The Transnationalisation of Intimacy:

Family Relations and Changes in an Age of Global Mobility and Digital Media

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Abstract

This chapter develops the 'transnationalisation of intimacy' as a conceptual lens to critically investigate the performance, embodiment and negotiation of transnational familial intimacy in a fast-evolving globalising and digital society. This is achieved by conducting a state-of-the-art review of theories and empirical studies on family relations and practices in a transnational context. We discuss how transnational familial intimacy is shaped by the conflation of structural and technological forces, which at once reinforces and challenges social and cultural norms of the family. We first show that intimate family practices are engendered and undermined by mobility regimes and infrastructures. We then illuminate how communicative practices pave the way for transnational linkages. However, inequalities may play out in the transnationalisation of familial intimacy, especially when material and symbolic forces are embedded in an unequal terrain. Finally, we consider the implications of transnationalism for (de)normalising family relations and practices, in creating distinctive, new transnational forms of intimacy between family members. In sum, this chapter draws attention to the mutually constitutive nature of transnationalism and changing family relations in a global and digital age.

Introduction

The contemporary era is characterised by a rapid movement of people, objects, technologies, finances, and digital information. Scholars have articulated this phenomenon through a 'new mobilities paradigm' (Sheller & Urry, 2006; Urry, 2007), pinpointing how various forms of corporeal and non-corporeal movements shape individual, familial, and social life. In a mobile era, everyday practices have been transformed by social, economic, political, and technological changes. Notably, the performance and experience of intimacy in the context of family life, as a form of practice (Jamieson, 1999, 2011; Morgan, 1996), has been reconfigured by expanding markets, national and border policies, as well as the advent of modern transportation and communication technologies. These developments highlight new ways in which personal and social relationships are reworked, adjusted, and negotiated through personal choices, mobilities, and media consumption. Against this backdrop, rapidly developing trends of global mobilities and digitalisation, which have moved far beyond the original context in which eminent sociologists such as Giddens (1992), Bauman (2003), Beck and Beck-Gernsheim (2002) and Cherlin (2009) theorised intimate family relationships, thus provide a great opportunity for us to rethink the transformation of intimacy in a transnational context.

This chapter offers a roadmap for understanding the performance, embodiment, and experience of intimacy in the context of transnational family life. We develop the 'transnationalisation of intimacy' as an important perspective to grasp how familial intimacy—i.e. practices enacted to maintain the intimate bonds between family members such as parents and children, intimate partners, spouses, and relatives—is reconfigured and transformed at the intersection of global mobilities and digitalisation. This development follows three steps. First, we critically assess existing theorisations of the transformation of intimacy and note their apparent lack of attention to transnationalism. Secondly, we consider

how material, symbolic and technological forces engender and undermine intimate family life across borders. Here, the entanglement between a global market, national and border policies, and digitalisation of everyday life has created transnational arrangements among family members (Bryceson & Vuorela, 2002; Parreñas, 2001). We discuss the role played by an asymmetrical distribution of and access to material and digital resources in enabling, structuring and constraining intimate practices of dispersed family members. Thirdly, we consider how the transnationalisation of intimacy (de)normalises and create new forms of intimate family relationships and practices. To achieve our objectives, we bring together and review scholarship on intimacy, family life, and digital cultures in a transnational context, with a critical focus on the implications of the processes of transnationalisation for understanding family changes.

The Transformation of Intimacy Revisited: The Role of Transnationalism?

Since the 1950s, decades of scholarship on the sociology of families and personal relationships has attempted to theorise how family relations have evolved hand in hand with broader social changes. In a pre-industrial setting, the conception of the family was defined based on composition and function, highlighting the definitive roles—reproductive, economic, and so forth—that each family member must enact (Murdock, 1965). However, the industrial revolution, further development of post-industrial societies, and the participation of women in the workforce have brought about considerable changes to familial arrangements.

Scholars such as Beck and Beck-Gernsheim (2002) argue that family relationships have become increasingly 'individualised'. Here, the individualisation of personal relationships refers to 'social processes of separating out, delimiting, focusing on or giving place to [the] individual, allowing some differentiation from rather than being subsumed

within social categories and collectives, and enabling room for manoeuvre rather than constraining through anchorage to traditional moorings' (Jamieson & Simpson, 2013, p. 18). A consequence of the trend of individualisation, as argued by sociologists such as Bauman (2003), Beck and Beck-Gernsheim (2002) and Giddens (1992), is the emergence of 'an ideology, philosophy or set of beliefs that celebrate or place particular significance on the individual' (Jamieson & Simpson, 2013, p. 18). From an individualisation perspective, the conception of family is no longer solely determined through its composition or definitive roles of its members but through practices (Morgan, 1996). Family members perform 'familyhood' by 'doing' family through, for example, dining together, confiding, and providing support and care for each other. More recently, with the global mobility of family members, the meaning of family is understood as a product of obligations, cultural norms, and highly mediated practices (Wilding, 2018).

