MIGRATION AND NEW MEDIA

Transnational Families and Polymedia

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How do parents and children care for each other when they are separated because of migration? The way in which transnational families maintain long-distance relationships has been revolutionised by the emergence of new media such as email, instant messaging, social networking sites, webcam and texting. A migrant mother can now call and text her left-behind children several times a day, peruse social networking sites and leave the webcam on for 12 hours, achieving a sense of co-presence.

Drawing on a long-term ethnographic study of prolonged separation between migrant mothers and their children who remain in the Philippines, this book develops groundbreaking theory for understanding both new media and the nature of mediated relationships. It brings together the perspectives of both the mothers and children and shows how the very nature of family relationships is changing. New media, understood as an emerging environment of polymedia, have become integral to the way family relationships are enacted and experienced. The theory of polymedia extends beyond the poignant case study and is developed as a major contribution for understanding the interconnections between digital media and interpersonal relationships.

Mirca Madianou is Senior Lecturer in Media and Communication at the University of Leicester, UK. She is the author of *Mediating the Nation* and several articles on the social consequences of the media.

Daniel Miller is Professor of Material Culture at the Department of Anthropology, University College London, UK. His most recent books include *Tales from Facebook* and *Digital Anthropology* (edited with Heather Horst).

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INTRODUCTION

Within the past few years a revolution has been taking place, one with huge consequences, but so far subject to only limited systematic research. While there are many studies of globalisation and migrant transnationalism, few have addressed the consequence that probably matters most to those involved, which is the separation of families. Specifically, how do parents and children care and look after each other when they live in different countries for many years separated because of migration? Although transnational families are not new, they are becoming increasingly common. Furthermore this type of separation now often involves mothers and their children as a consequence of the feminisation of migration, partly fuelled by the insatiable demand for care and domestic workers in the developed world. The dramatic change which has revolutionised the way in which families maintain long-distance communication, is the emergence of a plethora of internet- and mobile phone-based platforms such as email, instant messaging (IM), social networking sites (SNS) and webcam via voice over internet protocol (VOIP). These new media have engendered the emergence of a new communica-tive environment, which we will call 'polymedia'. This book is dedicated to the understanding of this new type of 'connected transnational family' which is the result of the convergence of these two phenomena: migrant transnationalism and the explosion of communicative opportunities afforded by new media.

This book makes both a substantive and theoretical contribution to the under-standing of these profound, parallel developments of family separation and trans-national communication that are shaping our contemporary worlds. We believe that to understand these transformations we cannot and should not separate them as, on the one hand, a study of the media, and on the other hand, an enquiry into what it means to be a migrant, or a mother. Our understanding will be much enhanced if we study media situated in the context of what it means to be a transnational mother in this environment of polymedia. As a result, this book

contains not just a theory of polymedia, but also a theory of mediation in which we consider in general terms how relationships and media are mutually shaped. We do so by drawing on a long-term ethnographic study of prolonged separation between transnational Filipino migrant mothers based in London and Cambridge and their (now adult) left-behind children in the Philippines. No other country exemplifies the phenomenon of 'distant mothering' as clearly as the Philippines with over 10 per cent of its population working overseas, the majority of whom are women with children left behind. The Philippines is also at the forefront of globalisation in terms of its appropriation of new media platforms, notably mobile phones, the consequences of which have already been documented, especially with regard to the public sphere (Castells *et al.*, 2006; Pertierra *et al.*, 2002; Rafael, 2003). More than 10 million Filipino children are officially estimated to be left-behind, most of whom see their migrant parents only once every two years. Given that such visits are even less frequent for families of undocumented migrants, it is evident that such parent–child relationships have become increasingly dependent on the available communication media. We argue that focusing on this case of prolonged separation and intense mediation helps to bring to light and crystallise aspects of both parts of this equation: a better understanding of the consequences of new media, and an insight into the very nature of parent–child relationships. Starting from this case of accentuated separation and mediation, we then move on to develop a new theory of polymedia and of mediated relationships which, we argue, can have a wider applicability. The book is equally driven by the aim to make an original contribution to the migration literature as well as to develop a theoretical understanding of digital media, distant love and the nature of mediated relationships. It also follows Stafford (2000) in arguing that understanding separa-tion is a route towards understanding the basis of human relatedness, autonomy and dependence and thereby the very nature of relationships.

