

A Transnational Pig: Reconstituting Kinship Among Filipinos in Hong Kong

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Abstract: Migration may offer Filipinos abroad new ways to practice religious faith and opportunities to extend social networks, but many must at the same time sustain and renegotiate kinship ties at home. The obligations of kinship can mean declarations of faith are not always what we might think. Rather than being the good converts or diligent congregation members of their self-descriptions, migrants may continue to be drawn into village ritual at home. This paper aims to show how an exchange-based approach to faith persists in the diaspora and enables migrants to renegotiate long-distance forms of kinship.

Keywords: Ifugao, Filipino Kinship, Faith, Philippines, Hong Kong

Rather than taking migrants' declarations of faith and life scripts of religious self-discovery at face value, this paper seeks to problematise the ways we might understand belief, exchange and diaspora among Filipino migrants. There may be a temptation to consider the proliferation of churches and faith-based consociality among Filipino temporary labour migrants to indicate that they are subjects of globalisation who have been inculcated with the neoliberal subjectivity necessary to sustain a compliant and docile workforce. Against this generalizing approach, I explore how, in the Filipino diaspora, much more local notions of religiosity are set against concepts of kinship, obligation, and indebtedness in framing the exchanges between home and abroad. *Utang* (debt) is a very practical problem for all Filipino

migrants and simultaneously an important strategy through which they build community and sustain long-distance kin ties. It is also a key concept in their spiritual self-understandings (Aguilar 1998; Pertierra 1992; Rafael 1988). Migrants have obligations to both their families and their congregations and tensions between the two inform people's experience of themselves (and others) as both properly faithful and authentically Filipino. My goal here is to place—and problematise—popular versions of Filipino religiosity within what Lee and LiPuma (2002) describe as the 'culture of circulation'—practices of evaluation, constraint, consociality and resubjectivation that emerge with movements of people and exchanges of value in migration.

The size and scale of the Filipino diaspora mean any such conflicts between religious obligations and kin exchanges are important to both household and national budgets. Government statistics for 2008 place 8,187,710 workers overseas from a population of approximately ninety-one million (POEA 2008), but these figures likely underestimate the total number of Filipinos working abroad. In Hong Kong alone, there are 155,317 Filipinos—125,810 on temporary working visas, an estimated 6000 'irregular' migrants, and 23,507 permanent residents. Of these temporary workers, ninety-five per cent are female. Popular estimates place one tenth of the population overseas and describe 30—50 per cent of all households as 'subsisting on remittances' (Bello 2005). Monies remitted from contract workers and emigrants have a huge impact on the domestic economy in the Philippines. Many migrants remain abroad for long periods and, in their daily lives, faith becomes an important consolation for their loneliness and frustration. On their days off, church-based consociality offers both opportunities to extend migrants' social networks and material sites for the reflexive practice of collective life (Ong and Collier 2005, p. 7). Church services, post-church gatherings, and pilgrimage excursions while overseas constitute important nodes in the Filipino culture of circulation, not least because they are sites where migrants 'compare notes' on their relations with those at home.

Perhaps most importantly, by offering migrants new ways of understanding themselves—perhaps as secular pilgrims or as lay missionaries charged with a spiritual imperative for the work they perform—faith can become a lens through which migrants transform the ways they think and feel about themselves in the world. Faith-based collectivities are frequently the safest and most accepting sites for migrants to make sense of their new circumstances while simultaneously holding onto

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an understanding of themselves as rooted in their place of origin. The promise of personal transformation can intensify migrants' attachments to their religious confessions as a key aspect of an extra-territorial Filipino nationalism. Yet such outcomes are not a forgone conclusion. Religious belief, as well as the faith-based collectivities in which migrants' participate and the consociality these networks support, can take on very different forms. In the Filipino diaspora, the role of faith within the culture of circulation is arguably a much localized than broadly national phenomenon.

Home Matters

In my ethnographic case here, respondents share in the Filipino culture of debt and exchange but describe themselves as 'indigenous people'. The Spanish may have held the Philippines for four centuries, but their colonial rule never effectively extended to the mountains of the interior. Unlike the British in the settler societies of Australia, New Zealand and North America (where almost the entire native population became categorised as 'indigenes'), the Spanish never settled the Philippine islands in large numbers. Native inhabitants who accepted Spanish rule actually formed much of the 'mainstream' population of the Philippines and it is only the un-colonised uplanders who are now popularly considered 'indigenes.' My respondents' come from one such indigenous group. Their home village only converted to Christianity after the Americans assumed the role of colonial power in 1898 (McKay 2005). As 'IPs' (indigenous peoples) they do not approach the world entirely as one might expect of 'mainstream'—lowland dwelling—Filipinos. Most lowlanders are Catholic, with Catholics comprising 80 percent of the Philippine population and the remaining 20 per cent being adherents of Islam, the Filipino Iglesia ni Cristo (Church of Christ) and a variety of other Protestant denominations.

