

Ghosts of futures present

Title:

Ghosts of futures present: photographs in the Filipino migrant archive

Author: Dr Deirdre McKay

William Smith Building

Keele University

Newcastle-under-Lyme

Staffordshire ST5 5BG

United Kingdom

Tel: 01782583601

Email: d.c.mckay@esci.keele.ac.uk

Biography: Deirdre McKay is Lecturer in Social Geography and Environmental Politics at Keele University. Her research explores themes of development and indigeneity in the Philippines and the experiences of indigenous migrants among diasporic Filipino communities overseas. She has published in *The Australian Journal of Anthropology*, *The Asia Pacific Journal of Anthropology*, and *Mobilities* as well as a number of edited collections.

Abstract:

Ghosts of futures present

This essay explores the role of photographs in shaping the social selves of Filipino temporary labor migrants. Examining the production of photographic self-images by Filipino migrants in Hong Kong and their reception in the Philippines, I show how people deploy photography as a technology to bring into being their desired future selves. By making present ghosts of the future, photographs of the self shape distinctive translocal subjectivities.

Introduction

This essay explores the uses to which photographs are put. Its starting point is the literature on the temporality of photography and its description of the ways in which photography allows people to experiment with making their social selves [Appadurai 1996]. Photographs of the self have the potential to be used for personal reflexivity – “reinventing ourselves the way we would like to be seen” [Bloustein 2003: 2]. Thus photography opens up a field for experimentation where “a subject is able to lay claim to features of the context or environment in a photograph as if they were the outcome of testing his or her own personal capabilities” [Lury 1998: 3]. Through such experimentation, photographs can allow people to take possession of a space in which they are insecure [Sontag 1977: 9]. This essay builds from these insights to explore the reflexive potential of photographs for shaping the insecure space of the future.

Photographs establish temporality by freezing, framing and fixing their subject – this is a commonplace in the photography literature [cf. Barthes 1981; Lury 1998]. The literature has tended, however, to focus on temporalities of the past, rather than the future. Photographs, because they can combine spatial immediacy with temporal anteriority and thus blur the usual experiential categories of time and space, can also shape futures. Photographic images can suspend time so as to allow the ‘this will have been’ anteriority that can be attached to their subjects to be reworked into a “this has already been” [Lury 1998: 3]. Anthropologists have examined this temporal aspect of photographs as it has been deployed in the construction of sociocultural fields. For example, Hirsch [2004: 36] argues that photography discloses persons acting in a “temporally extended field” of the

present in Highland Papua. Building on Gell [1998: 239, quoted in Hirsch 2004: 20], Hirsch demonstrates how his Papuan informants use photographs to extend “the present” to create a distinctive temporal field that not only retains the past, but stretches into the future.

Photographic portraits, in particular, offer people the opportunity to shape this time-to-come by manipulating images of the self. The photographic portrait invites its subject to become the person that she or he attempts to portray through their photograph image. Writing on the use of photographs in a Western context, sociologist Celia Lury [1998: 3] argues that the portrait offers its subjects what she describes as a “prosthetic biography” – a performative self-understanding that depends on manipulating one’s own image as photographic subject. This feature of “prosthetic biography” enables people to deploy their photographic portraits in social relations with the intention that their photographic images act as what Lury [1998: 3] calls “retrodictive prophecies”. That is, by managing images of their present to inform the expectations of others, photographs assist their subjects in creating future selves. Photographs accomplish this task by setting their subjects a challenge of becoming (more like) the subject they portray in their photographic image. Of course, the success of this manipulation of the image of the self depends on the subjects of photographic portraits having an accurate understanding of the ways their intended audience will be likely to interpret their image. Photographs can only act as retrodictive prophecies where the intended viewers of the portrait image understand the particular future biography the subject of the photograph intends his or her portrait to cite. The prosthetic biography attached to particular images

and their subjects is thus a feature of a community of interpretation, both requiring and producing sociality across and through the photographic image.

