

“I Have Always Thought of My Family First”: An Analysis of Transnational Caregiving Among Filipino Migrant Adult Children in Melbourne, Australia

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This article investigates the ways in which six Filipino migrant adult children in Melbourne, Australia use mobile devices and networked communications platforms to deliver care to their left-behind parents in the Philippines. The study interrogates the diverse mobile practices through a mobilities lens emphasizing how the performance of a resource-based and mediated mobility is engendered and undermined by existing sociocultural and sociotechnical forces. The findings reveal that the performance of various types of transnational caregiving—emotional and practical—in cementing linkages is shaped by filial duty and the obligation to care. Importantly, this study unveils how obstacles and frustrations arise in caregiving at a distance as a static familial norm remains unchanged despite the configuration of familial organization. In this case, sustaining transnational relations warrants constant negotiation and performative adjustments. In sum, the study seeks to unravel the enactment, embodiment, and negotiation of caregiving across distances and borders in the age of ubiquitous digital media.

Keywords: Filipino migrant adult children, smartphones, transnational caregiving, filial piety, Facebook, Viber, Skype, tactics

This article investigates the role of communicative mobilities in shaping the dynamics of transnational family life in the 21st century. Specifically, it locates how mobile device use facilitates transnational caregiving among members of the transnational Filipino family. I examine the ways in which six Filipino migrant adult children in Melbourne, Australia use broadband-based mobile devices and networked communications platforms to deliver caregiving from afar to their left-behind parents in the Philippines. These Filipino migrant adult children identify themselves as young, unmarried, and professional workers who sustain relationships with their left-behind parents. The major aim of the research study is to identify how caregiving from afar is performed, embodied, and negotiated through the use of ubiquitous digital communication technologies. This inquiry is supported by subsequent research objectives: to identify the

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motivations behind mobile device use; to pinpoint the forces that enable and constrain the expressions of care beyond borders, and; to uncover the consequences of mediated caregiving in transnational Filipino family life. As part of a broader doctoral project that investigated the mobile practices of transnational Filipino families in Melbourne, Australia, I employed in-depth interviews (Creswell, 2013; Lindlof & Taylor, 2002) to uncover the diverse and nuanced caregiving practices through mobile communication. Further, a qualitative methodology mapped out a critical analysis of the relationship between the informants' personal migration histories, familial relationships, obligations, and commitments, as well as mobile device engagement. This approach uncovered the informants' performances, experiences, and negotiations of transnational caregiving.

This study engages with the growing number of studies that have explored the intersections of Philippine transnationalism and mobile communication (Cabañes & Acedera, 2012; Francisco, 2015; Fresnoza-Flot, 2009; Madianou, 2012, 2014, 2016; Madianou & Miller, 2011, 2012; Parreñas, 2001a, 2001b, 2005; San Pascual, 2014a, 2014b, 2016; Uy-Tioco, 2007). It particularly examines transnational caregiving through a mobilities lens (Urry, 2007). This approach highlights how the conduct of relationships at a distance is shaped by interconnected mobilities—corporeal and imagined (Elliott & Urry, 2010; Urry, 2007). Notably, I seek to situate the mobilities frame beyond a Western context (Elliott & Urry, 2010; Sheller & Urry, 2006; Urry, 2007) and discuss ways of sustaining social relations in the Global South (McKay, 2007; Miralao, 1997). In critically engaging with the mobilities perspective, the study identifies how mediated mobilities are shaped by sociocultural and sociotechnical forces (Keightley & Reading, 2014). For instance, familial encounters through mobile device use between migrants and their left-behind loved ones are molded by "filial piety" (Benitez, 2005; Dai & Dimond, 1998), reflecting a common caregiving practice among migrant adult children across Asia (Dai & Dimond, 1998; Sung, 1998). Moreover, sociotechnical competencies also add layers to the delivery of care across borders and distances (Baldassar, Baldock, & Wilding, 2007; Parreñas, 2005, 2014; Wilding, 2006). In sum, this then shows how mediated mobilities are influenced by asymmetries in transnational family life (Lim, 2016; Madianou & Miller, 2012; Parreñas, 2005, 2014). Importantly, the study contributes to articulating the differentiation and complexity of caregiving at a distance (Baldassar, 2008; Baldassar et al., 2007; Wilding, 2006) among transnational Filipino families. I argue that examining the mediation of transnational caregiving is a potent approach to illuminate the paradoxical consequences of the digitalization of care practices in a transnational field: the entanglement of mobilities and stasis (Cresswell, 2010; Sheller & Urry, 2006; Urry, 2007).