The respondents discussed below are largely Catholics and former Catholics from among the Ifugao, an ethnic group recognised under the Indigenous Peoples' Rights Act (1997), who live in the mountains of Luzon, the Philippine archipelago's northern island. They come from Haliap, a village where kinship is recognised among the descendants of common great-great grandfathers and sometimes beyond. Kin relations in the Ifugao bilateral system are maintained through a regular series of reciprocal exchanges of goods and labour that mark life-course events and religious

festivals. Kin who do not participate appropriately have their relationships ‘forgotten’ while other people can be incorporated into the kin network on a fictive kin basis. As in the Hispanicised lowlands, relations of debt and obligation are paramount in reproducing kinship but, in Ifugao, many of these relations are still expressed in and around ritual. Moreover, the Ifugao sibling bond is particularly important (see Eggan 1960) and transfers between siblings, particularly from older to younger, are expected throughout the life course. Initially founded on labour, such transfers are increasingly of gifts and ‘donations’ in the form of material objects and of cash, both ongoing flows and funds for specific purchases, including the performance of traditional ritual obligations. The social meaning of these transfers is never set, but continually revisited and opened up for negotiation as to their value, the connections they express and the level of reciprocity implied or expected. Such gifts sustain long distance consociality between migrants and ‘home’, connections based on the sending, receiving and distribution of objects and cash, the constraints placed on donors and recipients, and the continual evaluation of gifts, the use for which they are intended and to which there are eventually put, and the variety of meanings ascribed to them as cash and objects. From within this space of long distance exchange, migrants may shape new subjectivities for themselves as family and community benefactors and as faithful Christians, fulfilling obligations to Church and church-defined obligations to family.

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Most of my Haliap respondents have practiced a highly syncretic Christian faith at home. Though they identify as Catholics, they regularly observe rituals drawn from their indigenous tradition that they describe as ‘pagan’. Yet both at home, and, increasingly, in the diaspora, they are converting to new, Protestant denominations, including the Filipino-run and Manila-based *Iglesia ni Cristo*, the largest Protestant denomination in the Philippines. Conversion inflects Haliap’s culture of circulation with conflict over the use and meanings of cash and objects sent home by migrants abroad. Respondents describe this conflict as a conflict between the obligations they recognize as concomittant with belonging to either Catholic or Iglesia churches.

Like many of the ‘new’ Protestant churches,’ the *Iglesia* preaches a prosperity gospel (see Wiegele 2005; Coleman 2006). *Iglesia* doctrine is based on the Church’s Filipino founder’s reading of the Bible, as elaborated by its pastors. The *Iglesia* believes ‘unity is only possible when everyone completely agrees’ and thus members

draw themselves into line with the Manila-based church leadership (Harper 2001, p. 114). The church expresses a Filipino national fundamentalism that claims globality through superior access to religious truth and superior administrative skills (Harper 2001). The church claims to be the ‘true church of Christ in the East’, as foretold in the scriptures, with other Christian denominations having fallen into apostasy. Founded in response to early twentieth century American fundamentalist missionising, the church’s ideals of evangelical mission reverse the colonial relationship, positing Filipino interpretation of scripture as the source of eventual global salvation. The *Iglesia* administers its almost entirely Filipino congregations as a kind of parallel state, with a transparent bureaucracy that rewards moral and legal behaviours. It offers members spiritual governance and cultivates an aesthetic of uniformity. The church doctrine does not make syncretic adaptations, like Catholicism has done in engaging Ifugao communities. Instead, the *Iglesia* depends on principles of conduct founded in a view of reality as unitary and unmediated, not open to interpretation, universal, unconstructed, and non-negotiable (see Latour 2004). Against traditional extended kin ties, the *Iglesia* similarly offers an alternate form of family—*kapatiran* or brotherhood—based on mutual support. *Iglesia* congregants learn that their lives are, first and foremost, ‘borrowed from God.’ The ways that the *Iglesia*—and other Protestant churches—interprets debt, however, often runs counter to more traditional Filipino conceptions of ongoing exchange and obligation to kin and community that are perhaps even more fundamental to the self and one’s self-esteem than one’s faith ([see Aguilar 1998; Rafael 1988](#)).

