What Role Does Documentary Photography Play in Exploring the Interaction Between Migrant and American Society?

by

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A dissertation submitted to the School of Media Arts at the Waikato Institute of Technology in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts in Visual Arts

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New Zealand

November 2023

Content

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank Vicki Kerr and Mason Holloway for their guidance and patience throughout the development and writing of my thesis, as this has challenged and developed my skills in academic writing. I would also like to thank my practical supervisor, Tamsin Green, for her guidance throughout my Master's project, which has led to a deeper understanding of photography.

Abstract

This dissertation explores the roles played by documentary photography in migrant and American society. Using Mary Louise Pratt's contact zone theory, it views photography as a “transcultural medium” in looking into the migrant’s interaction with society. Using photography works by Lewis Hine, Dorothea Lange, Katie Salisbury, and Brian Cohen as case studies, this dissertation answers the research question from representation, document, cultural identities and diasporic perspectives.

Introduction

Documentary photography is a photography genre that aims to capture and present the realities of the world truthfully and objectively (Seiferle, 2019). Rooted in a commitment to chronicle events, environments, and individuals, documentary photographers endeavour to tell stories that reflect the world around them, often focusing on social, political, and cultural issues (Sontag, 1973). In essence, documentary photography mirrors society, reflecting its realities, complexities, and nuances. As a nation with a foundation rooted in migration, the history of migration to America interweaves with the evolution of American photography. The waves of migrants arriving in America coincided with the widespread adoption of documentary photography (Carville & Lien, 2021, p. 12). Documentary photography is pivotal to migrant studies, offering a visceral and immediate representation of the migrant experience. Compared to textual records or statistical data, photographs capture the raw emotions, challenges, and triumphs migrants face, making their stories palpable to a broader audience (Ritchin, 2013).

The research question in this dissertation asks what role documentary photography plays in exploring the interaction between migrants and American society. The nature of documentary photography means that photographic images do not just revolve around questions of visual representation of migrants. They are also an essential medium for understanding the interaction between migrants and society. The word ‘migrant’ in the above research question is not limited to the subject in the photograph; it also refers to migrant photographers using photographs to express their cultural identities. As a Chinese student and a photographer living overseas, I often reflect on how I express my cultural

identity through photography and how I link my work to the Chinese migrant community. Mary Louise Pratt's (1991) concept of the "contact zone" provides a theoretical framework for examining selected case studies. By analysing the work of both traditional and contemporary photographers whose work focuses on American migrants, I explore ways documentary photography contributes to our understanding of migration and insight into the various functions that documentary photography serves in representing migrants within American society.

This dissertation starts with a review of Pratt's (1991) contact zone theory and others' expansions of this theory into photography studies. A contextual and visual analysis of four American photographers' works follows to answer the research question from different perspectives. The examples include the photos of migrants at Ellis Island by Lewis Hine (1905a, b, 1908), Japanese-American photos in California during WWII by Dorothea Lange (1942a, b, c), photos of Chinese migrants in New York by Katie Salisbury (2016, 2017), and photos of migrant buildings in urban Pittsburgh by Brian Cohen (2017a, b, c). Those photographers and their works highlight photography's function in demonstrating the entanglement of photography, migration, and America through cultural processes of temporal, geographical, hierarchical, and imaginative social contact.

Photography and Contact Zones

Linguistics and literary scholar Mary Louise Pratt theorised the term contact zone. In a 1991 keynote address titled “Arts of the Contact Zone”, Pratt introduces a manuscript from 1613 written by a Peruvian named Guaman Poma, which detailed the Spanish conquest of South America. This manuscript was written to King Philip III of Spain in an improvised mixture of Quechua, a language spoken by indigents living in the Peruvian Andes, and “ungrammatical, expressive Spanish” (Pratt, 1991, p. 34). She describes the words in this manuscript as a “contact language” that is improvised to allow speakers of different tongues to communicate with one another. Like this manuscript, she refers to the site for such linguistic and cultural encounters as a contact zone. She further articulated contact zones as “social spaces where disparate cultures, meet, clash, and grapple with each other, often in contexts of highly asymmetrical relations of power” (Pratt, 1991, p. 7). Pratt originally utilises the concept of the contact zone to frame transculturation processes that emerge from the cultural encounters between subjugated peoples and their colonisers.

Although this term was introduced in the context of language and literary theories, the concept has been applied to studies including visual culture and photography (Carville & Lien, 2021). Most notably, photography history and theory scholars Justin Carville and Sigrid Lien appropriate photography as an art of contact zones in their book *Contact Zones Photography, Migration, and Cultural Encounters in the United States*. They focus on the transcultural aspect of Pratt’s concept and view photography as a “transcultural medium”. They noted that “photography forms part of a series of fluid and overlapping contact zones” (Carville & Lien, 2021, p. 15). In this way, the photo can be “situated within multiple contact

zones in different geographical locations and across time" and "allows individuals to both experience other cultures and to maintain, establish, and articulate cultural bonds, forge imagined communities, and share cultural experiences across and between nations" (Carville & Lien, 2021, p. 19).

In exploring and discussing documentary photography in the interaction between migrants and American society, this dissertation adopts Pratt's contact zone concept as the framework in three levels. Firstly, Pratt's contact zone theory emphasises the need to personalise encounters between different cultures, and documentary photographers arguably achieve this. Compared to fine art photography, documentary photography is necessarily generated from the photographer's contact in the real-world context. The photographer's personal experiences and aesthetics form the style and composition of the photograph, and the encounters between the photographer and the subject become contact zones. Through intimate portraits, candid shots, and storytelling compositions, photographers bring the faces and voices of migrants to the forefront. By doing so, they create an emotional connection that transcends geographical boundaries, fostering empathy and understanding.