The ability of a photographic portrait to function with retrodictive prophecy and thus shape the future self of its subject produces a distinctive subjectivity, one where the image haunts its subject. To make this argument, this essay considers how photographs mediate subjectivities in a particular ethnographic context. The photographs I examine come from a migrant sending village in the Philippines and from its migrants in Hong Kong. This village is now a translocal sociocultural field, a locality shaped by the mobility of contract workers and sustained by the circulation of people, photographs, goods, phone calls, and text messages. As a translocality [Appadurai 1996], this village exemplifies how the intensities of globalization constitute what remain distinctively local subjectivities through (sometimes vicarious) experiences of mobility. To explain how photographic portraits shape such distinctive subjectivities in this village, I first situate my arguments within the literature on subjectivity and then describe how photographs ground the archive of representations produced through migration.

Photography and subjectivity

Anthropological accounts of subjectivity use the term to indicate the internal life of the subject, constituted through thoughts, feelings, and embodied sensibilities [Holland and Leander 2004: 17, cited in Luhrmann 2006: 345]. In her widely-cited review of the field, Sherry Ortner [2005: 37] describes a “culturally/ religiously produced subject ... defined not only by a particular position in a social,

economic and religious matrix, but by a complex subjectivity, a complex set of feelings and fears". For Ortner [2005: 37], subjectivities are "structures of thought, feeling, reflection and the like that make social beings always more than the occupants of particular positions and the holders of particular identities." Subjectivities are fluid and mobile, shaped by a series of subject positions which subjects then reflect on in multiple and sometimes contradictory ways. This means subjectivities are complex, and never simply reducible to the experience of a singular subjection. Thus, although the everyday lives of my indigenous migrant respondents are largely spent doing domestic work in Hong Kong, their expressions of their self-aware, reflecting selves are shaped by far more than simply the experiences of being a "helper" or a migrant. The richness of their experiences and diversity of the sources in which they ground their sense of self are revealed through the messages they exchange with each other and those at home, and, most particularly, in the photographs they produce and circulate. These photographs, however, do something more than simply document subjectivities; they also help to bring into being my respondents' future selves.

Photographic technology enables people to shape their own future structures of feeling in at least two powerful ways. Firstly, because subjectivities are constituted through experiences of quotidian embodiment, the materiality of photographic images works to establish future forms of sociality between subjects. Secondly, because subjectivities are produced in the subject's internal sphere of self-aware reflection, manipulating photographic temporality offers subjects the potential to act on their future selves by shaping the content of sociality with others. Each of these two modalities – materiality and temporality -

can tell us something intriguing about the social histories of photographs and the distinctive subjectivities they build and express.

Photographs function as material things through and across which people are sociable [Wright 2004] and this function is intimately entwined with embodied, affective accounts of subjectivity. Because subjectivities draw on symbols, senses, and the temporalities of lived experience, and reflect accounts of the physiological self, memory, imagination and desire provided by broader cultural formations, they are socially constituted. As material objects, photographs can mediate this social constitution of subjectivity by shaping both the affects arising in social encounters and the forms taken by the self in social interactions with others. Its social constitution means subjectivity is at once embodied and relational – a sense of self shaped by affective experiences of both dissonance and recognition for a self that does and then does not fit with the subject positions experienced in interactions with others [Berlant 2002: 2]. Photographs, being simultaneously representations of relationships and material objects, offer innumerable possibilities of dissonance and recognition for this performative self [Edwards *et al.* 2006]. A photograph can ground this performative self by constituting ongoing affective ties and social connections by materializing them in a specific image. Thus possessing, displaying, and handling photographs shapes peoples' social relations both with the subjects of the images and with the wider community in which images might be shared, viewed, interpreted, exchanged, or concealed. The material image encourages forms of sociality structured around accumulation, exchange and display.

The temporal qualities of photographic portraits engage the reflecting self and the possibilities of acting upon this self. Between affective experiences of the world and conduct - at least for the Western, individuated subject - subjectivity emerges as an interior space with its own laws and processes [Rose 1996: 119; see also Butler 1997]. In this internal space, both positive knowledge and rational techniques of self-shaping are possible. However, because the subject has no foundational self-knowledge, the absolute centre of this space is empty. It is this aporia which sits at the centre of subjectivity that allows future selves to be brought into being. The empty centre of the subject becomes evident to the reflecting self through the reflexivity that a photographic portrait demands from its subject. As Barthes [1981: 12, cited in Bloustein 2003: 2] observes, "I do not stop imitating myself, and because of this each time I am (or let myself be) photographed, I inevitably suffer from a sensation of inauthenticity, sometimes of imposture..." This feeling of imposture underpins the aspect of retrodictive prophecy attached to photographic portraits. Confronted by an image of themselves which feels inauthentic but to which they aspire, people can transform what begins as imposture, with effort and anxiety, into a future reality. As subjects of the image, they can attempt to frame their photographic representation so that their image cites a particular prosthetic biography which they then try to incorporate into their own life history. Photographic portraits thus offer people the opportunity to shape their futures and act on their subjectivities by delimiting the subject positions they experience in their interactions with others.

