Migrant narratives as photo stories: On the properties of photography and the mediation of migrant voices

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Abstract
This article examines how the properties of photography might mediate voice, defined as the capacity to speak and to be heard speaking about one's life and the social conditions in which one's life is embedded (Couldry, 2010). It focuses on the affordances that the image provides for migrant cultural minorities to articulate such a voice within the context of collaborative research. I look at the case of Shutter Stories, a collaborative photography exhibition featuring the photo stories of Indian and Korean migrants from Manila, The Philippines. Using participant observation data, I show that it was photography's ability to be all at once indexical, iconic, and symbolic that became important in voice as 'speaking' (see Scott, 1999). It allowed migrants to tell rich, multimodal narratives about their lives, albeit with some key limitations. I also show that it was photography's inability to fix meanings with finality that mattered in voice as 'being heard' (see Messaris, 1997). Although the locals who visited the exhibition engaged with the photo stories in an overwhelmingly positive manner, they often did not completely grasp the migrants' complex narratives. All these data indicate that collaborative photography exhibition projects should not just be about how migrants speak and are heard. They should also be about how migrants can listen, so that they can adjust what they say to how they are being heard. This is a valuable reminder that in conceptualising photography and migrant cultural minority voices, we also need to take into account the broader process of multicultural dialogue.

This article explores the ways in which the properties of photography might mediate voice, especially within the context of a collaborative research project. It pays particular attention to how this medium allows migrant cultural minorities to tell their narratives about their lives. This is a task that requires critical thought, especially since there is much optimism surrounding photography as a platform for cultural minority groups to express themselves. Photographs are said to help cultural minority groups to overcome the barriers posed by verbal language, as it allows them to craft stories that rely primarily on visual language (see Messaris, 1997; Scott, 1999). Together with this, taking photographs is also now thought to be a commonplace activity for many people in highly urbanised and highly mediated contexts, cultural minority groups included. Partly because of the advent of mobile photography as well as of photo-sharing and social networking sites, making images and putting them up for public display has become ubiquitous and much less daunting than, for instance, writing, painting, or music-making (see Burgess, 2006; McKay, 2010; Van Djick, 2011).

In this article, I define voice as people's capacity to speak and to be heard speaking about their lives and the social conditions in which their lives are embedded (Couldry, 2010).[1] Consequently, I look into how the properties of photography matter not only in the moment when migrants produce images (which relates to voice as speaking), but also in the moment when the migrants' images are consumed (which relates to voice as being heard). This allows me to make two significant scholarly contributions. First is that by engaging in such an analysis, I hope to further expand the boundaries of the extant literature on the photograph as a narrative medium. There is already a rich set of literature on this subject. It includes the works of, among others, Barthes (1981), Berger (1988 [1972]), Lucaites and Hariman (2001), Messaris (1997), Scott (1999), Sontag (2002 [1977]), and Zelizer (2006). Important as these works are, they often focus too heavily on what the characteristics of photography mean for those who interpret images. With their singular focus on the relationship between the nature of photography and the process of photographic consumption, these works do not do enough to articulate what these characteristics might mean for those who construct images.[2] And this is something I intend to do in this article.

Second, I aim to provide a nuanced account of the possibilities and problems of attempting to harness photography as a platform for migrant cultural minority voices. In so doing, I hope to help further empirically ground the assertion that collaborative research projects should avoid the tendency for overoptimism about the empowering quality of visual media (Buckingham 2009). To be sure, there are existing works on the role of the various visual media in collaborative research (for example, Banks 2001; da Silva and Pink 2004; Mitchell 2011; Pink 2006). There are also works look at the value of handing over the camera to research participants to generate insights about their lives (for example, Krieg and Roberts 2007; Singhal et al 2007: Wang 1999). But then again, these works do not directly address how the specific properties of the photograph might impinge on socially marginalised voices.

To anchor my discussion on how photography might mediate voice in collaborative research projects, I use the case of *Shutter Stories*: *A Photography Exhibition on the Life of Indians and Koreans in Manila* (which I will refer to throughout the rest of this paper as *Shutter Stories*). This was a collaborative research project that I worked on with the five Indian and four Korean migrants whose works were featured in the exhibition as well as with two photography scholars from one of the top universities in the Philippines. I initiated this project in an attempt to create an 'interruption' (Pinchevski 2005) to how the Philippine capital of Manila, a 12 million strong mega-city, has symbolically marginalised its two most visible diasporic groups: its approximately 115,000 Koreans and its 70,000 Indians (MOFAT 2009; Salazar 2008). As I fleshed out in previously published piece (Cabañes, 2014), Manila is an interesting prism for understanding how the mediation of multiculturalism might play out in the postcolonial Global South. Whilst Indians and Koreans are generally better off financially compared to the locals in the city, the Manila-centric Philippine national media and the public discourses of Manila's local Filipinos nevertheless portray these

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[1] Couldry refers to this definition of voice as 'voice as a process' (Couldry 2010, 10). And in this article, it is this particular conception of voice that I focus on. It is important to note, however, that Couldry posits that there is a second register to voice that is about 'the act of valuing, and choosing to value, those frameworks for organising human life and resources that themselves value voice (as a process)... [and] discriminating against frameworks of social, economic and political organisation that deny or undermine voice' (10-11). He refers to this conception of voice as 'voice as a value' (10).