The second aspect deals with mobility and asymmetry. Pratt (1991) states that the concept of "contact zone" is partially contrasted with the ideas of "community" that is based on shared language, communication, and culture. For migrants, language, culture or tradition are essential elements for their identities and the migrant community is bound together by the homogeneousness shared identically and equally among them (Wodak,

2012). At the same time, this community is limited, by "finite boundaries" that are the language or cultural barriers between migrants and the dominant society, resulting in segregation and isolation of migrant groups (Anderson, 2020). In the contact zone between migrants and society, power imbalances are often stark, with dominant narratives overshadowing marginalised voices. When migrants need to make their voices heard, they may be in the same predicament as Guaman Poma. When viewing photography within the concept of contact zones, it can “invoke the spatial and temporal co-presence of subjects previously separated by geographic and historical disjunctures” and emphasise the “interactive and improvisational dimensions” of cultural encounters (Pratt, 1992, p. 7). Thus, photography as a visual language, in its capacity to envision heterogenous, polyvocal migrant histories and memories, could act as a “contact language” between migrants and society. In its multiple material forms, documentary photography has been identified as a contact zone between viewers as political subjects and the image as an agent of information (Carville & Lien, 2021). Documentary photographers, by capturing the experiences of migrants, amplify these voices and challenge prevailing stereotypes and prejudices. They provide a platform for migrants to tell their own stories, challenging stereotypes, presenting a more holistic and humanising view of the migration experience and shaping migrants’ figures and publicity in society. Thereby, documentary photographers and their works subvert the traditional power dynamics inherent in migration narratives.

The third level focuses on identities and memories. As subjects in photographs, migrants are essentially mobile people who move from one place to another - diasporas. Stuart Hall (1990) emphasised that the diasporic identity is not fixed; it is a “production”

which is “never complete and always constituted within representation” (p. 222). The representation of identities, including those of migrants, is shaped by cultural contexts and subject positions. Subject positions acknowledge that individuals occupy specific positions within cultural narratives. In diasporic communities, the diasporic identity is formed from individual’s negotiation on their subject positions in relation to both their host societies and their cultural origins (Hall, 1990). This negotiation is similar to the “contact” process of Pratt (1991). The contact between migrant’s heterogeneous language, culture, lifestyle, and the new society constitutes their migration experience and diasporic identities. Documentary photography’s role in this process is “a discrete space shaped by a specific historical context or entangled within various contexts of communication”, preserving migrants’ contact, clash, or fusion experience as histories and memories (Carville & Lien, 2021, p. 19). Those photographs are not lifeless neutral items. They are culturally situated and carry embedded meanings, reflecting the “production” and “formation” of diasporic identities.

Therefore, contact zones are ubiquitous in migration-related photographic practice. Physical or virtual contact zones can exist between the photographer and photographic practice, the photographer and the subject, migrant and community, as well as photographic image and the viewer. These zones are where unequal power relations clash, different perceptions collide, identities are reproduced, and different cultures meet. Pratt's contact zone provides a framework to shift the perspective of documentary photography, migration and America beyond narratives of departure and arrival, to photography’s ongoing role in visually articulating transgenerational and trans-locational experiences that continue to shape American migration histories.

The following case studies discuss photography's roles in the interaction between migration and America from different perspectives. The contact zone is used as a primary analytical tool to identify the perspective of visual analysis for photos, and a contact zone will be identified in each of the works. The first case focuses on Lewis Hine's (1905a, b, 1908) photography during the American Progressive Era when social documentary photography shed light on exploited people. This section explores what Lewis Hine's photographs captured when migrants first stepped into America via Ellis Island, which can be understood as a geographical contact zone. This case study focuses on how this contact zone offers authenticity and legitimacy to Hine's photographs and how those photographs become a "social document" representing migrants' experience in shaping public perception and understanding of early twentieth-century migration.

The second case study engages with the document function of the photograph of interned Japanese-American migrants during WWII by Dorothea Lange (1942a, b, c). After the Pearl Harbor attack, the Japanese-Americans suffered systematic racial discrimination, which eventually evolved into political action. This section focuses on how impounded documentary photographs act as a medium that carries the oppressed voice and how they become important evidence in political redress.

The next chapter is centred on a migrant photographer shooting from inside a migration community. Fifth-generation Chinese-American photographer Katie Gee Salisbury (2016, 2017) photographs migrant Chinese workers in New York Chinatown. This section

discusses how she uses documentary photography to trace her Chinese heritage and re-produce her cultural identities. Her works demonstrate how these photographs worked as contact zones in humanising the migrant Chinese workers in New York and promoting empathy and understanding of Chinese workers.

The last case contains photos of migrant architecture in urban Pittsburgh by Brian Cohen (2017a, b, c). In this series, he establishes a visual discourse on the presence of migrants without using their portraits. The contact zone in his photos is the urban spaces in which migrants are embedded. This chapter focuses on how the photographs of the diasporic "homes" visually articulate migrants' polyvocal histories and experiences.

Photos of Migrants at Ellis Island by Lewis Hine

Lewis Hine was one of the leading practitioners of social documentary photography in the 20th century (Seixas, 1987). Social documentary photography is a subgenre of documentary photography that records social and/or environmental issues (Bate, 2020, p. 50). Hine started photographing in 1903, and the following year worked as a photographer at the Ethical Culture School in New York. His first commission from this school was to photograph new migrants arriving on Ellis Island (Szlezák, 2009). Photography historian Ian Jeffrey (1981) describes Hine's work at Ellis Island as follows:

> He worked at this between 1904 and 1909, and took around 200 pictures in all. The purpose of this project was to reveal the new Americans as individuals, and to counter any idea that they were the worthless scourings of Europe (p. 159).

The Ellis Island photos and Hine's many other social reform-influenced works, such as child labourers, European refugees and construction workers at the Empire State Building, made him one of the most influential photographers of his time (Willmann, 2008). This chapter will focus on the visualisation of the Ellis Island experience in Hine's photos, and the "social document" role his photos played in looking at early twentieth-century migration.

The Social Context of Hine's Photography

In America, the turn of the twentieth century was known as the Progressive Era. It spanned roughly from the 1890s to the 1920s - was a period of social and political reform.

