

*Theorizing Photo-remittances: Counter-streaming Vernacular Photography & Diaspora*

Recent discussions of photography and diaspora have focused on its capacity to establish the global connections of diasporic communities fractured by migration and imperial violence, or how it is mobilized by individuals and communities to maintain affiliations to the home-land while expressing their cultural transformation as migrants in new host environments. Through what Arjun Appadurai identifies as the 'complex, overlapping, disjunctive order' of cultural flows, new transcultural practices, and forms of photography emerge through which communities splintered and dispersed through migration and exile can imaginatively rediscover shared histories, articulate emerging cultural identities, and meliorate collective experiences of geographic and cultural dislocation. For scholars of vernacular photography such as Tina Campt, photography also facilitates diasporic self-making to be circulated back to the homeplace; demonstrating both an adherence to cultural forms of self-presentation at the same time that they project new or emerging identities as a result of the cultural transformations of migration. Central to these conceptualizations of photography and diaspora, are the spaces where cultural flows intersect in the production of new material conditions for emerging diasporic cultural practices. These spaces have predominantly been identified as those of the host country; by and large the cosmopolitan centres of north America, central and western Europe. Mirroring perspectives of migration historiography, ethnography and cultural production, analysis of photography and diaspora has thus largely been skewed toward the cultural practices, epistemologies and resources that are carried by migrants to the host country. These practical, aesthetic and conceptual resources are brought to bear on their negotiations and transformations of cultural identity, which are expressed through the knotty entanglements of transcultural visual cultures which emanate

from specific locales; those where migrant communities have established ‘positions of *enunciation*’, to borrow Stuart Hall’s phrase, from which to visually articulate diasporic cultural identities. However, little attention has been paid to what this paper terms ‘photo-remittances’; the counter-streaming of vernacular photographs by diaspora back to the home place. Drawing on recent explorations of non-financial forms of remittance, this paper argues that the circulation of vernacular photographs are forms of social and cultural remittance between extended familial networks. Outlining a framework for theorizing the photo-remittance through the exchange of vernacular portraits within and between migrant communities, the paper argues that the re-migrant photograph not only maintains familial bonds, and cultural affiliations, but also functions as an individualized form of cultural diffusion that can have broader cultural affect within the homeplace. Discussing vernacular commercial studio portraits, the paper argues that photo-remittances do not just contribute to the cultural transformation of the homeplace through the codes and codifications of the photograph. The paper also traces how the material form of the photograph itself which introduces novel forms of self-fashioning and modes of re-configuring cultural identity into the familial networks of diaspora communities. Identifying vernacular photographs as forms of social and cultural remittance, the paper proposes an alternative perspective for exploring photography and diaspora from below.

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