On Movements and Stasis: Care Circulation in Philippine Migration

Changing economies, national structures, and geopolitical posturing between countries in the Global North and the Global South are some of the many causes of Philippine human migration (Aguilar, 2014). As evidence of bearing the uneven social consequences of a globalizing economy, high levels of human labor export are weaved into the social fabric of Philippine society. Historically, former President Ferdinand Marcos' issuance of the Labor Export Policy with Presidential Decree 422 in 1974, as well as the Labor Code of 1974, which formalized the Philippine labor migration program (San Juan, 2009), encouraged the exportation of "warm bodies" to address the country's economic problems, such as unemployment and foreign debt (De Guzman, 2003; San Juan, 2009; Tyner & Donaldson, 1999). Evidently, national policies have reinforced the circulation of commodified and docile bodies, in which an individual value is often

equated with the amount of remittances sent. Money transfers are then used as the country's dollar reserves or to pay the debts generated from transactions with the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (Aguilar, 2014; Parreñas, 2001b).

Fundamental in the construction of the Philippines' national economy is how class divide and hierarchy have remained untouched (Aguilar, 2014). The Filipino middle class and elites have sustained their social position through allegiances with international investors (Aguilar, 2014). This new social order and highly politicized social landscape evoking postcolonial realities primarily place poor Filipinos in a position of limited access to resources and opportunities (Aguilar, 2014). Here, everyday life and strategies for survival have turned into servitude performed across continents, while agency is reduced to sending remittances and the fetishization of mobile communication to downplay the pains of family separation (Francisco, 2015). Furthermore, the government bestows the title *mga bagong bayani* (new heroes) of the country to recognize the overseas Filipino workers' unsurpassed economic contribution. *Translocal subjectivities* has then become a term (Conradson & McKay, 2007) to expose the obstacles and frustrations embodied by migrants because of the weak support and intervention by the nation-state (McKay, 2007). To date, the Philippines is one of the world's major suppliers of low-cost, feminized, and skilled labor across the globe (Parreñas, 2001b; San Juan, 2009). According to data produced by the Philippine Overseas Employment Agency (POEA) (2018), approximately 2.3 million Filipinos worked abroad in 2015. Notably, complementing a lived transnational condition is the use of digital communication technologies that provide translocal spaces for connectivity, agency, and belongingness amid family separation. Nevertheless, whereas individuals are denied care in their home territory, informal and unpaid care is produced, circulated, and experienced through transnational exchanges among family members (Cabañes & Acedera, 2012; Francisco, 2012; McKay, 2007, 2016; Parreñas, 2001a, 2001b, 2005, 2008; San Pascual, 2014a, 2016; Uy-Tioco, 2007).

In this study, I critically engaged with the transnational caregiving practices of Filipino migrant adult children. The study is built on a set of literature that examines transnational caregiving through mobile device use (Baldassar, 2008; Baldassar et al., 2007; Merla, 2015; Wilding, 2006). According to Baldassar et al. (2007), transnational caregiving, a form of distant care that is enacted among individuals living across continents, is mediated by the capacity to exchange care, cultural notions of obligations, and negotiated commitments within the family. For Baldassar et al., caring beyond borders, such as the use of new media and information and communication technologies (ICTs), often facilitates a sense of belonging and emotional proximity, as well as establishes a distant co-presence among geographically separated family members. Consequently, as a form of emotional and unpaid labor, it produces "ways of togetherness" (Baldassar, 2008). In the context of media and communications, mobile device use affords virtual co-presence (Baldassar, 2008), and frequent communication paves the way for connected presence (Licoppe, 2004) and absent presence (Gergen, 2002). Evidently, the capacity to traverse spatialities and temporalities positions the mobile device as a conduit that enables transnational families to "do things together at a distance" (Nedelcu & Wyss, 2016, p. 216).