One of the book's arguments is that although information and communication technologies (ICTs) do not solve the problems of separation within families, they do contribute to the transformation of the whole experience of migration and parenting. For example, it is telling that the opportunities for cheap and instant communication feature strongly in migrant mothers' justifications regarding their decisions to migrate and to settle. However, the fact that ICTs can potentially contribute, even if indirectly, to the shaping of migration patterns is not to say that the communication is necessarily successful. In fact, we will show how the perpetual contact they engender can often increase rupture and conflict between parents and children. The only way this becomes clear is through our transnational approach to research, which involved working with both the migrant mothers and subsequently the left-behind children of these same mothers whom we interviewed back in the Philippines. In the book we both demonstrate and interpret a discre-pancy between the mothers' and children's accounts. While for the mothers new communication technologies represent welcome opportunities to perform intensive mothering at a distance and to 'feel like mothers again', for their young adult children such frequent communication can be experienced as intrusive and unwanted,

although this often depends on specific issues such as the age of the children at the time the mothers left and the nature of the media available to them.

In addition, this book aims to make a wider theoretical contribution by developing a theory of polymedia and a theory of mediated relationships. The theory of polymedia emerged through our need to develop a framework for understanding the rapidly developing and proliferating media environment and its appropriation by users. Although our analysis of communication technologies begins by investigating the affordances (Hutchby, 2001) and limitations of each particular medium, technology or platform, our discussion of the emergence of a new environment of proliferating communicative opportunities that is polymedia shifts the attention from the individual technical propensities of any particular medium to an acknowledgement that most people use a constellation of different media as an integrated environment in which each medium finds its niche in relation to the others. We will also argue that, as media become affordable and once media literacy[1] is established and continues to develop, the situation of polymedia amounts to a re-socialising of media itself, in which the responsibility for which medium is used is increasingly seen to depend on social and moral questions rather than technical or economic parameters.

If the term 'polymedia' recognises the importance of the human context for media use, this leads the way to our final chapter where we are able to bring this theory into alignment with the theorisation of relationships to create a theory of mediated relationships, which builds upon prior theories of mediation in media studies (Couldry, 2008; Livingstone, 2009b; Silverstone, 2005), but is here combined with debates about kinship, religion and mediation in anthropology (e.g. Eisenlohr, 2011; Engelke, 2010). In this final theoretical chapter we demonstrate that the key to understanding mediated relationships is not to envisage them as simply a case of how the media mediates relationships. Rather we start from our theory of relationships which demonstrates that all relationships are intrinsically mediated and that we can understand the impact of the media only if we first acknowledge this property of the relationship.

This book exemplifies the benefits of giving equal weight to relationships, media, ethnography and theory. But it is also sensitive to the context of its own case study, to the stories of suffering, separation, loss and also empowerment and love that make this more than just grounds for delineating such academic terrain. We have focused this volume just as much on the need to convey these stories and the background in the political economy of global labour and its impact especially on migrant women and their left-behind children.

The rest of this chapter will review the three key literatures which underpin this study, namely, global migration and transnational families; new media, consumption and transnational communication, and finally motherhood. We will end the chapter by providing an overview of the whole book.

Global migration and transnational families

Families whose members are temporally and spatially separated because of work are nothing new. Thomas and Znaniecki's classic *The Polish Peasant in Europe and*

America (1996) is a riveting account of the early twentieth-century migration to the US partly told through the letters that sustained these long-distance relationships between separated family members. The recent intensification of global migration and, crucially, the increasing feminisation of migration, have brought about a new type of transnational family where women seek employment in the global north, leaving their children behind. Transnational motherhood (Hondagneu-Sotelo and Avila, 1997), precisely because it challenges entrenched and often ideological views about the role of mothers and the value of children (see also Zelizer, 1994), has largely been seen as one of the hidden injuries of globalisation: the high social cost the developing world must pay for the increased income through remittances which keep the economies of the global south afloat.

The impact on left-behind families and the relationship people maintain to their countries of origin have been a relatively recent focus of attention, perhaps because for so long the migration literature focused on questions of assimilation and integration in the host societies (Vertovec, 2009: 13). An influential approach for understanding transnational families has been the 'care chains' approach (Hochschild, 2000; Parreñas, 2001) and the related notion of 'care drain' affecting developing countries which experience a 'care deficit' by exporting their mothers and care workers (Hochschild, 2000; Widding Isaksen *et al.*, 2008). The work of Parreñas (2001) on Philippine migration has acquired paradigmatic status in exemplifying the connections between different people across the world based on paid or unpaid relationships of care. The concept of a global care chain has particular poignancy because of the way this is refracted in the impact upon left-behind children. The paradigmatic case is where a Filipina woman from Manila spends much of her life looking after a child in London, using part of her wages to employ a Filipina from a village to look after her children in Manila. This woman in turn uses part of her urban wages to pay someone else in her village to look after her own children. These images of a global care chain are powerful representations of the larger inequalities of contemporary political economy.

