Facebook, Long-Distance Marriages, and the Mediation of Intimacies

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This article examines the intersections between transnational labor migration in Southeast Asia, the rise of advanced communication technologies, and intimacy in long-distance marriages. Exploring how Filipino migrants and their left-behind partners continue "doing" intimacy from a distance through mobile communication technologies, we interrogate how gendered discourses and practices of marriage are reorganized when wives take on the role of transnational breadwinners navigating the gender-segmented overseas labor market, while husbands are left at home. In an increasingly mediated age, how do communication technologies shape intimate relationships across distance? Conversely, how do the power dynamics in long-distance marriages shape mediated space? We argue that transnational couples engage in "performative mediated intimacies," which are largely shaped by gendered discourses and practices surrounding being "ideal" wives and husbands. Faced with an "intimacy limbo" as a result of temporal and spatial distance, migrants and their partners cope by (re)shaping their transnational relationships in strategic ways. Despite the lack of opportunities for co-present marital interaction, the line between private and public marital lives becomes blurred in online platforms like Facebook.

Keywords: marriages, long-distance relationships, communication technologies, social media, intimacy, gender, transnational family

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With a long history of overseas deployment of its citizens as a stop-gap measure to address persistent economic issues of high unemployment and poverty rates, labor migration in the Philippines has become the "gold standard" in the development of a highly institutionalized and regulated international migration framework (Asis, 2008; Battistella & Paganoni, 1992; Martin, Abella, & Midgley, 2004). From being a temporary solution to the economic and political turmoil of the 1970s, earning remittances through labor migration has become a permanent and central fixture of the Philippine economy. Given a poverty incidence of 26.3% (Philippines Statistics Authority, 2016a) and an unemployment rate of 6.1% (Philippines Statistics Authority, 2016b), it is no surprise that labor migration has become entrenched as a strategy for national economic growth as well as an option for individual social mobility. Reflecting the overdependence on exporting labor in the Philippines, the Philippine Overseas Employment Administration reported that, in 2014 alone, the agency processed and legally deployed 1.8 million Filipino migrant workers overseas (Philippine Overseas Employment Administration, 2015).

The dependence on and institutionalization of labor migration as an answer to poverty has given rise to a "culture of migration" (Asis, 2006) in the everyday life of Filipinos. Dubbed as *bagong bayani* (meaning "new heroes") in popular and state discourses, Filipino migrants venture overseas as a "sacrifice" to secure the family's social mobility while also contributing to the Philippine economy (Martin et al., 2004). Under the prevailing temporary migration regime in Asia based on time-limited work contracts, the massive outflow of migrants from labor-sending countries such as the Philippines are expected to travel solo without family members, giving rise to "the geographically dispersed 'family' as a 'new' form of living arrangement" (Yeoh, 2009, p. 1). This transnational living arrangement portends to deeper shifts in gender ideologies, familial relationships, and decision-making processes (Asis, 2003; Asis, Huang, & Yeoh, 2004; Medina & de Guzman, 1994; Miralao, 1997; Quah, 2009).

It is in this context that this article responds to the call among scholars for an "emotional turn" in understanding migration and mobilities, which puts "emotions, especially love and affection, at the heart of migration decision making and behaviour" (Mai & King, 2009, p. 296). Gorman-Murray (2009) further argues that migration is more than "embodied displacement," as "focusing on the body demanded accounting for the qualities of *embodiment*—in particular, self-identification and capacities for sexual desires and intimate relationships—and the impact they have on migration" (p. 445). This article focuses on how long-distance Filipino migrants and their left-behind partners negotiate and reconstitute intimate conjugal relationships through the mediated spaces of communication technologies. First, we analyze the mutually constitutive relationship between mediated and physical spatiotemporalities by understanding how transnational couples negotiate with the "intimacy limbo" of migration. Next, we train our lens on how transnational couples deal with the intimacy limbo by fostering "performative mediated intimacies" to reconstruct intimate gendered identities as wives and husbands online. Using Facebook as a case study, we argue that transnational couples strategically use "public display of connection" to negotiate with "affective structures" that regulate their performance of transnational gendered identities. Lastly, we examine how "performative mediated intimacies" and the structures that govern the (im)mobilities of Asian labor migration contour marital intimate relationships and identities in the transnational family.