This study is situated in the context of Philippine transnationalism. I refer to existing studies that have unraveled how the provision of care in a transnational context is performed and negotiated. The pioneering study by Parreñas (2001b) presents the different forms of unpaid, informal, and feminized care—

moral, practical, and emotional care—as key to sustaining transnational relationships. Further, a wide range of scholarly work echoes the discussions of Parreñas (2001b). For instance, performing moral care emanates through the ways in which migrants guide their children to become responsible individuals (Parreñas, 2001b, 2005), such as completing school assignments (Chib, Malik, Aricat, & Kadir, 2014; Uy-Tioco, 2007). Emotional care is then deployed through expressions of concern and affection (Fresnoza-Flot, 2009; Hondagneu-Sotelo & Avila, 1997; Madianou, 2016; Madianou & Miller, 2011; Parreñas, 2005). Furthermore, material care is translated into sending remittances and *balikbayan* (returnee) boxes (Fresnoza-Flot, 2009; Hondagneu-Sotelo & Avila, 1997; Horst, 2006; Madianou & Miller, 2011, 2012; McKay, 2007; Parreñas, 2005), which Parreñas (2001a) refers to as “commodification of love”. In sum, personal, intimate, unpaid, and often feminized labor (Parreñas, 2001b, 2005) is essential to capturing and strengthening bonds among transnational families.

To re-examine transnational caregiving practices, I deploy a mobilities lens (Urry, 2007), allowing the study to engage with how various forms of interdependent mobilities—corporeal and imagined—contribute to the conduct, organization, and experience of family life at a distance (Urry, 2007). Here, a mobile life (Elliott & Urry, 2010) is enacted within a “communicative environment of affordances” or polymedia (Madianou & Miller, 2012), enabling separated family members to regain continuities and solidarities. As transnational family members thrive within such a mediated environment, a mobile device or a platform functions as a form of “network capital” that facilitates information- and communications-driven relations powered by accessing various resources — financial, spatiality, temporality, networks, and so forth (Urry, 2007). Notably, personalized communication in a “network society” (Castells, 1996) is shaped by age, gender, social class, ethnicity, and dis/ability (Elliott & Urry, 2010).

Extending the mobilities lens in the context of media and communications, I follow Keightley and Reading’s (2014) approach, taking into account how mediated mobilities are engendered and undermined by broader sociocultural and sociotechnical factors. First, the study focuses on how a cultural values system (Baldassar et al., 2007; Lim, 2016; Madianou & Miller, 2012) influences transnational and mediated relationships. Echoing the work of previous scholars on how family values inform the care exchange between the migrant adult children and their families (Baldassar et al., 2007; Dai & Dimond, 1998; Lai, 2010; Leinonen, 2011; Stuifbergen, Van Delden, & Dykstra, 2008; Sung, 1998; Wilding, 2006; Wilding & Baldassar, 2009), this study identifies filial piety as central to caregiving practices in a Filipino household. Filipino migrant adult children often are expected to respect and love their parents (Benitez, 2005; Francisco, 2012; Medina, 2001; Soriano, 1995). This filial duty also compels adult children to repay the parents for providing for their needs (Medina, 2001), demonstrating *utang na loob* (debt of gratitude), which means that “there is always an opportunity to return a favour” (Pe-Pua & Protacio-Marcelino, 2000, pp. 55–56). Furthermore, this familial expectation makes an individual’s personal aspirations subordinate to family interests (Miralao, 1997; Soriano, 1995). As this study suggests, expressions of love, care, and respect to the parents are also performed, embodied, and experienced in a transnational context through mobile device use. For example, the delivery of care beyond borders among migrant adult children to their left-behind parents is made tangible through frequent communication (Burholt, 2004; Kang, 2012; Sung, 1998). Furthermore, transnational exchanges facilitate the coordination of sending and receiving remittances (Horst, 2006), transforming the technological apparatus as a vessel for expressing intimate bonds and domestic sociality (McKay, 2007). In sum, communication technologies supplement existing family practices, structures, and relationships (Wilding, 2006).

I also pay close attention to how fulfilling caregiving obligations can also become a source of obstacles and contradictory affective experiences (Baldassar et al., 2007; Nedelcu & Wyss, 2016; Wilding, 2006). For example, perpetual connectivity through ICT use paves the way for unwanted and constant requests for money from left-behind family members (Horst, 2006; McKay, 2007; Wilding, 2006). Furthermore, participating in an always-on connectivity can become suffocating especially when transnational communication, demanded by left-behind and ageing parents, becomes an extra pressure (Nedelcu & Wyss, 2016). The migrant adult child often gives way to such process. This goes to show how social processes, structures, and expectations persist even in a transnational arrangement (Baldassar, Nedelcu, Merla, & Wilding, 2016). Importantly, asymmetrical access to technological resources undermines communicative capacities (Baldassar et al., 2007; Madianou & Miller, 2012; Wilding, 2006). Nevertheless, despite the presence of communicative challenges, the migrant adult children sustain the enactment of transnational caregiving as a way to overcome feelings of guilt in living away from their parents (Baldassar et al., 2007; Baldock, 2000; Benitez, 2005; Reyes Uribe, 2013; Wilding, 2006). Overall, this study exposes the ways in which transnational caregiving is enacted by Filipino migrant adult children through mobile device use, articulating the fusion of mobilities and immobile social structures that often lead to paradoxical consequences in nurturing family life at a distance. It also highlights the personal tactics deployed by the migrants to ensure the sustenance of family relationships.