[2] There is another set of relevant literature that provides important insights into how various social formations shape people's practices of photography (for example, Bourdieu 1990; Burgess 2006; Kendall 2006; Slater 1995). However, even these do not necessarily pay enough attention to the role that the characteristics of photographs play in people's ways of taking photographs.

migrants using problematic stereotypes. The predominant imaginary for the city's Indians is the 'bumbay'. They are thought of as a 'smelly, turban-wearing, heavily bearded, motorcycle-riding loan shark who preys on needy locals desperate enough to agree to borrow money under or buy home appliances through an usurious lending scheme' (ibid). Meanwhile, the predominant imaginary for the city's Koreans is of them being moneyed but nevertheless weird 'invaders' who have decided to come to the Philippines in droves. They are thought of as 'brash,' 'unruly,' 'noisy,' but also comically naïve (ibid.).

Shutter Stories was meant to foster a space wherein some of Manila's Indians and Koreans could create photo stories that would challenge these problematic representations. The project began in July 2011, with the five Indian and four Korean participants undergoing a series of seminars on basic photography, photo narration, and photo selection. The participants were then asked to craft their own stories about migrant life in Manila. Finally, in August 2011, the participants' photo stories were put on display for a week-long public exhibition in one of the largest shopping malls in Manila.

In summary, this article analyses how the properties of the photographic medium shaped the kinds of stories that the Indian and Korean participants of the *Shutter Stories* project could tell about their migrant lives and, equally important, shaped the ways in which the local Filipino viewers engaged with these stories. Through this, it hopes to identify the affordances that the image can provide for migrant cultural minority voices.

A mediational approach to photography in collaborative research

As my key approach to the research problem in this study, I use the concept of mediation. This concept has been made to refer to different things across different scholarly disciplines (for an excellent mapping out of these definitions, see Couldry 2008, 20012; Lundby 2014; Thumim 2012). My use of mediation in this article is anchored on the work of the Roger Silverstone, who defines this concept as the process in which meanings are circulated in society and, as a consequence, are constantly transformed (Silverstone 1999). Key to understanding this process is the need 'to enquire into the instability and flux of meanings and into their transformations, [and] also into the politics of their fixing' (ibid., 16).

In line with this notion of mediation, my discussion in the latter half of this article will focus on how the photograph as a medium figured in the circulation and transformation of the meanings attached to the Indian and Korean migrants' stories about their lives. Crucial to this discussion is a nuanced conceptualisation of the most salient characteristics of photography: that, as Clive Scott contends, it simultaneously denotative and connotative. Using C.S. Peirce's classic semiological modes of the index, the icon, and the symbol,[3] Scott makes two suppositions about this paradoxical quality of photography. First, he claims that photographs are primordially denotative, with the indexical as their most basic relationship with the reality that they are thought to represent. Second, he also claims that as these images become increasingly removed from the context of their production, their connotative quality becomes more and more pronounced. They move towards the iconic and, later on, to the symbolic (Scott, 1999). I elaborate on these points below, highlighting

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[3] Chandler defines these modes as follows: (1) the index as 'a mode in which the signifier is not arbitrary but directly connected to the signified,' (2) the icon as 'a mode in which the signifier is perceived as resembling or imitating the signified,' and (3) the symbol as 'mode in which the signifier does not resemble the signified but which is fundamentally arbitrary or purely conventional' (Chandler 2007, 36-37).

how these different photographic modes diverge and converge. I also present how these modes might impact on the mediation of migrant voices.

The photographic modes, their promises, and their problems

The photograph as index

Scott argues that, first and foremost, the photographic medium is indexical. For him, photographs are inextricably linked to their material referents via physical causality or connection; at their most basic, images are comprised of traces of light patterns and their reflections off subjects (Scott 1999). For many scholars, what defines this indexical mode of photographs is the idea that they are an aide-mémoire (for example, Hughes and Noble 2003; Keenan 1998; Messaris 1997). This refers to how photographs, by their very nature, are never completely themselves. They constantly hearken to something else from the past, from that particular instance in which they were originally taken. But at the same time, as Roland Barthes points out, photographs can also be a counter-memory. Barthes contends that when the origins of photographs are unknown, they become images that people can view but cannot decipher (Barthes 1981, 91). In such instances, they fail as memory devices, with their denotative elements unable to summon the complex meanings associated with the original sensory experience depicted within their frames (Sontag 2002 [1977]).