By converting to *Iglesia*, Ifugao villagers in Haliap have been able to both identify with the new, post-colonial Filipino nationalism and withdraw to some extent from extended family/village networks and the traditional exchange practices associated with ‘pagan’ rituals. As an Ifugao *munfahi*—‘pagan’ ritual specialist—once explained to me, ‘Christians were always stingy (*kuripot*—tight-fisted) but these *Igelisa* are even more (so).’

Religious affiliation and the practice of faith in daily life is a site of conflict in the village. Haliap has a history of previous interethnic conflicts in struggles between Ifugao sub-groups—ethnic Adyangans and Kalanguya people—over land. To some extent this has been transmuted into conflicts between *Iglesia ni Cristo* and Catholic households over obligations in the moral economy. Haliap’s *Iglesia* congregation has

long refused to participate in 'pagan' community rituals because doing so may lead to their excommunication. Equally, because they are unable to join any group not sponsored or approved by the Church, they have been accused of undermining community development efforts, including a farmers' co-operative, leaving Adyangan syncretic Catholics and their Kalanguya counterparts without the numbers and networks needed for successful enterprises.

Haliap exemplifies a contemporary version of what were once much more widespread social forms. Before Spanish colonisation, Filipino societies were shaped by variations on debt bondage and social relations were constructed around notions of exchange. Colonial conversion to Christianity transmuted these exchanges with patrons, ancestors, and spirits into those with the Christian God and the Catholic Church (Aguilar 1998, Rafael 1988.). More recently, many Filipinos have not been entirely satisfied that Catholicism has been the appropriate path to propitiate a God who will guarantee prosperity (Wiegele 2005). Teachings on debt and the appropriate forms for transacting with the spiritual realm have featured prominently in a wide variety of post-colonial Filipino spiritual practices (Aguilar 1998; Cannell 2006; Rafael 1988.) When *Iglesia* members learn in the village church, as they do also in Hong Kong, that their lives are 'borrowed' from God, their church is both reinforcing and subtly transforming an indigenous understanding that relations with the spiritual realm are reciprocal transactions (Aguilar 1998; Cannell 2006; Scott 1983). My respondents ask questions of faith such as, 'If you pray for something, should God give it to you? If he doesn't, does this mean you have committed some offence that you have yet to remedy? Should you try a different form of asking, through ritual or sacrifice?' As migrants overseas, their approach to Christian spiritual exchange remains very similar to the ways their village-mates and local syncretic Catholics propitiate ancestors and spirits of place in 'pagan' ritual. Likewise, in times of crisis, those at home turn to God and to ancestral spirits, but also to kin abroad.

In Ifugao migration, the sense of immediacy engendered by migrants' responses to requests from home matters a great deal. Immediate responses strengthen trust and intimacy and enhance a migrant's status, both in their sending community and in their overseas networks. Yet, as Weiner (1993, p. 292, cited in Strathern 1996, p. 529) writes: 'the task confronting humans is not to sustain human relationships... [but] to place a limit on relationship'. This insight resonates particularly strongly with

Filipino migrants because for Filipinos, a sense of self is fundamentally determined through a person's relationships with others. Migrants abroad typically struggle to limit a seemingly never-ending—and often escalating—series of demands on their overseas earnings from kin and village-mates. Those left behind usually expect to intensify, rather than have the migrants' absence attenuate, the reciprocal exchanges that sustain sibling and broader kin group relations. Migration thus usually means that migrants discover they have far more relatives than they previously recognised, with their [apparent](#) overseas success stimulating an un-forgetting of previously inactive kin ties. Some of these renewed or reworked kin connections can be beneficial—assisting with finding jobs abroad and investing in property or business at home; others are more straightforward attempts at predatory extraction. Overseas, migrants can feel overwhelmed and express fear they will be 'consumed' by the needs of those at home, unable to meet them and unable to return home until the requests are met. Otherwise they fear they will feel 'ashamed'. The emotional state resulting—anger and alienation alternating with nostalgia and homesickness, combined with a fundamental threat to self-identity—can make migrants mentally and physically ill.