There exists a corresponding debate at a popular level within the Philippines itself with regard to the impact of migration upon parent–child relationships. Critical to our fieldwork was a film called *Anak* (the word in Tagalog for 'child') which portrays the extreme example of a mother who feels she has sacrificed herself for her children by taking on domestic work in Hong Kong. But during her absence, her son drops school grades and loses his scholarship, and her daughter falls into a life of assorted vices including smoking, drinking, drugs and abusive boyfriends leading to an abortion. The film is dominated by the relationship between the mother and the sullen and resentful daughter who blames all her woes on being abandoned by her mother. This was a hugely popular film in the Philippines. It was directed by R. Quintos and starred Vilma Santos, a well-known actress and politician, now the mayor of a major town. We often started our discussion with the children by asking for their reaction to the film, which was easier to broach than immediately discussing their own childhood. So in addition to any academic debates, we also have to be aware of the way these issues are constantly appraised within the Philippines itself.

In the academic literature, gender has been understood as being key to under-standing dynamics in transnational families. Parreñas (2005a) in her study of Filipino left-behind children noted that when mothers migrate they are expected to perform the caring and emotional work typically associated with their mater-nal role, but also to take on the traditional male breadwinning role. Globalisation and female migration have not reversed, nor even challenged traditional gender roles and hierarchies. This finding is also shared by Hondagneu-Sotelo and Avila (1997) in their study of Latina transnational mothers in California as well as Fresnoza-Flot (2009) in her research with Filipina migrants in Paris. Hondagneu-Sotelo and Avila (1997: 562) argue that female migration has not replaced caregiving with breadwinning definitions of motherhood, but rather has expanded 'definitions of motherhood to encompass caregiving from a distance and through separation'. For Pessar (1999), any advances by women's breadwinning capacity are cancelled by the fact that female migrants are overwhelmingly employed in the care and domestic sector, thus preserving patriarchal ideologies. However, McKay (2007) and Pingol (2001) observed a different gendered division of domestic work in the Philippine region of Northern Luzon.

The political economy of care and the feminist critique on which the care chains approach is based have made significant contributions to the literature on migra-tion, with their emphasis upon the economic motivations for emigration. However, the focus of the care chains approach on structural factors does not acknowledge the empowering potential of migration for women and does not grant much agency to migrants themselves in determining their own trajectory (McKay, 2007; Silvey, 2006; Yeates, 2004). The care chains approach also assumes a normative and uni-versal perspective of biological motherhood which should be performed in a situation of co-presence (actually living together in the same household). What the more ethnographically based studies such as McKay (2007) and Aguilar *et al.* (2009) demonstrate is that both the global feminist discourse employed by Parreñas (2001), and also globalised ideas about women's responsibilities (which are found in the Hollywood-style melodrama that clearly influenced the film *Anak*) have to be complemented by grounded study within the Philippines, which may reveal very different and more nuanced expectations about mother–child relationships.

Mothers themselves are subject to competing discourses about the moralities of their own actions. In such circumstances it seemed vital to recognise the migrant women's own perspective, particularly when the research agenda concerns sensi-tive and emotive issues such as family separation. In our research we have adopted an ethnographic approach which recognises migrants as reflexive subjects, albeit ones positioned in structures of power. For example, crucial for understanding the relationships and communication between mothers and left-behind children is the analysis of the context of migration, including the reasons why women migrate in the first place. The bottom-up ethnographic perspective followed here can uncover the contradictory and perhaps less socially acceptable motivations for migration and cast light on the processes through which women negotiate their various roles, identities and relationships. This is an approach followed by

Constable (1999) in her work with Filipina migrant workers in Hong Kong, where she focused on the ambivalent narratives of return amongst her participants. Such accounts of the motivations for migration and settlement often highlight personal reasons which are not captured by more top-down perspectives such as that of the care chains with its emphasis on the role of the state and the political economy of care.