In this chapter, we approach the family as 'practice based' and we build on a range of scholarly works that highlight the role of intimacy in shaping family life. Intimacy, in this context, is defined by Jamieson (2011, p. 1) as 'the quality of closeness between people and the process of building this quality [...] Closeness may also be physical, bodily intimacy, although an intimate relationship need not to be sexual and bodily and sexual contact can occur without intimacy'. Ultimately, we use the term 'familial intimacy' to refer to practices enacted to maintain a sense of closeness and familyhood between family members. Thus, non-familial forms of intimacy, such as casual sexual encounters, are beyond our remit.

The individualisation thesis has evolved in tandem with the development of post-materialism (Inglehart & Norris, 2003). For Giddens (1992), the movement of modern families away from the cornerstone of materialist, functional exchange and interdependence has given rise to what he termed the 'pure relationship', in which intimacy is no longer sustained by normative and material structures, but rather by equal, 'mutual self-disclosure

and appreciation of each other's unique qualities' (Jamieson, 1999, p. 477). Similarly, writing of the changing institution of marriage, Cherlin (2009) posits that the foundation of modern marriages has shifted from functional subsistence to companionship between intimate partners, and then to the individualised pursuit of self-growth. In late modernity, intimate (family) relationships are characterised by increasingly liquid and fragile interpersonal bonds (Bauman, 2003).

Over the past few decades, transnational cross-border mobilities have been a major feature and driver of social changes across the globe (Urry, 2007), and intimate family relationships are increasingly forged and maintained in a transnational context (Wilding, 2018). Nevertheless, existing theorisations of the transformation of familial intimacy have yet to fully engage with the rapid and ongoing development of transnationalism. In the words of Beck and Beck-Gernsheim (2014, p. 549), 'family sociology has paid little attention to globalisation and cosmopolitanisation'. Although there is now a rich and diverse body of empirical research on transnational families, there is still insufficient theoretical development in understanding the implications of transnationalisation for changing forms and nature of family relationships and practices.

Our attempt to bring together the literature on migration studies and the sociology of families responds directly to the question raised by Beck and Beck-Gernsheim (2014, p. 558): 'what happens when globalisation hits home?' The cross-fertilisation between the two bodies of literature requires us to interrogate how transnational family relationships stretching across national borders reinforce or problematise the assumptions of post-materialist families, 'individualisation', and 'pure relationships'. Specifically, we ask what role materiality plays in shaping the practice of transnational familial intimacy. We explore how, if at all, 'doing' family in a transnational context unmoors people from the familial collective and normative familial roles in leading to an 'individualisation'. We examine what equal, mutual

disclosure—the key notions underpinning Giddens' (1992) 'pure relationships'—mean for transnationally located family members. Finally, we discuss how the transnationalisation of intimacy (un)equally affects the changing ways in which people experience their family relationships.

Mobility Regimes, Infrastructures, and the Making of Transnational Intimacy

Transnational families are borne out of cross-border migration. The entanglements of changing global markets, national and entrepreneurial policies, border control, and the rapid development of transportation and communication technologies have shaped people's mobilities (Urry, 2007), helping forge new family relationships beyond the confine of nation-states (e.g. through transnational marriage) and for pre-existing family ties (e.g. between parents and children, siblings, etc.) to stretch across borders (Bryceson & Vuorela, 2002). Transnationally located family members often express intimacy via money transfers, circulation of consumer goods (Parreñas, 2005), and digital device use (Madianou & Miller, 2012). Against this backdrop, our conceptualisation of the transnationalisation of intimacy considers the role of regimes, infrastructures, and processes that produce, sustain, and sometimes hinder transnational familial arrangements. As transnational family members often 'do' intimacy at a distance, void of physical co-presence, it is also key to understand how physical distance and efforts to bridge the distance constitute a key part of their familial arrangements.

Examining transnational familial intimacy necessitates a critical engagement with the role of various systems that engender, govern, and potentially undermine practices of cross-border mobilities. It requires us to go beyond the familial institution and specific nation-states to consider the role of a broader, global system that engenders the physical mobility and separation of family members. In this case, we need to situate our discussion in the new

mobilities paradigm, highlighting how a range of mobility systems and infrastructures facilitate the stretching of relationships beyond borders (Sheller & Urry, 2006; Urry, 2007). Moreover, the paradigm also argues that interconnected and unevenly distributed mobility systems and infrastructures—transport, communication, and so forth—yield and reinforce hierarchy, division, and exclusion (Sheller & Urry, 2006; Urry, 2007). Noting how the new mobilities paradigm maps the intertwined systems across the world and their influences on the conduct of transnational family relationships, we must move away from approaching intimate familial practices from the perspective of methodological nationalism (Wimmer & Schiller, 2009), which privileges the dominant role of national and local contexts, systems, and processes in shaping personal and social experiences. Rather, we need to approach intimate family life as produced in a transnational social space (Hannam et al., 2006).