Most migrants from Haliap have begun their overseas sojourns in Hong Kong, initially taking contracts as domestics—maids or 'garden boys'. Contract work in Hong Kong commands some of the highest salaries available in the global market for migrant labour, so migrants make substantial contributions to livelihoods [at home](#). They are [their village's](#) link to the global economy. As elsewhere in the Philippines, people from indigenous Ifugao communities have had an uneven engagement with globalisation and the image of 'the global Filipino.' Ifugao migrants experience their sojourn abroad as the intersection of Philippine state-sponsored and regulated work-abroad programmes, the particular conditions of work in their employer's household, their family ties and the expectations of those at home, and, finally, their relationships with migrant consociates in Hong Kong. All of these relations [produce a culture of circulation that is shaped by](#) their (often concealed [when overseas](#)) Ifugao ethnic identities, their (sometimes-novel) religious affiliations, and their involvements in the 'pagan' cultural practices that distinguish Ifugao [culture](#) from [that of the](#) Filipino mainstream.

In Hong Kong, my respondents find living in employers' homes [places constraints on](#) the [timing](#) and nature of their connections with those at home and [their](#)

Hong Kong consociates.¹ They depend on daily SMS text messaging and weekly voice calls to mediate and sustain their kin relationships. Outside their work, the meeting places offered by Hong Kong's public spaces enable them to reconstitute locality-in-extension as 'home-away-from-home.'² Villagers meet in Central, at weekly church services in St. John's Catholic Church and the *Iglesia ni Cristo* nearby, and, afterwards, in and around Worldwide Plaza shopping mall, socialising at very specific meeting points in Central's Statue Square and restaurants on nearby streets. All this is micro-coordinated with mobile phones, typically in text exchanges and conversations between village-mates who are either siblings or close (first or second) cousins, aunts/uncles or nieces/nephews.

Haliap is thus not 'just a village'—it stretches between Ifugao Province, different locations throughout the Philippines, Hong Kong and beyond. Cash remittances, messages, information, gifts and people move back and forth between, in my respondents' terms—places of 'staying.' The pattern is an artefact of colonial history in the Philippines; the ethnic 'Adyangan side' of Ifugao has formed a diaspora within the Philippines since at least the 1880s (McKay 2005). Late 1990s overseas labour migration has then expanded this field to incorporate sites overseas, forming a transnationalised Ifugao innovation within Godelier's (1975) 'kinship mode of production'. Godelier describes a mode that is not household production, *per se*, but ideas about sharing and obligation, status and exchange that ensure a kin group (writ large) access to the means of production over a wide area, securing livelihood where local conditions require cash supplements. This kinship mode is the mode of production for Ifugao circulation, and ritual practice plays an important role within it.

Below, I explore exchanges among a set of ten Haliap siblings, now spread across the Philippines, Singapore, Hong Kong, Saudi Arabia and Canada—sites where my respondents are provisionally, rather than permanently, diasporic. Migrants 'staying' outside the village must continually demonstrate their commitments to their siblings, and, through them, to broader village life in order to maintain their status as locals. To do so, they must respond to requests for assistance, particularly financial aid. Such commitment does not preclude other identifications and affiliations and migrants' participation in other forms of consociality and locality in Hong Kong. My respondents would agree with Hage (2004, p. 116) when he observes 'home... is not that which stops us from moving, rather it is what gives us a sense of security to move

in the world'. For them, however, this migrant sense of security in 'home' remains contingent, always tied into the maintenance and reproduction of kin and communal relations (see Carsten 2004).

One of Haliap's key organising sites is Hong Kong's HSBC building, near the Star Ferry terminal in Central. Haliap reconstitutes itself here every Sunday, when migrant domestic workers enjoying their day off meet to socialise, remit money and run personal errands after attending church services. The Haliap group may all be related, but they are split across religious lines. Some attend the Catholic mass at St. John's, others the *Iglesia* service in Sheung Wan. No matter which church they belong to, they meet up as a group after church. Though many of my eight respondents described their sojourn in Hong Kong as having intensified their faith and drawn them closer into church congregations, religion here may not be doing quite what we might expect—if we expect that it will help migrants transcend kinship ties and become individuated, autonomous subjects. Just as it can transform migrants abroad, the culture of circulation can also transform locals—those left at home. In the case outlined below, that of pleas for a sacrificial pig, the culture of circulation provides a platform for efforts to extend local traditions overseas at the same time as it reshapes the village through participation in new religious affiliations.

A Transnational Pig

Luis, a Haliap migrant working in Hong Kong, was a member of the *Iglesia*. Though his sojourn in Hong Kong has strengthened his engagement with the *Iglesia* as a global and fundamentalist church, this did not always translate into the relationships he maintained with his Haliap siblings. Luis enjoys belonging to this wider collective with clear chains of command, transparent finances, and an explicit set of practices to ensure one lives a daily life that leads to prosperity; he is proud that his church is 'not corrupt like the government'. Before departing Haliap, Luis had been church deacon. Deacons lead small groups of church members as their first point of connection with the church, providing guidance on spiritual wellbeing and personal concerns and monitoring attendance and donations. Luis had accompanied his *Iglesia* pastor to pray over sick villagers and tried to dissuade his Catholic neighbours from seeking out ritual cures. In Hong Kong, he had been looking to take on the same role, building personal networks among his fellow congregants. This was part of the cultural capital

he was amassing abroad, directed to returning to Haliap or moving on with a higher status in his church.