It appears then that the indexicality of photographs means that they can be an aid as much as a hindrance to how we remember; photographs can both reinforce and recreate, assure and trouble, as well as evoke and interfere with our memories (see Sturken 1997; Wells 2004; Zelizer 1998). As Hughes and Noble put it, photographs, 'like the memories they stand in for, are never pure or unmediated' (Hughes and Noble 2003, 5). They are instead 'artifactual constructions, hence sites of contestation and dispute' (5).

The photograph as icon

The ambiguity at the heart of photographic indexicality leads me to the notion of the medium's iconicity. This photographic mode emphasises that images are not only visual records with an enduring connection to their material referents. They are also visual depictions than can elicit diverse interpretations. As Scott puts it, even if photographs are primordially indexical, they have 'a large dose of the iconic from the outset…all photographs, individually...move from the indexical to the iconic, without, however, sacrificing their indexicality' (Scott 1999, 32). Scott also says that the reason why photographs tend to travel the route from the indexical to the iconic is because they usually undergo a process of disembedding. This could be spatial, as happens when they get physically transported from one location to another while their referents get left behind. But this could also be temporal, as happens when they slowly but inexorably become historical artefacts whose referents get increasingly distant through the passage of time (*ibid.).*

Once the contextual linkages of photographs are loosened, they become open to interpretations that are less locally generated and that are more generally understood. This means that the emphasis shifts away from indexicality and personal memories and moves towards iconicity and collective memories. What happens here is that as the photograph increasingly loses its capacity to reveal the smaller and more personal details, it also increasingly gains the ability to become a visual representation that can stand in for complex historical realities (Hariman and Lucaites 2003; 2007; Sturken, 1997). This makes photographs very powerful, since they are thought to encapsulate the memories of a certain group. At the same, this also makes photographs be very political, as they are extremely filtered and abstracted representations of these memories (Berger 2008 [1972]; Sontag 2002 [1997]; Zelizer, 1998).

The photograph as symbol

Once the emphasis of photographs shift from the indexical mode to the iconic mode, they could very easily move towards the symbolic mode as well. This is because both the iconic and the symbolic stem from the connotative quality of photographs. But they do have a significant difference. Scott says that whilst the symbolic mode is still about photographs as visual representations, the representation tends to be of the conceptual rather than the historical (Scott, 1999). Concretely, this means that conceptual meanings can be embedded into photographs. Paul Messaris argues that this can be done by deploying photographic conventions, which he labels as the syntax of the medium. These conventions include visual communication codes, such as camera angles, colours, lighting, staging, and other such techniques (Messaris, 1999). Barthes makes a similar point. He talks about the *studium* or the set of shared cultural resources drawn on by photographers in the process of photographic creation. Through this, photographers are able to call the attention of the viewer, as well as offering them a framework for making sense of the visual codes embedded within the frame (Barthes, 1981).

But then again, as with most other visual media, photographs cannot really pin down meanings with finality (Hall, 1997). Messaris says that images are often syntactically indeterminate and imprecise in articulating propositions, such as analogies, contrasts, or causal claims. At best, they can only privilege certain interpretations (Messaris 1997). Once again, Barthes makes a similar claim. He talks about the *punctum* or the unpredictable detail in photographs that holds the attention of the viewers in a way that no other element in the photograph can. Barthes colourfully describes the punctum as that which flies through the air like an arrow and pierces the viewers. Crucially, he says that this is something that the photographers cannot really predetermine (Barthes, 1981).

It is important to note that despite the polysemy of photographs, they are usually read in a limited number of ways. This is because photographs are usually not interpreted in isolation. Photographs are generally interpreted intertextually, that is, in relation to the other images that circulate within a society. As such, they end up being viewed from within the discursive formations that predominate the said society (Rose 2007). Photographs are also generally interpreted in relation to the perspectives privileged by the social domain wherein they are displayed, whether this be an online news site, a place of worship, an art gallery, or a history museum, amongst others. Because of this, the transportability of photographs can sometimes be tricky. This is especially the case when the domain wherein these images are produced operate under discursive formations that are completely antithetical to the domain in which they are consumed (Zelizer 2006).

The photographic modes and migrant voices

Drawing from the discussion in the preceding section, one can identify a number of important implications that the photographic modes might have on the voices of migrants such as the Indian and Korean participants of *Shutter Stories*. The existing literature indicate that the interplay amongst the three key modes of the medium can open up and close down particular ways in which migrants can tell their stories about diasporic life.

For one, there is the photograph's indexical mode and the complex tension between photographic remembering and forgetting it brings about. The photograph's testimonial character as an aide-mémoire offers the possibility of concretising and authenticating the stories told by migrants, thereby cementing the irrefutability of the account that they offer. The photograph's tendency to be a counter-memory, however, with its inability to fix personal meanings and

intentionalities, means that it poses the risk of being unable to reveal the fullness of the stories of told by migrants (for example, see Alu 2010).

Second is the photograph's iconic mode. This opens up the opportunity for migrants to speak not just about their individual migrant experiences, but also about the migrant experience in general. In other words, their personal memories can also become collective memories that purport to encapsulate the experiences of their fellow migrants. With that said, the iconicity of photographs also raises the problem that images might be seen as one-sided, as they necessarily simplify the complexity of migrant experiences (for example, see Gordon 2006).