We attempt to explore questions that unearth the power-laden "spatial reorganization of social relations" (Massey, 1994, p. 4) that undergirds the transnational family. Despite the sophisticated and

burgeoning literature on the Asian transnational family, the intense academic gaze has been largely on migrant mothers (see Fresnoza-Flot, 2009; Peng & Wong, 2013; Tacoli, 1999; Uy-Tioco, 2007) and left-behind children (see Battistella & Conaco, 1998; Hoang & Yeoh, 2012; Madianou & Miller, 2011; Madianou & Miller, 2013; Parrenas, 2005; Yeoh & Lam, 2007). There has been more limited scholarly efforts in understanding other relationships in the transnational family, such as long-distance conjugal relationships between migrants and their left-behind partners (see Constable, 2003, 2010; Locke, Tam, & Hoa, 2014; Pingol, 2001). Furthermore, Locke, Hoa, and Tam (2012) argued that the scholarship on migration and marriages has focused on "migration *for* marriage," neglecting to explore the changes in conjugal relationships *after* marriage where geographical separation has occurred *because* of labor migration. That "migration may be centrally *about* as well as *in tension with* being a good husband/wife and a good father/mother" is thus elided in the exploration of how gender and conjugal relationships are reconstituted and transformed (Locke et al., 2012, p. 11).

In the next section, we review the intersections of scholarly research on migration, intimacy, and communication technologies to provide a framework from which to analyze the abovementioned themes.

Asian (Im)mobilities and the Intimate Spaces of the Media

In an era lauded to have ushered in the "end of geography" through globalization (Cairncross, 1997)—characterized by time-space compression and the hypermobility of goods, capital, ideas, and people—exploring questions about mobilities, or lack thereof, has become central to understanding its impact on society. Scholars, such as Massey (1994) are critical of the utopian discourse positing an absolute and universally hypermobile world, since the friction and unevenness of space and time still exist for some more than others. Instead of a false dichotomy, where movement is associated with progressiveness, while rootedness is connected to backwardness, the literature on mobilities calls for a recalibration of our understanding of the complex process of globalization. Modes of analysis that recognize the spectrum of mobilities and immobilities bring us forward to a more productive understanding of the uneven "power geometries of time-space compression" (Massey, 1994, p. 149).

Migration has been one of the key sites of inquiry in the mobilities literature to explore how different people are related to the "fast and slow lanes of social life" (Hannam, Sheller, & Urry, 2006, p. 11). In Asia, the need to understand the differentiated forms of (im)mobilities becomes more pronounced, as the region experiences multiple circuits of labor migration at every skill level, from highly skilled professionals to low-waged manual laborers. The Asian migration regime is characterized by "use and discard" policies (Yeoh, 2006, p. 36) that incorporate temporariness and precarity not only in the lives of the migrants but also for the families they leave behind. Policies on immigration and visas that dictate the different "times of migration" (Cwerner, 2001, p. 15) inevitably contour care and intimate arrangements in the transnational family. Familial relationships and identities are shaped, as the members grapple with the precarity of present and future plans. For example, the "genderised mode of labor substitution" (Heyzer & Wee, 1995, p. 39), where women from developing countries move to developed economies to fulfil the demand for service and care work in exchange for economic capital, creates what Hochschild (2000) calls "global care chains." When the migrant moves and the family is left behind, a "care void" is inevitably created in the transnational household. It is unsurprising that a major strand in the literature on migration and intimacy has focused on

what happens to familial intimacy when the caring presence of women, especially mothers, becomes temporally and spatially absent (see Fresnoza-Flot, 2009; Parrenas, 2005; Tacoli, 1999; Uy-Tioco, 2007). Other forms of "care void" that may inhere in relationships between the wives and husbands, however, have attracted less scrutiny in the scholarly literature.

In understanding the (re)arrangement of care and intimacy in the transnational household, it is helpful to note that the spatiality of intimacy is manifested "through relations that are specific to particular spaces" and, conversely, intimate relationships are enacted "through space-specific practices" (Browne, Kim, & Brown, 2009, p. 4). As Morrison, Johnston, and Longhurst (2013) argue, the understanding of intimacy and love should be reframed as spatial, relational, and political at the same time. The spatial dislocation that occurs during migration brings to the fore opportunities for and constraints on the performances of intimate gendered identities. It also highlights the various ways intimacy is regulated and governed (Walsh, 2009). Here, we foreground how intimacy is used as a "regulatory construct" to discipline bodies and sexualities in an attempt to form the "ideal" kind of citizens and the "right" type of families (Oswin & Olund, 2010, p. 61).

Attention to the spatiality and relationality of intimacy between transnational family members turns our focus to the role of communication technologies—and in particular, the mobile phone—which have become "emblem[s] of liquid modernity" (Morley, 2017, p. 159) among low-waged migrant workers in Asia. These technologies not only enable long-distance communication with the homeland at a relatively low cost, they have also been elevated to the status of "lifeline" for migrants (Thomas & Lim, 2010, p. 2). As the primary mode of keeping a "connected transnational family" (Madianou & Miller, 2013, p. 1), the mediated space of mobile technologies becomes a crucial site where transnational intimacy is shaped and spatialized.

