



WORKINGMAN'S DEATH





WORKINGMAN'S DEATH

a film by Michael Glawogger

Michael Glawogger is a placeless and restless soul, a traveller by nature: a man who cannot live without one eye on the "foreign" and faraway. To him, Austria is just a base camp, the center of operations for planning his journeys and artistic ramblings. The search for digressions, for far-flung detours, is a fundamental element in his work. (I find it symptomatic, for example, that in the final scene of the dark comedy "Slumming," Glawogger's most recent feature film, which was completed shortly after *Workingman's Death*, one of the protagonists – and with him the director as well – suddenly breaks away from Vienna and escapes to Indonesia to find an eccentric vanishing and end point amidst the corrugated iron shacks of Jakarta.)

Far from the industrialized world we shed our old sense of security. The films, photos, and texts Glawogger produces in barren no-man's lands and urban limbos hold hidden surprises. What at first glance may seem unsettling or depressing about many of his motifs abruptly transforms itself upon closer inspection. Glawogger does not let the misery take over in the slums he shows us but instead focuses on the strong hope, contentedness, and solidarity we also encounter there. And in the constant threat of death, life is celebrated all the more vehemently. The appalling and the beautiful are only a hair's-breadth away.

Thus, the author, filmmaker, cinematographer, and photographer Michael Glawogger is constantly at work on a revision of our collective view of the world. The book you have before you is part of this undertaking. In it, Glawogger presents powerful images, not only his own, but also those of friends and colleagues whom he has asked for artistic contributions. In the short, very personal texts that support the photographs (or are in contrast to them), he writes about the problematic working conditions and processes arising before and during the shooting of the film as well as (and this perhaps to an even greater extent) the people who have by chance caught the eye of the foreign visitors and stumbled in front of their camera lenses: ruminations about casual acquaintances, fleeting encounters, and lasting impressions.

Glawogger loves details, the particular rather than the larger whole – because we are only really capable of comprehending the little things, because only the particular (and not the general), only what we experience with our own senses (not the touristically or politically correct) can give us the visceral certainty necessary to express a reasonably self-assured opinion about the state of a complex world. That is why Glawogger's written, filmed, and photographed stories always deal with apparently minor, insignificant subjects: a Chinese bird vendor, a Nigerian butcher with a very busy



schedule, or a Ukrainian miner showing off her finest dress. Michael Glawogger would prefer not to be regarded as a globalization analyst, defiantly claiming that he would not even know what that was supposed to mean. Of course he is, in everything he does, a portraitist of the signs of the times, of the yawning gap between tradition and postmodernism. That he eschews the hip buzzwords only speaks in his favor.

The texts and images Glawogger has collected in this book are, in respect to each other, caught in a curious state of tension rather than devoted to mere reciprocal elaboration. Word and image shed light on each other in an intriguing way: it is as if each were the key to unlocking the other – though without explaining it completely – opening it up, creating space for free association and contemplation. This is a fragile, intricate compendium of stories which Glawogger has gone out looking for, hunted down, tales about workers and transient studies of life in microcosm. What they have in common is the loving eye of the author, but Glawogger is no social romantic – and he is unsentimental enough to have included the unsettling stories as well as the limitations one sometimes encounters when trying to bridge cultural gaps. Much of his best reasoning comes from the critical reflection of his own actions. By also emphasizing failed or unfinished attempts, missed moments, by concentrating on pictures never taken and scenes never shot, he playfully makes the leap from the working reality and the myths of the hero worker to media analysis – to the crucial questions of his profession. What is an image, and what is it capable of? What will it never be able to show? What does taking a photograph really mean, photographing under less than clear circumstances?

Although the book shares its title *Workingman's Death* with the film, like all of Glawogger's projects it also still retains an independent character of its own: it is not a mere shifting of content from film to paper, not a simple variation of a job already done, but a path of the imagination that takes only its point of departure from the making of the film and the film itself. It has things to say that could not have been conveyed on the screen: very private thoughts and an imagination gone fabulously wild – the feverish dreams of a filmmaker who is constantly transcending the bounds of his art.