Luis's engagement with the church was less about individuation and more about situating his extended self within a new and more powerful set of networks. This entailed concealing his ethnic identity as 'indigenous' from most of the members of his Hong Kong congregation. They spoke Filipino and knew very little about Ifugao. That did not matter to Luis, because 'God is the same everywhere' and he could follow the church's teachings and rules just as well as anyone else. Yet, in 2005, Luis found himself in a dilemma: his sister, the sibling he felt closest to, was begging him to act against church teachings by funding a 'pagan' ritual.

Just before Christmas, 2005, Sarah asked Luis to contribute a pig to a ritual she was planning. She sent her brother this request as a short video clip, filmed on my camera, because she was in Haliap and he was in Hong Kong. In it, Sarah pleaded with him to send money for the purchase of a pig for an Ifugao healing ritual—*fogwa* or 'the washing of the bones'. She knew the *Iglesia* forbids supporting 'paganism', so she assured Luis that no prayers would accompany the sacrifice.

Sarah and her husband Brandon live, not in Haliap, but in his Kalanguya-speaking village in down the road. Both are in their late 30s. Sarah is a schoolteacher, Brandon, a police officer. Their marriage is not only inter-ethnic, but inter-faith. Sarah left the *Iglesia* to return to Catholicism when she married Brandon. In 2005, she was teaching at a remote school, a two-to-three hour hike each way from the main road. Posted far from home, she spent weeknights in a rented a room near the school. She and Brandon depended on 'working students' to help take care of their three children when Sarah was absent. Sarah found it difficult being a Haliap Adyangan married into a Kalanguya family and also being a Catholic. Her job added further psychic strain. Part of a teacher's job was to count the votes during the contentious local elections and Sarah became caught up in Kalanguya inter-family politics. Sarah's illness began in mid-2004. She had persistent fatigue and a sensation that she was floating 'in her head,' above the ground. An expensive series of consultations in the lowlands ruled out ischemic heart disease. Beyond this, doctors could not offer a diagnosis.

After her medical treatment, Sarah asked for a transfer to the school in Haliap. Her manager promised to consider her request, but seemed to be lingering over the

decision. One of Sarah's sisters-in-law then referred her to an Adyangan healing medium (a *munanap*). The medium told her that her dead mother was 'disturbing' her. The cure for her problems would be to perform *fogwa*—to ask a *munfahi* to 'wash' and rebury her mother's bones. The idea appealed. Holding *fogwa* for Sarah's health was one way she and Brandon could rally public support and thus effectively pressure the local Department of Education officials to reassign her.

Sarah and Luis's mother had also belonged to the *Iglesia ni Cristo*, so Sarah was surprised to learn their deceased mother was requesting *finogwa* ['making *fogwa*', meaning to give a secondary burial]. She explained to me that Brandon's Kalanguya Catholicism was highly syncretic, so he was much more enthusiastic than she was. Sarah worried about the opinions of her *Iglesia* siblings. Brandon, meanwhile, went ahead and disinterred his mother-in-law's bones, contacted a *munfahi* to chant the required invocations to the ancestors, and began sourcing the sacrificial animals to feed the visitors. *Fogwa* is a redistributive feast where the house is open to all. Brandon was planning to feed many people and was adamant that Luis donate a pig. Sarah thus followed up on her video message with SMS text messages. Providing a pig, she told Luis, would 'show my family has not abandoned me.'

Luis understood that sending cash for the pig would increase Sarah and Brandon's social status and, by extension, his own. However, he also saw that sending cash would show Brandon, not Luis, leading the family in the public practice of faith. Sarah's request thus challenged Luis's judgment. While Luis and his wife Angelina had repaid money borrowed from Sarah and Brandon to migrate to Hong Kong in the first place, a sense of indebtedness still lingered. Brandon had previously asked Luis to send him some Merrell 'branded' shoes as a gift. In her video message, Sarah told Luis to 'forget the shoes' because Brandon was now insisting on the pig. Both requests demonstrated Brandon's ability to command resources across international borders, but Brandon's desire had shifted from an orientation to a more generic consumer culture—the name-brand shoes—to globalising his own interpretations of the value of local cultural forms—the pig. Brandon, it seemed, was trying to claim the upper hand in negotiating the forms of consociality that would be supported by migrants' donations. Brandon's plans placed Luis and his beliefs in a supporting, 'donor' role, constraining his ability to dispose of his overseas earnings as he wished. While the shoes demonstrated Brandon's consumer sophistication, his demand for