We turn to the vast literature on new media technologies and interpersonal communication to understand the spatialization of intimacy and intimate gendered identities in mediated communication. As intimate relationships have usually been defined in terms of proximity and authenticity (see critiques such as Constable, 2009), a key question relates to whether authentic intimate relationships can be fostered in the space of communication technologies. There is a prevailing discourse on the "morality of proximity" (Bauman, 1993, p. 217), where face-to-face interactions are valorized over mediated relationships, prompting us to care for those who are nearer. In this view, the "here" is seen to be more authentic than what is "there" in the virtual world. Many scholars of communication technologies have contested this artificial dichotomy between the virtual "there" and the real "here."

In this vein, recent scholarship on personal connections in the technologically mediated age have attempted to (re)spatialize the relationships that occur through mediated communication. In her work, Baym (2010) argues against the separation of a "cyberspace" that is detached from everyday life, and instead posits "the notion that what happens online may be newer, but is no less real" (p. 6). She pushes forward the conceptualization of digitally mediated platforms as creating a "metaphorical sense of shared space" (Baym, 2010, p. 77). Other conceptualizations of digital space in media studies have pointed to the "saturation" of our everyday lives with electronic and communication media, which makes it "difficult to tell a story of space without also telling a story of the media, and vice versa" (Couldry & McCarthy, 2004, p. 1).

The intertwined relationship between mediated and physical spaces can also be seen in the way connections and relationships made through mediated communication are characterized by the constant blurring of public and private lives. Fortunati (2002), for example, contends that practices of intimacy that used to be hidden from the public gaze are now seen to also involve the public performativity of intimacy enabled by the mobile phone. Expanding this view, Madianou (2016) argues that communication technologies and social networking sites create what she calls "ambient co-presence." She defines this as enabling a "peripheral, yet intense awareness of distant others made possible through the affordances of ubiquitous media environments" (Madianou, 2016, p. 1).

While acknowledging the affordances of communication technologies to transcend spatial and temporal boundaries, we recognize that mediated space cannot be simply celebrated as providing an equal and democratic playing field. Mediated space is not an abstract "nowhere" but a social space produced by the interplay of processes occurring in both territorial space and digital space, including the uneven power politics of inclusion and exclusion along axes of class, race, and gender (Gibbs & Tanner, 1997; Jones, 1995). In other words, while communication technologies may allow for some degree of freedom from the frictions of geography, they can also become conduits for reifying prevailing ideologies and unequal power structures. For example, through the aid of communication technologies, migrant mothers can become "good mothers" by performing care from a distance; this also has the effect of naturalizing what constitutes motherhood norms, further reifying the double burden that women migrants are expected to carry as *both* caregivers and breadwinners (see also Parrenas, 2005). In this sense, the enlarged possibilities of "cyberspace" can also limit the emancipatory potential of labor migration for women by masking patriarchal expectations. Meanwhile, gender inequalities inscribed in material space remain unquestioned.

We equally recognize the agency of users in the shaping of technologies while also being informed of the inherent affordances and limits of media technologies. Miller et al.'s (2016) notion of "scalable sociality" alerts us to the affordances of social media in facilitating users' agency in fashioning different scales of interaction—such as from the smallest to the largest, or from the private sphere to the public, and vice versa—with different individuals and groups. Donath and boyd (2004) explore social networking sites where individuals strategically deploy "public displays of connection" to verify authenticity, (re)contextualize online relationships, and widen networks. Meanwhile, Lasén and Casado (2012) show how technologies have inherently different features and affordances—whether visual, audio, or textual—thus introducing a different "affective bandwidth" (Lasén, 2010; Picard, 1997) that allows users to express different types of emotional responses and connections via different media.

In summary, we aim to find the connection between how the unequal power geometries undergirding the increased flows of feminized labor migrations in Asia are negotiated, contested, or reified by transnational couples through the affordances of media technologies. By exploring the mutually constitutive relationship between mediated space and everyday life, and how real, authentic, if still uneven, intimate relationships are enabled through communication technologies, we seek to explore how transnational conjugal couples harness the different affective affordances of media technologies in negotiating their intimate lives from afar. We aim to enhance our understanding of the power dynamics at play in "doing gender" (West & Zimmerman, 1987, p. 126) online by examining how communication

technologies influence conjugal relationships, and conversely, how gendered ideologies of intimacy and marriage contour mediated space. In the next section, we turn to a brief discussion of research methods.