Examining the interplay between materiality and temporality for a particular set of images will reveal how the interaction between these two aspects of photography shape particularly haunted and anxious, yet aspirational and optimistic subjectivities that characterize the translocal social fields created by migration. The next section thus examines the social histories of photographs circulating between Filipino migrants' homes in Haliap in the upland province of Ifugao and their overseas worksites in Hong Kong. Their circulation across this dispersed village demonstrates how photographs have become fundamental to the constitution of the translocal social field, shaping both the form and content of sociality.

Photographs in the migrant archive

Photographs circulate from Haliap to Hong Kong alongside text messages, phone calls, emails, letters, and boxes of goods, all of which form what Appadurai [2003: 23] calls the "migrant archive." This archive is "a continuous and conscious work of the imagination, seeking in collective memory an ethical basis for the sustainable reproduction of cultural identities" [Appadurai 2003: 23]. By contextualizing and materializing experiences of mobility and subjection, the migrant archive allows people who have been marginal to the global economy to develop dreams and aspirations in a context of uncertainty and rapid change [Appadurai 2003: 25]. The archive is formed by the accretion of private communications in public circulation, so it exists beyond the debates of the commercial media. Though personal, Appadurai [2003:22] characterizes the archive as a politically contested space, describing it as a site of "voice, agency and debate, rather than ... mere reading, reception and interpellation"

[Appadurai 2003: 22]. While the bulk of the communication between Haliap and migrants in Hong Kong is comprised of SMS text messages and phone calls, photographs and their materiality ground the work of imagining prosperous futures.

More ephemeral kinds of communication depend on the circulation of photographs to enable sociality. While text messaging allows people to communicate “I’m here and thinking of you” and convey these messages immediately across translocal space, texts are difficult to share with others and hard to store. My respondents attach social meaning to text messages by grounding them in ongoing relationships materialized through circulating photographs which depict lives lived abroad and at home. Often they compose and send text messages while looking at a photograph that they have either stored on their mobile phone, carry in their wallet, or have displayed on the wall. Similarly, when they display or read the words of messages they have received from others, they frequently also show their most recent photograph of the sender. In Hong Kong, all my migrant respondents own mobile phones with built-in cameras. These are used to store collections of photographs which include pictures taken with the phone in both Hong Kong and Haliap, and also images created by re-photographing photographic prints from collections held by kin in Haliap. None of my respondents can afford the cost of the picture messaging services that would transfer images directly from phone to phone.

Migrants working in Hong Kong regularly send home their photographic portraits. Sending these images back to the main village site is a way for those

overseas to impel kin and community to consider their migrant relations in their daily lives. As material objects, photographs make these absent migrants present in their home places [see also Cannell 1999]. This is very important to migrants working on short-term contracts, because they will not be able to remain in Hong Kong. Instead, they must dream of, prepare for and invest in futures that will happen “at home” in the village. Their earnings, investments, and future security are thus very much in the hands of their kin who remain in Haliap. Displaying photographs of migrant kin at home serves to extend the village space by performing the ongoing integration of those in Hong Kong into the sphere of family or community. Likewise, the circulation of photographs among migrants in Hong Kong allows the home village to encompass distant spaces. Photographs thus “provide a physical manifestation, as an object of material culture, and as a performative reminder – through... display and viewing” [Lozada 2006: 95] that allows the spatially dispersed village to remain connected in a virtual realm and supports a virtual form of sociality.

