**Mirca Madianou, Daniel Miller: Migration and New Media.**
Transnational Families and Polymedia, Routledge, London, 2012, 175 pp.

Mirca Madianou and Daniel Miller's book *Migration and New Media. Transnational Families and Polymedia* is based on a long-term study conducted among Filipino mothers living in the UK and their left-behind children in the Philippines. Madianou and Miller explore how the mother-child relationship has changed with, and gets shaped by, new digital media such as cell phones, instant messaging, social network sites, blogging and webcams. The authors argue that media and relationships are mutually formed. Based on the evidence of their research with Filipinos, the authors develop the theoretical concept of 'polymedia', which has wider applicability

About 10 to 15 percent of the Philippines' population is working abroad, the majority being female. Most of the emigrant women take jobs as domestic helpers or nurses and leave their children behind in the Philippines. Currently around 12 million Filipino children's mothers are working abroad. The emigration of women is, on the one hand, often connected with downward social mobility, what Perreñas calls 'contradictory class mobility' (Madianou & Miller 2012: 25).[1] On the other hand, they are usually paid a significantly higher salary. According to Madianou and Miller, economic reasons are of major importance for most Filipinos, but by no means the only factors having an impact on their decision to emigrate and settle abroad. Other 'more hidden' factors revealed by the authors are, for example, abuse and humiliation, the ban on divorce, the breakup of a relationship, and also reasons like the wish to explore a new country and to gain independence. Furthermore, Madianou and Miller claim new media to be an additional factor determining migration patterns. According to the authors, the possibility to communicate on a daily basis with geographically distant persons has an impact not only on the decision to leave or to stay abroad, but also on the way these long-distance relations develop. "One of the book's arguments is that although information and communication technologies […] do not solve the problems of separation within families, they do contribute to the transformation of the whole experience of migration and parenting" (Madianou & Miller 2012: 2).

Vertovec called cheap international phone cards 'the social glue of transnationalism' (Madianou & Miller 2012: 7). This is also true for other 'cheap' media. However, in addition to successful stories of mother-child relationships stretched over continents, *Migration and New Media* also presents cases where digital media did not prevent but actually created new conflicts, for example by reminding the children over and over again of the fact that their mother was absent. Most of the mothers welcomed the new technologies, which enabled them to feel and act like 'complete' mothers again. They felt that new media gave them a chance to maintain their independence without having to renounce their role as mothers. Half of the interviewed children, in contrast, saw new media as having no or a negative impact on their mother-child relationship. Interestingly, something similar to a friendship emerged between some of the interviewed mothers and their children. According to the authors this 'western ideal' does not correspond to the traditional Filipino role model.

*Migration and New Media* is "based on a long-term (2007–2010) ethnography with Filipino transnational families in the UK and the Philippines" (Madianou & Miller 2012: 153). The study is comparative on three different levels: first, the perspectives of mothers in the UK and the ones of children in the Philippines are compared. All in all, Madianou and Miller conducted 106 in-depth interviews. In twenty cases they were able to pair mothers with their children. Second, one level of comparison is dedicated to contrasting early migration experiences without digital media with more recent experiences. Third, the possibilities and limitations – as perceived by the interviewees – of the various media are compared.

Based on their evidence, Madianou and Miller felt the need to introduce a new concept. The term polymedia is taken from the Greek word 'polus', meaning several or many. The authors state that "most people use a constellation of different media as an integrated environment in which each medium

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1    All quotes in the text are taken from the reviewed book.

finds its niche in relation to the others" (Madianou & Miller 2012: 3). Polymedia thus describes a media environment and the users of those media. Madianou and Miller define three criteria for polymedia: first, the user must have the possibility to choose between at least half a dozen media. Second, the user must be digitally literate and be able to use all the media. Third, which media are chosen for communicating is not a question of money. This means that "the responsibility for which medium is used is increasingly seen to depend on social and moral questions rather than technical or economic parameters" (Madianou & Miller 2012: 3).

As the title promises, *Migration and New Media* focuses on the academic fields of migration and media. Furthermore, the book is driven by the aim "to develop a theoretical understanding of digital media, distant love and the nature of mediated relationships" (Madianou & Miller 2012: 2).

Madianou and Miller are not the first ones to observe the morality of media use. The data in *Migration and New Media* shows a lot of similarities to the classical sociological study conducted by Thomas and Znaniecki, "who observed the formulaic nature of letters as manifestations of social obligations and solidarity among Polish family members who were separated because of work" (Madianou & Miller 2012: 56). Many of the left-behind children in the Philippines said that writing letters to their mothers was often a 'forced' act, which had to follow the 'etiquette of letter writing'. For the mothers, however, conventional phrases like 'I love you' might have been very meaningful. Before the arrival of digital media and the lowering of the cost of international calls, separated mothers and children could only choose between letters and cassettes. These text- and voice-based media were perceived as having very different emotional effects, some preferring one, and some preferring the other. Madianou and Miller state that "at this historical stage media do not merely carry or convey content, but their nature and materiality profoundly mediates the relationships themselves" (Madianou & Miller 2012: 67). For this past time period the authors argue on the same lines as McLuhan – one of the most prominent media theorists – with his famous claim that 'the medium is the message'. He meant that it is not the content but the medium itself which determines the communication and its effects. In the time of polymedia, however, the authors argue that the approach of technological determinism is not appropriate. Here Madianou and Miller use the concept of 'affordance' developed by Hutchby, who "sees technologies neither in terms of their users' interpretation, nor their essential technical properties, but in terms of the possibilities that they offer for action [...]" (Madianou & Miller 2012: 105). The main emphasis of *Migration and New Media* is thus not on how new media and social life determine each other, but how new media are 'domesticated'.