Method

To grapple with the transnational dynamics inhering in communication technologies and marital relationships, this study draws primarily on qualitative fieldwork conducted at both home (left-behind husbands in the Philippines) and host (migrant wives in Singapore) countries over nine months, from 2014 to 2015. Using purposive sampling, we designed the study to include both paired and unpaired couples. Of the 30 interviewees, 10 were paired couples, allowing for deeper, double-sided insights into the transnational relationships from the perspectives of both migrant wives and left-behind husbands. The remaining 20 interviewees were unpaired. This strategy allowed for more freedom and reduced the fear that some participants have of being exposed to their partners (despite our assurances of interviewee confidentiality).

In selecting our participants, we considered migrant wives who have been working in Singapore for at least two years at the time of the study to take into account the temporal dimensions of migrant experience. The migrant women participants were drawn from a range of occupational categories ranging from domestic work, technical work, to the service industry to reflect the wide spectrum of work opportunities Filipino women have in Singapore.

Similarly, the left-behind husbands in the Philippines were those whose partners have been working in Singapore for at least two years. To widen the pool of left-behind spouses, we also drew selectively on a separate study[2] conducted in 2017 with 50 Filipino left-behind partners (husbands and wives) of migrant spouses who were working in different destination countries (e.g., Saudi Arabia, Qatar, Hong Kong) and who had been away for at least six months.

In this research, we wanted to explore the impact of migration on transnational couples and also delve deeply into the emotional experiences and intimate relationships that are intertwined with their migration projects and media use. The main research tool we used was the semi-structured life story interview as a "qualitative, ethnographic, and field research method for gathering information on the subjective essence of one person's entire life experience" (Atkinson, 2007, p. 225). While keeping the interviews open-ended, we explored the following themes and questions: childhood family experiences, education, and employment history prior to migration; love and married life stories; migration history; rituals and routines of transnational family; and communication technology use and practices. The research design aimed to capture diachronic data on media use—as in Madianou and Miller's (2013) study. In the

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[2] CHAMPSEA, or Child Health and Migrant Parents in South East Asia, is a large-scale, longitudinal study, conducted in the Philippines and Indonesia, involving both household surveys and in-depth interviews with left-behind spouses and children.

process of sharing their life stories, the participants also inevitably compared past versions of technologies and communication practices with their present media preferences and experiences.

It must be noted that interviews dealing with topics as private and intimate as marriages are tricky for both the respondents and the interviewers. When it came to thorny topics like infidelities, marital woes, and financial problems, some respondents were not as forthcoming in divulging sensitive information. The Filipino cultures of "shame" and "saving face" were at work here as topics that will taint the family's reputation in the public's eyes were usually avoided. In cases when the respondents did share sensitive information, it must be recognized that these may also be answers that have been molded to "save face." Thus, the purpose of the life story interviews was not to arrive at objective, unassailable truths, since we recognize that participants can choose to reconstruct and revise the stories that they told. Understood in this way, life stories had the advantage of foregrounding the subjectivity of individual lived experiences. They also pointed to the fact that the ways life stories were recalled, curated, and narrated were inevitably connected to wider social politics and power dynamics.

The interviews lasted between 45 to 120 minutes and were conducted in a mix of Filipino and English. These were audio recorded, transcribed, coded, and then thematically analyzed. Ethics clearance was successfully obtained from our university.

"Intimacy Limbo" and "Strategic Intimacy" in Transnational Marriages

In this section, we examine the mutually constitutive spheres of mediated communication and the negotiation of gendered power dynamics that occur in transnational marriages. Comparing the forms of communication available a decade ago with the plethora of virtually free and advanced communication technologies currently available, the participants often extolled the value of having an "always on" connection with their transnational partners. Sunshine (42-year-old left-behind wife), whose husband has been working overseas as a dental technician for the past 22 years, explained:

> It's good that we have the Internet now. Even when he's at work we are [talking] online.
> Even if we don't say anything, we just keep Skype going . . . as long as he's there [and]
> he can see us. That's our daily routine. Now you can see him, you know his every move.
> Unlike with letters, he can say that he's okay, but you never really know if he's okay. Now
> if he's sick you can see, you can know [through these new technologies].

The attempts to create "ambient co-presence" (Madianou, 2016) can also be seen in how the participants have positioned the layout of their communication devices (such as their laptops, personal computers, tablets, and mobile phones) within the physical space of the home. In many of the transnational households interviewed, these communication technologies were positioned in the living room, the most active and frequented place of the house for the family (see Figure 1).
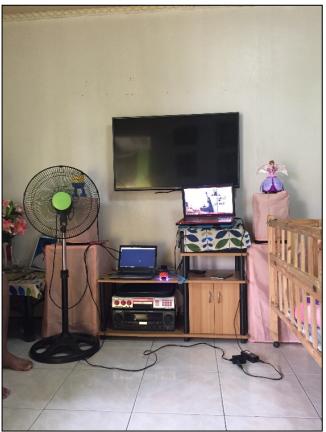
Figure 1. The current living room computer setup of Michelle (40-year-old left-behind wife), showing an ongoing Skype video call with the migrant husband in Qatar.