Photographic prints mailed to Hong Kong by those at home are fewer in number, but just as important. These photographs tend to document important life events that migrants have funded such as graduations, weddings, funerals, and village festivals. Or such photographs may show the happy outcomes of the receipt of migrants’ funds, showing new fields, repaired houses, new agricultural equipment, or a commemorative flyer for a community event. These photographs are provided to migrants as evidence of their gifts – a further materialization of a translocal sociality shaped by reciprocal exchange. These photographs are circulated among migrant workers in Hong Kong. When Haliap

Ghosts of futures present

migrants come together after weekly church services, they show each other not only photographs of the family graduations, weddings and funerals they have funded, but pictures of “improved” houses, new farms and fields, and new agricultural equipment that represent investments in securing a future livelihood in the Philippines.

A powerful sense of constant connection emerges from these exchanges of photographs and the accompanying voice calls and text messages. Maintaining this connection requires displays of emotional care and transfers of economic value that entail almost instantaneous responses to long-distance requests. As Pertierra [1992] argues, village sociality in the Philippines is constituted through participation in a shared temporality. To maintain village sociality across distance, it becomes particularly important for migrants to respond immediately to crises or special events in the Philippines with either advice or, more often, transfers of cash. For migrants, their ability to provide financial aid in a household or community emergency has great potential to enhance their status. For their kin at home, the ability to command resources from a relative working overseas likewise serves as a demonstration of prowess. Text messages and calls received by migrants thus frequently convey requests for emergency finance to cover the expenses of school fees, weddings, funerals, unexpected medical expenses and livelihood emergencies. Families of migrants often display the most recent photographs sent from Hong Kong in the room from which they text or make phone calls. Having a current photograph of a migrant relative to hand both displays their international connections to kin and visitors and materializes the relationship to which they turn in a crisis. Those in Hong Kong, however,

sometimes express dismay at the content of this translocal sociality with one respondent complaining “home... they only call me when they need money, or send pictures when they’ve spent it, otherwise, nothing...”

Photographs and their circulation reveal how absent migrants are nonetheless present in the translocal village by documenting migrants’ positions within a dense network of affective and obligatory ties, and exchange, gift, and redistributive relations that together shape locality. Migrants often fund their travel to jobs overseas with loans from those left at home, paying off their debts from their Hong Kong wages. Photographs from Hong Kong then provide material evidence that the migrant is doing well and that the debt will be repaid. While they are abroad, migrants typically take on more debt to pay for housing, education, or to make investments at home that will provide for their future. Those receiving remitted money then send photographs to Hong Kong that serve as documentation of these investments, reassuring the migrant that family members are managing the money according to the migrant’s wishes. Translocal sociality here revolves around the affects and social expressions of borrowing, indebtedness and economic care, with photographic images serving as reminders, promissory notes, and pre-emptive displays of various forms of debt and obligation. Migrants in Hong Kong sometimes express concerns that the photographs sent from home may be staged or “faked.” They are concerned that their kin at home have not managed their investments properly nor made the kinds of substantial improvements that the photographs of rituals, agricultural activities and construction might suggest. Those at home, in turn, are anxious that their migrant relatives’ expectations of “progress” and gratitude will be met

by the images posted to them in Hong Kong. Sending photographs is thus a material act of caring that supports both claims on migrant earnings and the claims of migrants to make investments and have these cared for by kin and community.

In revealing economic relations, photographs also make visible the shape of personhood in the translocal sociocultural field. Photographs document, maintain, and materialize relations that extend beyond the boundaries created by subjectivation of persons as individuals. Persons in photographs more often than not represent a set of social relations — their siblings, their household, their kin group, their neighborhood cluster, their village of Haliap – rather than bounded, individual selves. This is why the many photographs circulating in Haliap depict kin groups, shared projects or labor exchange groups, and community-wide celebrations rather than lone individuals. Often my respondents were unable to give me the names of all the persons pictured in a photograph, but could describe the event where the photograph was taken, the economic exchanges underlying its sociality, and the social relations they thought the images enacted. Thus photographs in translocal circulation offer a commentary on the remittance of cash by migrants, reminding everyone that people are constituted through relations with others and that these relations depend on the production, appropriation and distribution of economic surplus [see Strathern 1988: 161], especially where these relationships include those people working abroad.

