



Book Review

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Earvin Charles B Cabalquinto, *(Im)mobile Homes: Family Life at a Distance in the Age of Mobile Media*. Oxford University Press: New York, 2022; xiii + 256 pp.; ISBN 9780197554848, £25.99 (pbk)

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Transnational families maintain connections through multiple media platforms in the current digital era, yet they are still struggling with either being physically reunited or digitally connected. This phenomenon is mainly due to the inherent inequalities in globalization: the access or lack of access to digital resources, social support, and immobility caused by the COVID-19 pandemic and its associated lockdowns and quarantine policies. Mobile media technologies profoundly mediate and alter daily interpersonal and familial interactions, reconfigurations of home, and sense of meaning and belonging (Chambers, 2016). Digital communication tools are used predominantly by overseas economic migrants and their left-behind family members from developing countries to create and maintain family relationships, alleviate homesickness, and create new meanings of “home” (Chambers, 2016). Nonetheless, migrant families are regularly marginalized in academic and public debates about the role of media and the “home” (Chambers, 2016). In such context, Cabalquinto’s *(Im) mobile Homes: Family Life at a Distance in the Age of Mobile Media* is an impressive accomplishment and builds engagingly on the scholarship of digital migration studies.

The book opens by mapping the history, technological landscape, and mobile media usage of Overseas Filipino Workers (OFWs) in Melbourne, Australia, and their left-behind family members in the Philippines (p. 5). Centering on the concept of “(im) mobile home” the book critically investigates the dynamics, role, and texture of mobile media usage in maintaining transnational families in diverse contexts, such as observing family rituals, performing care, and managing crises. Drawing on vivid research data collected by semi-structured in-depth interviews and novel visual methods of photo-elicitation and documentation, the book answers the following questions with nine fluent-written chapters: (1) Why study the transnational Filipino families? (2) How do the political, institutional, economic, cultural, social, and technological affordances impact people’s mobile practices? (3) How do mobile phones and digital social media

shape the organization, embodiment, and negotiation of (im)mobile homes? (4) How do transnational family members (re)present their subjectivities, creativities, and resilience to negotiate the pre-existing structural system that (re)produces marginalization?

Cabalquinto positions himself in the field of digital migration studies (Leurs and Smets, 2018) and coins novel concepts, such as mediated (im)mobilities and trans-local cocooning. Through resonating and compelling ethnographic accounts, Cabalquinto argues convincingly that digital communication technologies mobilize the enactment of a home from afar (p. 183). Mobile devices and networked communication platforms are potent tools to cope with family separation, especially in turbulent circumstances. For example, in chapter 7, Cabalquinto examines the emotional link and empowerment that smartphones, social media, and mobile applications provide as a digital lifeline in natural calamities, health issues, and other emergencies. These two paragraphs give a real good insight into the book. Well done!

Though this book is not designed to illustrate the digital transnational family life during a pandemic. Nevertheless, its insights and remarks do provide a critical lens for examining the role that mobile media plays in family life at a distance in the current global health crisis. Cabalquinto elucidates in the last chapter that mobile communication technologies grant Filipino transnational families an opposing feeling: gains and pains, presence and absence, connections and disruptions, and the benefits and challenges (p. 191) of using digital communication technologies in maintaining mobile, networked, transnational ties. He emphasizes government and institutions' role in proactively supporting and empowering the marginalized. He reminds the readers not to neglect the underlying social, cultural, political, and technological inequalities which might reinforce the digital divide and social hierarchy between users of mobile media technologies (p. 21).

Noteworthy that this book includes a methodological appendix, in which Cabalquinto outlines and displays the qualitative techniques he used to critically unearth and analyze the role mobile devices play in upholding a transnational family life in a digital era (p. 208). The appendix provides vivid supplement materials both practically and methodologically which provide a paradigm that readers could examine, reflect on, and follow in their research contexts.

Both domestically and globally, migration has a societal cost (p. 10). Cabalquinto's work represents a significant advancement to de-center western-centric digital migration studies (Leurs and Smets, 2018) by examining and adding the case of the Philippines, an Asian developing country. The book adopts a de-westernizing, non-media-centric strategy to localize and contextualize the theory building. However, the author could engage more deeply with local theories or studies conducted within the Filipino setting.

In addition, Cabalquinto does not reflect on the Silicon Valley origins and character of (nearly) all social media networks mentioned by the interviewees to truly de-westernize digital migration studies and reflect on why apps developed and based in the Philippines are not popular among transnational Filipino families. It is indisputable that, given the extent of capitalism's colonization and its effects, large corporations like Google control most of the world's digital communication market, which echoes Cabalquinto's discussion about the embodied tension between the nation-state and its citizens. The existing inequality of a globalizing economy further deepens the divide. Future research should

focus more on regional and local practices and inclusive knowledge production from the periphery against the immobilization of power and hierarchy in specific political and economic systems (p. 186).

Nonetheless, this book provides a clear roadmap for future research on the care, labor, and digital intimacy practices of transnational families and labor migrants in the age of mobile media, offering insights into family life at a distance in the age of mobile media. Valuable to academics, learners, and readers who desire more critical knowledge of digital migration studies from a non-Western perspective.

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