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donations for the *fogwa* tested his ability to divert Luis's Hong Kong earnings and subvert Luis's religious practice. Luis, however, did not want to be forced to bend his religious precepts by his brother-in-law, and felt constrained by his previously prominent role in Haliap's *Iglesia* congregation, a role he was attempting to replicate in Hong Kong. Sarah, meanwhile, felt caught between her natal family and her husband and exposed to community censure. For these reasons, Sarah asked me to show her video message not just to Luis, but also to her Hong Kong-based Haliap friends. The pros and cons, obligations and claims behind the request for a pig were widely argued, as the story played out by text message and voice calls across Haliap, negotiating the limits of consociality.

After some consideration, Luis decided not to accede to Sarah's request. His reasoning surprised me. Luis consciously did not consult his church friends about Sarah's request, even though (or perhaps because) he had extensive social networks and a leadership role in the congregation. Luis wanted to consider her petition as a matter of kinship and *damayan* (obligation) to his sister who had helped him in the past. Rather than adopting a self-consciously 'religious' approach to the situation, Luis considered medical healing and social healing to be more or less one and the same.

Luis focussed his concern was with the efficacy of the ritual, rather than the probity of 'paganism.' I had previously heard Luis describe pagan practices as spiritually wrong—'prayers to the devil'. But, in this situation, Luis explained that, even without the *munfahi* saying prayers, *finogwa*—it is really a pagan ritual. Before, when everyone followed *fahi* and believed in it, it was medicine. Now, it is just feeding the people... a way of scattering money'. Luis considered belief to reveal something about the identity and state of mind of believers. He thought villagers no longer truly believed, but just liked to be fed. Luis imagined the village would attend the feast because people were greedy, rather than truly believing their participation would give his sister good health. He considered this greed to be a fault in his villagemates' faith that rendered ritual powerless. He was not concerned about faith in an abstract spiritual realm populated by 'devils' but about his wider community believing in a connection between his mother's spirit and sister's health. Luis himself did not believe in any such connection. His understanding was that his mother's conversion to *Iglesia* was not one she would ever repudiate, even after her death.

Thus, even in the unlikely event his mother were ‘a spirit’ and not living in the heaven described by the *Iglesia*, she would not make the children she had nurtured ill in order to force them to conduct a ritual she herself had rejected. Luis’s counter-claim was that his co-villagers lacked the proper intentions to make the ritual work as medicine and were simply trying to force him to acknowledge their claim on his success in

Hong Kong. By supplying a pig to feed them, he would be extending village consociality, enabling those at home to partake of the earnings of migrants abroad, but this extension would be brokered by his brother-in-law, and Luis refused to be constrained by, or subordinated to, Brandon’s ambitions.

Luis texted Sarah: ‘If you go to hospital, I can give money. But not for *finogwa*...’ He offered to arrange for Haliap’s *Iglesia* congregation to hold special prayers for her health. He also suggested Western-style medical treatment because he had already prayed for Sarah himself and ‘it did not work’. Luis presumed that the most effective healing would come, not from either superior scientific understanding or better access to God or divinities, but from recruiting the widest possible spiritual and material networks of support. He wanted to link his sister to spiritual realms beyond the limited scope of local ritual. For him, social efficacy and medical efficacy remained the same thing: a matter of the scope of one’s networks. In this, Luis did not focus on the specific beliefs held by the *Iglesia* as opposed to the Catholics or ‘pagans’. Instead, he evaluated the possibilities that interested him within these beliefs—those for networks and exchanges.

I asked him if he would have responded differently if the pig were requested for a ritual to be held—and the meat redistributed—in Haliap, rather than in the Kalanguya village. Luis demurred, explaining he would look for ‘a way around,’ so he could avoid the sanctions of his church but gain the additional prestige such a contribution would provide him among his Catholic kin. Such spirits did not disturb Haliap people in Hong Kong, he explained, because they remained at home—‘with their bones’ and ‘in the surroundings’. Luis was not worried about what might happen if Sarah did not hold the ritual. He predicted that ‘nothing’ would happen, meaning she would not recover, nor would her illness become more serious. Instead, he offered: ‘sometimes nothing may really be something..., but I’m not yet sure.’ In Luis’s view of the cosmos, the spirits of *fahi* could still have some effect, but the church would likely have more.