By reflecting on the material and symbolic systems that govern transnational mobilities (Sheller & Urry, 2006), we first build the conceptualisation of the transnationalisation of intimacy on 'regimes' (Glick Schiller & Salazar, 2013). Glick Schiller and Salazar (2013, p. 189) defined a 'regime' as 'the role both of individual states and of changing international regulatory and surveillance administrations that affect individual mobility'. For instance, migration policies (Glick Shiller & Salazar, 2013) and profiling technological and border systems (Shamir, 2005) may discriminate migrants based on class, age, gender, and ethnicity, resulting in containment or entrapment in particular spaces and territories (Turner, 2010). The stasis of certain family members vis-à-vis the mobility of others can then produce the transnationalisation of ties and linkages (Bryceson & Vuorela, 2002). In a sense, as noted by Shamir (2005), regimes demonstrate how globalisation consists of various systemic patterns and processes of exclusion. Therefore, examining transnational family arrangements involves and necessitates a critical engagement with a transnational mobility regime, which classifies, segregates and moors people and their family relations

through policies or regulatory processes (Turner, 2007) and profiling technologies (Shamir, 2005).

As hegemonic norms about the family permeate mobility regimes, it is crucial to note that not all forms of familial intimacy enjoy a similar level of legitimacy under the same mobility regime. For example, mobility regimes and migration policies in Europe continue to give prominence to and reinforce marriage and the nuclear family as a normative, legitimate form of family (Wray, 2016). Against this backdrop, unmarried cohabitation holds far less currency than marriage when it comes to transnational migration, as family migrants' access to temporary family visa, permanent residence, and citizenship tends to be legitimised on the ground of marriage more than unmarried cohabitation (Probert, 2012). Capitalising on the normative nuclear family model, the British migration regime, for example, insufficiently recognises intergenerational and extended family relations beyond the nuclear family (Tu, 2019). Therefore, as different mobility regimes are closely shaped by their respective cultures and family systems, members of transnational families often experience a normative disjuncture because the legitimacy of distinct dimensions of their family relations come to be challenged and re-constituted as they move across national borders.

Further advancing our understanding of the transnationalisation of intimacy requires an engagement with the infrastructural turn in migration studies (Lindquist & Xiang, 2018; Xiang & Lindquist, 2014). According to Xiang and Lindquist (2014), migrant mobilities are typically produced and undermined by an assemblage of non-human and human actors, which can be categorised into five components: the commercial (e.g. intermediary agents), the regulatory (e.g. state apparatus and procedures for documentation, licensing, and training), the technological (e.g. transport and communication), the humanitarian (e.g. non-government and overseas organisations), and the social (e.g. migrant networks). For instance, in Asian labour migration, infrastructures may refer to passports, migration documents,

brokers and agents, work permits and policies, and so forth (Lin et al., 2017). Compared with the concept of mobility regime, the infrastructural perspective covers a broader range of components (e.g. commercial institutions, network, and communication technologies) that channel transnational migration, highlighting the holistic assemblage of and interplay between different infrastructural components.

Taken together, the mobility regime and infrastructure perspectives complement each other in helping us understand how familial intimacy is produced, facilitated, conditioned, and curtailed in a transnational context, particularly in terms of people's differential access to transnational migration. While existing literature on migration infrastructure has mostly focused on labour migration, several recent studies have begun unpacking the role of various infrastructures underpinning transnational family relations (Brandhorst, 2020; Hu et al., 2020; Merla et al., 2020). Here, the focus revolves around how various and interconnected systems, such as institutional contexts (Kilkey & Merla, 2014), gender norms and expectations (Baldassar & Merla, 2014), and technological landscapes (Cabalquinto, 2018a; Baldassar & Merla, 2014; Wilding, 2006) shape transnational familial intimacy.

Take for example the well-studied case of labour migration from the Philippines. The out-migration of Filipino workers from their homeland and the production of transnational families are dependent on and shaped by mobility regimes and infrastructures. In host countries such as the United States and Saudi Arabia, the 'denationalisation policies' facilitate the recruitment, selection and employment of cheap labour, often in a gendered and classed manner, birthing the transnationalisation of family life (Parreñas, 2015). In this process, brokers, agents, training centres, employers and various border agencies coalesce to 'infrastructure' the cross-border mobility of Filipino workers (Guevarra, 2010; Rodriguez, 2010). However, through 'renationalisation of policies', labour migrants and their families are often denied access to (full) work rights, citizenship, and welfare services in their host

country (Parreñas, 2015). These conditions can place migrants in temporary or long-term separation from their family members.