Perhaps this is why the workingman Glawogger is so restless: while the finishing touches were being put on the German original of this book, he was already far off in some other remote place, in Jakarta, Surabaya, or Lombok, working on two different screenplays and writing the concept for another project – his third film that would take him to the far reaches of the globe. Michael Glawogger's drug is the unfamiliar. It generates unforeseen images and ideas in him – and a strangely sharpened sense of reality, which only through its interaction with the dreamer, the visionary in him, is capable of creating the diametrically charged energy that gives the bold undertaking *Workingman's Death* its vital force.

Stefan Grisse mann



MAN WITH THE WAVING HANDS *Thorez, Ukraine*

Andrej has worked in mines all his life. In former times in the state-run mines – perhaps in the “Red Star” or the “Tri Bis” – in any case in one of the big mines in Thorez. In 2000, he was forced to retire when he was only 47. The Red Star closed down shortly after the fall of the Soviet Union, and Tri Bis had stopped paying wages many years earlier. When I met him, he was mining coal illegally – behind his house. His grandfather still knew where to dig, and Andrej and his friends quickly found coal. The hole they had dug themselves was called “Little Hope.” “Big Hope” was a few houses further down the road.

Andrej was eager to show us the mine on our first visit, he wanted us to sing and drink with him, and he wanted us to take his picture. While I photographed him, he kept giving instructions and waving his hands about energetically. He could not keep still.

I showed him this photo two years later, printed in a brochure about my research for the movie. He immediately wanted me to pay a fee of 100 dollars for it. Little Hope, meanwhile, was in the hands of the local Mafia and had become quite lucrative. Nobody seemed to remember that they used to call it Little Hope.

DAMAGED PHOTO *Thorez, Ukraine*

This picture was taken by the Ukrainian photographer Viktor Marushchenko. He accompanied us for part of our journey and showed us his country. He will be pissed off at me for publishing this photo because it is clearly damaged.

He took it with an old Leica someone had given him a long time ago. I always liked it when Viktor used his Leica. Then this damaged photo. Everyone likes this shot. Even Viktor himself. The weight of the sacks, the mist, in this image you can even feel the chill. We discussed the possibility of digitally repairing it.

I think it is good the way it is. Like an old unfinished painting that just remained a sketch, the canvas half white or half black. It is damaged in any case. Otherwise it probably would have become the poster for the movie. Instead it ended up here, proud, beautiful, and precise. For people who want to see it rather than those who have to.







Thorez

A coal worker leaving the mine with his bike.

Many miners ride their bikes from all corners of the city to this mine. It is situated between the new section of town and the miners' colony. To keep their bikes from being stolen, they take them below ground. This illegal mine, where approximately 100 people work, is part of a government-run coal mine that was shut down several years ago.

The mine is in very bad shape. The illegal miners call themselves "the doomed," but they can't really be bothered about the unsafe working conditions. Their only goal is to extract as much coal as possible so they can feed their families. This was no easy shot because it was -20°C outside the mine and some 10°C inside. Where I was standing was exactly where the warm and the cold air converged.

In addition, it was pretty steep, and finding a secure foothold was not easy because the ground was very slippery. It took a whole roll of film to get one good picture.

Larissa

After work Larissa, Lena's mother, comes home to the barracks where she still lives with her daughter. In this city where almost all the mines have already been shut down, the miners' colony is half empty. One can move into any of the uninhabited houses with a clear conscience – just make sure the furnace works. In a lot of the houses people have set up illegal distilleries where they produce low-quality vodka. They slap on a forged label and sell it as official government-bottled liquor. Larissa has had to dig coal all day. She is exhausted and stands listlessly while I take her photograph. It has been an icy winter, and Larissa, who suffers from chronic bronchitis, has a bad cold. There is not enough money for medicine. All she has to alleviate her condition are vodka and strong cigarettes.