In addition to revealing relationships, photographic portraits in the archive also make visible individuated forms of social status, a concept my Haliap

respondents describe with metaphors of social size. Both subjects and recipients described portraits as representing positions in networks of social relations, with migrants being (in English) “big” persons because they are central to networks of exchange. In this field of relational personhood then, portraits of migrants create distinctive forms of relational subjectivity linked both to the materiality and the anteriority of the photographic image. Following the social life of particular photographic portraits across the translocal field of Haliap illustrates the distinctive ways in which relational personhood, translocal subjectivities and photographs are entwined.

Sending photographic portraits

The photographs in Figures 1 – 4 were taken by me and one of my Haliap respondents, Jose (a pseudonym), in Hong Kong in December, 2005. Jose then sent prints back to the Philippines. The first photograph (Figure 1) shows Jose on the beach beside the Stanley Markets on Hong Kong Island. At Jose’s instigation, we each posed for a photograph by the water’s edge. Later, reflecting on this photo, Jose pointed out that he was wearing a turtleneck shirt as well as black Chinese cotton slippers. When he looked at the photograph, he observed that it depicted him in the “uniform of a helper” (domestic worker). Because this was “low” work, he decided not to send this particular photograph back home, but to keep it as a memento of the day. Two of the photos that Jose did select for mailing home were Figures 2 and 3. In Figure 2, he and Rosa (also a pseudonym), his wife, sit on a bench at Ocean Park. This theme park is a middle-class Hong Kong amusement attraction displaying panda bears, dolphins, and seals as well as having themed areas, including the bench featuring Disney’s Little Mermaid

which appears in the photograph. This image speaks of globalized culture, consumption of leisure services and tourism. Jose deemed it suitable to send back to Haliap. Jose's selections reveal strategic decisions about which kinds of images will be shared with his kin and community.

The photograph Jose described as "most important" to him was Figure 3, a portrait of him taken by Rosa after Jose had remitted their Christmas gifts (of cash) to their family in Haliap. In this photograph, Jose is standing in Statue Square, near the Worldwide Centre mall in Hong Kong's Central district. He is carrying a promotional bag from the Philippine National Bank. Possessing the bag indicates both that he has just sent money and that the amount he sent was sufficient to merit a giveaway bag. Behind him is Santa's Village, a display of Christmas decorations erected in Central's Statue Square. Jose is wearing his church-going clothes. His outfit includes a watch and shoes that Rosa told me he had purchased with money borrowed from a finance agency. This photographic portrait speaks of success and affluence. His clean, leisure-oriented clothes, new shoes, and cigarette emphasize to the Haliap viewer that he can also afford some personal luxuries alongside the gifts sent home. For the Haliap viewer, there is no sign to indicate that his apparent success depends on further borrowing.

Here, as in other photographic portraits, culture is expressed through the choice of a "finite and well-defined range of subjects, genres and compositions" for photographs [Tagg 1988: 63, quoted in Pinney 1997: 11; see also Hirsch 2004]. Just as for Hirsch's [2004: 23] Papuan subjects, to stand in front of the camera clean, well-dressed, and prosperous cites Jose's Ifugao ethnicity and the visual

economy [Poole 1997] of the upland Philippines in particular ways. As an Ifugao man, from an ethnic group often associated with poverty and backwardness, Jose's self-presentation is intended to convey messages about both his cosmopolitanism and his personal economic potency. His staging and selection of this photograph reveal an attempt to act on his subjectivity by portraying himself as solid, secure and worthy, a person who can offer assistance, guidance and material help to others. In other words, he has had himself photographed as a relatively "big" person.

The reception of Jose's photographs in Haliap was the subject of our discussions on my next visit to Hong Kong. Jose laughed as he told me that they had generated a flurry of text messages and phone calls from relatives and neighbors requesting loans. His descriptions of these communications suggested that his photographs spoke to their recipients about status and potency in a social field where the kinship mode of production is now translocal. In Haliap his status – as well as the care of his investments and future possibilities – depends on reciprocity and the debts of gratitude his gifts and loans entail; thus a flurry of requests indicated that a number of people held him in high esteem.