Paradoxically, most participants remained ambivalent about the quality of mediated communications in sustaining intimate bonds. Despite the synchronized lives of transnational couples fostered through constant everyday communication, most of the participants still shared some sadness about the state of their marriages. After prolonged periods of separation, many participants reported a growing sense of being "aloof" and becoming "strangers" to each other. For many couples, when asked what they talked about in the course of everyday communication across the distance, they shared that it was "same, same." Carlo (41-year-old left-behind husband) echoed a commonplace sentiment that reflected the frustration left-behind husbands felt about being burdened by repetitive communication regarding mundane happenings:

> It's just usually the same things: "Have you eaten yet?" "What did you eat?" "Where are you going?" "What are you doing?" "Good night," "Good morning"...Then it's the same cycle next day. To be honest, sometimes you can't talk about anything new because you talk all the time.

Like Carlo, most of the participants reported a "dull repetitiveness" and an increasing sense of banality in the conversations between transnational couples, fueling feelings that they had grown apart. In this "intimacy limbo," intense emotions and thorny intimate issues were often downplayed to avoid issues that might escalate tensions or cause discomfort. Instead, couples engaged in repetitive and trivial communication as a routinized display of being a couple. Ironically, frequent but trite communication enabled by the plethora of advanced communication technologies available today often ended up creating a feeling that the other party had become a distant stranger.

When migrants returned for short visits, the nagging feelings of being strangers were amplified. Carlo's migrant wife, Joanne (32-year-old front-desk officer working in Singapore for five years) shared her experience during her short vacations home:

> Honestly, I feel awkward around my husband, especially when it comes to intimate stuff. Sometimes he asks me why I'm too distant when he hugs me or kisses me. . . . It's just different; maybe I've already been so used to being apart . . . and being alone that it's hard for me to go back to being intimate . . . being with someone again. When I come home . . . I see him . . . I see him more as a companion, . . . not in a sexual way.

Randy (50-year-old left-behind husband) expressed a similar feeling that emotional distance is part and parcel of "getting used to" the long period of separation. He said: "I've gotten used to her absence. Time passes by and you get used to being alone."

The deferment of the family's reunification often created resentment between the migrants and the left-behind family members. When relationships thinned out and feelings became more distant through the long periods of separation among transnational family members, they resorted to a range of temporary stop-gap measures to hold on to a sense of familyhood. The virtual co-presence cultivated through SMS, Skype conversations, or other mediated forms of communication worked as a form of "buying" time and forestalling rupture, but only up to a certain degree. As earlier noted, despite communicating more frequently through mobile time that was almost "always on," this did not necessarily translate to the deepening of conjugal bonds at the emotional level. As the migrant wives and left-behind husbands avoided talking about problems that were out of their control in order to avoid worrying the other, the couples sometimes grew apart. In this context, the "social glue" that transnational family members often deployed can be described as a form of "strategic intimacy," a version of intimacy where long-distance communication was geared toward more functional and basic communication, enough to maintain familiarity but not enough to create deeper emotional bonds.

The above case of Joanne and her left-behind husband Carlo is illustrative of how transnational couples deployed strategic intimacy. Intense emotions were tempered and bracketed, as focusing on these while trying to achieve the transnational family's financial and migration goals would increase the fragility of familyhood during the period of separation. As Carlo explained:

> I do not want to bother her of our problems here. I do not like talking about my problems and sadness with her. What's the point? Making her lonely or homesick will not help our goals. . . . If she gets sad without us achieving our goals, then it was all for nothing.

Meanwhile, migrant wives, like Joanne, shared how they avoided communication that made them homesick and lonely. They explained that they had strategies to "harden" themselves in the crucial moments of migration, when they were more vulnerable to sadness and loneliness, like during short vacations back home and the first few days of coming back to Singapore after a vacation. For Joanne, it was difficult to talk to her family on an audiovisual platform like Skype after having just arrived back in Singapore from a vacation:

> I try to avoid Skype for the first few weeks of coming back. I stick with text messages or just voice chats. It's just that when I talk to them on Skype, I see them, hear them, but cannot hug them nor kiss them. It's just the worst kind of torture, a few days ago I can hold them, but now they're just on a screen so distant and far.

