwise in partial or total shadow. Some of the (presumably older) black and white photos of their night school programs look as if they are negative slides of film photographs themselves. One picture of a Barefoot-run night school shows an outdoor classroom where a teacher, up against a chalkboard, is surrounded by a

semi-circle of young children sitting cross-legged on the floor around him. The bodies of the students, whose backs are turned to the camera and heads bow diligently toward their writing in front of them, are hardly visible to the camera except for the bright white of their clothing. The teacher, whose body and face are in profile to the camera, is similarly darkened so that he is rendered featureless. Except for the glare of the overhead solar light that powers the night school, the image seems to be an inversion of what would typically be featured in documentary photographs on development projects.³² We can see the classroom, the solar light, and the blackboard but not anything identifiable, emotive or distinctive about the people in it (fig. 11).



One of a hundred night schools lit by solar energy.

Figure 11.

Similarly, a two-page color photograph of solar panels charging in the sun prominently features the technologies of light as the main event, while in the background of the image a person sits inside a building in complete shadow. The beauty of the photo is enhanced by the

³² The caption reads: “One of the hundred night schools lit by solar energy.”

vibrant reddish-orange blooms of a climbing flower vine that twists around the ledges, windows and door frames of the building just above the fourteen solar panels that are connected by wires through the door frame to the shadowed person inside. While it does not look like a photo negative, the photo still inverts the viewers expectation by foregrounding the non-human in light and beauty and the human in shadow (fig. 12). In another photograph titled “Three dais-traditional midwives,” three women in saris stand together in the center of the image, framed by a window with light flooding in. The walls of the room are bright white and inscribed with what seems to be graffiti etchings of names and words in English and Hindi. Similar to the photos taken at night and the photos taken of women working with their face in shadow, the women’s faces are completely obscured by the lighting in the room. Their faces, arms and saris blend into the darkness of the floor making any features hard to see. Their white head coverings blend with the white walls surrounding them. Except for the caption indicating their profession, the lack of any solar technologies or other indication of activity makes this image appear to be the most unknowable and mysterious in the collection. The viewer is held at a distance from the subjects, while the shadows are too dark, and the light is too bright to make anything else out (fig. 13).

This image, like that of the person in the shadows behind the solar panels, presents the viewer with a dark room where the image is yet to be developed. In contrast to the *Doña Luz* images that show a kind of primitive, voyeuristic view on the indigenous communities in Latin America, these dark room, more unconventional images of Tilonia work to give the viewer a greater sense of unedited, unposed and “realistic” representation that is unexpected, and thus more persuasive, in the genre of development photography. The images of the solar panels, the night schools and the midwives are examples of the ways that Barefoot effectively integrates the concept of the “barefoot photographer” with their mission to represent and do development

differently, breaking away from expectations of what development looks like to craft an image that is unique and created directly by the people really there on the ground.



Figure 12.

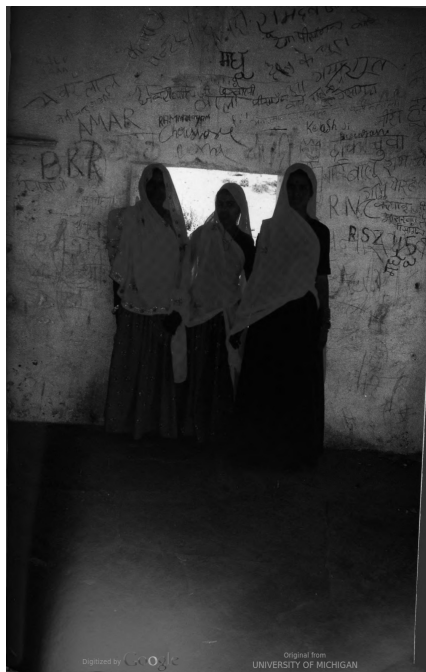


Figure 13.