Finally, there is the symbolic mode of photographs. This provides migrants the opportunity to attach conceptual meanings to their visual narratives. But then again, this mode also raises the issue that those viewing the photographs might interpret visual narratives in ways that are less aligned with the migrants' original intent. Instead, these viewers might have an understanding of the images that are more in line with the dominant discourses of the particular society or the particular social domain in which they are embedded (for example, see McKay 2008).

Exploring photographic mediation in a collaborative photography project

To explore how the properties of photography might mediate migrant voices with the context of a collaborative research project, I use the field notes and audio recordings I took while conducting participant observation during the second phase (that is, the implementation phase) of *Shutter Stories*. This phase included both the time when the Indian and Korean project participants were undergoing seminars on basic photography, photo narration, and photo selection as well as the time when their works were on display for public exhibition. As contextualising data, I also use the life story interviews I had with the migrant participants. These interviews happened during the first phase (that is, the preparation phase) of the project, during which my concern was to understand how the mediation of multiculturalism in Manila impinged on the everyday life experiences of the city's Indians and Koreans.

I would like to make three important methodological notes here. One is about the composition of the participants in the project. In an effort to capture the diversity of perspectives that I encountered during the first phase of the project, my original plan involved asking ten of the Indians and ten of the Koreans I interviewed to join the second phase of the project. In the end, however, *Shutter Stories* ended up with a smaller group of five Indian and four Korean participants (see Tables 1 and 2).

Insert Table 1.

Insert Table 2.

What is interesting is that these nine participants who saw the project through shared a number of strikingly similar characteristics. These shared traits were instrumental in helping me convince them to join a project that required an intense level of commitment. One is their relatively young age and their unmarried status, which meant that they had schedules that were more flexible than some of the other life story interviewees, who might have been kept busy by their families or by their prominent roles in their businesses or professions. Second is their university experience, which made the photography seminars a familiar set- up, unlike some of the other interviewees who might have found the format rather daunting. Third is their interest in photography, which meant that they were keen to learn more about it and get recognition for doing it too, unlike some of the other interviewees who might have been less interested in or more apprehensive about the craft.

My second methodological note is about how I took the position of 'participant as observer' throughout the project (Hammersley & Atkinson, 1983, p. 93). I was a participant and an insider because as the project organiser, I worked closely with Terri and Ricki—the photography scholars facilitating the seminars—and also with the migrant participants. I was also an observer and an outsider because as a researcher, I needed to periodically take a step back from the project and examine the process that the participants and I were undergoing. This double move enabled me to have a nuanced perspective of how the Indian and Korean participants found the project supported and, in a few instances, limited their voices (see Mac an Ghaill 1996).

Finally, and related to the point above, I should say that because of my role as project organiser, I was involved in setting up the context within which the migrant participants could speak and be heard through their photo stories. As regards the context of production, I provided an ideological frame for *Shutter Stories* by saying that the project was driven by the data I gathered about the problematic imaginaries that Manila had of its Indians and Koreans. This was one of the key reasons why, as the ensuing discussion will show, the migrant participants crafted photo stories that sought to challenge the stereotypes about their cultural groups. Together with the photography scholars Ricki and Terri, I also asked the migrant participants to consider professional media production aesthetics in creating their images, as this would help strengthen the possibility that viewers would engage with their work. This was why, as the ensuing discussion will show as well, the migrant participants incorporated those so-called production logics of the cultural industries in their photo stories (see Burgess, 2006).

As regards the context of consumption, I was involved in three key decisions. These included: (1) prioritising some of the migrant participants' request for anonymity and, as such, downplaying their identities in the public exhibition, (2) crafting the accompanying promotional materials that framed the exhibition as an invitation for the city's local to 'view Manila from another standpoint', and (3) dealing with the project's financial constraints by giving up on displaying the images on photo panels and instead showing them as a continuously looped slide show on a large LCD screen. These decisions mattered because of how it contributed to the establishing to exhibition context within which the migrant participants' photographs were viewed. After all, "images work differently in the contexts that put them to work" (Zelizer 2006, 5). Indeed this particular exhibition context was why, as the discussion below will reveal, many of the exhibition visitors read the photo stories as primarily iconic.

Voice as spoken: On the mediation of image production

When the Indian and Korean participants of *Shutter Stories* were producing their photo stories, the key property of photography that mattered was how it could be simultaneously indexical, iconic, and symbolic (Scott 1999). This characteristic of photography enabled the migrant participants to speak using rich, multimodal narratives that sought to interrupt the stereotypes about their cultural groups, albeit with some key limitations. Below I discuss how the migrants made use of each of the three Peircian semiological modes in crafting their images.