Consuming photographs

Visiting Haliap allowed me to follow the fate of the photographs Jose had sent home. In Haliap houses, photographs are rarely framed and hung. Instead, people arrange photographs on shelves, tack them to doors, store them in plastic leaved booklets, but always have them to hand. Photographs from Hong Kong are handed over to guests and handled regularly, becoming faded, foxed by

mildew, and covered in greasy fingerprints. Their time in the migrant archive is fleeting because they are inherently fragile objects, given the damp and chill of Haliap's rainy season and their treatment in the hands of curious children.

Jose's recently-constructed house in Haliap is occupied by his sister-in-law and family and they received the photos taken in Hong Kong the following month. By my visit, six months on, these photographs had been sufficiently damaged (through repeated inspection and circulation among neighbors and relatives) that they were declared (in English) "consumed". Jose's sister-in-law, the custodian of the photographs, cut out the figures of people – including Jose – and added them to a large collage on the wall opposite the front door. The collage had, as its background, a huge poster (5' x 3') of a waterfall and also featured clippings from glossy magazines. The collage was notable for its large scale and the way it dominated the room used to receive visitors.

This collage positioned both Jose's sister-in-law and her boyfriend in a liminal landscape that appeared to me to be an image of the global. Alongside Jose's figure, cut from the photograph in Figure 3, the collage contained images of office towers and of other migrants in Hong Kong sent by Jose, as well as the figures of several Haliap neighbors cut from other photographs. By incorporating Jose's image along with those of migrant neighbors, his sister-in-law grounded her imagination of possible futures in current kin and village relations. When I asked her to tell me about the collage, she said it was "just for fun" and then elaborated, "and to remind myself that I have a dream to work abroad, too."

Ghosts of futures present

The collage exemplifies Appadurai's [2003] claim that the migrant archive opens up the capacity to aspire and the possibility of taking risks within translocal social fields for people who are not (yet) migrants themselves. When I later asked Jose if his photographs had initiated any particular requests from his sister-in-law, he was able to give me a long list. She had sent him text messages asking for capital to start a small store, money to purchase a new oven, an increase in the amount Jose and Rosa send as a household allowance each month, and a request to find her a potential employer of her own in Hong Kong. By adding bits of the photographs sent by Jose to her collage, she demonstrated her position in a network of relations that enable her, too, to aspire to success through migration. She was not alone in this aspiration.

As for Appadurai's [2003:22] description of the migrant archive as a site of "voice, agency and debate", I found that people receiving migrant photographs did not appear to question the apparent documentary quality of the images. Unlike migrants in Hong Kong, people viewing the images did not suggest that they might be faked or staged. Here, instead, the materiality of the photograph supported a widespread faith in migration as a "remedy" to local struggles for livelihood and development. The interpretation of Jose's photographs by his sister-in-law exemplifies the ways non-migrant villagers interpreted migrants' photographs as documenting real increases in material wealth, personal well-being, and potential to act as patron within extended family networks. When I suggested to some of Jose's Haliap relatives and neighbors that perhaps Jose was struggling with finances, they were dismissive, referring me back to the images of his evident prosperity and his ability to meet his sister-in-laws' requests. They

expressed what I understood to be a determination to take his photographs at face value, ignoring several other sources of information on the economic struggles of migrant workers.

Rather than inciting debate or giving voice, in translocal Haliap migrants' photographic portraits are a site where particular kinds of translocal agency find expression. It appears that there is a tacit agreement between migrants abroad and those at home that such images are to be interpreted in an optimistic and positive light. By acting as if their photographs document a present self, migrants gain the ability to bring their desired subject positions – successful investor, patron, and mobile cosmopolitan - into being. When people at home respond to migrants' photographs with requests for gifts and loans and business proposals, migrants become the kinds of subjects they would like to be, in many cases despite, not because of, their personal economic circumstances while working abroad. As Jose explained, photographs made bigger people, those on whom others can depend and who can then command the loyalty of others. This opportunity to become "bigger" at home was, for Jose, worth the risk of going into additional debt by borrowing against his Hong Kong salary from a finance company. Indeed, his clothes in the portrait (Figure 3) and much of the money he sent home for Christmas represented debt, rather than outright earnings. Jose's staging and selection of particular portrait images to send home is thus a way that Jose acts on himself, shaping his social relations in ways intended to bring into being the successful future to which he aspires.