Gorlovka

Workers of the Lenin Coal Mine No. 5 in Gorlovka near Doneck at the company steam bath after their shift. The coal mine is stuck in a crisis, the majority of the workers have been laid off. Today, the bath facility, which was originally built for 2,000 people, is used by only a few dozen.





PAK AGUS *Kawa Ijen, East Java, Indonesia*

Everyone dreads the vapor. It isn't as if the workers ever get used to it. The vapor burns your eyes, and you don't know whether to breathe through your nose or your mouth. And on top of that, you can hardly see anything.

The wind can change direction from one second to the next, and then suddenly everything around you turns white – so white that even the bright yellow of the sulfur is hardly visible anymore. This is especially scary if you do not know the "Kitchen" very well – because you don't know where to run.

On one side there is the lake whose waters are only 5° C, on the other side the way out leads across soft rock and lots of little bridges. The best thing to do is stay calm, breathe through your nose, and wait for the wind to turn.

Here Pak Agus shows me how to keep a cool head despite the sulfur vapors. He presses his ski mask lightly against his mouth and tries to make his eyes as small as possible. Still, there is no hiding the repugnance and effort involved. Pak Agus is around 50 years old and has been mining sulfur in the volcano since he was seventeen.

DRUNK *Kawa Ijen, Indonesia*

The sulfur miners don't drink. They just smoke. Fat cigarettes they roll themselves that look like joints and taste like cloves. They say that smoking makes them strong. And maybe it's true because in a way they are indeed the strongest men in the world.

When they do drink, they drink a kind of beer and become quickly and violently drunk. They stagger around in the dark, shout, hit each other, and sing wildly into the night. All their equanimity leaves them, and it is as if they have become the dark sides of themselves. They do not stop until they collapse exhausted in the grass and fall asleep.

The following morning before the sun comes up, they collect their baskets from the trees and make their way up to the top of the volcano again, past the daily crowds of tourists lining their path.

The workers on Kawa Ijen can erupt like the very volcano they tame with the sweat of their brow. It is something they do only on rare occasions, but then they spit and fume and go on a rampage with no regard for the consequences.





BASKETS *Kawa Ijen, Indonesia*

Before I had ever seen a worker on Kawa Ijen, I saw baskets full of sulfur everywhere. There were certain key points – in a curve, on the trunk of a tree knocked down by a storm, or just anywhere on the path leading into the volcano.

The baskets looked so forlorn and forgotten. No workers anywhere in sight. Then, at some point, they were gone.

The volcano has opening hours like a factory or a business. There is a small iron door that is unlocked at dawn and locked sometime around five in the afternoon. This makes it difficult for the average worker to carry more than one load into the valley. The distance back to the weighing station is approximately five kilometers.

For this reason, a lot of workers carry their baskets part of the way, then leave them there while they go back to fetch a second load, which they carry a little ways further before returning for the first load. Some carry their first load half way down the mountain to a point outside the iron door before returning to the Kitchen. They carry their second load all the way to the weighing station and then return for the first load after the gatekeeper has already closed the iron door.

In the evening, they toss their baskets into a tree or hang them like bicycles on the wall outside their little huts.

COLOURFUL *Kawa Ijen, Indonesia*

Climbing Kawa Ijen can get very steep sometimes. A footpath, wide and comfortable, but steep. It takes some getting used to and you find yourself panting and wheezing at intervals.

It was at one of these steep sections, as I was coming around a corner, that I almost ran into a tourist. All decked out in professional cycling gear, colorful, skintight, a helmet on his head. With one hand he was toting a bike that probably cost as much as a small car.

I should have taken a photo, but some shots you just can't take. Now I am glad I didn't. A picture of this harbinger. A harbinger of the mountain bike races that may soon be taking place on Kawa Ijen, or of tourists starting to carry the workers' baskets. That does happen from time to time. The people here say that every year an extreme athlete from Australia comes and carries a few basketloads of sulfur down the mountain.