On the indexical

The Indian and Korean participants often referenced the indexical quality of the photograph. by alluding to the idea of the image as an aide-mémoire, as a testimonial to the irrefutability of the personal story being told (see Hughes and Noble 2003; Scott 1999). For instance, there is Preet (22, male, Indian), whose photo story was about his father being engaged in *five-six* (or moneylending) and him being a yuppie. Preet said that he meant for his story to challenge local Filipinos' simplistic notions about the turban-wearing, motorcycle-riding, money-lending *bumbay*. This was rooted in

his many negative encounters with this stereotype. Preet was deeply affected by this because many of his male relatives, including his father, fit the stereotype. At the same time, however, much of his worldview was more akin to that of middle- and upper-class Filipinos than to that of Manila's Punjabi Indian community. From Preet's stories, I could glean that this had much to do with how he took his studies seriously and, as such, how he was heavily influenced by the kind of intellectual discourses to be found in Manila's private schools. In light of these, his photo story can be understood as an argument for his hybrid cultural identity—that is, his being influenced by both Indian and Filipino cultures—so that Manila's local Filipinos could recognise him someone worthy of their respect (cf. Fraser and Honneth, 2003).

The first part of Preet's photo story, subtitled 'My Father', was a series of images of his father as, for all intents and purposes, a *bumbay*. These were various photographs of his father on a motorcycle, getting ready for his daily ride around Manila (see Figure 1). Preet explained that his motivation behind these images was to establish that his father worked very hard just to give him a good future. He would go on to say emphatically, "[I want to tell everyone] I'm proud that my father does *five-six*. Where would I be without him, right?"

Insert Figure 1 here.

Meanwhile, the second part of Preet's photo story was subtitled 'Myself'. This included images that showed how his workplace was set firmly in the heart of Philippines' premiere central business district of Makati, how his office had posh interiors, and how his afterwork lifestyle was very yuppie (see Figure 2). Preet said that he wanted these images to serve as evidence that he certainly did not fit the stereotype of the *bumbay*. He said that although he was proud that his father was a moneylender, 'that doesn't mean that I don't get pissed that people always think of us Indians as *bumbays*…For me, at least, these photos [about my life] are meant to prove that a Punjabi like me can work in Makati.'

Insert Figure 2 here.

Interestingly, it was the same consciousness about the irrefutability of the photograph that hindered some *Shutter Stories* participants from telling the stories they wanted to share. The key issue here was that because the photo stories were to be publicly exhibited, they could compromise the anonymity of those potential subjects who might have wanted their identities withheld. This issue is something that runs counter to the current body of literature on photography and memory, which usually talks about the problem of the image turning into a counter-memory (for example Barthes 1981; Hughes and Noble 2003; Sontag 1977 [2002]). But then again, most of this literature on the indexicality of the photograph is focused on how images might be consumed primarily by family and other close relations.

In the case of Preet, the concern for photographic indexicality manifested in his consciousness about the need to balance expressing pride in his father in public and making sure that he protected his father from unnecessary ridicule by local Filipinos. He did want to honour his father by letting people know who he was. But as he put it, 'The best compromise is to show my father, but not show his face.' This is why, in the end, Preet took photos that revealed glimpses of his father's hands, feet, and motorcycle, whilst not giving away his father's face.

On the iconic

Some of the *Shutter Stories* participants believed that since their photographs had the capacity to be credible testimonies of their personal lives (that is, to be indexical), these could also

be equally credible representations of the lives of Manila's migrants (that is, to be iconic). This idea hearkens back to Scott's argument that it is the photograph's material quality as an index that enables its representative value as an icon (Scott 1999). For this discussion, I focus on the case of Sonya (22, female, Korean), whose photo story was about the everyday activities of those Koreans who had already established roots in Manila. Her interest in telling this nuanced account of the community life of Manila's long-term Koreans was that she believed most local Filipinos did not really know much about their group. Although she herself had many Filipino friends whom she first met in high school and in university, she also had firsthand experience of how her Korean community was generally isolated from wider Filipino society (cf. Laux & Thieme 2006; Noh et al 2012). She was eager to share what she knew about this group because she had lived eight years of her 'grown up life' with them. Moreover, it was important for her that local Filipinos had a better understanding of this group, especially since, as she put it, 'my life is really here [with Manila's Korean community]!'

Sonya said that whilst she was collecting the images for her photo story, what she had in mind was to represent the multitude of activities in which the different generations of Manila's Koreans were engaged (see Figure 3). When she shared her photo story in the photo selection seminar, she said,

> I know I can't show all the stuff that we [Koreans] do here. Still, I want to give a sense of just how much activities we have (sic). That's why I tried my best to include the different aspects of our lives here.

Insert Figure 3 here.

It is important to note that unlike famous iconic images wherein it is individual photographs that are thought to be iconic (Hariman and Lucaites 2003), the *Shutter Stories* participants often indicated that the photo story as a whole was iconic. One important reason for this kind of thinking was the project asked of them to tell their narratives not through a single images, but through a series of images. This much as clear from most of the introductory captions that the participants wrote. Sonya, for instance, had the following line in her caption: 'Koreans of all ages have migrated to the Philippines. And as this photo story shows, those who belong to different generations have different daily lives and activities as well.'