Mobility regimes and infrastructures, along with their stratifying effects in the creation of transnational families, work in a broader context of global capitalism (Robinson, 2004). The political economy of transnational mobilities suggests that material and capital transactions permeate the motivation and consequence for people to 'do' transnational families. For example, Polish cleaners working in German households and Filipino nannies taking care of American babies are driven by an aspiration to achieve economic mobility through transnational migration (Beck & Beck-Gernsheim, 2014). As the migrants send remittances back home, the functional, material exchanges in these families extend across national borders. Meanwhile, a new global wave of privately sponsored international education mobility is only made possible through the sustained exchange of economic and other resources between transnationally located family members (Brooks & Waters, 2011; Ma, 2020). Here, it is important to note that global labour and education mobilities, as well as transnational familial intimacy resulting from such mobilities, are as much driven by the uneven distribution of resources across the world as by the post-colonial cultural imaginaries of the world underpinning the construction of 'desirable' destinations (Constable, 2003; Hu, 2017). Therefore, transnational family relations resulting from phenomena such as the 'global care chain' and transnational education mobility are closely embedded in the materiality and symbolic hierarchies fashioned by global capitalism.

Digitalisation and the Mediation of Transnational Intimacy

Once transnational family relationships are established through mobility regimes and infrastructures, such relationships are often sustained and mediated through digital communication technologies (Baldassar et al., 2007; Cabalquinto, 2018a; Madianou &

Miller, 2012; Mckay, 2012). Significantly, the multiple affordances of digital communication technologies and diverse modes of communicative routines mobilise the transnationalisation of familial intimacy.

Technologies shape the nature, quality and dynamics of intimacy between transnationally located family members. A key aspect of the transnationalisation of familial intimacy is the use of smartphones, social media platforms, mobile applications, and broadband infrastructures in mediating intimate family lives. Since its mass adoption, mobile phones have been considered an 'intimate object' of everyday life (Fortunati, 2002). They are used to convey intimate expressions, a unique self, and exchange personalised information (Fortunati, 2002; Lasén, 2004). In transnational families, ubiquitous digital communication technologies help to overcome the challenge of physical separation. Historically, migrants relied on letters and cassette tapes for intimate expressions (Madianou & Miller, 2011). The advent of mobile phones enabled the consumption of prepaid calling cards, serving as a social glue in maintaining a relatively costly connection (Vertovec, 2004). Subsequently, the prevalence of computers led to the utilisation of chat rooms and emailing services (Baldassar et al., 2007; Wilding, 2006). The further advancement of mobile networks, apps, and platforms not only provided migrants with new modes of transnational communication but also reduced the cost of such communication.

Transnational family life is performed, embodied, and negotiated through a plethora of rapidly evolving and ubiquitous digital communication technologies. Many studies have highlighted this by coining a range of terms, including 'long-distance intimacy' (Parreñas, 2005), 'virtual intimacy' (Wilding, 2006), and 'ambient intimacy' (Hjorth et al., 2012). Of particular relevance to the transnationalisation of intimacy, different media use, informed by a range of emotions (Boccagni & Wilding, 2015), may produce different levels of disclosure and intimate affect (Wilding, 2006). Notably, the concept 'polymedia' proposed by Madianou

and Miller (2012) proves useful in examining the intricacies of transnational family lives embedded in a web of communication technologies and affordances. Madianou and Miller (2012) have highlighted the role of personalised communication technologies in enabling both closeness and distance among transnational family members and how these outcomes for transnational linkages are situated within social and familial structures as well as domains of technological access and competencies.

More recently, several scholars have studied the enactment of transnational intimacy in a polymedia environment, uncovering the possibilities, tensions, and negotiations in digital practices for sustaining transnational intimacy. Digital media use often produces co-presence routines (Nedelcu & Wyss, 2016), contributing to producing transnational affective capital or a sense of belonging and ontological security (Leurs, 2014). More specifically, multiple mobile platforms, such as WhatsApp (O'Hara et al., 2014), Facebook (Acedera & Yeoh, 2018; Cabalquinto, 2018a; Mintarsih, 2019), and Skype (Marino, 2019), have been used to produce mundane, random, and personalised contents and maintain transnational familial intimacy (Hjorth et al., 2020).