In Chapter 3 we build upon Parreñas (2001: 27) who developed an intermediate level analysis combining a bottom-up perspective with the macrostructural approach of political economy of labour migration (Sassen, 1988). This allowed Parreñas to identify a range of 'hidden motivations for migration' which extend beyond the well-rehearsed and socially accepted reasons, which are usually economic. For example, Parreñas observed that personal reasons including the breakdown of a relationship, domestic abuse and extramarital affairs, constitute a significant motivation for women's migration (2001: 62–69), often in conjunction with other well-documented economic and political reasons. However, our work suggests that migrants do not always articulate the contradictions (what Parreñas calls the 'dislocations of migration' [2001: 23]) in their narratives. Rather, often the discrepancy between their own accounts (which often draw on well-rehearsed public discourses about what constitutes good mothering and a good reason to go abroad) and their actual practices, points to the contradictions and ambivalence that is part of the project of migration. To unearth such discrepancies one needs the long-term and in-depth involvement of ethnography. Migrant women occupy simultaneously different and often contradictory subject positions: breadwinners and caregivers; devoted mothers and national heroines; global consumers and exploited workers. Our ethnographic perspective documents how they negotiate these conflicting identities both discursively and through practices.

Although, as we noted earlier in this section, research on transnational families is part of the transnational turn within migration studies, it is perhaps ironic that one still encounters a degree of 'methodological nationalism' (Wimmer and Glick-Schiller, 2002) within such scholarship. It is as if researchers cannot escape the 'assumption that the nation/state/society is the natural social and political form of the modern world' (Wimmer and Glick-Schiller, 2002: 301). Although it would be foolish to entirely repudiate the relevance of the nation-state in the analysis of migrant transnationalism, it seems that one way of overcoming the straightjacket of methodological nationalism is to actually conduct research transnationally. Our research has benefited from this comparative, multi-sited perspective. By focusing on the relationships between migrant mothers based in the UK *and* their left-behind children in the Philippines we have 'followed the thing' through a multi-sited ethnography (Marcus, 1995). The comparisons – and contradictions – between the mothers and the children's perspectives lie at the heart of this book. We came to recognise that we would have written an entirely different book if we had concentrated on migrant mothers only, or on their children. Transnationalism is all about relationships, and following them (rather than assuming them) is one way of dealing with the perils of methodological nationalism.

Transnational communication and new media

For transnational families who are reunited on average every two years,[2] new media are essential for keeping in touch. Dependence on new media is exacerbated in the case of irregular migrants who often do not see their families for longer periods (in our sample the longest period without a visit was 13 years; for similar observations see also Fresnoza-Flot, 2009). In such cases new communication technologies become the only means through which migrant mothers can maintain a relationship with their children. Given this almost extreme dependency, it is perhaps surprising that new media have not received much attention in the literature of migrant transnationalism, although studies have highlighted the more general importance of the mobile phone as a social resource in the lives of migrants (see Thompson, 2009). Most academic writing on new media and migration has looked at the important questions of identity and integration (Gillespie *et al.*, 2010) and the political implications for diasporic and national populations (Brinkerhoff, 2009; for a review see Siapera, 2010). Although this literature has been very useful and influential, it does not address the urgent question of sociality and intimacy in a transnational context (although see Horst, 2006; Miller and Slater, 2000; and Wilding, 2006), while the focus on the rather bounded concept of identity does not always capture the dynamic nature of transnational processes (Glick-Schiller *et al.*, 1992; Madianou, 2011).

In the context of Philippine migration, Parreñas observed that among separated Filipino families mobile phones actually tie migrant women to their traditional gender roles (Parreñas, 2005b), echoing North American studies about mobile phone use and the spillover of the domestic into the professional sphere (Chesley, 2005; Rakow and Navarro, 1993). Apart from gender inequalities, Parreñas also argues that the political economic conditions of communication determine the quality of transnational intimacy and family life (Parreñas, 2005b), as families without access to the internet or even a landline are deprived of care and emotional support. In the next chapter we shall acknowledge these stark asymmetries both between the communications infrastructure of the Philippines and the UK and within the Philippines. But although a political economic analysis has to inform our understanding of transnational family communication, it cannot fully account for the dependency of such families on digital media and the mutual shaping of technologies and relationships.