As mentioned previously, while the collection clearly presents modern technologies and innovative methods of development (the handpump, solar panels, night schools, women subverting gender roles through their work), the contrast is made visually more striking by how the distinctive traditional clothing and rural setting of the images might read to the Western viewer. Vibrantly embroidered saris and cholis, sparkling nose rings, and wrist and ankle bangles make subjects in the otherwise stark desert landscape eye-catching. The desert setting, with few trees and buildings made of stone and cement, is a plain backdrop to the modern technologies and bright clothing on display. This juxtaposition also allows for the viewer to simultaneously appreciate the beauty of an “untouched humanity,” “traditional” culture, and the agrarian setting while also being dazzled by their use of modern, sustainable technology. While *Dona Luz* showed how tradition was giving way to modernity, *The Barefoot Photographers of Tilonia* shows how Barefoot College in Tilonia integrates both worlds. In contrast to images of tradition that will no longer exist, or an “untouched” culture that has not seen outsiders, this set of photographs allows for development itself to be innocent and pure without changing or destroying traditional ways of life. While Rosaldo describes the feeling of imperialist nostalgia being about “someone [who] deliberately alters a form of life and then regrets that things have not remained as they were prior to his or her intervention,” the Western viewer in this collection is able to enjoy these images without a sense in which the Westerner has intervened or destroyed any part of it.³³ As spectators to the social experiment occurring at Barefoot College, viewers can yearn for the purity and innocence of a form of development, however true or real this may actually be, that allows us to have all of the tools of modernity and technology without the destruction or imperialist force that accompanies it. In this way, the book, while falling into other

³³ *Barefoot Photographers of Tilonia*, 108.

problematic colonialist tropes, effectively brings together Barefoot's mission and its visual arguments.

Conclusion

In this paper, I have argued that Barefoot College, through their two photography books, published 20 years apart, calls attention to photographic form and creative uses of light, shadow and nostalgia to craft different visual arguments for their Western viewers about the authenticity, and therefore efficacy of their work. The evidence provided by both the anonymous barefoot photographers (and the curators who selected their photographs) and the individual professional photographer (speaking for Barefoot College), in distinctive ways, build visual arguments that attempt to align the development work and mission of Barefoot College with photographic form while often drawing upon harmful narratives of colonialism. By comparing the closely controlled environment of the photographer's darkroom studio and the space of undeveloped, unelectrified "dark rooms" that Barefoot seeks to bring solar devices, and therefore their vision of development to, I draw another parallel between photography and development. In the darkroom, through the process of photographic development and the process of international development, truths about poverty are controlled, transformed and created. As viewers, we must interrogate how the co-construction of these processes, like the visions of reality portrayed in a fixed camera lens, are rendered natural, beautiful, innocent and even pure through our distant gaze.

As consumers of an abundance of everyday images portraying different visions for international development work, we must be particularly attuned to how even Global South organizations who claim to drive a postcolonial approach to development work, fall into colonialist narratives and imagery. While my reading of these images offers only one version of how these photographs could be interpreted, we each bring to the enthymematic "free space" in

visual argumentation a variety of understandings of what global poverty is and looks like. We all have different assumptions of what structural inequities like the lack of basic electricity, as seen through the “dark room,” or the presence of strict or oppressive gender roles, as seen through the “traditional” clothing or daily lives of women in developing countries, look like and are. These images are often reinforced by development organizations and help us build our own understanding (or lack thereof) of the complicity we have in upholding inequitable systems that perpetuate and sustain global poverty. As a leader in global development work, Barefoot College has a responsibility first and foremost to the people they serve by calling out (not further entrenching) harmful and oppressive narratives that cement racist, sexist and colonialist stereotypes about rural, poor and indigenous populations they work with. As a highly visible organization claiming to represent these populations, they must more thoroughly attend to their visual rhetorical strategies to align with their mission to center rural, poor and indigenous populations, not the curators or the professional travel photographers, as agents for change. Barefoot’s approach to their photography books, which make solutions to poverty into appealing, beautiful objects for consumption by a Western audience, largely constrains their desired mission to bring a postcolonial angle to development work. As Western audience members, we must also account for our own reflection, perhaps as the curator, the travel photographer, or more likely, the passive museum go-er, strolling with our wine glass in hand, who, in leaning in to look a little closer at a striking candlelit altar in a distant country, is confronted with our own stare, looking back at us in the gallery glass (fig. 3.1).