The workers find it strange because he doesn't want to be paid.

But the ways of the tourists are probably as inscrutable as those of the ghosts who guard the mountain.

I never took any pictures of the ghosts either.



KANDAPELLETHEAD *Port Harcourt, Nigeria*

The Port Harcourt slaughter yard is a labyrinth of people and animals. It took weeks before I had visited all the departments and explored every path.

The whole area is actually a market, which is situated between a zoo, a bridge in the middle of construction, a river, and an industrial park where multinational corporations like Coca-Cola and Shell have set up operations.

The grounds consist of a few huts, a large covered market hall, a cold storage room, a corral for the cattle, pig pens, a pool table set up under an awning, a mosque, a few shanties, a slope leading to the river that also serves as an open toilet, and the various sites where animals are transformed into meat.

These sites consist of a charred elevated platform for roasting the beef parts and whole goats, a large paved surface, the "Slab," where the cattle is slaughtered, skinned, and cut into portions, and finally a kind of courtyard where the pigs are butchered, placed in bath tubs of scalding water, and scraped with sharp knives to remove their bristles. Right next to this, a long hall extends straight through the market. After roasting, this is where the goats are brought to be cleaned and further processed. And then there are the restaurants, a second mosque, the CD store, several tailors, and the photographer.

It starts to get light at around five in the morning. Now you realize that the counters are covered with people, sleeping vendors, butchers, assistants, meat haulers. They yawn and stretch and peel back their thin blankets. The sweet smell of the previous day's meat hangs in the air, and you can hear the roosters crowing everywhere.

Some people pray, some wash themselves at the Slab or brush their teeth out back by the great mounds of bones, others have breakfast, a hot milk beverage or skewers of meat, and many of them hold small transistor radios to their ears. A symphony of images, sounds, and smells slowly unfolds before you, swells and becomes ever louder, ebbs at noon, and is calm again. First come the goats led by the young assistants of the goat butchers and goat roasters. The goats make the most noise as they are being brought – all tied together – to the slaughter yard. It is hard to tell whether they can sense what awaits them; maybe it is just uncomfortable to be pulled around all tied together like that.

Next, other young assistants use pieces of discarded tires they have cut into sections to fetch fire from the fire pits in front of the restaurant where the women have begun to cook. As fire is brought to the slaughter yard, calls of "Mallam! Mallam!" begin mixing with the rising clamor of bleating goats. "Mallam" means "sir" or "man" and is a respectful address used to call the goat slaughterer over to where a goat is being held down and have him slit its throat for a fee of 40 nairas.

The goat slaughtering area is dotted with masonry-lined holes, which one after another turn into fire pits. They are where the goats will be roasted later. Now the flames are leaping and thick plumes of black smoke rise and fill the sky.

In the meantime, the assistant cattle traders and butchers are driving the cattle from the corrals

to the Slab. For the workers, this is the best part. It is both a test of courage and the chance to see how fast you can run. The bulls (and they are all, without exception, bulls) do not bellow at all, but they behave like wild animals on these last fifty meters to the slaughtering grounds. A short time later, they submit almost apathetically to their fates.

As they arrive at the Slab, the hawkers' cries mix with the distant but audibly frantic bleating of the goats. "Kandapellethead!" or "Kandakandakanda!" or "Pelletpelletpellet!" they yell, each trying to drown out the other. "Kanda" means skin, "pellet" means innards, and "head" is the same as in English. The hawkers shout these words in any combination, announcing the three delicacies they have to offer for future consumption.

In the meantime, the goats sizzle on their fires, and around the corner the pigs squeal. They are the ones most likely to comprehend what is in store for them. In the background, men walk past carrying charcoaled goats on their heads. They are on their way to the goat washers, who yell cheerfully as they scrub the hair off the goats with water and brushes.

