

TRACKING GANDHI

ANJA BOHNHOF



India | Bangladesh | South Africa | Europe

2014 – 2019

78 photographs, c-prints, 65 x 50 / 90 x 70 /
130 x 100 cm; Assistants: Lea Lemmermöhle, Tobi
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My life is my message. (M. K. Gandhi)

In his role as political and spiritual leader of the Indian independence movement and in his out-and-out commitment to human rights, Mahatma Gandhi today ranks as one of the key figures of the last century –on a par with such people as Martin Luther King or Nelson Mandela, whose lives reflect his influence. The idea he developed of radical, non-violent resistance representing both the content and method of his political actions still captivates the modern mind.

Despite the undisputed fact of his historical achievements, Gandhi has remained a visionary. Today's world has still not fully embraced such fundamental political objectives as social equality for all people, mutual understanding between the different religions or the assured satisfaction of basic human needs across the globe through vegetarian nutrition and regionally controlled production.

The photographic project *Tracking Gandhi* is a journey to places in India, Africa, and Europe that represented important milestones or turning points in Gandhi's private and public life. It is a complex journey that leads halfway round the world. Some of the photographs that have been produced for this project were taken in places that are not accessible to the public and not only involved extensive research but also required a time-consuming approval process and the negotiation with elaborate bureaucratic systems. Moreover, the project includes images of places that have not previously been considered in connection with Gandhi.

The resulting work can thus be seen as unique in its present form. On the one hand, chronologically arranged imagery shows the intriguing journey that Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi took through life, a path that was by no means free of contradiction. On the other hand, the photographs are a visual record of a journey through time, illustrating the dynamic tension—inherent to the places depicted—that exists between the present-day appearance of these sites and the historical aura with which they are charged. This tension takes on a variety of very different forms: some images document a visible commemoration or show places that have been co-opted into a museum context. In some cases with far reaching historical and political impact. In other pictures we see the original function being continued or transformed. Sometimes the visual references are no longer evident or can only be surmised to some degree.

This opens up a further level of meaning, located in the time between the historical Gandhi and our present time. Successive pasts, present, and future lie, like superimposed archaeological layers, at once are separate and interwoven in the depths of the images. Gandhi himself always resisted stereotyping, personality cults, and simplified categorization. *Tracking Gandhi* respects this stance in terms of both form and content and thus consciously opens up new perspectives, providing scope for non-judgemental reflections.