It is also crucial to point out that none of the participants, Sonya included, expressed concern about how the process of representation is an inherently political process that could simultaneously valorise and marginalise certain ways of viewing the world (Berger 2008 [1972]; Sontag 2002 [1997]). If anything, their talk seemed to indicate that they had a decidedly rosy view of the representative power of their work. They tended to assume that the photograph's ability to stand in for complex realities was something straightforward and unproblematic. Sonya herself said to me during the exhibition opening night,

> No joke, I'm really happy to be a part of this project. At least I get a chance to show Filipinos our Korean life here [in Manila]…I love your country, really, and that I hope your country will love other Koreans the way it loved me.

I find this view unsurprising, given that the relationship between images and ideology is something that most people do not really worry about in the practice of photography in the everyday. As some scholars point out, ordinary photographers are often unreflexive about how they might be reproducing existing discourses, whether problematic or otherwise (for example Holland 2004; Pinney 1997; Van House et al 2005).

On the symbolic

Although the *Shutter Stories* participants were not professional photographers, the photography scholars I was working with and I noted that the participants made an effort to use the conventions of photography to embed conceptual messages into their images (see Messaris 1997). When the photography scholars and I probed the participants about the individual images they took, the participants often referred to the various elements of photography that the scholars discussed in the basic photography seminar and in the photo narration seminar: lighting, texture, focus, angling, composition, and colour, amongst others. A case in point is Sukhprit (19, female, Indian), whose photo story featured a portrait of her mother as the epitome of a traditional Punjabi Indian woman. This story was driven by Sukhprit's struggle about her own identity as someone who simultaneously wanted to admire and challenge this notion of womanhood. On one hand, Sukhprit talked about her affinity for being a traditional woman. This was primarily because she adored her mother, whom she described as "the greatest person in [her] life". On the other hand, Sukhprit also often argued for the value of being a modern woman. She claimed that she was influenced by the worldviews of her international set of friends and of her relatively liberal university and, as such, believed in doing things her way. She said, 'I have a knowledge of my abilities as an independent woman...I have the right to do the things that I want, of course in accordance to the morals of my parents...But I'm not always a good girl.'

In Sukhpreet's photo story, she deliberately thought about how she could use the different elements of the photograph to convey conceptual messages that would complicate how local Filipinos understood Indians. For instance, she wanted one of her photographs to reflect how her life was characterised by the combination of the modern and the traditional (see Figure 4). Sukhpreet talked about how she did this via arranging the composition of the image:

> Here [in this photograph], the modern part would be those signs on the doors [of the rooms of my brother and of myself]. Then the traditional part would be Maa's prayer area...In a way, I'm trying to capture that despite how my brother and I are Westernised in so many ways, Maa keeps us tied to our Indian culture.

Insert Figure 4 here.

A similar case is Hae Jin (24, male, Korean), whose photo story played around with the abstract ideas of need and love in the context of migration. Hae Jin explained that his story was actually a visual representation of his reflection about what he labeled as the "weird welcome" that Manila gave him, primarily because he was mistaken as a wealthy foreigner. By this he meant his experience of having his mobile phone stolen by a pickpocket within his first month in the city. This really made Hae Jin think a lot of his safety because he did not want to be a victim twice over. He was concerned that it was not really an option for him to return to Korea nor for his parents to come over and visit him, since they were firmly lower middle-class and could not afford all the plane tickets this would require. He also felt that he could not approach the police about the matter because the rumour was doing this only meant asking for more trouble. It came to a point, however, when Hae Jin felt that he could not carry on being paranoid all the time. So he made a resolution: 'I didn't really want to waste my time here thinking and thinking about that one negative experience...Apart from [the theft], it's really been very pleasant for me. Especially because of all the friends I've made in university.'

Of all the participants, it was Hae Jin who was most intent on harnessing the symbolic mode of photography. His photo story was comprised primarily of images that stood for our diverse human needs. Amongst other things, he had photographs of a cat to represent our fellow creatures,

water to represent the natural resources around us, and technological devices to represent innovation. He wanted end his work, however, by saying that love is the most important thing of all. To establish this, one of his final two images was that of heart-shaped leaves (see Figure 5). According to him,

> The shape of the leaves means love, of course. If you notice, I put them in sharp focus and made everything else blurred. That means that this love, it's, like I say, the most important thing, more than anything else.

Insert Figure 5 here.

Clearly, the *Shutter Stories* participants deliberately sought to harness the symbolic mode of photographs. With that said, the photography scholars observed that the participants were not always precise with their use of the visual language. This was understandable, as the participants were still in many ways ordinary photographers who were only beginning to learn to think conceptually about photography. Aware that such imprecisions heightened the inherent ambiguity of the photograph in articulating propositions (see Barthes 1981; Messaris 1997), the photography scholars sought to help refine the works of the participants. This was why they provided constructive criticism at the end of each of the participants' presentations, which took place during the photo selection seminar. The refinements to the photographs notwithstanding, the photography scholars and I were aware that none of us in the project could foreclose the possibility that the public might interpret the participants' photo stories in unintended ways (Barthes 1981).