At the Slab, the first bulls are being thrown down, they hit the concrete with a heavy thud or land in the spreading puddles of blood, while the hawkers yell at the top of their lungs: "Kandapellethead!" Some are already bargaining loudly with the newly arriving customers, who usually only want to pay a fraction of what the vendors are asking.

Wheelbarrows full of goat carcasses, bloated from roasting and bright yellow after being washed, are pushed toward the parking lot, while the first cattle heads are severed from their still kicking bodies.

One of these heads weighs in the range of fifteen to twenty kilograms. The butchers mark the heads with the owners' initial, then they are taken to a relay point and from there to the goat slaughtering area.

Here, the shouting and bleating, the slaughtering and roasting are still going strong. The horns are hacked off and the cattle heads roasted, then they are washed in discarded water-filled truck tires until they are the same yellow color as the roasted goats. Then they are brought back to the Slab and cleaved in the midst of dying animals and twitching meat.

Most of the cattle is already skinned and cut into pieces, and the haulers shoulder large sections of meat. This is one of the most grueling jobs of all. With half a bull on their shoulders, these men run to the washing troughs, where they soak and wash the meat briefly, then heave it back onto their shoulders, run clear across the market, and stow it in the trunks of taxis and transport vehicles.

Then they hurry back to the Slab so they will be there for the good pieces and good buyers. Meanwhile, other workers are taking the tails and skins to the fires to be roasted.

This frenetic cycle of herding, slaughtering, dying, hauling, washing, roasting, chopping, portioning, bargaining, hawking, arguing, screeching, rejoicing, and running repeats itself until noon rolls around and the vultures come.





The vultures sit on the roofs waiting patiently for the cycle to spin to a stop. Then they hop down onto the Slab or on the great mounds of horns and bones near the goat slaughtering area to devour what is theirs.

At around one o'clock, a couple of workers hose down the Slab.



Then the blood flows into the river, across which a new bridge is currently being built. It looks so different than anything at the slaughter yard. The workers there are clean, the concrete is clean, and one day the president of Nigeria went there to inaugurate the clean half-finished bridge. That day, the slaughter yard at Port Harcourt was closed so that the smoke and noise would not disturb the president during the ceremony.

The workers got the day off, and so did we. All we shot that day were five pigs in the middle of the goat slaughtering area which, amid thousands of chopped off horns, had curled up together for a little snooze.

BURNING COWS *Ibadan, Nigeria*

The first time I set foot in the Ibadan slaughterhouse was a week before shooting. I was tired and slow, which early mornings tend to make me. I arrived just as the young goats were being slaughtered, and to me their cries sounded especially mournful. In a large open hall the cow carnage was almost over, only the transport-weakened animals remained, and they were being piled onto handcarts and pushed to the slaughterer by loudly yelling assistants.

And then suddenly I found myself standing in a kind of clearing, an open space just outside the hall. Lying at my feet were four cows with their heads cut off, they were still twitching, their legs sticking up in the air. A group of young men poured gasoline from soft plastic bottles over the carcasses. Then they roasted the cows by setting them on fire.

As soon as they noticed us, the hawkers tried to sell us heads and feet. The workers struck heroic poses in front of the cows.







BLACK AND WHITE *Port Harcourt, Nigeria*

Uche James Iroha was the first photographer who wanted to work in black and white. That seemed odd considering the place. The Port Harcourt slaughterhouse is literally bursting with color. Black surfaces covered with dark red rivers of blood, brightly burning fire pits, the workers' flashy T-shirts, women in flamboyantly patterned robes, and often up above, a clear blue sky. If it rained, everybody opened their umbrellas, and suddenly the whole place was awash in an array of new colors.

But Uche's eye was right on the money. Black and white reproduces color in its own way. It makes the pictures simpler, brings out the shading, and holds them together. One senses a realistic world, but what one sees is different from what the eye perceives.

Black and white filters out the view of the photographer and lets the viewer experience a new place. But working in black and white is hopelessly outmoded. These days there is no way to tell a sponsor that you want to shoot a film in black and white or explain why. And if you do succeed, you will not be able to market the film once it is done. In addition, black-and-white film material means much higher costs. Since it has become so rare, there are not that many labs equipped to process it without custom service.

