BOOK REVIEW

Migration and New Media: Transnational Families and Polymedia by Mirca Madianou and Daniel Miller (Routledge, 2012)

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In 2007, Daniel Miller presented his paper on "What is a Mobile Phone Relationship" in the "1st Living the Information Society Conference" held in Manila. In his presentation, he mentioned the work he was just embarking on with Mirca Madianou on long-distance relationships of separated families and the ability of different media to sustain those relationships over time (Miller, 2009). He was then building on the extensive work that Parrenas (2001, 2005a, 2005b) had done on Filipino transnational families, and in particular, on mothering from a distance.

Aside from Parrenas, there has since been more research done about communication among overseas Filipino workers (OFWs) and the families they have left behind. Paragas (2006), for instance, also documented the transition from letters, tapes, on to phones and mobile phones. Many of the more recent studies on migrant Filipinos such as Aguilar (2009) cannot avoid having some discussion about the role that technology plays with respect to the communication needs of migrants and the family members they leave behind. Other studies have focused on the use and impact of these new media (Aguila, 2008/2009; Thomas & Lim, 2011). As Madianou and Miller themselves mention, migration and mobile phone texting are two of the top attributes that academics often associate with the Philippines (Madianou & Miller, 2012, p. 26).

In 2007, Miller's discussion was focused on what a mobile phone relationship was. Since then, his collaboration with Madianou, in this book on migration and new media, has been successful in capturing the rapid changes that new media have undergone and the complexity of the communication among migrant families that has resulted from this.

Madianou and Miller's study is focused on migrant mothers in London who were separated from their children. What makes their book noteworthy is that through its longitudinal ethnographic approach, it is able to navigate the different periods of migration and the different communication devices that came along with them. One can then follow the evolution not only of the relationships between parent and child but also the evolution of global migration patterns in the Philippines and the changes in new media along the way. The authors are also able to remind us that as recent as the early 1990s, communication among migrants and their children was still mainly through letters and the occasional telephone call.

Much has happened since. Among these are the opening of the telecommunication market, the rapid expansion of access to the telephone, the popularity of texting, and later on the use of the Internet, along with other developments in new media. Now, how migrant mothers communicate with their children is very, very different—and all this in a span of two decades.

The parallelisms in how earlier migrants valued letters and cassettes and how they valued text messages and phone calls are also noteworthy. Letters are physical, not synchronous, but very personal. Cassettes, on the other hand, evoke emotion and presence. They can also be stored and listened to over and over again, with the emotional value that comes with the presence of the voice of a loved one. While letters allow people to compose their message carefully, cassettes tend to be more spontaneous. Given the large time lag between receiving and sending letters and cassettes, these physical media were also much valued commodities.

Older readers who have had this experience of separation from their loved ones during this time can easily empathize with the rich and textured stories of the migrants mentioned in the book Likewise, younger readers who are more familiar with the new media can also easily empathize with contemporary challenges such as in using YM! and Skype and the awkward situations that these can put them in while communicating online.

Hence, throughout the book, the authors successfully provide common threads that have remained true even though the medium of communication has changed, especially with respect to privacy, sensitive emotions, and the individuality that adolescent children seek as they get older.

What has changed, according to Madianou and Miller (2012), is this emergent environment of *polymedia* wherein the profusion of new and alternative forms of media has allowed more specification to the particular medium that

best serves the mode of performance and type of relationship being maintained, as was already evident in the participants that the authors documented. This is consistent with a survey done by MSN that found that OFW families on average have 10 gadgets with which to communicate with their loved ones in other parts of the world (Ho, 2011).

The authors' thesis about polymedia is interesting, although its application in the context of transnational families remains limited by the fact that not all OFWs may have the same level of access to new communication in other parts of the world. Migrants in London are in a unique and privileged situation compared with the large number of migrants who live in more difficult conditions in the Middle East and in some Asian countries. Likewise, perhaps the children they leave behind may not be typical of other migrant children in other parts of the country where there is lesser access to the Internet and the kinds of applications more typical in urban homes or cybercafés.

While arguing that a state of polymedia is achieved when cost and access are no longer an issue, this state is actually far from the reality of many OFWs.

The situation for a vast majority of OFWs, in terms of access and use of whatever basic communication is available to them and their families, may also be worth considering in future research. Situations in many countries where OFWs, including seafarers, are deployed make considerations such as which medium to turn to difficult. Many of these OFWs have a limited choice because of the constraints that their children face in the Philippines or that they themselves face in their country of employment. How a state of polymedia for all OFWs and their families can be achieved is something that a government like that in the Philippines, which exports and encourages its migrant labor by calling them *mga bagong bayani* (modern heroes), should strive for as among the basic rights that its citizens who are laborers in other countries should be entitled to.

Finally, new media has developed so fast that the authors acknowledge being unable to document more recent trends in long-distance communication among migrant families. Hence, one limitation of the book is that it barely touched the movement of communication from the then popular social networking sites like Friendster and Multiply to Facebook (or at least the new usage of this form of online communication has not been documented as heavily). Nonetheless, the book has laid the groundwork on how new media have become complementary devices instead of substitutes, and informs about the interplay of new media, relationships, and emotions, as well as the complexity of navigating parent-child relationships made more complex by their circumstances.

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