In addition to using diverse platforms, transnational family members also develop a diverse range of personalised and carefully crafted practices to manage their emotional distance and sustain transnational familial intimacy (Alinejad, 2019; Madianou, 2019). For example, migrants select and share carefully a range of customised contents with their family members on social media to protect their autonomy and privacy while remaining connected beyond borders (Alinejad, 2019, 2021). Disconnective practices such as not sharing, hiding or removing information are often deployed (Alinejad, 2019; Acedera & Yeoh, 2018; Cabalquinto, 2018a; Hu et al., 2020). In some cases, despite a lack of access to modern communication technologies, refugees reproduce transnational familial intimacy via 'family imaginary' by collating photographs of dispersed family members and photoshopping and

putting them in a collage (Robertson et al., 2016). In moments of navigating physical immobility and forced family separation, smartphones function as 'pocket archives' through which migrants and refugees reconstruct transnational intimate connections via synchronous and asynchronous modes of communication (Leurs, 2017; Smets, 2019). These practices illustrate the diverse ways in which transnational familial intimacy is produced and negotiated in a networked environment.

To understand the implications of digitalisation for transnational familial intimacy, it is therefore important to pay attention to the types of communicating via a range of digital devices and online platforms (Alinejad, 2019, 2021; Madianou, 2019). Specifically, we need to ask whether people have access to communicative technologies, to what technologies they have access, what the nature of the access is, and the contexts in which connections are established, sustained and negotiated. Certainly, technological apparatuses can mediate, enhance or undermine intimate experiences and sociality (Paasonen, 2017). However, differential technological accesses and competencies are crucial to generating distinct intimate expressions and affective experiences (Alinejad, 2019; Madianou, 2019). Cross-border intimate communication is not only moulded by the mobility, networked connectivity, and ubiquity of digital technologies; it is also influenced by gender and locality (Hjorth, 2011, 2015), familial duties and obligations, and individual capacities (Baldassar et al., 2007). As Elliott and Urry (2010, p. 101) argued, digital communication technologies are constitutive of 'mobile intimacy', which 'involves routine, ongoing, mundane and continual communicational orderings of relationships and family'.

Structural Inequalities, Digital Ruptures, and Interrupted Transnational Intimacy
While thus far we have discussed how mobility regimes, infrastructures, and particularly communication technologies have enabled people to develop and maintain transnational

family relationships, it is equally important to examine how they can constrain and disrupt transnational familial intimacy. As discussed earlier, mobility regimes and infrastructures structure the mobilities and settlement of migrants in their country of destination. Migration legislation and policies on citizenship and social welfare tend to treat migrants as productive subjects and limit their access to essential family rights (Brandhorst, 2020; Merla et al., 2020). For instance, migrants often have limited rights to reunite with their family members in the host countries, and their rights to form a family through pathways such as unmarried cohabitation, marriage, and adoption are closely scrutinised and censored by their host countries (Hu, 2016; Papademetriou & Sumption, 2011). Migration policies may also limit the temporary visit or settlement of migrants' left-behind family members (Baldassar et al., 2007; Brandhorst, 2020). While restrictive migration regimes often produce lengthy or even permanent family separation, many transnational family members are found to reclaim family life through sending remittances and care packages to fulfil essential family functions and alleviate the emotional burden of family separation (Parreñas, 2005, 2015).

The reliance on communication technologies to sustain transnational familial intimacy can also be challenging and frustrating. First, due to the uneven financial status of family members (Baldassar, 2008; Madianou & Miller, 2012; Parreñas, 2005), the circulation of remittances and care through mobile device use can place extra financial pressure and demands on migrants. Recent studies have shown how transnational communication can be exploited by left-behind family members to ask for money and extra gifts from their migrant family members (Cabalquinto, 2020; McKay, 2007; Singh et al., 2012). Secondly, asymmetrical technological landscapes between the home and host countries can produce differential communicative capacities. For example, for some migrants, stable internet access may be limited in their areas of origin (Cabalquinto, 2018b; Madianou & Miller, 2012; Parreñas, 2005; Wilding, 2006). Some left-behind family members may not have access to

broadband-equipped digital devices and online platforms (Brandhorst, 2017; Madianou & Miller, 2012). Moreover, a lack of technological competency in using mobile devices and online platforms can considerably constrain one's communicative capacities (Baldassar, 2008; Cabalquinto, 2018b; Madianou & Miller, 2012). Notably, according to the International Telecommunication Union (2019), 3.6 billion people remain offline worldwide, and a majority of them are found in low- and middle-income countries and regions. Yet, resource scarcity and deprivation are likely reasons for people to out-migrate from these countries and regions, thus birthing transnational family relations. As a result, migrants from low- and middle-income countries and their family members staying in the country of origin are particularly likely to experience interrupted familial intimacy.