Awareness of social issues has increased during this period and a desire for change in response to the challenges posed by industrialisation, urbanisation, and economic disparities. (Quick, 2010). The most noticeable photographer of this period is Jacob Riis. His photographs documented the squalid living conditions in New York's slums. Those photographs published in his book *How the Other Half Lives: Studies Among the Tenements of New York*, sparked widespread outrage and led to social reform aimed at improving tenement neighbourhoods (Huff, 1998). Riis's work, along with that of other photographers, like Lewis Hine and Henry Mayhew, concentrated on capturing the lives and work environments of social groups with low socio-economic status and contributed to a growing public awareness of the need for social and housing reform (Stange, 1989).

Photography theorist David Bate (2020) describes social documentary photography in this period as having a particular visual style that combined realistically depicted social inequality with social criticism. This visual style made social issues more eye-catching and engaging for the public. At the same time, the mass production of journalism contributed to the wide circulation of social documentary photographs, drawing the public's attention to ongoing social issues. Furthermore, documentary photographs published in newspapers and magazines, compared to written content of social injustice, became accessible even to those who were not proficient in English, especially various migrant groups. Thus, these photographs reached a broader audience than solely verbal reporting ever could (Stange, 1989).

In 1908, after the Ellis Island series, Hine quit his job teaching at the school and started a new commission for the National Child Labor Committee. He visited factories across the country and photographed the working conditions of children labourers. Hine primarily used those photos to critique social issues and was often compared to Jacob Riis (Jessop, 2018). Like Riis's tenements, Hine's photographs depicting child labourers tugged at America's collective conscience and helped improve American labour laws (Huff, 1998).

However, the main attention was centred on the reformation and benefits for working-class Americans, not migrants. Unlike downtrodden residents or working children, most politicians were contemptuous of migrants who were excluded in this social reform wave (Daniels, 1997, p. 47). American studies scholar Klara Szlezák (2009) argues that primary political issues in the Progressive Era exclude concern and equality about migrants. Photography scholar Alan Trachtenberg (1977) points out that "reformers had been slow to awaken to the special needs and unique experiences of non-English-speaking immigrants" (p. 122). Szlezák (2009) claimed that after arriving in America, migrants had not yet become an integral part of the American workforce, so they were not generally considered to be a group needing help.

Although migrants were not the main figure in social reform, Hine's Ellis Island series (1905a, b, 1908) centred on them and captured the very moment of their arrival in America. Hine's priority was to capture the human side of migrants, instead of the collateral tags on them like non-labour, newcomer or contender. In this series, the migrants' experiences, marked by fear, insecurity, and hopeful anticipation, were informative and inspiring. The

aim of humanising migrants, as seen in Hine's photographs of migrants at Ellis Island, can be interpreted as meeting reformative aims, using documentary photography as a social instrument to lessen negative sentiments.

Ellis Island as a Geographic Contact Zone

Ellis Island is located in New York Harbour and served as the busiest port for inspecting and handling migrants in America. From 1892 to 1932, over twelve million migrants entering America experienced processing procedures at Ellis Island. This island is a symbol of migration, and the human tragedies that have occurred there, such as family separation, the rejection of migrants and the dashed hopes, add to its iconic aura. As historian Alan Kraut (1982) describes: "Although the time spent at the island depot was usually only a few hours, the experience was, for many immigrants, the most traumatic part of their voyage to America" (p. 55).

Geographically, Ellis Island marked the moment and space of contact. It is the "contact zone" where migrants transfer from one culture to another and begin a new life. Passing through Ellis Island enabled migrants to go from one realm to another, from the sea to the land, symbolising their departure from their former lives and arrival into the United States, pursuing the American dream. Ellis Island created an emotional space encompassing both loss and belonging, a journey of departure and arrival, and the yearning for a new life that resonates with each person. Facing strange surroundings and an unfamiliar language, migrants were unsure whether they would be able to pass these checkpoints, whether they would be deported and whether their belongings would be safe. Every checkpoint and every

person they encountered was uncertain. During this process, the courage and resilience of leaving their old life clashed with the uncertainty of the prospect of a new life, which is the experience Hine captured and encased into his photos.

“Social Document” of Migrants’ Experience

Hine himself called his work “social photography” as a form of “social document”, in which the use of photography is concerned with matters of social record (Quick, 2010). He believed he needed to be “double-sure that my photo data was 100% pure--no retouching or fakery of any kind” (Clark, 2001, p. 5). Hine viewed a qualified photograph as “a reproduction of impressions made upon the photographer which he desires to repeat to others” (Clark, 2001, p. 6). Hine’s photos play a role as the “social document” in understanding the Ellis Island experience of migrants. The photographs analysed below share a common thread: the everyday experience of Ellis Island.

Hine's (1908) photo, “Climbing into the Promised Land” (Figure 1), shows migrants huddled together on stairs. By establishing direct eye contact between himself and the migrants, Hine also establishes direct eye contact between the migrants and the viewer of this photograph - Americans. Looking directly into the eyes of the subject, the viewer feels as if they are also participating in the scene. In this way, Hine guides the viewer's perception while reducing the distance between the subject and the viewer, thus creating favourable conditions for understanding and empathising with the migrants (Natanson, 2019). On the other hand, Hine's choice of title for the work is also noteworthy. Migrants are not only “stepping” into the new world but also “climbing” it. Coming and settling in America is never

easy for migrants, but once they prove themselves determined enough, they will establish a better life and “climbing up” the social ladder.

Figure 1.

Climbing into the Promised Land

(Hine, 1908)

Another of Hine's (1905a) photos depicting migrants’ experiences on Ellis Island is “Italian Family Seeking Lost Baggage” (Figure 2). The family consists of a mother, a son, a young daughter and a baby, with piles of luggage in the background. Migrants usually take all their possessions with them. Economic capital is crucial in shaping migrants' new life in America. Losing baggage would mean that all the family's possessions, the starting capital for a new life, were at risk. The anxious faces of the family in this photo emphasise the hardship of migration. As the title of the photograph states, when their only remaining economic capital is lost, the opportunity to start a new life will be further deprived.