The world is in color, and to depict it any other way would be unrealistic – this is the most common argument against shooting in black and white.

Taking pictures that reflect the world around us – I would say – is not a matter of color or black and white.

THE DEATH OF THE WORKINGMAN *Port Harcourt, Nigeria*

Several months after we left Nigeria, we received a large envelope. It contained rows of photos taped together, handmade posters, and long strips of double exposures. Uche James Iroha had assimilated the world of the Port Harcourt slaughterhouse into his own system. The red was drawn with a magic marker. The language is broken, the words scrawled, but the impression is as if a giant hand had written them in the Port Harcourt sky.





Gaddani, Pakistan

I wasn't on the list of the people who were allowed to travel to Gaddani. I do not now recall why, but I was always in danger of being kicked out of the country. The secret police was after me. They came up with new excuses every day. Usually, however, they just said it was too dangerous for me here. Some days we were able to bribe them, other days we weren't, and so I always had the feeling I was taking pictures in a race against time. Finally, four days before we finished shooting, they really did throw me out. I was depressed and very upset.

The police thought I was a Hindu because my name "Akash" when translated means "Sky," and because I was a Bangladeshi. Bangladesh has negative connotations for Pakistanis. When I tried to extend my residence permit, I noticed a list of "negative countries" hanging on the wall and saw that Bangladesh was right at the top. I had wanted to extend for 20 days and ended up being granted only seven.

Before I came to Pakistan, I thought the police in my country were more corrupt than anywhere in the world. But here I was to learn differently. You can do whatever you want if you have money. After my experiences in Pakistan, I think I could work anywhere in the world.

You don't notice it at first glance, but you soon realize there aren't any women or children in Gaddani. The dominant image you take home with you is one of hundreds of big, healthy men cutting up ships on a beach in the Arabian Sea. The work seems to go very slowly, and yet the ships disappear very quickly. It isn't until much later that you understand the depth of their know-how and skill.

The Gaddani workers are open and hospitable people.

OIL Gaddani, Pakistan

Gaddani is one of those places where the discarded ocean-faring giants from all over the world are brought to be converted into scrap metal. Empty tankers and cargo ships lie waiting in the shallow water close to shore.

These images of Gaddani radiate a sense of calmness. Even during the most grueling and back-breaking work, everything seems somehow easy and weightless, as if the scrap metal, or oil. Various work groups take care of the different tasks. Some pump the water out of the interior of the ship, others remove the electrical fixtures and installations, pipes and ducts are taken from the deck, and residual oil is scraped from the cargo spaces. The latter task is usually performed by migrant workers from Bangladesh. Shirtless and barefoot they stand in the ship's hold shoveling chunks of hardened oil into sacks which they haul onto deck using a winch and then dump into the sea.

This makes thick black streaks on the sides of the vessel, telltale signs that the ship has already been cleaned.

Later, I watched the same workers fishing. They catch hall fish, bisser, and muschke – whatever finds its way into their nets. A little bit of oil does not hurt the fish, they say. The solid oil sinks to the bottom and mixes with the sand.





Out of the ship's furnishings the highest ranking foreman selects a chair from which to oversee shipbreaking progress. Salvaged parts are used in the living quarters of the workers and in the bosses' canteens.

Here live the foreman Nani Mrachman and the blowtorch operator Omar Khan. No trespassing without their express permission. Thank you.

MIGRANT WORKER *Gaddani, Pakistan*

I first thought of it while standing in the hold of the Sea Giant, taking pictures of the men scraping residual oil from the walls of the ship. Why not invite a photographer from Bangladesh to take photos here in Pakistan, for these men who were removing oil were Bangladeshis – migrant workers. They worked in the ship, lived on the ship, and hardly came in contact with the other workers from Pakistan. They cooked different food, had a different religion, and were much smaller. I was hoping to be able to connect with the Bangladeshis through the photographer.