As mentioned above, Madianou and Miller acknowledge the importance of economic and political considerations when it comes to the decision whether to migrate or not. Nevertheless, the authors distance themselves explicitly from neoclassical as well as from world system theory because their "data suggest [as discussed above] that the decision to migrate usually involves a combination of reasons and almost never simply a single motivation" (Madianou & Miller 2012: 32). Some mothers mentioned that almost all their friends had migrated at about the same time, a fact which bolstered their own decision to leave. This data supports Massey's 'cumulative causation approach', which basically says that more migration produces more migration (Madianou & Miller 2012: 32).

According to Madianou and Miller, one of the contributions they can provide to the literature on migration – in addition to polymedia and the importance of new media in migration patterns – is the "comparatively neglected motivation for emigration, which is the desire for personal development and self-improvement" (Madianou & Miller 2012: 32).

In addition to the significant facts that make *Migration and New Media* a more than worthwhile book to read, it is written in a clear and pleasant style. Readers are guided smoothly through the content, knowing at every point where they have been and where they are going. The research data is well connected to theoretical concepts. Thanks to their language, the clear structure and the numerous connections between topics, Madianou and Miller manage to present complex concepts in a comprehensible manner. Although the book clearly addresses an academic readership, it might also be appealing to lay people. The book's bibliography is long, covering a wide range of authors and academic

fields. The clear reference system allows the reader to find additional literature on topics of interest without major effort.

*Migration and New Media* is a valuable contribution to media and migration studies, showing that one perspective cannot be enough when trying to capture a phenomenon in all its complexity. Madianou and Miller challenge many common sense ideas. For example: "Transnational motherhood […] has largely been seen as one of the hidden injuries of globalisation: the high social cost the developing world must pay for the increased income through remittances which keep the economies of the global south afloat" (Madianou & Miller 2012: 3). The authors do not neglect the fact that for many Filipino mothers and their left-behind children the separation causes a great deal of harm. But they also tell success stories, about mothers who felt worshiped for the first time when they went abroad and about mother-child relationships that improved for both parties when a geographic separation was established.

One remarkable strength of Madianou and Miller's work is the fact that the authors remain critical to the end towards their own data. As most of the interviewed children were teenagers at the time the new media became widespread, the authors take into consideration the idea that the negatively perceived impact of new media on their relationships with their physically absent mothers could be more related to them being teenagers than to the new media.

*Migration and New Media* offers deep insights into the lives of different people, Filipino culture and their understanding of family and kinship. Due to the judicious selection of quotes from the interviews, the book never becomes a boring read. Based on their evidence, Madianou and Miller disclose tendencies while always reminding the reader that no two cases are alike. By giving the diverse personal stories so much weight, the Filipinos do not get objectified, but are treated as individuals.

Despite the fact that the media environment is permanently changing, the concept of polymedia does not have an expiration date in the near future. Madianou and Miller are not running behind the development of new media, but are actually ahead of their time. At present not many people are living in polymedia (for the criteria, see above), but the global trend is moving towards it. In addition to its durability, the concept of polymedia is not restricted to the Filipino case, but has a broad applicability.

Two minor criticisms:

First, as mothers and their own children were interviewed, it was sometimes possible to obtain two perspectives on the same incident. The two views often showed interesting discrepancies and were very enriching for the project as a whole. Sometimes, however, the 'double perspective' created an ethical problem, i.e. when a mother or child revealed information about the other, information that the other obviously did not want to share with the researcher. For example, one mother stayed in a hotel for part of her holiday back in the Philippines because it was quieter than at 'home'. Madianou and Miller got this information from the child and stated that this was not mentioned by the mother. Even though Madianou and Miller's research is based on very personal information, they do not reflect on these ethical concerns that might emerge when interviewing two related persons. Second, Madianou and Miller do not include network theory in their work. This is slightly irritating, as *Migration and New Media* is clearly closely linked to this approach.

Well-written and revealing, *Migration and New Media* can be enthusiastically recommended to all people interested in the academic fields of migration and media. The book shows that new media have an impact on long-distance relationships between mothers and children, but that this impact is often perceived and evaluated differently by the two groups. Madianou and Miller connect their research to many theories in different disciplines and offer deep insights into the very personal stories of Filipino mothers living abroad and their left-behind children. Their interesting approach is rewarded with fascinating results. *Migration and New Media* is an extraordinary, multi-faceted and multi-sited contribution to media and migration studies and is furthermore one of the few academic books that makes one smile once in a while.

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