Figure 2

Italian Family Seeking Lost Baggage

(Hine, 1905a)

In the third photo of Hine (1905b), “A woman, a boy and a girl at a chain link fence” (Figure 3), Instead of mother, daughter or son, Hine (1905b) used neutral terms, ‘A woman', 'girl' and 'boy” in the title. Those neutral and long listing terms of individual figures imply to the viewer that this is a broken family; one essential member, the father, is missing. Thus, separating the individual from the family context suggests that the father may be deported or refused entry, and the remaining family members must be separated. By giving his photographs such an emotional burden, Hine emphasises that coming to America does not

simply mean crossing the ocean but encompasses unpleasant and difficult experiences like rejection, separation and helplessness.

Figure 3

A woman, a boy and a girl at a chain link fence

(Hine, 1905b)

These photos capture the faces, bodies, attire, expressions, and arrival settings of these migrants. They establish the essential aspects of the who, what, where, and why that form figures in migration photography. These images provide a distinct appearance, presence, and authenticity to the portrayal of European migrants arriving in America. These elements form a significant photographic figure of migration, depicting a tangible and visual portrayal of the migrant precisely at the moment of "contact" with a new society.

Through the capturing of these diverse scenes experienced by migrants passing Ellis Island and the emotions those migrants carried, Hine's photos (1905a, b, 1908) emphasise

the authenticity of their subjects, embodying to the viewer what migrants encountered, the hardships and challenges involved in the road to America. Klara Szlezák (2009) describes this: “Neither focuses on the exoticism of foreign faces nor reproduces stereotypes about immigrants. The photographs present immigrants as people just like you and me” (p. 72). As a “social document”, Hine’s photos visualised the migrants’ experience and conveyed an extensive range of factual and emotional elements linked to that time.

Photos of Japanese-Americans during WWII by Dorothea Lange

Dorothea Lange (1942 a, b, c) is one of the most influential documentary photographers. She is famous for her photographs of agricultural workers who migrated to the West, including the most widely recognised photo in America, Migrant Mother, when she worked for Farm Security Administration (FSA) (Dupêcher, 2018). Lange's FAS photos are generally seen as an embodiment of protective concern (Gordon, 2017). Those photos "hollowed out human hearts and spewed them out as dust" (Nishigushi, 2008, p. 139), conveyed her ideas and encouraged solidarity with the public.

In 1942, three years after her FSA commission, Lange was commissioned by the federal War Relocation Authority (WRA) to photograph the forced relocation of Japanese-Americans. Lange's work on Japanese-Americans does not explicitly focus on the concept of migration in the typical sense. Instead, her photographs captured the involuntary and discriminatory displacement of Japanese-Americans, mandated by government policy. Lange's photographs document the experiences of individuals and families who were uprooted from their residences and placed into internment camps. Her "concern" and "care", and personal affiliation for Japanese-Americans made her struggle during this commission and held criticism for this internment policy. As a result, Lange's images were impounded, and none were eventually published during the war.

As Pratt (1991) emphasised the critical examination of power relations in her concept of the contact zone, the highly asymmetrical relations of power dynamics inherent in the internment of Japanese-Americans, highlighted how one group had the authority to

incarcerate another based on cultural and racial differences. In this case, the internment of Japanese-Americans was a clear exercise of power by the U.S. government, and Lange's photographs, by documenting the injustices of internment, contributed to a critical understanding of the power dynamics at play in the contact zone.

The internment experience forced Japanese Americans to negotiate their identity within the context of the dominant American culture. The loss of homes, businesses, and personal belongings, as well as the restriction of movement and civil liberties, contributed to a process of transculturation—the blending and reshaping of cultures in the contact zone. In this process, Lange's photographs served as a medium in which the experience of the oppressed was documented and preserved. This representation in the form of documentary photography can be seen as a negotiation of agency within the contact zone. This chapter focuses on the roles Lange's photographs play within this contact zone, and discusses how those impounded photos, after decades, serve as historical evidence to bring back justice and heal collective memory.

“An enemy within”

The history of the internment of Japanese-Americans started from the Pearl Harbor attack on 7 December 1941 (Hastings, 2011). This surprise attack provoked hysterical waves of fear about potential future attacks on the American West (Gordon, 2006). As a result of the fears of espionage and sabotage, anti-Japanese sentiment permeated the mainstream media and the internment of Japanese Americans was justified as a military necessity. Under massive propaganda, media and officials implanted Japanese-Americans’ “enemy”

identity deeply into public perception. Racism is successfully whitewashed into patriotic fervour. In February 1942, President Roosevelt signed Executive Order 9066, which started the internment of Japanese-Americans, regardless of their citizenship.

Impounded Photos

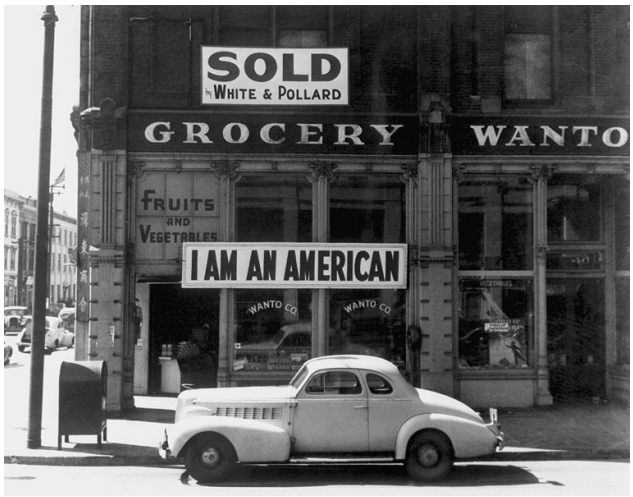
From February to July 1942, Lange was authorised by the WRA to photograph the internment throughout California and took more than 800 photos (Gordon, 2006). Asian American history scholar Megan Asaka (2007) writes, “The position was a challenging one for Lange as well…. Appalled by the forced exile, she confided to a Quaker protestor that she was guilt stricken to be working for a federal government that could treat its citizens so unjustly” (para. 1).