Voice as heard: On the mediation of image consumption

When the Indian and Korean participants' photo stories were being consumed by the local Filipinos who visited the *Shutter Stories* exhibition, the key property of photography that figured significantly was its inability to fix meanings with finality (see Messaris, 1997). As I pointed out earlier in this article, the viewing context created by *Shutter Stories* positioned the locals to view the images in a manner that was primarily as iconic, secondarily as indexical, and only rarely as symbolic.

During my informal conversations with some twenty (out of the approximately one hundred and fifty) local Filipino visitors, I observed that some of their talk about the photo stories referenced the indexical mode of these works. I would say that one of the clearest examples of this was how a university student, Jenny (22, female), shared her thoughts about Amisha's (21, female, Indian) photo story on a day in the life of the Filipino-Indian television and radio celebrity Sam YG. Jenny said that she could not help but be most interested in Amisha's photographs, since she was a huge fan of Sam YG. She delightedly scrutinised the details of the images to find out as much as she could about Sam YG. It seemed that doing this gave her the feeling that she was, in some ways, transported into Sam YG's world. She explained, 'The photos make me feel as if I'm with Sam YG! It's exciting to see...the inside of his house...those tops he owns...his van...' (for example, see Figure 6). Clearly, Jenny thought of Amisha's images first and foremost as objects that provided her an actual link to Sam YG and the life in which he lived (cf. Hughes and Noble 2003; Scott 1999).

My talk with Jenny also revealed the limits of the indexicality of Amisha's photo story. Despite all the textual captions that Amisha included, which were already the most numerous amongst all the photo stories, Jenny often felt that she had too little contextual information that would allow her to fully understand the images she was seeing. She said that she wanted to know more because the images were, as she described it in Filipino, *bitin*, a concept that roughly corresponds to English word 'tantalising'. Put another way, the indexicality of the images made Sam

YG's world so near yet so far. In this specific case then, words were not enough to reconstitute the necessary contextual cues to make the images completely intelligible (see Alu 2010).

Insert Figure 6 here.

There was much less talk amongst the local Filipinos that alluded to the symbolic mode. And most of these allusions were relatively indirect. Take, for instance, the thoughts of a photography hobbyist, Carding (45, male), about his favourite photo story in the exhibition, which was Preet's (22, male, Indian) story about his father the *five-six* Indian and himself the yuppie Indian. Carding never explicitly talked about what he thought were the ideological messages behind Preet's photo story (see Scott 1999 and his examples of symbolic readings of photographs). Being the photography hobbyist that he was though, he could not help but indulge in some lengthy commentary about how the various elements of the visual language were deployed in the photo story. He said, for instance, that one of the most effective techniques used in the photo story was the use of recurrent visual cues that tied together Preet's photographs of his father and of himself (for example, see Figure 1 and Figure 7). According to Carding, 'The comparison between the father and the son's hands and feet...that was really good. It gave me goosebumps!'

Carding said as well that one of the weaknesses of Preet's photographs was the lack of drama in the frame. For Carding, these photographs 'felt too factual...It just says 'This is where I work.' That's it. He could've made better use of them if they conveyed something more complex than that'. Clearly then, even if Carding never really got to talking about what the images might have meant, he was, to a degree, deconstructing the conceptual arguments that he thought were embedded in them. This particular reaction concretises the idea that no matter how one tries to pin down the meaning of a photograph at the moment of production, one cannot really pin down how viewers might interpret it at the moment of consumption (see Barthes 1981; McKay 2008).

Insert Figure 7 here.

In contrast to the Jenny and Carding who were talking about their favourite photo stories, the local Filipinos would talk about the rest of the works in the exhibition as a collective, as if these photo stories all constituted one unified narrative about Indian and Korean life in the city. Below are a couple of the comments that the local Filipinos made during the course of our conversations:

> Well, I was interested in the photos of the Koreans because I'm curious about them. I see them all the time, but I have no idea what it is they're doing here. All I hear is that they're here to learn English. That's what they say, right?...One of the things I got from the photos was that they're Christians. I didn't know that!...It looks like they're well off too. But I think that's obvious. They're foreigners! *(Jose, 22, store attendant)*

> I've always known about the *bumbays*. *Five-six* and all that, right? We used to have one as a neighbour. But I've never really known anything about them...To me, this [exhibition] is quite educational. Honest. Because it's the first for me to know all these things about them...The most surprising [thing from the exhibition]? It's that we actually have an Indian *artista* (celebrity)! *(Tina, female, 30, housewife)*

Here we can clearly see that photo stories were 'put to work' as icons by the way in which the photography scholars and I set up the public exhibition of *Shutter Stories* (see Zelizer, 2006). The viewers could not help but see the images as, first and foremost, broad representations of the lives of Manila's migrants, what with (1) the contextualising information about the migrant participants removed, (2) the accompanying promotional materials implying that the photo stories

represented the diverse views of Indians and Koreans, and (3) the photo stories themselves being presented not as separate stills but as one streaming narrative.