This sense of putting emotions in limbo is an important coping strategy because even though couples were reunited during home visits, they were aware of the temporary nature of these reunions. Most migrant wives shared that although they loved the feeling of being back with their family, knowing that they had to leave soon to return to their jobs overseas put a brake on becoming too emotionally involved. They felt the need to control their emotions so that they would not be "too soft" and become homesick when they had to leave again. The carefully cultivated emotional distance that the migrants had achieved in their new life overseas was something that they saw as crucial if they were to achieve migration goals they had set for themselves and their family. We argue that there is a mutual shaping of communication technology and the transnational family dynamics at play here, which creates a form of intimacy that is at the same time familiar but distant. Both migrant wives and left-behind husbands shared the feeling of growing distant from their partners as time passed.

Facebook and "Performative Mediated Intimacies"

In this section, we argue that despite the "intimacy limbo," Filipino transnational couples continue "doing" marriages in the spaces of communication technologies. Through the virtual mediation of these intimacies, we analyze how transnational couples are able to re-embed their marital relationships in the actual spaces of the homeland and host society by deploying what we term "performative mediated intimacies." Using a case study of Facebook, we demonstrate how the virtual space becomes an arena where "affective structures" regulate and amplify the gendered ideologies of marriage.

Facebook, a social media site used for connecting with friends, family, and acquaintances on a more public community scale, has become one of the most preferred platforms for conducting intimate communication between transnational couples. Sandra (42-year-old left-behind wife) shared her experience of having her Facebook application easily accessible to her via her smartphone:

> It's high-tech! Look, before it's just [regular calls and text] through the cell phone. Now
> you can make video calls. You can see the person you're talking to. There's no limit on
> time, you can call, you can chat . . . anytime regardless of how long. . . . It's free! [So
> that's why] it's okay. We get to talk every day. Sometimes you can see what he
> posts. . . . [Through Facebook, I see] the things that are happening there. As long as
> there are no posts of women [everything's okay].

In the Philippines, marital and romantic relationships are embedded within the community through the public and communal aspects of church and civil marriages. The prevailing discourse of the state and church on the sanctity of marriage and its unbreakable bonds (further bolstered by the lack of divorce laws in the country), upholds Filipino gendered ideologies of husbands as the "pillar of the household" and wives as the "light of the home" (Alcantara, 1994; Medina & de Guzman, 1994). Values symbolically attached to these ideologies bring forth a patriarchal discourse of husbands-as-breadwinners and wives-as-moral-compass of the households. Hence, despite marriage having a private and intimate nature, its communal and public aspects make these unions subject to the community's gatekeeping to ensure conformity to the ideals of familyhood.

Facebook's public-facing affordance (Miller et al., 2016) is used as a means for transnational marriages to be publicly recognized and affirmed by the community. Despite these marriages being disembedded from the community's physical space and gaze, the affordances of Facebook are deployed to shape "performative mediated intimacies," that is, a set of mediated strategies used in "doing gender" and performing idealized masculine and feminine intimate identities virtually, as a way of conforming to the affective structures that regulate sexuality and intimacy.

Virtual Tagging of Relationships

One of the strategies transnational couples used was "public display of connection" discussed by Donath and boyd (2004). To do this, participants used the textual affordances of Facebook to make their relationship status public. In the "About" section, the user can note his or her relationship status as "Single," "In a relationship," "Married," or "Engaged," and even "tag" his or her partner's Facebook account (e.g., a wife can link her Facebook account to her husband's). By "tagging" another person's account, anyone who clicks on the tag will be immediately linked to the Facebook account of the other person.

Both migrant and left-behind partners used this feature as a form of security that has a two-fold purpose: first, to publicly have their relationships re-embedded in their homeland's social community (i.e., friends, families, acquaintances), and second, to ensure that the relationship status of both men and women are known publicly to prevent infidelities and unwanted sexual advances from others. The public profession of one's "relationship status" on Facebook gave the transnational couples peace of mind and ensured them that although they were apart, their relationship status was public for everyone to see and know, despite not being physically together in everyday life. As long-distance separation was not seen as an ideal setup for married couples, these relationships often became subject to gossip and were seen to be susceptible to infidelities. An online (re)affirmation of one's marital status was hence crucial in creating a sense of security.