Even when people have access to up-to-date communication technologies, such technologies have a fixated set of parameters. Certainly, digital media use allows dispersed family members to convene, exchange information, and generate a sense of intimacy. However, smartphone or social media use does not constitute a qualitatively equivalent alternative for in-person contact (Hu & Qian, 2021; Madianou & Miller, 2012). Several studies have shown how transnational family members longed for physical expressions of intimacy (Cabalquinto, 2018a; Madianou, 2012; Madianou & Miller, 2012), and such longing is particularly prominent on a much larger scale during the COVID-19 pandemic in the context of lockdowns and border closure (Nehring & Hu, 2021). Crises such as illness and death in transnational families are particularly telling of the limitations of communication technologies (Baldassar et al., 2007). Therefore, digital devices and platforms are often referred to as 'sunny day technologies' (Wilding, 2006). Despite technological advancements, it is still necessary for individuals to travel in order to maintain close family bonds and experience familial intimacy that is bound with socially, culturally, and symbolically significant places and events (Urry, 2002).

While communication technologies and digital platforms often operate on a transnational scale, they are also interpenetrated by state regulations and censorship. For example, the state censorship of mainstream platforms such as Google, Facebook, Twitter, and WhatsApp in mainland China (King et al., 2014) means that Chinese migrants enjoy a limited repertoire of technological affordances to communicate with their families. Amid the US-Sino trade war, attempts made by the Trump administration to ban TikTok and WeChat in the United States (Paul, 2020) suggest that the mediation of transnational intimacy between family members is susceptible to not only national policies but also international relations between nation-states.

Although digital technologies facilitate the maintenance of a sense of familyhood, such digitally mediated familial intimacy can also reinforce stringent familial norms and gendered expectations despite physical separation (Cabalquinto, 2018b; Hu, 2016; Madianou & Miller, 2012; Parreñas, 2015). For instance, digital connectivity has created distinct 'transnational mothering' and 'transnational fathering' practices (Parreñas, 2001, 2008). Here, communicative practices are typically influenced by an individual's conformity to gendered familial expectations (Madianou, 2012; Parreñas, 2015). In some cases, overseas migrants conform to familial expectations by acting the role of a filial family member—one who is readily available, supportive, and self-sacrificing for the family's needs (Cabalquinto, 2018b).

Digitally mediated transnational familial intimacy can be charged with communicative tensions. For example, overseas mothers may feel ambivalent about their ability to provide care and financial support from afar because their left-behind children do not completely understand their physical absence and virtual presence (Madianou, 2012). Moreover, ambivalent experiences can also be compounded when uneven technological access and literacies impede the ability of overseas migrants and their left-behind family

members in meeting familial duties, such as managing tasks via constant communication (Cabalquinto, 2018b). Nevertheless, these outcomes reflect digital connection as both a blessing and a burden in sustaining transnational family ties (Horst, 2006, 2013). By closely examining the ruptures in digital media use, we can unpack how inequalities exist in the transnationalisation of familial intimacy (Goggin & Hjorth, 2009). Indeed, structural and technological forces, at the same time, facilitate, destabilise and disrupt the performance and experience of transnational familial intimacy.

The Transnationalisation of Intimacy: A Mosaic of Continuity and Change

As family relationships increasingly stretch across national borders and become heavily structured by mobility regimes and infrastructures as well as mediated by digital technologies, it is crucial to consider how the transnationalisation of intimacy has reconfigured the familial institution. Early sociologists suggested that traditional family relations were predicated on the materialist foundation of resource exchange and functional interdependence (Murdock, 1965), but the foundation has since been eroded by processes such as societal modernisation and the gender revolution (Cherlin, 2009; Giddens, 1992). However, the question remains as to how, if at all, the transnationalisation of familial intimacy has changed family forms, norms, and practices.

Extensive research has shown that migrant mobilities, which are responsible for creating transnational families, are partly driven by motivations for material gains for the family (Parrenas, 2001b & 2005; Urry, 2007; Wilding, 2018). For example, it is not uncommon that labour or marriage migration is directly driven by people's aspirations to economic and symbolic mobility on a global stage (Constable, 2003; Xiang & Lindquist, 2014). Transnational family relations are often maintained by the exchange of gifts and remittances between family members (Hondagneu-Sotelo & Avila, 1997; Wilding, 2018).

Although the transnationalisation of familial intimacy has substantially changed the temporal and spatial modalities of practices enacted by family members to maintain a sense of closeness and familyhood (Beck & Beck-Gernsheim, 2014), it does not seem to have substantially altered the material exchange and functional interdependence between family members (Bryceson, 2020). As we have shown, materiality also permeates the infrastructuring process responsible for forging transnational familial intimacy (Lin et al., 2017; Lindquist & Xiang, 2018) and for sustaining the mediated means through which family relationships are maintained (Cabalquinto, 2018b; Madianou & Miller, 2012).