Lange used her lens to capture what the WRA did not want “patriotic” Americans to see. Lange's photo is in a contact zone where the voices of the exploited and the authority clash. Like Guaman Poma’s letter in Pratt’s address, Her photo “will read very differently to people in different positions in the contact zone” (Pratt, 1991, p. 37). Those photos established a negotiation envisioned transcending the numerous divisions among Japanese-Americans from the dominant social power, in which the subordinated Japanese-Americans single-handedly give themselves authority in the photos. When documenting life inside the internment centres and concentration camps, she was prohibited to photograph barbed wire and bayonets. Besides the control and censorship during her shooting process, authorities were also sensitive to the implications of her images (Varner, 2016). As Pratt (1991) mentioned, “where legitimacy is defined from the point of view of the party in

authority regardless of what other parties might see themselves as doing" (p. 38). Lange resigned from the WRA after only a few months, unable to tolerate this censorship and her conflicting feelings about the work. Despite this, she created a series that showed the cruelty of the American government and the humanity of the individuals who were forced to abandon their lives due to their Japanese heritage (Varner, 2016).

Figure 4

I am an American



(Lange, 1942b).

Figure 4 (Lange, 1942b) shows a grocery store named Wanto Co. on Franklin Street, Oakland, California. It was shot on 13 March 1942, shortly after the deportation of Japanese-Americans in this once-thriving Japantown. Lange's original captions and an article by Tim Chambers provide more context. After the attack on Pearl Harbor, Masuda, who was born in Oakland and the owner of the business, was likely as appalled by the Pearl Harbor attacks as all of his neighbours (Chambers, 2017). Recognising the intensifying surge of anti-

Japanese sentiment, he promptly put up the sign the following day, proclaiming, “I AM AN AMERICAN”. However, such gestures of loyalty allegiance were in vain. Two months after the attacks, Roosevelt’s 9066 order triggered mandatory “evacuations” of the Japanese. As the “SOLD” sign suggests, Masuda was forced to sell the shop and move inland with family to Fresno Assembly Center, California (Shimoda, 2017). According to local records, the Masuda family never returned to Oakland like most interned residents of Oakland’s Japantown (Chambers, 2017).

These slogans are not just the impotent shouts of the owner. They created the same visual impression with Nazi graffiti. During the 1933 “Jewish boycott”, the Nazis first coordinated action against Jews. Nazis painted the Star of David and the word “Jude” graffiti on store display windows (United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, 2021). Ironically, some Jews sold their businesses for a significantly reduced value and ended up in camps, just like Masuda and other Japanese-Americans.

Figure 5

Members of the Mochida Family

(Lange, 1942a).

Figure 5 shows a decent-looking family standing neatly together. Their attire contrasted with the conditions we now know they endured. The tag hanging outside their clothes disturbs the togetherness and peace in this family photo. The tags do not bear their names but only a number. Each person's tag contains two pieces of information: generally, each tagged person has been identified as a perceived national security threat, and their individuality has been reduced by the government to a mere identification number (Hong, 1997). The worst humiliation of this group, the obliteration of their identities, is preserved by this photo.

Figure 6

Young Evacuees

(Lange, 1942c).

In Figure 6, Lange focuses on a family waiting to be transported to an internment camp. Urgency and intense drama are made manifest in this photo. In the centre, two little

boys struggle to poke their heads out between the two suitcases, looking desperately into the lens, displaying a mix of confusion, disorientation and unease. Meanwhile, one adult turned his back, deliberately avoiding the camera or unwilling to face this trampling of his dignity. A half-open suitcase implies the haste of relocation. They only have a few days to secure their belongings and dump their businesses. During incarceration, most Japanese-Americans lost their property, homes, shops, and possessions (Hong, 1997).

These photographs illustrate the heavy-handed military presence under which these individuals were confined, the upheaval of families, the mountains of luggage, the transport systems and the mass confusion that prevailed. The fearful faces of children and decent figures powerfully contest the government propaganda about “an enemy within” and hate-filled rhetoric and vilification of Japanese-Americans (Varner, 2016). This is not what the government wants the public to see. As historian Emiko Hastings (2011) mentioned, “The photographs of internment were meant to document for control, not public information” (p. 35). Lange was prohibited from sharing her photos with the public, and they were suppressed throughout the duration of the war. In fact, certain prints were marked with the word "impounded" by the military authority. Subsequently, they were discreetly archived in the U.S. National Archives, and considered as government property (Gordon, 2006).

Evidence and Collective Memories

With the political redress movement of the late twentieth century, these photographs, along with other historical archives, eventually made the government acknowledge and rectify the internment. The first major achievement of the movement

occurred in 1976 when President Gerald Ford formally revoked Executive Order 9066 and admitted that the wartime internment of Japanese-Americans was a mistake (Nishigushi, 2008). In 1983, the report by the Commission on Wartime Relocation and Internment of Civilians concluded that the Japanese-American internment had been caused by ‘‘race prejudice, war hysteria, and a failure of political leadership’’ (U.S. Commission on Wartime Relocation and Internment of Civilians, 1997, p. 459). When the final redress payments were disbursed to the internees in 1999, Japanese Americans had largely achieved a substantial degree of closure.

Lange’s photographs illustrate one role of documentary photography for the migrants and society: despite being impounded, the photos became evidence of documenting the exploitation of Japanese Americans, preserving their collective memory, and, more importantly, served as a tool to expose and challenge the power imbalance in the contact zone. Through her work, voices of the marginalised were amplified and brought into the broader public discourse. The very photographs documented the control of the Japanese-American population evolved into a potent catalyst for social justice and advocacy within Japanese-American communities.