Method

Australia, a multicultural country, is home to thousands of Filipino migrants. Different migration pathways—skilled, family, humanitarian, and temporary employment—have facilitated the migration of Filipinos to Australia. According to a report released by the Australian Bureau of Statistics in 2016, there were 232,284 Philippine-born people in Australia (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2018); 155,680 had Australian citizenship and 73,364 were non-Australian citizens (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2018), making the Philippine-born community one of the largest in Australia.

As part of a larger PhD project that investigated the conduct of transnational family life in Melbourne, Australia, I focused on the ways in which six Filipino migrant adult children use mobile devices and communications platforms to enact transnational caregiving among their left-behind parents in the Philippines. The informants were considered Overseas Filipino workers (OFWs) based on the categorization made by the Philippine Embassy in Canberra. They were Filipino migrants who were on temporary employment in Australia. The informants were holders of Subclass Visa 457 or Temporary Work (Skilled) Visa, which provided them short- and long-term work contracts. I chose this group because of its prominence in the Australian workforce alongside the transnational arrangement of the visa conditions. In 2014–2015, 5,084 Philippine-born individuals were granted Subclass Visa 457 (Department of Immigration and Border Protection, 2018). Notably, Subclass Visa 457 holders, as well as their family members, are not entitled to social welfare benefits provided by the Australian state to permanent residents and citizens (Larsen, 2013). Furthermore, these migrants opted to leave their parents in the Philippines because of the expensive visa fees for their family members. For instance, a parent visa or Subclass 103 and an aged dependent relatives visa cost AU\$3,945 (Department of Immigration and Border Protection, 2018). Given the parameters created by migration policies, migrant use digital communication technologies to remain connected to their left-behind loved ones.

The informants were recruited through snowball sampling. Some of them were referred by several Filipinos who were members of various organizations in Melbourne, including the Filipino Community Council of Victoria (FCCVI) and the Philippine Consulate in Melbourne. The six Filipino migrant adult children had a diverse range of personal profiles. They were between 26 and 34 years old, single or in a relationship, had a university degree, and held professional jobs (see Table 1).

Table 1. Profile of the Study's Overseas Filipino Workers in Melbourne, Australia.

| Name | Age (years) | Relationship status | Education | Profession | Years in Australia |
|----------|-------------|---------------------|-------------------|----------------------|--------------------|
| Jeff | 26 | Single | Bachelor's degree | Registered nurse | 2-3 years |
| Aimee | 27 | In a relationship | Bachelor's degree | Education consultant | 2-3 years |
| Rachelle | 28 | In a relationship | Master's degree | Sales manager | 9 years |
| Patrick | 31 | Single | Bachelor's degree | Registered nurse | 2-3 years |
| Reggie | 32 | Single | Bachelor's degree | Registered nurse | 3 years |
| Nick | 34 | Single | Bachelor's degree | Registered nurse | Nearly 4 years |

The majority worked as nurses in a hospital or in aged care. This is not surprising. In the case of Subclass Visa 457 holders, health care professionals registered a high level of employability in Australia. During 2014–2015 alone, 217 Philippine-born citizens who were registered nurses obtained temporary work (skilled) visas (Department of Immigration and Border Protection, 2018). Nevertheless, these university graduate and English-speaking professionals work in health care, information technology, and finance. They arguably belong to the “third wave” of Filipino migrants in Australia, brought on by the shift of Australia’s immigration policies toward skilled migration (Espinosa, 2017). Further, most of them had been in Australia for a minimum of two years, but their migration pathways to Australia varied. Two came to Melbourne to take a bridging course and eventually found a job in a hospital, one enrolled in a master’s degree program and got a marketing-related job, and the rest moved to Melbourne after securing a job offer from an employer while still based in the Philippines.