Bibliography

- Barefoot College. "Doña Luz." Accessed May 20, 2021. <https://www.barefootcollege-donaluz.org/>.
- Barefoot College. "Home." Accessed June 7, 2021. <https://www.barefootcollege.org/>.
- Barefoot College, "Solar." Accessed May 20, 2021. <https://www.barefootcollege.org/solution/solar/>.
- Finnegan, Cara A. "The Naturalistic Enthymeme and Visual Argument: Photographic Representation in the "Skull Controversy." *Argumentation and Advocacy* 37, no. 3 (2001): 133-49.
- Houin, Cedric. *Doña Luz: Stories of Latin American Solar Mamas*. Self-published: Dropbox, 2020. <https://www.barefootcollege-donaluz.org/product-page/dona-luz-e-book>.
- Invaluable. "Photography Exposed: How to Develop Film in a Darkroom." Last modified February 27, 2019, <https://www.invaluable.com/blog/how-to-develop-film/>.
- Khanna, Shrey and P. Moorthy. "Analysing India's Soft Power Functioning in the Twenty-first Century." *India Quarterly* 73, no. 3 (2017): 292-311.
- Lidchi, Henrietta. "Finding the Right Image: British Development NGOs and the Regulation of Imagery." In *Humanitarian Photography: A History*, edited by Heide Fehrenbach and Davide Rodogno, 272-296. New York: Cambridge University Press Logo, 2014.
- Neuhaus, Jessamyn. "Colonizing The Coffee Table: 'National Geographic' Magazine and Erasure of Difference in the Representation of Women." *American Periodicals*, Vol 7 (1997): 1-26.
- NGO Advisor. "Meet the World's 200 Best Social Good Organizations for 2021." Accessed May 20, 2021. <https://www.ngoadvisor.net/top-200-ngos-world>.
- Pfister, Damien Smith and Carly S. Woods. "The Unnaturalistic Enthymeme: Figuration, Interpretation, and Critique after Digital Mediation." In "Twenty Years of Visual Argument," edited by David Godden, Catherine H. Palczewski, and Leo Groarke, 236-253. Special issue, *Argumentation and Advocacy* 52, no. 4, (2016).
- Rojas, Alberto. "Kong Nyong, el Niño que Sobrevivió al Buitre." February 21, 2011. <https://www.elmundo.es/elmundo/2011/02/18/comunicacion/1298054483.html>.
- Rosaldo, Renato, "Imperialist Nostalgia." *Representations*, no. 26 (1989): 107-122.
- Roy, Ananya. *Poverty Capital: Microfinance and the Making of Development*. New York:

Routledge, 2010.

Suri, Sanjay. "In Pictures: Villagers' Barefoot College." Accessed May 20, 2021.
http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/shared/spl/hi/picture_gallery/05/south_asia_villagers0_barefoot_college/html/1.stm.

The Barefoot Photographers of Tilonia. New Delhi: Lustre Press Pvt. Ltd, 2000.

Time 100 Photos. "Starving Child and Vulture." Accessed May 20, 2021.
<http://100photos.time.com/photos/kevin-carter-starving-child-vulture>.

Varial Studio. "Cover of National Geographic China!" January 17, 2017.
https://www.varialstudio.com/journal/blog_posts/NationalGeographicChina.

Wikipedia. "The Vulture and the Little Girl." Last modified June 7, 2021.
https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_vulture_and_the_little_girl#:~:text=Due%20to%20the%20public%20reaction,to%20a%20feeding%20centre%20in.