The highly gendered pattern of the transnational division of reproductive labour means that the gendered division of domestic and care labour persists to a large extent in transnational families. In the 'global care chain', for example, the international division of productive and reproductive labour serves to reinforce the (gendered) division of labour between family members, thus reinforcing their interdependence (Parreñas, 2015). The difficulty of providing in-person care and parenting from afar means migrants may be free from the vicissitudes of familial responsibilities such as in-person housework and physical care provision (Bryceson, 2020). But this does not mean that migrants are free from care responsibilities altogether. As Parreñas (2005, 2015) has shown, what migrant mothers miss out on the provision of physical care is often compensated by their performance of mediated forms of care, such as supervising their children's schoolwork and providing emotional support online. In his study, Kyle (2000) finds that Ecuadorian male migrants in New York and Europe deliberately restrict the information they share about their migrant lives with their left-behind wives and families as a strategy of gender control to maintain their sense of masculinity. It is clear from extensive research that the transnationalisation of familial intimacy has not substantially altered gender norms and relations in the familial institution (Lim, 2014; Parreñas, 2015).

Nevertheless, there is also some evidence that transnational migration provides a creative solution for people to lift anchor from familial norms imposed at their places of origin (Sassen, 2003). In his research on Chinese-Western intermarriage, Hu (2016) finds that transnational migration enabled some professional Chinese women to evade social pressure imposed by the stigma of 'leftover women', which vilifies their socioeconomic achievements and singlehood. In this case, transnational migration provides the women with a viable way to individualise their choice of whether and when to marry. While forced hypogamy—highly educated professional women being normatively compelled to marry a man of a lower educational and socioeconomic status as a way of maintaining male domination in the family—is not uncommon in patriarchal societies such as China and India (Hu & Qian, 2019; Lin et al., 2020), transnational migration has certainly created a pathway for some people to individualise their spouse selection and marital strategy.

Going beyond a heteronormative framing of family and intimacy, recent research has focused on lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer (LGBTQ) transnational families. For example, scholars have examined Russian queer diasporas in London and Berlin, showing that in countries where non-heterosexual relationships are criminalised or marginalised, transnational migration helps LGBTQ individuals to evade hegemonic heteronormativity and potential persecution (Mole, 2018; Mole et al., 2014). An emerging body of research on LGBTQ families has shed new light on the families' use of transnational surrogacy as a non-traditional pathway of reproduction and family formation, with particular attention to its ethical and inequality implications (Brainer et al., 2020). Despite a growing body of research on gender in transnational families, sexuality has yet to receive due scholarly attention. As a result, important questions such as how LGBTQ people negotiate sexuality, heteronormativity, and family roles and norms in a transnational context remain unanswered, which should be an important direction for future research.

The transnationalisation of familial intimacy, particularly via the intensified use of digital media, also engenders asymmetries between one's display of familial intimacy online and practice of intimacy offline. The mediated means of maintaining transnational family relations foreground the performative quality of intimacy (Cabalquinto, 2018a, 2018b). As members of transnational families communicate their respective lives across distances by sharing information in a family WhatsApp chat group, on Facebook, and via Skype, the representation of their intimate family lives is often self-censored and thus partial (Alinejad, 2019; Cabalquinto, 2018a; Madianou, 2019). In this sense, mediated communication between family members enables strategic and selective, rather than equal and full disclosure between family members as predicted by Giddens (1992). Furthermore, the asymmetries in access to communication technologies and differential digital literacy between family members also mean equal disclosure is practically difficult (Madianou & Miller, 2012), if not impossible, even if people had a desire to achieve full mutual disclosure.

In the context of communicative asymmetries, studies found that the mediation of transnational familial intimacy often centres on the re-animation and reliving of imagined family rituals, which in turn serves to reify rather than challenge traditional family norms (Cabalquinto, 2018b; Hu, 2016). In their recent study on how Chinese international students in the United Kingdom and their parents in China communicate online during the COVID-19 pandemic, Hu, Xu and Tu (2020) show that in order to maintain a sense of normalcy, the students and parents are found to strategically express and suppress information and emotions to strike a delicate balance between appearing concerned, calm, and authentic in 'doing' transnational family relationships. Indeed, the performance of normative families and normalcy in a transnational context often involves intense emotional mobilisation (Quah, 2018; Vermot, 2015). Therefore, it is pivotal for scholars to account for the emotional contour of the transnationalisation of intimacy.