The greatest challenge of studying new media in the context of transnational family relationships is that the technologies themselves are constantly changing and research often seems to be chasing a moving target of technological developments and innovative appropriations on the part of the users. Each new mode of communication seems to become what Vertovec (2004) described for cheap international cards, that is 'the social glue of transnationalism', with examples provided by Wilding (2006) on email, or Uy-Tioco on texting (2007). This is reflected in our own studies. When we began our fieldwork three years ago, transnational family communication was often mainly centred upon one medium such as telephone

calls or email, each with its own affordances and limitations. It was often possible to see the consequences of that particular type of communication on the relationships in question. However, gradually, and certainly over the past couple of years, we noticed a shift towards a situation of multiple media. Relationships, increasingly, do not depend on one particular technology, but on a plurality of media which supplement each other and can help overcome the shortcomings of a particular medium. People can also take advantage of these different communicative opportunities in order to control the relationship. So, for example, if they want to avoid confrontation they do not call but send an email. This is what led us to consider polymedia with a focus on the social and emotional consequences of choosing between a plurality of media rather than simply examining the particular features and affordances of each particular medium (see also Baym, 2010; Gershon, 2010).

Although we recognise that this new environment of communicative opportunities is not yet a reality for everyone in the Philippines or even in the UK, it already represents a qualitative shift in the way technologies mediate relationships. This is why we felt the need for this new term to allow us to describe the situation. Although the term 'media ecology' could be an alternative, it is concerned with the wider systems of communication such as transport, or issues of usage such as politics and health (Slater and Tacchi, 2004), while we wanted a term that will highlight the unprecedented plurality and proliferation of media. 'Multimedia', on the other hand, is now an established term with a very different meaning (a situation where several different forms of media are being used simultaneously and in direct relationship to each other, for instance using instant messaging on social networking sites) and it would therefore be confusing to use that term. 'Multichannel', or 'multi-platform' might be closer to what we wish to describe, although choosing either term would force us to prioritise either the terms 'platform' or 'channel' when in fact our findings suggest that such technological hierarchies are not particularly meaningful to users. This is why we chose 'polymedia' as a new term to describe the new emerging environment of proliferating communicative opportunities.

It may seem that the term 'polymedia' merely acknowledges the plethora of different media that are now available, but the point we wish to make is both more profound and closer to the heart of social science. Our argument will be that this growth of diverse media is crucially linked to changes in their pricing structure as well as in users' media literacy (Livingstone, 2004), and it is the combination of these factors that transforms the relationship between people and media. Previously people would assume that the choice of media was dictated by issues of availability of technology or price, and were constrained from extending their inferences from the choices other people made. But the word 'polymedia' will be used to consider much more generally how media are socialised, which is why it then leads on to a subsequent theory of mediation. Both draw upon a number of theoretical developments such as the rich tradition of consumption and domestication of ICTs (Berker *et al.*, 2006; Miller and Slater, 2000; Silverstone

and Hirsch, 1992) and the theory of mediation (Chouliaraki, 2006; Couldry, 2008 and 2012; Eisenlohr, 2011; Livingstone, 2009b; Madianou, 2005 and 2012b; Miller, in press; Silverstone, 2005).

Historically, mediated interaction was understood as being inferior compared to the golden standard of face-to-face. This was mainly due to the reduced amount of symbolic cues (for example, lack of visual cues in a letter, or telephone communication) which gave rise to ambiguities and potential misunderstandings (Baym, 2010: 51–54; Thompson, 1995: 84). Also problematic was the perceived lack of norms to regulate mediated interaction which also had the potential to amplify conflict (through the case of 'flaming') (Baym, 2010: 55). Recent studies on the social shaping of technologies (MacKenzie and Wajcman, 1999; Wajcman *et al.*, 2008), domestication (Berker *et al.*, 2006; Miller and Slater, 2000) and mediation (Couldry, 2008; Livingstone, 2009b; Madianou, 2005; Silverstone, 2005) have shown that mediated interactions are more complex than that and that society and relationships are mutually constitutive. Similarly, polymedia aims to contribute to this academic discussion by showing how users can overcome the limitations of any particular medium by choosing an alternative in order achieve their communicative intents and to assume control over their relationships. We should stress, however, that we are not implying that media power is becoming redundant in a situation of polymedia. On the contrary, power is a recurrent theme in this volume and will be analysed as being present in both the social and family contexts (family relationships are asymmetrical) and the political and economic contexts of migration and telecommunications.

All of these are brought together in our final chapter, which culminates in a theory of mediation which can be traced back to the early days of media and communications research when Lazarsfeld and Merton wrote in 1948 that research ought to try to understand the effects of the sheer presence of media institutions on society. Silverstone developed this notion of mediation as:

> a fundamentally dialectical notion which requires us to understand how processes of communication change the social and cultural environments that support them as well as the relationships that participants, both individual and institutional, have to that environment and to each other. At the same time it requires a consideration of the social as in turn a mediator: institutions and technologies as well as the meanings that are delivered by them are mediated in the social processes of reception and consumption (Silverstone, 2005: 3).