I conducted in-depth interviews (Creswell, 2013; Lindlof & Taylor, 2002). The data collection was administered from December 2013 to April 2014. The interviews were executed in an apartment or a rented house of the informant. This article describes the caregiving practices of the six informants. I acknowledge this limitation of engaging with a small number of informants. It must be noted that the six informants were part of the bigger research project that investigated the mobile practices of transnational families in

Melbourne, Australia. This article essentially elaborates on the analysis of the ways in which young and professional migrants use a wide range of mobile devices and platforms for transnational caregiving.

As a major theme of the study, I located transnational caregiving through the practices of the informants, paying attention to their personal stories and diverse mobile experiences. The range of informants' profiles generated varied responses through thematic questionnaires. For instance, the questionnaires mapped the personal and technological profile of the informants. The interview sessions also allowed the informants to talk about their experiences of migrating to and settling in Australia. I also probed them to share the kind of relationships, family values, and expectations they engaged with through a long-distance arrangement. Furthermore, the informants discussed their motivations behind mobile device use in performing caregiving at a distance. The informants articulated their experiences on the communicative opportunities and obstacles in mobile device use. As this study engaged a small number of informants, I recommend that future studies can also compare and contrast the caregiving practices of different demographics of migrants in Australia and across continents to expand on a critical understanding of caregiving beyond borders.

The interviews lasted 45–60 minutes. Informants responded in their own language, Tagalog. Some answered in Taglish (Tagalog English). I transcribed, examined, and categorized the interview verbatim. Based on categorizing and coding the informants' responses, I found themes such as "caregiving," "filial piety," "digital competency," "depth of relationship," and "family norms." These codes were used to analyze the informants' responses, as well as to engage with the literature on mobile device use in transnational caregiving practices. To protect the informants' privacy, I use pseudonyms in this article. The research study was approved by the Monash University Human Research Ethics Committee (MUHREC). Incorporated in this article are quotes translated from Tagalog or Taglish to English.

On Emotional and Practical Caring at a Distance

Mobile devices and networked communications platforms have been indispensable tools in enabling the Filipino migrant adult children in Melbourne to deliver transnational caregiving to their left-behind parents. Notably, all the informants have access to a smartphone alongside other mobile devices such as a tablet computer and a laptop. Mobile platforms such as Facebook, Skype, messaging applications, and a wide range of software programs are used in everyday transnational exchanges. Importantly, the informants navigate a mobile world by switching across fixed and mobile broadband connectivity, paving the way for relatively cost-free and data-based communication. Notably, mediated mobilities in the context of transnational caregiving are informed by social factors (Keightley & Reading, 2014). I demonstrate this by emphasizing how the migrants express love and concern to their left-behind parents, which articulates the performance of filial piety in a Filipino transnational household.

I observed that the informants ensure that their left-behind parents have access to a mobile device or a platform to participate in information-based connectivity (Urry, 2007) at a distance. To implement transnational connectivity, the migrants sometimes send a secondhand device to a left-behind parent. Here, I argue that the act itself of sending a device becomes an important gesture to demonstrate how relationships are valued, especially given the connective capacity of mobile devices. More importantly,

sending old devices shows the negotiation of "practical care" (Baldassar et al., 2007; Parreñas, 2001b): connecting a left-behind parent through a relatively cost-free transnational communication. Noticeably, mobile device use is shaped by the depth of the relationship (Miller, 2009) among the migrant and the left-behind parent.

For instance, Nick, a 34-year-old registered nurse in Melbourne, and an only child, sent his iPhone 4 to his 74-year-old mother in the Philippines; he then bought a new phone by signing up through a plan that gave him access to free international text messaging and calls, as well as mobile data. During the interview, he admitted that he has a close relationship with his mother, which has been strengthened when his father passed away in 2006. Given their family arrangement, Nick makes sure that constant connection is readily available to his mother, which is made through the presence of a smartphone. He emphasized,

At least she can call me. She does not need to use a regular line. She can just use Wi-Fi. She can use a Skype prepaid to contact me. She can still use and call without paying the call charges in a regular phone. So, it's a big saving on her part too if ever there's an emergency.

Furthermore, for Nick, being in perpetual contact (Katz & Aakhus, 2002) due to the accessibility of multiple communication channels evokes feelings of reassurance. He added,

She's using prepaid. So I told her to call me when she's out or in the province. She can still call me even if she doesn't know how to connect to the Wi-Fi. She can use her mobile credit. Or she can text me first and then I call her.