Photos of Chinese Migrants in New York by Katie Salisbury

Katie Gee Salisbury (2018) is a photographer and writer based in Brooklyn. She describes herself as Chinese, Anglo-Irish, and a fifth-generation Chinese-American. From 2016 to 2017, she photographed Chinese Fujianese migrants working low-status jobs in New York, especially highlighting the Chinese cooks, delivery workers, waiters, and community organisers who work in the Chinese restaurant industry. Her photos are evocative portraits of people far from home, caught between two continents—China and America. This chapter starts with a discussion of her photos along with the context of the Chinese restaurant in Brooklyn. Then, regarding her photography practice as a "contact zone", the following focuses on how she uses documentary photography to produce and express her cultural identities.

Restaurant Workers in New York

Chinese restaurants are ubiquitous across New York City. According to data from the Chinese Hospitality Alliance, there are almost 3,000 Chinese restaurants in New York City (Morgan, 2020). The arrival of Chinese immigrants in America was primarily motivated by imported labour demands, and the establishment and subsequent emergence of Chinese restaurants in the United States can be traced back to a historical legacy of exclusion. Chinese migrants started arriving and settling in New York throughout the 1800s, including an 1870s wave of Chinese migrants searching for "gold". Eating houses run by Chinese sprang up around working towns and won a reputation for high-quality food and low prices (Blank, 2023). The Chinese Exclusion Act (1882) led to a sharp decrease in the number of Chinese migrants coming to New York and the rest of America (Waxman, 2009). However, a

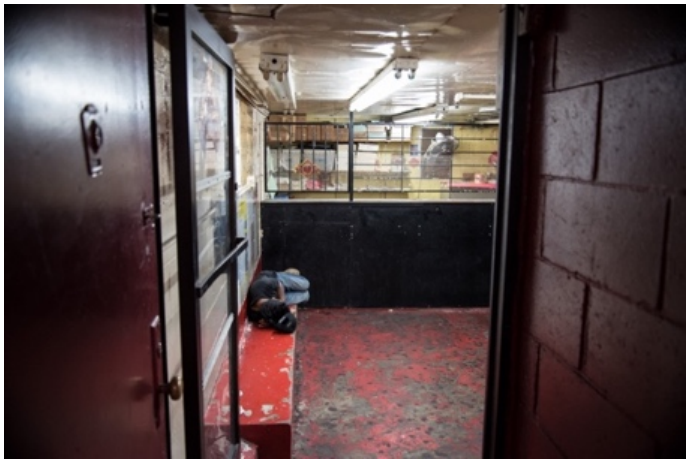
loophole in the Act unintentionally fuelled the Chinese restaurant boom in the 1930s. Legal historian Heather Lee (2015) explained that there was an important exception in the 1882 Act: certain Chinese business proprietors in the United States were eligible for special merchant visas, permitting them to travel to China and return with employees. Restaurants were among the businesses qualified for this status. Some Chinese migrants collectively contributed their funds to establish high-end restaurants, rotating responsibilities for managing these establishments and using them as a means to bring family members to America, under the pretence of working at the restaurant. According to the sociologist Peter Kwong (1979), by 1930, a staggering 84% of the Chinese population employed in New York were working in the restaurant or laundry industries. Now, These restaurants persist in serving as a means of livelihood for ordinary labourers migrating from China (Chen, 2017).

Most Chinese restaurant workers in Brooklyn are from Fujian province (Liang, 2023, p. 32). In Fujian, the residents eke out their livelihoods as farmers, fishermen, and labourers in sweatshop factories. Only a minority manage to complete high school. While some Fujianese are proficient in the widely spoken Mandarin, many are fluent only in their local dialect, not to mention English (Hymowitz, 2014). Salisbury (2018) mentioned that most subjects in her photos are illegal migrants without the status to work and stay. A portion of these Fujianese enter America as refugees, seeking asylum due to political persecution in China or to escape the religious intolerance of the communist government. Other Fujianese resort to smugglers, commonly referred to as "snakeheads", who help them fabricate counterfeit documents and navigate a harrowing journey. These arduous escapades can come with a staggering price tag of $50,000 or even more (Hymowitz, 2014). For those

young men and women without English fluency and skills, low-paying jobs in restaurants become their primary choice. Figure 7 shows a young man sleeping in an employment agency in one basement on Eldridge Street. In a 2019 BBC report on Salisbury, Guest (2011) revealed this young man's story: He was homeless and was waiting for the agency to open. An employment agency like this is the starting point for migrants seeking jobs in a Chinese restaurant. The agency owners call employers on behalf of job seekers and help Chinese restaurant owners find suitable workers (Feng, 2019).

Figure 7

Waiting



(Salisbury, 2016)

Despite its popularity and ubiquitous presence, Chinese restaurants are still regarded as an affordable and convenient dining choice. Chinese restaurant workers were anticipated to toil for meagre wages and engage in physically strenuous tasks without complaint. Their hours are brutal: ten hours or more a day, six and often seven days a week. Average annual earnings in Chinese restaurants are typically at least 40% lower than the

national average for restaurants (Lee, 2015). Figure 8 shows a cook named Chen who works in the kitchen at Happy Wok in Crown Heights, Brooklyn. Since 2000, he and his wife have owned Happy Wok. Open 365 days a year, he says: “I work 100 hours a week. I'm so tired” (Feng, 2019, para. 14).

Figure 8

Chef Chen

(Salisbury, 2017)

At first glance, the photographs may appear to be documentation of daily working activities in an urban space, marked by portraits of migrants and their environments. However, these subjects’ stories hinted at the hard and complicated nature of establishing a new life in a foreign land, as opposed to the resourceful, college-going, entrepreneurial, and profoundly hardworking “model minority” stereotype. Salisbury’s photographs emerge as a visual essay of the formation of the “diasporic figure” and invite consideration of the working conditions and personal sacrifices of Chinese migrants.