In this volume the term 'mediation' applies just as much to the question of what is a social relationship as to the question of what is a medium. The situation of transnational mothering raises huge issues of what the very terms 'mother' and 'child' mean. When we come to the analysis of our research material it will become clear that this extreme case actually throws light on the question of what is a mother as it applies to any situation including that of co-presence because a social relationship

is already a form of mediation. A mother is both a normative concept – the ideal as to what a mother should be – and the experience of actually being, or having, a mother. As this book unfolds it will show why any further development of a theory of mediation as applied to media is best achieved through equal attention to the theory of mediation as to the relationship. This point leads directly to our third discussion of the literature, which starts to open up this question of what we mean when we use the term 'mother'.

Transnational motherhood: normativity and ambivalence

The last section suggests that in order to assess the impact of ICTs on the relationships between transnational mothers and their left-behind children, we need to pay just as much attention to the issue of motherhood as to an appreciation of the media. In the next chapter we will provide a discussion of the Filipino idioms of family, motherhood and childhood. The present discussion is a more general reflection on motherhood which we argue is indispensable to the understanding of mother–child relationships and their mediation. One of the reasons such a clarification of terms and theoretical baggage is crucial is because motherhood is a constant trope in ideological debate. Moral panics regularly erupt about what constitutes good, or 'good-enough' mothering (Winnicott, 1971), feeding into questions and often translated into policy regarding mothers' employment and identities (Riley, 1983; Rutter, 1981; Smart and Neale, 1999). Even though there is an increasing recognition of the changing nature of family and the plurality of parenting arrangements (Golombok, 2000) – from single mothers and working mothers to stay-at-home mothers and from heterosexual mothers to lesbian mothers and so on – there is widespread assertion, even among feminists, that parenting needs to take place in a situation of co-presence. This is nothwithstanding anthropological accounts of many regions, such as the Caribbean, where the nuclear co-present family has never been the norm (for a classic account see Clarke, 1957). In this climate mothers leaving their children to pursue their own ambitions are quickly branded 'bad mothers' (Jackson, 1994; for a discussion of the Philippine case see Parreñas, 2008: 22–39). Transnational mothering disrupts this normative notion of co-present parenting. This is the dominant discourse that we now see reflected in the film *Anak* discussed earlier. Our purpose in the next few paragraphs is to clarify our analytical tools that will help us understand the changing nature of mother–child relationships in the context of separation and mediation.

Being a mother is defined by being in a particular relationship. As Miller (1997) has shown in his paper 'How infants grow mothers in North London', the development of the child as a new being is equally reflected in the process, much more commonly taken for granted, by which a female becomes a mother. This disrupts the dominant literature which is driven by a concern to examine the impact of maternal behaviour on children's development. Feminist critique has for a long time identified such one-sided emphasis in psychoanalysis and developmental psychology (Hollway and Featherstone, 1997; Parker, 2005: 15–18). Even

Winnicott's (1975) essay 'Hate in the countertransference', which is now considered a classic text on maternal ambivalence, is concerned with its impact on the baby's development. To simply see the mother from the point of view of her child's needs would be tantamount to her infant's own narcissism: seeing the mother as merely an extension of the infant's needs. Parker (2005: 18) refers to 'maternal development' to contest the one-sided emphasis on child development, thus acknowledging that mothers, just like their children, are changing also as part of the challenges of the experience of motherhood. This is part of Parker's efforts to theorise mothers, rather than treat them as empty vessels to be filled with their children's needs and desires. Our research contextualises motherhood in the wider lives of these Filipina women, subjects with multiple identities and needs, that can become manifest as ambivalence. Although most writing on ambivalence is located within psychoanalysis (Hollway and Featherstone, 1997; Parker, 2005), we feel it is essential to recognise these same issues within an ethnographic encounter that can equally expose what Hays (1997) terms the 'cultural contradictions of motherhood'.

Our evidence will show that ambivalence is particularly relevant to the experience of migration. For mothers with left-behind children, migration as deterritorialisation can exacerbate such maternal ambivalence. We regard ambivalence as a normal state for many mothers (Hays, 1997), who must negotiate contradictory roles as workers and mothers, but equally the ideal freedoms posed by feminism contradicted by the constraints and re-gendering created by motherhood (Miller, 1997). For migrant mothers such negotiation is more challenging because work (in the UK) and mothering (in a transnational space) are spread across different countries and continents, leading to a situation of 'accentuated ambivalence' (Madianou, 2012a). In Chapters 3 and 5, which aim to illustrate the contours of transnational mothering from the bottom up, we will explore the ways in which mothers negotiate this ambivalence and the role that ICTs play in this process.