In this case, mobile device use is important to how family members can be there for each other (Baldassar et al., 2016; Merla, 2015).

Mobile devices and communications platforms are also used to plan the family's future, such as building a house. This is the case for Reggie, a 32-year-old registered nurse, who regularly sends money to the Philippines to pay for "family projects". In many cases, the mobile device allows him to transfer money through online transactions. Here, remittances become a "medium of care" (Singh & Gatina, 2014). Importantly, he usually receives updates through mobile calls about the projects' progress. Through a family group chat in Facebook Messenger, he shares photos of a house design and properties with his mother and sister to discuss the "look" of the family's future house. He noted,

Lately I've been sending house designs. We are planning to get a model since I bought a property. We're planning to put up a three-story house. One family per level. So, basically three families.

In this case, transnational exchanges become a pivotal process in allowing a migrant to generate a sense of active participation in realizing family ventures. This practice also stirs emotional proximity necessary for the nourishment of family relations (Baldassar, 2007). Significantly, I contend that Reggie

observes filial piety by giving back to his family members who have been supportive in his education and professional mobility. As he noted, "This is my way of returning the favor."

Whereas existing literature on Philippine transnationalism has demonstrated how caregiving practices have become tied to feminized labor (Parreñas, 2001a, 2001b, 2005), this study shows how the provision of emotional care is also performed by male migrants, articulating how intergenerational care practices have become diversified (Baldassar & Merla, 2014). For the study's informants, the deployment of emotional caregiving is made possible through ritualistic and daily interactions, creating a sense of connected presence (Licoppe, 2004). In some cases, transnational exchanges also facilitate the expressions of comforting affects.

For example, Patrick, a 31-year-old registered nurse, has a close relationship with his mother. He usually calls her three times a week. In addition, he often schedules a Skype session with his mother, which enables them to update each other about their day-to-day happenings. However, not all Skype communication involves good stories. Patrick sometimes receives bad news from his mother. He shared,

We talk about her work. She's the head in their office, but there were some people who were spreading rumors about her. It's strange because those people used to be close to our family, and they're doing that. Then I'll tell my mom, "Do not think about it. You just have to do your job and let them be. They already have a bad reputation so just ignore them."

In this sense, Patrick uses a mobile device and platform to provide emotional support to his mother. This gesture demonstrates his roles as a filial son.

Frequency of contact in transnational caregiving often increases most especially when a left-behind parent has a medical condition. For instance, Nick revealed during the interview that he has been monitoring his mother's health over the past years. His mother has a heart condition and is also suffering from depression. With this, he often assists his mother through a regular Skype session. He said,

She often cries. So, I need to divert her attention. I'd tell her to go shopping. I'd ask her what's her favorite color. I'd ask her what's her activities for the day. All those questions were raised just to distract her. I need to divert her attention from feeling depressed.

I then asked Nick if his absence has impacted his mother's state. He replied,

Not because of that. But there are times that she just feels lonely. So, I don't want her to feel that way, to feel alone. So, I want her to see me through Skype. And even though it's nonsensical, I'd ask her to just call me. Even that's in the middle of the night. Like two or three o'clock in the morning, that's fine. I already told her to just call anytime.

In this statement, Nick demonstrates how being contactable 24/7 indicates a form of "being there" for each other (Baldassar et al., 2016).

Negotiating Caregiving Burden

In this study, I identified two salient factors that undermine the quality of transnational caregiving: asymmetrical sociotechnical competencies in using a mobile device, which complements previous studies on the uneven use of mobile phones in caregiving at a distance (Baldassar et al., 2007; Madianou & Miller, 2012; Wilding, 2006), and the persistence of unchanged family norms despite the disruption of the family's organization. These sociotechnical and sociocultural forces primarily impact mediated mobilities (Keightley & Reading, 2014) in the context of transnational caregiving. As discussed below, various strategies are then deployed by the informants to experience satisfying transnational relationships.

The migrants often have to deal with the technological competency of their left-behind parent. For instance, Nick recently encouraged his mother to use Viber, a messaging application. He believes that such a platform would afford them longer times to talk at a cheaper rate. However, his mother is not knowledgeable in using such a broadband-based platform. As a result, his mother sometimes accidentally presses the "regular call" button instead of the "free call" button. This often generates additional costs. To resolve this, Nick deploys "remote teaching." He explained,

If she does not understand the instructions, I ask her to open the laptop, the camera. Then I ask her, "What do you see on your phone? Do you see the button? Okay, press it." So, I give instructions in that way.