The Pakistanis and the Bangladeshis hate each other. There's no other way to put it. Maybe that's the reason that the men from Bangladesh have to do the most unpleasant work, and it is definitely the reason why the secret police did not even want to let Akash into the dockyards. For three weeks, Akash the photographer had himself become a migrant worker. In astonishment, he saw a country so similar to his own and yet so strangely foreign and abhorred.

He and my Pakistani assistant always called each other "brother." They said it with a certain undertone and I never knew exactly what it meant.

They never became brothers, that's for sure.

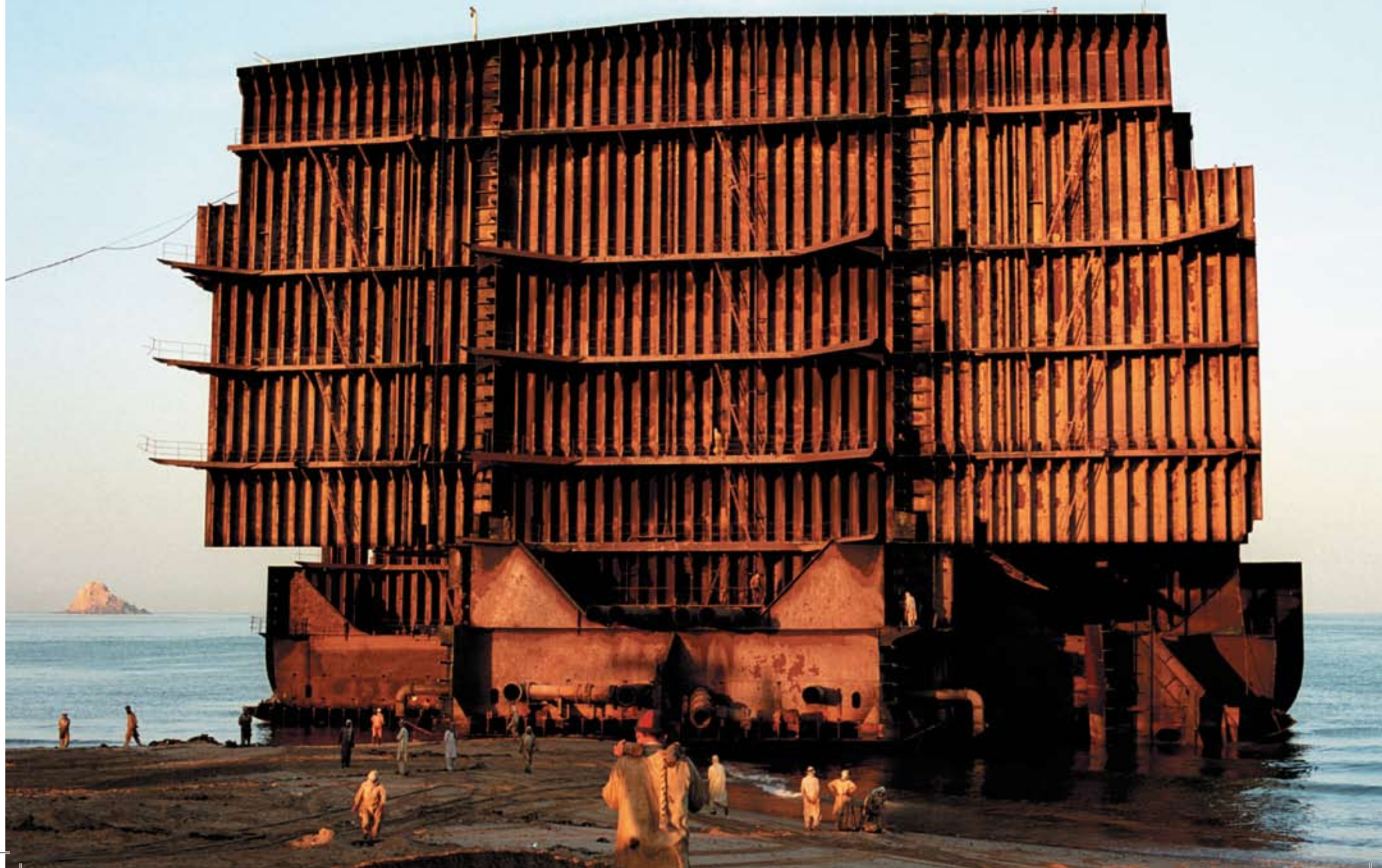
BANGLADESHI COLONY *Karachi, Pakistan*

Since we had to wait for our work permit for Gaddani, we decided to have a look around Karachi. A little while later we were sitting in a tea house when I noticed two Bangladeshi at the next table. They told me about a ghetto where Bangladeshi lived. I was immediately interested since there is a similar place in Bangladesh, a Pakistani colony. At the time, I had already been working for a year on a documentary about the living conditions there.

That morning in Karachi, I visited the colony and found a group of broken people who had clearly had horrible pasts and were desperately searching for their identities.

This is the tale of a community of more than 200,000 people who have lived like animals for the last 33 years and who will probably spend the rest of their lives in crowded ghettos, makeshift camps, and shanty towns somewhere in Pakistan. But these downtrodden people are not oppressed by poverty alone. They are also being deprived of education, future prospects, and their own identities. This is the tale of people who only exist as numbers, whose food is bought with ration books, and whose bedtime stories tell of arson in the slums.

The rituals of life and death, the victories, the hopes, and the sorrows of each family are packed neatly into a 3-by-3-meter box. Glancing into one of these huts, one sees simple rooms where the





beds, in which countless people sleep side by side, are propped up on stacks of bricks, below which the woman of the house must cook, grind spices, and feed babies.

"Can you imagine what it is like for me to have to sleep in the same room with my wife, my two daughters, my son, and his wife?" a furious old man asked me on my first and last day in this colony.