Chinese Cultural Identity

The core of Salisbury's work also rests on using photography to produce her Chinese identity. Although she tags herself as Chinese, Anglo-Irish, and a fifth-generation Chinese-American and is proud of her Chinese heritage, in an interview with BBC, she said she is often told she does not look Chinese because she is mixed race (Feng, 2019). This preoccupation with her own identity is her starting point and drives her to photograph the Chinese Fujianese migrants in her community. During the shooting process of this project, she discovered a little-known fact about her cultural identity. Salisbury mentioned: "To my surprise, I discovered a forgotten piece of the past that only my great aunt, Lilian Wong, was still privy to. Her father Gee Kee Ward, my great-grandfather, a Fujianese immigrant from Toisan, Fujian, had himself owned and operated a Chinese restaurant across the street from Union Station in Los Angeles during the 1940s" (Salisbury, 2018, para. 4).

Her cultural identity is not only produced from the "recovery" of her past family history but is also positioned by and within her photographer role. As Hall (1990) emphasised, "Cultural identities are the points of identification, the unstable points of identification or suture, which are made, within the discourses of history and culture. Not an essence but a positioning" (p. 226). In Salisbury's case, she tries to position and express her Chinese cultural identity through her photography practice. Her cultural background informs her photographic choices of subjects. Her photography emanates from a specific Chinese community, where migrant stories helped her establish "positions of enunciation". Her position as a fifth-generation Chinese-American shapes her perspective and influences the way she captures and interprets scenes. She turns the camera toward a population that

is familiar to her, with a shared language and ancestry. She is simultaneously a variably defined diasporic subject. Her dual role as a photographer and Chinese-American means that she brings a unique perspective to this topic and is not an outsider looking in but rather a community resident, photographing from within. She mentioned, “I realise that, when I spoke to them in Mandarin, I inadvertently opened up a door that had previously been closed to them, a channel for learning what life is like in America for everyone else” (Salisbury, 2018, para. 6).

Hall's (1990) concept emphasises that communication is not a neutral process but is influenced by power dynamics. Salisbury, by actively engaging in documentary photography, takes on the role of representation. Her photographs become a form of cultural expression, challenging or reinforcing existing narratives about migration and cultural identity. The social context of Chinese migrants, including the reasons for migration and the broader socio-political climate, becomes part of her enunciation. Her photographs serve as a visual commentary on the historical forces that drive migration and the impact of those forces on individuals and communities. Salisbury’s documentary photographs are not just visual records but are shaped by her unique position as a Chinese-American, influencing the way she sees and presents her cultural identity. Those photographs serve as a form of cultural expression and contribute to a broader dialogue about migration, identity, and representation.

Thus, Salisbury’s photography practice put her at the juncture of a contact zone, where the Chinese migrants in her photos are struggling hard to become “American” while

she reclaims her cultural identity by picturing and interviewing them. For Salisbury, documentary photography, as practical, aesthetic, and conceptual resources, are brought to bear on her negotiations and transformations of cultural identity. In this process, her cultural identities, such as those mentioned by Hall (1990), “are constantly producing and reproducing themselves anew, through transformation and difference” (p. 235). Tying her Chinese heritage as a part of her complex identities helped her create a unique and exclusive discourse. Her photographs reflect not only the visual aspects of the subject matter but also the cultural nuances and personal experiences tied to migration. Photographs convey elements of her cultural heritage, traditions, or the intersection of her original culture with the new environment. This adds layers of meaning into her photographs, distinguishes them and leads to more public and media attention. This series later became a photography exhibition named *Thank You Enjoy*, which has been touring America since 2018. Through her exhibitions and media coverage of this series, she creatively turned her photography into shared materials and modes of distribution and circulation to proclaim her cultural identity and communicate diverse cultural experiences.

Photos of Migrant Buildings in Pittsburgh by Brian Cohen

Brian Cohen is the coordinator of the *Out of Many* exhibition. This exhibition consisted of a selection of photos from five Pittsburgh-based photographers, including Cohen himself. In 2017, they undertook a joint project to photograph the experiences of migrants who have settled or are in the process of settling in the city of Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania (Cohen, 2017d). His twenty-three photos documented one outcome of this process—the migrant-featured buildings. Geographers Blunt and Bonnerjee (2013) view this practice of transcending local boundaries and the quest to rekindle a sense of a former community in a new environment as what defines "home" for the diaspora. By regarding the urban context as a “contact zone” and those buildings as “home” embedded, this chapter discusses the role of photography in the visualisation of translating migrant’s culture into “home”.

Migration Photo without Migrant

Unlike previous examples by Hine, Lange and Salisbury, Cohen’s (2017a, b, c) series captures images of migration without explicitly referencing the migrants themselves. Instead, he chooses to bring to the fore the site-specific traces of the migrants’ presence in the urban tissue of an American city, such as “*Ukrainian Home*” (Figure 9), “*Vietnamese Buddhist Meditation Institute*” (Figure 10) and “*Hungarian Social Club*” (Figure 11). According to Cohen, These photographs depict buildings utilised by migrants and their communities in Pennsylvania throughout the past century. Some of these buildings served as migrant gathering places for generations and continue their original role, whereas others are no longer in use (Cohen, 2017e).

Figure 9

Ukrainian Home

(Cohen, 2017a)

Figure 10

Vietnamese Buddhist Meditation Institute

(Cohen, 2017b)

Figure 11

Hungarian Social Club

(Cohen, 2017c)

The style of Cohen's series displays a degree of banality and uniformity. They are all sole building fronts with the same formal composition. The content of his photo focuses on the appearance of the buildings, which enhances the colours, signs, and decorations as primary visual elements. At the same time, his photos are diverse in subjects. These buildings comprise a variety of establishments, such as community centres, places of worship, grocery stores, social clubs, and mutual-aid societies. Each of these structures, individually, symbolises a community's endeavour to affirm its integration into American society while preserving its distinct sense of identity, whether it's rooted in race, religion, ethnicity, or any other defining characteristic. Collectively, they form a network of colourful diasporicspaces superimposed on the map of contemporary Pittsburgh and its

surroundings. As Cohen writes in the caption, “step forward, and you see just one building, one community, one small colorful, beautiful piece of stone; step back, and you see the bigger picture, a country comprised of many peoples, striving to achieve their dreams of freedom and prosperity in the land that is now their home” (Cohen, 2017e, para. 7).