I asked Nick whether he gets frustrated at times when he teaches his mother. He noted, "It's alright [referring to teaching his mother] because I am patient when it comes to teaching my mother or anybody else."

Apart from sociotechnical differences, the obligation to show love and respect to parents can become a source of caregiving burden and negotiations. This is most salient when family norms remain unchanged despite the interruption of the family's composition. For instance, an informant had to bear the obligations and responsibility of a left-behind mother who decided to be more independent. This is the case of Rachelle, a 28-year-old sales manager.

During the interview, Rachelle recalled the unforgettable phone conversation with her father. Her father told her, "My daughter, take care of your siblings." She did not know that their conversation would be their last. Her father died in a car accident a few days after their conversation. This life-changing event made her stay in Australia to support her six siblings and her mother. During the interview, she revealed that her mother was immensely affected by her father's death. As she shared, "When my father died, a part of her [referring to her mother] also died. It's as if she just wants to become a *dalaga* [teenager]." Despite this, she remains supportive of her mother.

Rachelle's mother has continued to financially support the family through profits earned from her own small travel agency. But her mother's income is not enough to support the everyday needs of the entire family. For this reason, Rachelle has decided to stay in Melbourne. Moreover, being the eldest in the family also adds pressure to embracing the obligation to care for the younger siblings. For instance, she has been

postponing her “permanent residency” application because she prefers to send the money to the Philippines. As she lamented,

I have always thought of my family first. It’s also expensive to file for residency, thousands of dollars. Even though I have needs, I prioritize the needs of my family.

With her father’s death and her mother’s limited income, she has assumed the role of the family’s breadwinner. As she confessed, “I’m not just a sister. I am also more of a mother. But that’s how it goes. You deal with what you get.”

On a daily basis, she uses her smartphone to remind her siblings to study well, to take care of their health, and stay God-fearing. Moreover, she also sends money to finance her siblings’ education and everyday needs. In Rachelle’s case, various online platforms—Viber, FaceTime, and Facebook Messenger—are accessed to generate information about what her siblings need. However, enacting multiple roles—as a mother, breadwinner, sister, and daughter—through mobile device use stirs ambivalent feelings. This goes to show how contradictory experiences exist in transnational lives (Madianou, 2012). As she shared, “I know how to handle my siblings. But I feel like there are moments that I didn’t feel becoming a teenager or as a sister.” In Rachelle’s statement, the feeling of being denied her individuality is striking, which is a result of performing and juggling numerous roles, obligations, and commitments as enabled through mobile connectivity. To address such contradictory feelings, Rachelle opts to suppress her feelings, a persistent strategy deployed by migrants in managing challenges in transnational connections (Parreñas, 2001a). She then directs her energy toward supporting her mother and siblings. She focuses on ways to bring her siblings to Australia and provide them a bright future. As she highlighted, “The goal is for us to be together.”

In some cases, a migrant can be subject to the constant pressure of sending financial support for the health care of a left-behind parent. This condition is more complicated when the left-behind parents are separated or divorced and are not in good health. A case in point is Aimee, a 27-year-old education consultant. During the interview, Aimee revealed that her father has been undergoing kidney dialysis. Her father cannot rely on her mother because of their separation. Furthermore, her father does not have enough savings to cover the medical expenses. As a result, her father relies on the remittances of the children. Aimee has no choice but to support her father. She said,

My brother [based in Singapore] was supporting the education of our youngest brother’s child. My sister [based in Dubai] has her own family. Her salary is not that big. And I’m the one who earns more than them. I’m also single. So, it [the father’s condition] has become my responsibility.

Despite differing familial responsibilities, Aimee reiterated that her brother in Singapore also sends money for their father. Her brother often collects the money from her online and sends it to their mother in the Philippines. Their mother checks and collects the amount from the bank. Their mother then contacts the housemaid living in their father’s house to collect the money. The housemaid then passes the money to the father. In this case, mobile device use facilitates the “micro-coordination” (Ling & Yttri, 2002) of money transfer.

However, there are times that the sent money is not enough to cover their father's medical expenses. As a result, they then borrow money from their mother, which stirs tensions. As she shared, "Sometimes if it's insufficient, I'll call my mother. She would nag at me, but she'll eventually give some cash. Then she'll say, 'I'm no longer responsible for your father.'" During the interview, Aimee mentioned that the money provided by their mother is often a debt that must be paid.