In sum, the transnationalisation of familial intimacy is characterised by a mosaic pattern of family change and continuity. It has brought about considerable changes to *how* people practise family relationships, but in many ways, it has not changed the (gendered) norms and materialistic functions underpinning the familial institution. As we have shown, this mosaic pattern of family change in a transnational context features prominently a divergence between intimacy-in-practice in terms of substantially reconfigured ways of 'doing' family relations and intimacy-in-ideation in terms of largely fixated family norms people conjure up and (re)live to maintain a sense of 'familyhood'. Moreover, insofar as transnational family members selectively represent their lives online to reproduce their (imagined) family lives attached to their places of origin while pursuing individualised life biographies offline, the process of transnationalisation is also likely to create internally paradoxical intimate subjects under the condition of mosaic transnational family change.

Conclusion

This chapter contributes to the reconceptualisation of the conduct of family relationships and intimacy in a global and digital era. Over the past few decades, eminent social theorists such as Giddens (1992), Bauman (2003), Cherlin (2009), and Beck and Beck-Gernsheim (2002, 2014) have predicted that in late modernity, intimate family relations would become more fluid, individualised, tumultuous, and post-materialist. Although the rise of global mobilities and transnationalism has been a characterising feature of 'late modernity' (Urry, 2007), theorisations of the transformation of familial intimacy have not typically engaged with processes of transnationalisation. Arguably, the present-day state of intimacy between family members cannot be understood without probing its transnational and mediated dimensions. Filling this pertinent gap, we have developed the 'transnationalisation of intimacy' as a

conceptual lens to understand the conditions, embodiment, practice, and social consequences of transnational family relations.

The transnationalisation of intimacy encourages us to consider the role played by mobility regimes, infrastructures, and digital environments in shaping transnational and intimate family relationships. A complex set of political, legal, policy, social, cultural, and economic forces coalesce to produce transnational mobilities that are responsible for creating transnational families (cf. Lin et al., 2017; Lindquist & Xiang, 2018). Furthermore, the interpenetration of mobility regimes and infrastructures into the birthing and doing of transnational family relations suggests that materiality plays a central role in the transnationalisation of familial intimacy. In other words, transnational mobilities are often motivated by (anticipated) economic and symbolic mobility, and intimate familial bonds spanning across borders often sustain the transfer and conversion of economic and other forms of resources.

In situating the enactment of transnational intimacy in a networked environment, we have shown how the rapid development of communication technologies brings about communicative benefits, challenges, and negotiations for dispersed family members. Certainly, digital connectivity has helped family members to maintain a sense of intimacy across borders. However, uneven social and technological structures can often produce tensions in transnational family lives. In order to manage and nurture family relations, disrupted transnational familial intimacies are often repaired through diverse personalised communicative tactics of boundary making.

We have also highlighted that as family members' capacity to forge and maintain a sense of intimacy relies on very material and not so mobile facilities and infrastructures (Beck & Beck-Gernsheim, 2014), the transnationalisation of intimacy is close embedded in an unequal terrain of globalisation. Thus, while scholars such as Gidden (1991) and Bauman

(2003) argued that the transformation of intimacy is borne out of post-materialist conditions in late modernity, we have illustrated the selective nature of and inequalities inherent in such transformations. It is likely that mobility regimes and infrastructures will continue to evolve to accommodate and favour the needs, desires, and aspirations of certain privileged bodies, groups, and institutions (Glick Schiller & Salazar, 2013). Notably, as we enter an era of 'big data', the intertwining of intimate familial practices and digital technologies has fuelled new forms of commercialisation and a rapid development of platform capitalism on a global scale (Srnicek, 2017). Technology companies and social media platforms are seen to accrue an increasing amount of data on people's intimate lives (van Dijck, 2013). In so doing, they not only benefit from the operations of the migration industry for connective services for remittances, sending care packages, and philanthropy (Cabalquinto & Wood-Bradley, 2020; Peile, 2014), but also profit from colonising the intimate domain of people's lives. In this new form of digital colonisation, migrants, along with their families and networks, are subject to new forms of control and exploitation (Peile, 2014).

In conclusion, we have demonstrated the value of the cross-fertilisation between the literature on the sociology of families and that on transnational mobilities and communication. The transnationalisation of intimacy lays bare the intimate fabrics of transnationalism and underlines the importance of understanding globalisation not only as a grand scheme of social change but also as changes taking place through the nuanced vicissitudes of everyday intimate lives. The transnationalisation of intimacy also reflects critically on methodological nationalism, in both explicit and implicit forms, in the theorisation of global family change. It is clear from this chapter that the transformation of familial intimacy cannot possibly be understood without references to incessant mobilities and interconnections across nation-state borders. In a globalising world, people's intimate family lives are interpenetrated by transnationalism no matter they are on the move or remain

immobile, as the transnationalisation of intimacy takes place here, there, in-between, and everywhere.

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