This insistence upon acknowledging the perspective of mothers need not be opposed to the perspective of their children, which for us would be an abnegation of our understanding of the constitution of both mother and child as a relationship. According to Hollway (2001) the literature on motherhood and child development seems to have been marked by a certain dualism between those perspectives which see mothers as objects of their babies' and their families' needs (rather than people in their own right) and the feminist critique which sees women as subjects and active agents. Hollway (2001) proposes an alternative perspective of intersubjectivity as part of the attempt to examine mothers' and children's needs *in tandem*. Accordingly, here we directly juxtapose the points of view of both mothers and children. We were able to accomplish this because methodologically we sought to interview not only the mothers in the UK, but then with their permission their left-behind children – now young adults – in the Philippines. In total we were able to pair 20 mothers and children, but our wider sample contains many more mothers and children who were not 'paired up' (see Appendix for a detailed discussion of our sample and overall method).

Overview of the book

Having provided an overview of the literatures that inform our analysis and an outline of our own approach, we will now provide a synopsis of the rest of the book. In Chapter 2 we show that the more abstract issues raised here are particularly well exemplified in the case of the Philippines. An intensely migrant country with over 10 per cent of its population working abroad, the Philippines can be seen to epitomise processes of globalisation and the asymmetries between the global south and north. The chapter provides a brief introduction to the history of Philippine migration before presenting the statistics and an account of the feminisation of migration. This is followed by a discussion of the main literature on Filipino migration and its consequences. It reveals the unusual situation where the state itself actively promotes and celebrates this phenomenon. The focus then turns to Filipino migration into the UK, which has become one of the most popular destinations for Filipino migrants in recent years, especially following the systematic recruitment of Filipino nurses by the British National Health Service between 1998 and 2005. The second part of this chapter briefly describes the Philippines as having been in the vanguard of some aspects of digital communication, such as mobile phone texting.

Chapter 3 is dedicated to unearthing the reasons why women migrate in the first place and why they often choose to prolong migration and even settle in the UK. This analysis is crucial if we are to understand the communication between migrant mothers and their children. Contrary to popular perceptions and influential approaches such as neoclassic economics and world systems theory (for a review see Castles and Miller, 2009; Massey *et al.*, 1993), our research has found that economic motivations, albeit crucial, are not the only catalysts for migration and they are even less salient in explaining the reasons why women do not return to the Philippines. This chapter details the myriad motivations for female migration in the Philippine context and argues that ambivalence is a central theme in the experience of migration. This is particularly the case for women, whose lack of employment opportunities in the Philippines coupled with other structural push and pull factors mean that their jobs (and the respect and satisfaction they derive from them) are and can only be abroad, while their children remain in the Philippines. This chapter develops a concept of 'accentuated maternal ambivalence' (Madianou, 2012a) to highlight the particularly challenging and contradictory nature of transnational mothering.

This book deliberately flows between an emphasis upon the media and a focus upon the relationships. Chapter 4 achieves two key goals that help give the book structure and narrative as a whole. Firstly it provides material on the earlier stages of separation, mostly taken from oral historical accounts, so that we have a clear sense of the underlying conditions from when mothers were initially communicating with mainly young children. But at the same time the fact that this was based largely on only two dominant media, letters and cassettes, with only the occasional phone call, means that we can introduce the other key theme of this book, which is the

focus upon media themselves. In particular, the chapter systematically discusses the affordances and constraints of these old media and the ways in which they framed communication in these long-distance relationships. Even within this rather simple early media environment we see that users exploited the contrasts between these two available media in order to express their emotions and achieve their aims with regard to their relationships. In that sense in Chapter 4 we see the earliest evidence of polymedia: of media as an integrated communicative environment. Having a relatively simple distinction between two media in this chapter helps the book's movement towards the final chapters where we are faced with the proliferation of many different forms of media as part of an emergent environment of polymedia.