It must be noted that transnational caregiving involves emotional work. In the case of Aimee, feelings of frustration are often suppressed. Furthermore, humor is deployed to negotiate the pains and pressures of filial duty. For instance, Aimee gets upset whenever she receives news about her father through Facebook. She is informed by a relative that her father has not stopped smoking despite his medical condition. As she feels so stressed on receiving the news, she usually calms herself and first speaks to the housemaid. She asks the housemaid to verify the information. On confirmation, she then speaks to her father. However, this conversation involves a light and humorous approach as a form of performative adjustments in maintaining ties. She shared during the interview that she sometimes jokingly says, "I tell him, 'If you want to die, we can do an expensive funeral instead of us spending money for your treatment.'" I asked her how her father reacts, and she said, "He said, 'You are a disrespectful child!'" [giggles]. She shared that her father laughed at what she just told him. Interestingly, Aimee reiterated during the interview, "But he could not do anything about it because I'm the financier. I mean the reason I spend on his treatment is for his life to be prolonged. I couldn't accept that he still smokes." In spite of it all, she continues to send money. Furthermore, she has never questioned why the money sent to her father to cover the medical costs is often insufficient. In summary, Aimee's case affirms how transnational caregiving becomes a performative act of emotional management to sustain relationships, which are often overlaid with power asymmetries as enacted through mobile communication across continents (Lim, 2016; Madianou & Miller, 2012).

Conclusion

In this article, I have attempted to cast light on the role of ubiquitous mobile devices in enabling transnational caregiving, thereby facilitating a sense of emotional togetherness among Filipino migrant adult children in Melbourne, Australia, and their left-behind parents in the Philippines. Significantly, by deploying a critical mobilities lens (Urry, 2007), I have mapped out the different types of mobilities—corporeal and imagined—that are involved and produced within the processes of transnational interactivity. Yet, a salient point made by the study is the ways in which mediated mobilities are informed by sociocultural and sociotechnical forces (Keightley & Reading, 2014). Filial piety, as a main strand in binding domestic relationships, influences migrants to enact practical and emotional care at a distance. Yet, the existence of sociotechnical asymmetries, as well as the implementation of a static social structure, produce challenges in enacting caregiving at a distance. Evidently, such conflation of communicative benefits and obstacles demonstrates the paradox of mobile device use. To address the unsettling and unstable affective experiences, migrants continuously observe filial duty and suppress negative feelings.

I have demonstrated how transnational caregiving becomes a vantage point to articulate the fusion of mobility and immobility in an era of transnational mobilities. Fixed social structures and processes tend to anchor migrants to contradictory affects and constant negotiations. I contend that this aspect of a

migrant's mobile life necessitates a deep and critical assessment, especially in the context of neoliberal and globalized economies wherein the national government in the home country tends to be weak in fostering a welfare state for its citizens. As a result, family members often have to bear the provision of care to improve living conditions, which encompass well-being and affective states. Given as such, we should reflect on what other forms of policies and programs are needed to assist the members of the transnational Filipino family in the context of accessing stable and sustainable care practices and support systems. For instance, as suggested by Baldassar (2016), communication policies targeted to address the availability and "proficient" use of digital devices could be deployed alongside various programs that cover health, well-being, and other welfare needs. By doing so, the obligation to care would not become a burden that is constantly dealt with by a member of the transnational Filipino family. Rather, it becomes an institutionalized, national, and even an international undertaking. This approach can be emphasized if future research on Philippine transnationalism uncovers the fissures and tensions in enacting a mobile life, which is often branded as a "family strategy" (Asis, 1994), a characteristic of Philippine migration that tends to allow the national government to escape from its social duty and obligations.

In conclusion, caring from afar through mobile device use is pivotal in sustaining family life at a distance. Yet, movements are often constrained and are coped with through personal strategies. Importantly, caring from afar illuminates an amalgamation of mobilities and stasis, which transforms a transnational field as a site for struggles, dilemmas, and perpetual negotiations. I argue that a way to address such complexity is to push for reframing personalized and mediated mobilities as a national and global concern. By doing so, satisfying transnational relationships are built, embodied, and lived through. This contrasts with how transnational caregiving becomes an additional burden for those who are already in unstable living conditions.

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