Debate and critique

Sarah's request provoked a village-wide response, with Sarah's Hong Kong-based friends – [members of the St. John's congregation](#) - taking up her cause. I watched Sarah's video together with Nora, Darcy and Elvie in Central. They described Luis's refusal as 'hard-hearted' and 'closed-minded.' They also made these comments in text messages and voice calls to Luis, Sarah and others across Haliap. They accused Luis of an un-brotherly kind of 'stinginess'—an attempt to pull himself and his household away from Haliap community networks towards his church connections. Sarah's friends made four points: First, there was no ritual held when Luis and Sarah's mother died. Even though she was *Iglesia*, neglecting Ifugao ritual disrespected her kin, friends, and ancestors who remained Catholic and 'pagan.' This was a claim of the precedence of indigenous [consociality and its](#) cultural value—funerals being for the living—over that of the new Protestant churches [and the constraints they placed on their adherents](#). Making this claim, [Sarah's](#) friends argued for the primacy of kin obligations over non-local faith. Secondly, because Sarah had donated a pig for Luis's engagement ritual, he had an obligation to give back in kind when asked, an obligation which came before his personal religious beliefs. Thirdly, Sarah was asking Luis only for money and it should be Sarah's decision how she should spend it. This argument separated an exchange of use-value for a cultural debt from the ways a creditor might then choose to invest the repayments. And, lastly, Sarah's friends observed that, since the ritual would not be held in Luis's house, the *Iglesia* could not take any action against him. Thus Luis could not claim that he was really endangering his own stature within [the](#) church. Sarah's friends [has thus](#) decided in advance [that](#) Luis's refusal could not be founded in any reasonable self-interest, but in his determination to create distance between himself and his sister.

Nora explained to me:

'Here in Hong Kong, we learn that you do not have to be the same to go together. You just have to respect other customs and give them their place. That is how our thinking must be if we will join many peoples and faiths here, and how we should adapt if we will transfer again to a new place. Now, in Haliap, we should practice both *Iglesia* and *fogwa*.'

Nora's comments outlined a way of being a villager in a global world, migrating without distancing oneself from Haliap. Her approach runs against the idea

that migrants, using mobility to transform themselves, then become entirely obedient congregation members, subsumed into new church networks. In Nora's evaluation, it is not Brandon's expectations, but Luis's inflexibility of faith that is the problem. Nora outlines her own vision for long distance Haliap consociality, one constrained by the pragmatics of multi-cultural and global living and thus demanding a flexible faith-based subjectivity from villagers even in advance of their own migration.

Luis shared his church's concern with efficacy, but it was not shared in a way that distinguished it from the efficacy of Adyangan *fahi* approaches. His judgment was of how best to manipulate the spiritual world to provide material goods and personal benefits. This is much the same concern that underpins *fahi*. And both Luis and Brandon now engage this concern through different sets of self-consciously global practices. Luis explained that, since the *Iglesia* has congregations among Filipinos in countries around the world and actively evangelises among non-Filipinos, his church could offer prayers that would recruit far more support than simply feeding the community through *fogwa*. In this respect, his engagements with the church allow Haliap to become more global, but do not challenge the Haliap idea that the purpose of such connections is to translate spiritual networks into efficacy in healing.

Evaluating Sarah's request, Luis's concerns remained within the familial and communal collective, still constrained by locality and rituals. Thus whatever Christian faith is doing for people in Haliap—and this is necessarily a much wider variety of things than I have accounted for here—it does not appear to be rupturing kin relations so much as reconstituting them along new lines. Where previously siblings would have maintained 'close' relations through ongoing exchanges of land, labour, and agricultural products, they now have transnational exchanges of loans, gifts and goods. Here, migrants' notions of religious faith seem to be producing a plural cosmology within the village. We can see plurality emerging from what Luis did not do. Luis could have used this situation as an opportunity to justify withdrawing from a broader set of obligations to his extended family, constructing a rift with Brandon and Sarah. This outcome was what his Hong Kong friends were trying to pre-empt by talking about it—shaming him in advance. Luis, instead, found a kind of middle ground in which he acknowledged local ideas about networks and healing by offering his own, more global connections. Luis's approach to ritual across the virtual village is thus cautious, focussed on unity and recruiting numbers for efficacy. He retains a

transactional model of bargaining with the cosmos, situated in a collective and enacted by persons who extend through their social networks, placing kin before faith. While there are other moral and cosmological values embedded in ritual and social practices here, these, for Luis and his fellow villagers, are intimately entangled with material well-being and economy, rather than seen as separable.