Conclusion

In this article, I sought to explore the ways in which the photographic medium might mediate migrant cultural minority voices. To provide an empirical anchor to my discussion, I used the case of the *Shutter Stories* collaborative photography project. The data I presented make it clear that it is the multimodality of photography that significantly mattered in the voice as speaking (that is, the moment of image production); the three Peircian semiological modes generally enabled the Indian and Korean participants to tell rich multimodal narratives about their lives, even if it posed a few but key limitations to this. The data also made clear that it is the inability of photography to fix meanings with finality that figured most importantly in voice as being heard (that is, the moment of image consumption); amongst the three modes the figured in the migrant participants' stories, it was the iconic that local viewers engaged with the most.

The way in which photography mediated the voices of the Indian and Korean participants in *Shutter Stories* suggests that photography-based collaborative projects will always be at the mercy of the interplay between the complex convergences and divergences of the contexts of photographic production and photographic consumption. As a consequence, it will most often be the case that certain aspects of the photographers' narratives will be heard better whilst other aspects of their stories will be heard less, if at all. In other words, photographs will not be able to guarantee that what is spoken will be what is heard.

Although the above-mentioned insight might sound negative, it is not necessarily so. I would argue that the key value of this insight is that it reminds us not to think of photography and cultural minority voices in a vacuum. It instead pushes us to consider this concept in relation to the broader process of multicultural dialogue, defined as an openness towards engaging with diverse ideas, testing these ideas, and refining how to engage with these ideas (see Fraser 2003). In more concrete terms, this means that collaborative photography exhibition projects like *Shutter Stories* should not necessarily end with migrants speaking and being heard. These projects would do well to consider enabling migrants to listen as well. This would allow them to adjust what they are saying to how they are being heard. These projects should, of course, run in parallel with other works that focus on allowing different cultural groups to refine their ability to 'listen across difference'. Take for example that projects that have been done on listening interventions that include community media 'listening spaces' and 'eavesdropping with permission' (Dreher 2009a; 2009b; 2010). All of these would feed into a virtuous cycle of communication amongst the cultural groups concerned.

Following on from this consideration of the relationship between migrant cultural minority voices and multicultural dialogue, researchers who would like to engage in future collaborative photography exhibition projects might want to consider a couple of practices that I was not able to implement in *Shutter Stories*. This is in the iterative spirit that undergirds collaborative research work (Green et al.2003; Somekh 2006; Wadsworth 1998). One is that researchers might want to consider putting a feedback mechanism in place. This would entail not only generating comments from exhibition visitors, but also making sure that these comments are communicated to the migrant participants. Going beyond this, researchers might also want to launch a rethought version of *Shutter Stories* and other similar projects. Drawing from lessons gleaned from these earlier projects, they can continue refining the photography exhibition context such that migrant cultural minorities might be allowed both to speak better and to be better heard.

Meanwhile, subsequent studies can look into the dominant practices that accompany the use of photography in the collaborative exhibition projects. After all, the precise way in which the properties of photography are activated is heavily circumscribed by the practices attached to the said medium (see Buckingham 2009). This is something that one can already see from the data I presented, even if I did not focus on it in this particular article. Subsequent studies can also take a different angle to the study of photography and migrant cultural minority voices by looking at how the social experiences of migrants might shape the kind of images that they create. After all, understanding what the participants bring to collaborative research projects is also crucial to making sense of the multiple factors that are imbricated in the process of mediation (see Thumim 2012).

Acknowledgements

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Table 1. The Indian participants.

Name	Sex	Age	Civil Status	Occupation	Migration History
Amisha	F	21	single	freelance makeup artist	2nd generation
Sukhprit	F	19	single	university undergraduate student	2nd generation
Roshni	F	20	single	university undergraduate student	2nd generation
Anil	M	23	single	advertising account manager	2nd generation
Preet	M	22	single	advertising strategic planner	2nd generation

Table 2. The Korean participants.

Name	Sex	Age	Civil Status	Occupation	Migration History
Sonya	F	22	single	university undergraduate student	1st generation
Sang Mi	F	24	single	university undergraduate student	1st generation
Hae Jin	M	24	single	university undergraduate student	1st generation
Matt	M	23	single	university undergraduate student	1st generation

Figure 1. Photo 2 in Preet's photo story.

Figure 2. Photo 13 in Preet's photo story.

Figure 3. Photo 30 in Sonya's photo story.

Figure 4. Photo 6 in Sukhprit's photo story.

Figure 5. Photo 23 in Hae Jin's photo story.

Figure 6. Photo 2 in Amisha's photo story.

Figure 7. Photo 6 in Preet's photo story.