Chapter 5 is dedicated to the mother's perspective. It observes how the explosion of opportunities for cheap and synchronous communication through new communications technologies has allowed for 'a more complete' practice of intensive mothering at a distance. Different communicative media fulfil different aspects of mothering, allowing women to be in control of their households and children's upbringing. The digital divide within the Philippines and between the global north and south has implications for the type and cost of 'distant care', affording more opportunities to those with access to internet-based platforms. However, intensive mothering is also performed though mobile phones, which are widely available and represent a significant improvement from the past situation when communication was asynchronous and prohibitively expensive. Even though the frequency of communication through new media can often involve conflict and disappointment, for mothers it represents a more 'real experience' of mothering and an opportunity to 'feel like mothers' again. In this sense, communication technologies have implications not only for practices of mothering, but also for maternal identities. Even though there is evidence for the persistence of traditional gender roles in the transnational division of reproductive labour, transnational communication cannot simply be understood as confirmation of a negative spillover (Chesley, 2005) and asymmetrical gender relationships as the existing literature suggests (Parreñas, 2005b). We argue that new media are fundamental in the negotiation of the 'accentuated ambivalence' of migrant women by allowing them to negotiate a plurality of roles and identities across distances (see Madianou, 2012a). In that sense, new media can also be seen as a kind of solution (however imperfect) to the cultural contradictions of migration and motherhood.

If, as Chapter 5 has shown, the opportunities for cheap and instant communication are generally welcomed by the mothers, in Chapter 6, which focuses on the perspective of those left behind, we observe how transnational communication can be experienced as a burden by around half the children we worked with. We start by contrasting the mothers' perspective given in the previous chapter against the evidence that around half of the now adult left-behind children whom we met do not agree that these new technologies effectively reinstate their mothers in that role. However, this observation is not uniform. The other half of our participants feel that in some ways the combination of physical distance and control over new media made the transition through teenage life easier and even

strengthened their relationships to their mothers. Three factors account for the success or failure in these mediated relationships: the age of the child when the mother left, the quality of the pre-existing relationship and the range of the available media. We end this chapter with a tentative theorisation of relationships as they have emerged in the light of this study.

In Chapter 7 we begin to extend beyond the specifics of the empirical case study by developing a systematic comparison of each of the individual media discussed in the book, ranging from older technologies such as the phone to more recent additions such as email, instant messaging, social networking sites, webcam and texting. Our comparison revolves around the following parameters: interactivity, temporality, materiality and storage, replicability, mobility, public/private, social cues and information size. Having already established how the particular relationships appropriate the communication technologies (in Chapters 5 and 6), our aim here is to identify the ways in which each medium frames communication. Thus we ask what is qualitatively different about communicating via webcam (using applications such as Skype) compared to email or telephone calls? Why is webcam perfect for helping children with homework, or simulating situations of co-presence during family meals, but not as successful an environment for expressing love? Why is email communication so prone to misunderstandings and even the amplification of conflict? And what is it about phone calls that people find so appealing in terms of gauging their loved one's true emotions? This leads to a general discussion of media affordances and propensities as evident from our substantive study.

Chapter 8 develops our theory of 'polymedia', one of the book's original concepts. After considering the affordances and limitations of each particular medium in the previous chapter, we now turn to the combination of all these different media and the way this constitutes the emergence of a new communicative environment. Polymedia thus has to be understood as more than a sum of its parts as it represents a qualitative shift in the relationship between media and its social context. A theory of polymedia shows how the existence of multiple alternatives within an integrated communicative structure leads to a different environment for relationships themselves. This recognition extends our focus to the social and emotional consequences of choosing between a plurality of media (rather than simply examining the particular features and affordances of each discrete medium). In particular, this chapter examines the impact of the situation of polymedia for the nature of sociality, for the emotional aspects of communication and for the importance of power as a context for the analysis of asymmetry in relationships.

In our final chapter we develop our theory of mediation. Having made a contribution both to the understanding of the transformation of family relationships in the context of migration and globalisation and to the understanding of the different communication technologies in the context of long-distance love, the theory of mediation brings the two together. We start by introducing a theory of the relationship as an intrinsically mediated form. We then show how the impact of media within relationships is transformed with the advent of polymedia. This

allows us to create a theoretical framework that transcends the emphasis upon media in media studies, and on relationships and kinship in social science, to create a theoretical structure that can equally inform both. Although these final chapters are increasingly devoted to issues of theory, they remain constantly grounded in our ethnographic encounter combining the perspectives of migrants and their left-behind families. The struggles of these mothers and their children with regard to the relationships that matter more than almost anything else in their lives, is what ultimately reveals what is at stake in these theoretical discussions, an attempt to understand empathetically a situation which seems to be becoming ever more widespread as international migration becomes an inescapable feature of our contemporary world.

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