Aside from this, transnational couples also capitalized on the visual affordance of social networking sites like Facebook to mark their marital relationships. Most respondents interviewed put a high value on how their partners chose their profile pictures and cover photos on their Facebook accounts. Many made sure that their photos showed an image of them as a couple or that of the whole family. For some participants, virtually displaying each other's marital status through markers of familyhood shown in photos became an important means to foster transparency in the relationship and strengthen trust. Although this did not necessarily prevent infidelities, many participants attached symbolic value to the act of displaying these pictures. Sandra (42-year-old left-behind wife) explained the implications associated with profile pictures and cover photos on Facebook:

> Interviewer: What will happen if he changes his profile picture to just his photo?
> Sandra: No, in his profile picture, it's a picture of both of us. In the big [cover photo] one, it's our whole family. . . . He doesn't change it. But if he changes it. . . . Then it means something. . . . Like why did he suddenly change that? Maybe he's trying to do something with another [woman]!

Another variation of this public profession of relationships was seen in how the couples presented their names. In the Philippines, wives changing their surnames to that of their husbands' upon marriage is the norm. When Manuel (40-year-old left-behind husband) noticed that his wife had changed her Facebook name (to her maiden name) after they had a big fight, he became distressed:

> I was very worried. I know we are fighting, but she did not have to do that. Now it's weird that on Facebook, I have a different surname than her. People might think she's single or that we're not married anymore!

This made him feel that she was not just disconnecting herself from him emotionally, but also publicly denouncing their relationship.

Here, we see how the seemingly simple and mundane act of changing profile pictures and altering their Facebook identifiers held high symbolic value for transnational couples, all the more so because of the long-distance nature of these relationships. In the absence of physical togetherness as proof of marital unions, Facebook accounts needed to be carefully curated as a form of "performative mediated intimacy" to affirm marital status and signal trust, security, and fidelity in long-distance relationships.

Surveillance and "Affective Structures" of Jealousy and Shame

Displaying one's connections on social media through the various strategies we have outlined above enabled participants' relationships to be embedded in a "still virtual, but now public, space" (Donath & boyd, 2004, p. 76). By making one's connections virtually public, "social networking sites remove the privacy barriers that people keep between different aspects of their lives" (Donath & boyd, 2004, p. 78). In turn, this increases the potential for surveillance.

As Facebook is a visual platform, visual cues were used to derive conclusions regarding a partner's fidelity. Both left-behind and migrant partners shared that they checked their partners' Facebook accounts to familiarize themselves with the places their partners frequented, and the people they hung out with. Rowena (34-year-old migrant wife who is a domestic worker in Singapore) shared how her husband constantly policed what she wore via Facebook. She said:

> In the Philippines, he never allowed me to wear shorts, but here, everyone wears shorts on our Sunday days off. . . [the weather] is just too hot. He cannot see me anyways, so I still wore shorts. But one time, he saw a tagged picture of me on Facebook where I was wearing shorts. And then he messaged me . . ."Why do you need to wear shorts? Your husband is not there for you to dress sexily and try to be attractive. Are you trying to be attractive for someone else? Do you want to cheat on me?" So, now, I make sure to be more careful about the pictures my friends tag me on Facebook.

Both male and female participants strategically widen their social networks to include those of their partners' newly acquainted friends or colleagues while they were apart. For example, although some left-behind husbands had never met some of their wives' migrant friends in Singapore, the husbands still managed to develop a connection to them by sending them Facebook friend requests. Using the tags that linked photos to other users, each of the partners could add as friends the people tagged in a particular Facebook photo. By doing so, the migrant wives in Singapore were not totally detached from their left-behind husbands' gaze and reach, and vice versa. Similarly, left-behind wives in the Philippines employed the same strategy of connecting and adding their husbands' online Facebook friends. Sandra (42-year-old left-behind wife) explained why she sent an invitation to all the new Facebook friends her husband had recently added, despite not really knowing them:

> I will add [people on Facebook] every time he has new friends. I also accept [friend requests]. I [also send a friend] request. . . . Because I told him, every time I go online in Facebook, I can see he has a new friend. He said, "What do you want? [For me to have only] male friends?" Sometimes, I get jealous. These friends, they're mostly women. I have no idea. . . . [I add them] so that at least they would know that I am the wife. . . . This man has a wife!

Though these Facebook friendships started off as superficial contacts, they had value in allowing husbands and wives to contextualize the stories and experiences shared by their partners, not only by attaching a face to a name but also by widening their access to their partners' social circles.

In the case of husbands, this often had the effect of mobilizing affective structures of jealousy and shame rooted in doxic gender ideologies. By policing how Rowena appeared to portray a new gendered identity by being seen wearing skimpy shorts on Facebook, her husband deployed jealousy and shame to reify time-honored ideologies of "husbands-as-pillar-of-the-home" and "wives-as-light-of-the-home" (Alcantara, 1994; Morillo, Capuno, & Mendoza, 2013). By portraying what was deemed a sexy new image in Singapore and on a virtual public place like Facebook, Rowena had seemingly cast shame on her left-behind husband, not so much by her actions in material space but by failing to curate the ideal image of a

good wife in digital space. In turn, through using online strategies to regulate how migrant wives performed their sexual identities, left-behind husbands are able to assert their masculine power and assuage their feelings of shame.