THE PHOTOGRAPHER *Gaddani, Pakistan*

At some point during preparations for shooting in Gaddani, I saw a man with a red Kalashnikov ambling through the great gates of the shipyard toward the place where we were having lentils and water for lunch. He sat down and ordered tea. I thought to myself: okay, we're in Baluchistan, people walk around with Kalashnikovs here.

After that, I saw the man almost every day. He would stroll about the grounds, joke with the workers, and drink tea at Restaurant No. 9. He was dressed neatly and wore his hair combed back in a virile way. I figured he was a member of the secret police, of whom there are plenty in Gaddani. Their job is to keep foreigners from wandering around the grounds, which is strictly prohibited for intelligence reasons.

When the secret police made me leave Gaddani four days later, my man was not among them and the men I was forced to deal with were not like him. They were fat and brusque and impolite, if not to say brutal.

Four months later, I returned to Gaddani. My dapper friend was still there with his red Kalashnikov, but I only saw him occasionally. I was busy with the workers at dock No. 126 and preoccupied with my race against time. The Sea Giant was being broken up for scrap piece by piece before my very eyes. It was not until shooting was underway that I would finally meet this man. He came up to us with his Kalashnikov and asked if he could photograph us – one of the workers was paying for it.

His name is Abdul Khan and he is a sort of house photographer for the workers at the docks. All of them want souvenir photos to take home with them, and they like to pose with Abdul Khan's red Kalashnikov. It is made of plastic and is apparently more impressive than the Sea Giant with its 78,000 gross register tons.

We were assigned a policeman every day. He was supposed to protect us from the workers, who in the meantime had become our friends. These friends of ours, after all, were in the eyes of the authorities "men from the north" – Taliban, and you can never be too careful with them. Sometimes our policeman would help us carry our equipment, and when he did, he usually just put his machine pistol down somewhere to have both hands.

This – real – Kalashnikov did not see any action until the last day. As a prop for the souvenir photos the workers would take home with them and hang on their walls.