The Ghost of the Future

Like Jose, many of my other migrant respondents circulated photographic portraits intended to figure them as successful and wealthy, and then found they needed to remain abroad, taking on second or third contracts, until they could meet the expectations created by these photographs among those at home. For them, the experience of migration is one where the retrodictive prophecies attached to their portraits produce a self-reflexive experience of being haunted by a future self that they are compelled to enact in the here-and-now. The longer a migrant remains in Hong Kong, the more this subjective experience of imposture may be intensified. This is because photographs are material and “consumed”, meaning that migrants must continually send new, better and “more successful” portraits home to maintain their social position. Because the content of translocal sociality is shaped by economic exchange, the social histories of circulating photographs show a kind of inflation – where each image of success must somehow top that of the previous portrait.

Jose’s photographs reveal how the circulation of images frames dissonance and recognition for the performative self in a relational form of personhood. Jose explained that, when he cannot grant loans and make gifts, he feels he has failed in his plans and becomes smaller, losing status: “when they are disappointed in me, I feel small.” However, when he can share his savings or bonuses or take on extra work or loans, he continues to be recognized – and continues to recognize himself – as the patron he performs in his photographic portraits. Jose describes this as giving him a feeling of status and security, saying, “Then they cannot look at me as if I am become small.” Over time, however, Jose’s portrait images were materially “consumed” - cut out and put onto a collage and thus reduced in size

and re—contextualized in a space beyond his control. The fragile materiality of the image allows the Jose-of-his-image to become small. Renewing his image at home by sending another photograph of himself, as well as additional gifts or monies, is the way Jose can regain his social size.

Jose's comments on his social size exemplify what appears to be a wider discourse on the relational self as shaped by migration. Another of my respondents explained her experience of returning to the Philippines in terms of social size:

Now that I'm "ex-Hong Kong", it's as if I'm a bigger person here (in the Philippines) than when I am there... There I can provide more for my family; I am more to my friends. But when I'm there, I miss home. When I'm home, I miss being... the one I am there. There, all I can think about is home; home, all I think about is going back. [Quoted in McKay 2006: 268]

Like Jose, this respondent describes feeling "bigger" at home since she has migrated. She observes that she could be "more" to her friends and family if she remained in Hong Kong: returning home has diminished her. This is often the experience of migrants who have returned to the Philippines and who have been deemed to have squandered their overseas earnings – they are made to feel small and their generosity derided when they are labeled "one-day millionaires." The translocal sociocultural field thus recognizes migrants as successful and potent persons when they can continue to sustain the obligations of reciprocity that their "big" status requires on their return home. This respondent's discussion of

feeling big and small suggests that migrants returning home experience being “cut down to size” by everyday, face-to-face social interactions. Considering how Jose’s sister-in-law trimmed his photographic portraits for her collage, it may be that the material treatment of photographs is another way that those at home express their agency in their relations with migrants. Cutting migrants’ images down to size might symbolize the resentments felt by those at home when their relatives abroad begin to act as patrons, rather than debtors.

The material and temporal aspects of photographs allow both migrants and those at home to rework a relational self by producing and appropriating images. Whether as portraits that claim yet-to-be experienced success and security or as collages that map aspirations, photographic images here are used to create social size by a performative self. This mode of action on and of the self, through manipulation of the image, generates distinctive anxieties and expectations as well as informing the affects arising from interactions with others. The use of these photographs thus tells us about the struggle to manage the self in a relational field – by managing relations with and expectations of others.

For migrants, circulating these photographs engenders a distinctive subjectivity, one shaped by feelings of imposture and anxiety, as well as ambition and hope. Migrants are aware that, however optimistic they might be, bringing a prosperous future requires both hard work and luck. Thus the subject of the migrant’s photographic portrait is a ghost of this as-yet-uncertain future. Beneath its trappings of apparent success may lie the hidden emotional cost of migrants deferring their return home. By renewing their photographs and inflating the

success in the prosthetic biographies attached to the images they figure, migrants deploy the reflexive potential of photograph images to shape the insecure space of their future.