In contrast, wives in our study seldom used Facebook to openly police their husbands' sexuality. Instead, their approach to reasserting their marital relationships tended to be through indirect means, as seen in the way Sandra sent virtual invites to her husband's new online friends to underline her place in her husband's life, especially to women who seemed like potential threats. In other words, women tended to safeguard their marriages by policing other women's sexuality, instead of men's. This needs to be understood in a context where marital infidelities are judged using different moral yardsticks: While a woman's virtue is measured by how well she can control her sexual urges, a man is accepted as a virile being with sexual needs to be fulfilled, thus making infidelity due to distance justified.

As Donath and boyd (2004) observe, by allowing one's connections to be displayed virtually and publicly, he or she is at the same time "risking one's reputation." When different aspects of one's public and private personas are openly displayed, they enable the community to see, judge, and castigate. In this context, "performative mediated intimacies" that allow for marital and intimate relationships to be affirmed in the virtual space of the media become significant. By performing scripts of marital intimacies through the public-facing affordance of Facebook, these marriages gain social acceptance in their community, despite not conforming to the ideal of husbands and wives living under one roof. As Wise and Velayutham (2017) further explain, "affects such as shame due to unfulfilled obligations, or transgressions (e.g., around sexuality or marriage choice), can inscribe boundaries of exclusion through anxiety, rejection, and alienation so powerful that transnational subjects are pushed out of a transnational social field" (p. 125). Hence, the affordances of mediated space to allow for different forms of relationships and personhood to arise (See McKay, 2010; Miller, 2011) are not fully materialized, as affective structures continue to regulate the transgressions that deviate from prevailing marital ideologies.

Conclusion

Building on the view that communication technologies are not just neutral conduits of transnational communication, this article examines the role of communication technologies in (re)shaping the everyday intimate lives of migrants and their left-behind partners. The mutually constitutive, if uneven, relationship between mediated space and the particularities of the Asian labor migration regime leads us to several findings.

In the prevailing migration regime in Asia, where the majority of migrant workers are allowed into destination countries as economic labor units without the right to bring family members, the availability of a plethora of advanced communication technologies offering "ambient co-presence" was not enough to curtail the "intimacy limbo". We argued that this "intimacy limbo" is rooted in the temporary and precarious nature of labor migration regimes in the Asian region. As family reunifications are postponed, migration timelines are indefinitely extended, and future plans are mired in uncertainties, emotions and intimacies in the family sphere are suspended to cope with the precarity of migration plans and projects.

Through the notion of "performative mediated intimacies," we further argued that mediated interactions are not separate from but are rather closely intertwined with relationships and identities in physical space. Shaped by affective structures that regulate the "pragmatic of desires" (Constable, 2003, p. 133) in Filipino transnational marital relationships, how "performative mediated intimacies" play out in social media and communication technologies leads us into a more nuanced understanding on how marital relationships and intimacy are negotiated within the family. By excavating seemingly mundane online behaviors used in establishing "public display of connection," we showed that they have significant bearing on the embodied and emotional experiences of transnational couples. We argued that the practices and discourses that surround the shaping of transnational couples' "performative mediated intimacies" are significantly influenced by Asian (in this case, Filipino) moralities and values. While acknowledging the agency of users, the findings avoided projecting a utopian view of media technologies by recognizing the way patriarchal gendered norms may be reified to hinder the emergence of more progressive gendered identities in transnational space.

Given differentially gendered mobilities in the experience of labor migration in the Asian context, long-distance communication has become the central site where the "doing" of transnational marital relationships unfolds. As Miller and Slater (2000) argue, these mediated spaces are "important as part of everyday life, not apart from it" (p. 7), and as such, our "virtual" interactions and relationships are no less authentic than those conducted in "real" and physical spaces. It is crucial to conceptualize and theorize the effects of communication technologies, as these are not simply "add-ons" to the "doing" of familyhood but the central site for the (un)making of relationships. As emphasized by media scholars (Miller et al., 2016; Silverstone, 2002; Strathern, 1992), the use of communication technologies does not merely pertain to its functional usage but has moral, social, and affective imperatives in shaping meanings, practices, and relationships. In this study, we see how transnational couples molded the affordances of media technologies to fit their needs, and at the same time how media technologies shaped family dynamics. By following how intimacies are negotiated in mediated spaces between husbands and wives, we are further sensitized to the gendered geometries undergirding transnational labor migration and mobilities in Asia.

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