Home and Diaspora

Cohen's photos show that migrants do not travel alone. They are accompanied by an architectural vision and a sense of spatial organisation shaped by their culture of origin and previous experiences. When Cohen's subjects are understood as 'home', those traces of the migrant become more transparent. The buildings that translate these features into material forms point to the migrants’ explicit longing and desire to create a home away from home, as Myria Georgiou (2006) writes:

> Home is a special, intense and emotional space and symbol for diaspora…Home can be the domestic natural space, the immediate family, a private home, the refuge from the outside world. It can be the local space where everyday life evolves – the place to which people always return. It can also be the country of origin, the symbolic Home, the source, or the highly symbolic and mediated transnational context, which shelters diaspora against exclusionary national spaces. More than any one of these, it tends to be all of the above (p. 160).

For the diasporic lives of migrants, “home” stands for shared social spaces. Blunt and Bonnerjee (2013) think “the different ways of feeling at home in the city involve creating specific social spaces in the city and settings their boundaries” (p. 232). As those photos show, the actualisation of this home can be achieved by “transplanting” fragments of familiar landscape or urban texture into the spatial configurations of the adoptive environment. As Stuart Hall (1990) mentioned about the positions of enunciation, migrants occupy specific subject positions embedded with their cultural background, socio-economic status, and experiences. These buildings are marked with languages, colours, and symbols that make the difference and boundary from their surroundings. Photographs of migrant experiences through architecture can enunciate these subject positions, offering a visual narrative that goes beyond the physical structures to encompass the identities and stories of the individuals involved, expressing the pride of migrants’ cultures. Chinese find their familiar flavours in restaurants; Hungarians reminisce about their tightly-knit community life within clubs and associations, and Vietnamese receive religious meditation in their temple. Whilst their narratives of memory and nostalgia may seem to ground city and community identities in the past, these buildings are vital in expressing their identities in the present environment.

Understanding this home from the perspective of Pratt's contact zone theory, it can be viewed as a shelter result from the clash with the original urban landscapes representing hegemonic Anglo-Protestant syntheses (Kaufmann, 2004). Since the founding of America, Anglo-Protestant culture has long been central to “Americanization”. This abstract idea seemed to reflect a Utopian national synthesis. When social interaction is described in

terms of orderliness, unification, fusion, or imagination, usually “only legitimate moves are actually named as part of the system, where legitimacy is defined from the point of view of the party in authority regardless of what other parties might see themselves as doing” (Pratt, 1991, p. 38). As Cohen mentioned: “Some found freedom and riches. Most faced discrimination and prejudice” (Cohen, 2017e, para. 7). As a form of cultural assimilation, this process blurs nationalities and identities and contrasts multiculturalism. The homogeneous demands of this culture have made it socially under-inclusive and in tension with America's pluralistic social composition and ethnic inequalities, creating a conflict between the ideal of forming a “national and cultural salad bowl” and the practice of racial discrimination.

Since the 1950s Civil Rights Movement, this imagined national synthesis that had previously maintained its dominant influence has started to break down (Carson, 1986). The composition of the defining of America is evolving, as are the constituent groups within it. Internal social groups, like migrants, possessing distinct histories and ways of life that diverge from the established norms, began to assert these histories and ways of life as integral aspects of their citizenship, constituting the very essence of their membership in the national collective. In their interactions with the dominant society, many of these groups began to articulate a discourse of belonging that extended beyond mere representation and the fundamental rights bestowed by dominant authorities.

Thus, those migrant-featured buildings are “safe houses” for migrants against racial assimilation and discrimination. “Safe houses” featured the same language, food, grocery or worship, formed a relaxed and familiar environment and offered migrants a high degree of

trust and shared understanding. Within this environment, migrants could re-constitute themselves as horizontal, homogeneous, sovereign people, relieving and healing them from oppression. As Pratt (1991) describes, those buildings are “places for healing and mutual recognition, safe houses to construct shared understandings, knowledges, claims on the world that they can then bring into the contact zone” (p. 40).

The buildings in Cohen's photos are symbolic and meaningful. Even without the figures, viewers can acknowledge the presence of local migrant communities. Their identities are actively portrayed through visual elements in the photo and metaphor of home inscribed in various corners of Pittsburgh. They reflect the migrant’s effort to express their histories and ways of life as integral components of their citizenship, constituting the very essence of their membership in the national collective. Cohen's photos provide an alternative perspective for visualising the migrant experience, which is that documentary photography of migrants is not only limited to figures of migrants. These photos of the cultural buildings that migrants featured can also show the diaspora of migrants and their homes in a new country.

Conclusion

In sum, documentary photographers are observers, recorders and participants in social development. When they turn their lens on migrants, they humanise the migrant experience, foster empathy, and devote themselves to a more nuanced understanding of migration. By presenting images that evoke empathy and provoke thought, and using the camera in their hands as a powerful tool, documentary photographers contribute to broader discussions of migration policy, human rights, and social justice. Furthermore, their photographs address hints of the complicated nature of establishing a new life in a foreign land and carry the implicit cultural dynamic—a level of textual richness that is rarely encountered in documents that rely on the written form rather than the visual medium.

In this dissertation, documentary photography is an art of the contact zones. An aesthetic method of narrating and connecting with the concepts, concerns, histories, and perspectives of migrants; a social practice in transculturation and collaborative work in the arts of criticism and revelation; a way to move into a rhetoric of authenticity and an archive of the history redemption in which people engage with suppressed aspects of history. More importantly, they include a medium of communication that transcends differences and hierarchies, surpassing mere politeness while upholding mutual respect—a systematic approach to the concept of cultural and social mediation. In an era where migration remains a contentious issue, documentary photography can be seen as serving a role in bridging divides and fostering a sense of shared humanity.

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