Conclusion

Luis's obligation to, and interest in, sustaining kinship is a problem faced by migrants across the world. He needs his sister to manage his investments, he needs his community to respect him and support his family, welcoming him home on his eventual return. He may be a devout member of the *Iglesia*, but, as he wrestles with his sister's request, he extends an old village struggle between paganism and modernity into the culture of circulation shared by Haliap and its migrants in Hong Kong. Luis may frame his considerations over how best to manipulate the spiritual world to provide material goods and personal benefits in the doctrine of the *Iglesia*, but these concerns remain much the same concern as those that lie behind *fahi*, just scaled up to a national church and a 'global' congregation. Thus, though Luis's church has a global reach, Sarah and Brandon remind him – and their villagemates – the reach of local ritual can be global, too. After all, those abroad know kin at home expect that they are only ever 'staying' elsewhere and remain obligated to continue exchanges so that they may eventually return. Such obligations are enduring.

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In the end, Sarah's younger brother in Saudi Arabia – who had converted to Catholicism on his own marriage - gave money for the pig. The ritual was held. Sarah was able to demonstrate that her siblings abroad 'still cared' and Brandon was able to hold his redistributive feast. The result was such a show of community support and concern for Sarah's health that the school superintendent was persuaded to transfer Sarah back to Haliap. Her home life is now much less stressful and she has made a good recovery. Relations between Sarah and Luis remain close. Luis reported that Brandon was a bit distant—until Luis shipped him a pair of the Merrell shoes he had originally requested.

More broadly, Nora's comments show us how faith-based collectivities overlap with local community and can foster forms of diasporic Filipino consociality

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that extend local traditions, rather than impose more national and global norms. Though some churches, like the Iglesia, clearly try to offer their members faith-based subjectivities and new social networks that can substitute for kin and enable migrants to distance themselves from obligations in the Philippines, the obverse seems almost as likely to occur. Migrants' familial concerns, though transnational and largely happening 'elsewhere', likely become a central feature of faith-based consociality abroad, just as they occupy Nora, Elvie and Darcy's after-church socializing.

While 'mainstream' Filipino migrants might not be debating the probity of secondary burials as my Ifugao friends are, virtually all Filipino temporary migrants must remain caught up in village and neighbourhood-level rituals and exchanges marking life-course events, disasters and emergencies to sustain their own sense of personhood. Overseas, they engage with and contribute to most of these rituals at home through overlapping kin, village and faith networks. The faith-based collectivities they join and form in their their overseas work sites help them to balance their obligations to kin with self-care and self-transformation. From one perspective, we can see faith shaping the culture of circulation underpinning migration by providing these migrants with legitimate ways to restrict their redistribution of overseas earnings, offering criteria they can use to evaluate requests from home, and providing them with venues for socialising with other Filipinos while abroad. From another perspective, we would expect to see the foundational exchange concerns of Filipino migrants shaping their practices of faith, drawing them into or excluding them from consociality with fellow church members.

Notably, while Luis's church offers him a compelling 'borders-and-beyond' version of belonging to a global Filipino brotherhood of the faithful, Luis is not convinced. He does not turn to his church for advice on his sister's request. He does not seem to trust the Iglesia vision of uniform, faithful subjects in a nation beyond borders, largely based on his own experience of consociality in his Hong Kong congregation. Instead, Luis's story shows us the persistence of tradition and difference beneath a veneer of uniform religious adherence. Even though he is an aspiring church leader and now livies in Hong Kong, Luis's obligations to continue traditional village exchanges have not simply been extinguished by a Christian and individualised subjectivity. In the the debates over the donation of a transnational pig we see just how persistent Haliap's local networks, exchanges and the relational form of personhood they sustain all are, and how these elements of locality are now being

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sustained by the forms of evaluation, constraint, resubjectivation and consociality emerging with circular migration. This case suggests that, just as faith shapes the culture of circulation, the concerns of circulating migrants can equally shape migrants' churches, inflecting the practice of faith abroad with translocal concerns for their Filipino congregants' families, investments, and status at home.

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Comment: Not totally clear why we end up here – a new point. Wouldn't it be better to end with ties to Lee and LiPuma point about circulation eg consociality. CHANGED AND CLARIFIED ARGUMENT

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Notes

- [1] POEA [accessed 29 September, 2009].
- [2] Described in detail by Nicole Constable (1997)
- [3] For an extended description, see Law (2001)

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