Acknowledgements

Thanks to my respondents in the Philippines and Hong Kong and my colleagues at University of the Philippines, Baguio, for their continued support and hospitality. Fieldwork in the Philippines and Hong Kong (2004 and 2005) was supported by the Australian National University. My co-presenters in the 2005 Australian Anthropological Society meetings and colleagues Richard Vokes and Benjamin Smith provided helpful comments on earlier drafts. The paper has also benefited from the constructive comments offered by colleagues at the Australian National University, through the Human Geography Seminar series. All errors of fact and interpretation remain my own.

References

Appadurai, Arjun

1996 Modernity at Large: Cultural dimensions of Globalization.

Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

Ghosts of futures present

2003 Archive and aspiration. In *Art and Theory on Archiving and Retrieving Data*, Brouwer, Joke and Mulder, Arjen, eds, pp. 14 – 25. Rotterdam: V2 Publishing/NAI Publishers.

Barthes, Frederic

2000 *Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography*. Howard, Richard, trans. London: Vintage.

Berlant, Laurent

2002 Critical Inquiry, Affirmative Culture. *Critical Inquiry* 30(2): 1 – 5.

Bloustein, Gerry

2003 Envisioning Ethnography: Exploring the meanings of the visual in research. *Social Analysis* 47(3): 1-7.

Butler, Judith

1997 *The psychic life of power: theories in subjection*. Stanford: Stanford University Press.

Cannell, Fennella

1999 *Power and intimacy in the Christian Philippines*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Edwards, Elizabeth, Gosden, Christ, and Phillips, Ruth B.

Ghosts of futures present

2006 Introduction. In *Sensible Objects: colonialism, museums, and material culture*. Edwards, Elizabeth, Gosden, Chris, and Phillips, Ruth, eds, pp. 1 – 31. Oxford: Berg.

Gell, Alfred

1998 *Art and Agency: an Anthropological Theory*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.

Hirsch, Eric

2004 Techniques of Vision: Photography, Disco, and Renderings of Present Perceptions in Highland Papua. *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute* 10: 19 – 39.

Holland, Dorothy and Leander, Kevin

2004 Ethnographic Studies of Positioning and Subjectivity: an Introduction. *Ethos* 32: 127-139.

Lozada, Edward

2006 Framing Globalization: Wedding Pictures, Funeral Photography, and Family Snapshots in Rural China. *Visual Anthropology* 19: 87-103.

Luhmann, Tanya

2006 Subjectivity. *Anthropological Theory* 6(3): 345 – 361.

Ghosts of futures present

Lury, Celia

1998 *Prosthetic Culture: Photography, Memory, Identity*. London: Routledge.

McKay, Deirdre

2006 Translocal Circulation: Place and Subjectivity in an Extended Filipino Community. *The Asia-Pacific Journal of Anthropology* 7(3): 265-278.

Ortner, Sherry

2005 Subjectivity and Cultural Critique. *Anthropological Theory* 5(1): 31 – 52.

Pertierra, Raul

1992 Trust and the Temporal Structure of Expectations in a Philippine Village. *The Australian Journal of Anthropology* 3(3): 201–217.

Pinney, Christopher

1997 *Camera Indica: the Social Life of Indian Photographs*. London: Reaktion.

Poole, Deborah

1997 *Vision, Race and Modernity: A Visual Economy of the Andean Image World*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

Rose, Nicholas

Ghosts of futures present

1996. Power and Subjectivity: Critical History and Psychology. In *Historical Dimensions of Psychological Discourse*. Graumann, Carl F. and Gergen, Kenneth J. eds, pp. 103 – 124. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Sontag, Susan

1977 *On Photography*. New York: Dell.

Strathern, Marilyn

1988 *The Gender of the Gift: Problems with Women and Problems with Society in Melanesia*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Tagg, John

1988 *The Burden of Representation: Essays on Photographies and Histories*. Basingstoke: Macmillan.

Wright, Christopher

2004 Material and Memory: Photography in the Western Solomon Islands. *Journal of Material Culture* 9(1): 73 – 85.

Ghosts of futures present

Figures:

Figure 1 – Jose on the beach at Stanley, Hong Kong Island.



Figure 2 – Jose and Rosa with the Little Mermaid, Ocean Park, Hong Kong.



Ghosts of futures present

Figure 3 – Jose having just remitted his Christmas gifts, Statue Square, Central, Hong Kong Island.

