Excursions

Volume 10, Issue 2 (2020) | Reflections

Reflecting About Networks

www.excursions-journal.org.uk

Reflecting About "Logged On: Transnational Families and Communication Technology", by Lisa Rodan
(Issue 8.1, Networks, 2018)

Heather McKnight

Chief Editor – 8.1 Networks

We approached the 2018 edition of Excursions using the theme of *Networks*. The aim was to try to explore society as one that was not just falling apart in an era of post-truth politics, widespread exploitation and war; but one that was also coming together through finding new ways of being, resisting and communicating (Bajwa and McKnight, 2018). We aimed to find papers that would challenge traditional hierarchical constructs and offer up disruptive and thought-provoking understandings of connectivity. Lisa Rodan's paper spoke to our theme by considering how different generations of Portuguese migrants use technology to maintain their household transnationally. The article is grounded in an in-depth ethnographic study which examines trends of university-educated Portuguese migrants in London. Using a family case study, she addresses how emerging forms of digital communication are intertwined with, but also challenge, the everyday socialities of long-established kinship networks.

When selecting Rodan's article for inclusion in this edition, it was impossible to know how much the world would change in the coming months. Her examination of digital communication has taken on additional significance in the wake of the coronavirus pandemic and resulting self-

isolation and social distancing measures imposed. Early research emerging on technology and the coronavirus isolation measures have already suggested that "virtual technologies of care are supplanting tactile expressions of care between teachers and students, among family members, and across neighbourhoods" (Song and Walline, 2020). Social distancing has meant families living locally as well as transnationally have found themselves dependant on technology to maintain their kinship structures. The study by Rodan contributes to an increasingly important understanding of how familial relationships are negotiated using the modes of immediate, visual communication of today's technology.

The 2020 global pandemic has foregrounded the importance of digital modes of communication. Rodan notes how digital communications interrupt and construct the spatiotemporally of the family, how "time and space themselves are fragmented and reconfigured into 'micro' and 'meta' moments of relational experience between kin, as well as challenging individual understandings of personhood" (Rodan, 2018). She explains how spatial reconfigurations, such as long-distance video calls, create compressed "meta-moments" out of thousands of "micro-moments" that would constitute everyday family life. This process ensures there is sufficient communication to maintain kinship structure and household relations on a transnational basis.

Now more than ever, digital communication technologies are something that we have become more dependant on, more than we would have thought possible. With social distancing in place it is difficult to withdraw from these technologies without it threatening our livelihood, health or relationships. Even when things return to "normal", it is unlikely that this process will roll back entirely, no doubt leaving a significant impact on our interactive subjectivities. Digital communication has become a means of survival and a mode of comfort to replace the threat of physical

disconnectivity, there may be fears that such dependency places unprecedented power in the hands of those who control said technologies.

Rodan is particularly mindful of the complexities of technological interaction and personhood. She grounds this in Ingold's (2011) idea of "the 'meshwork' of things and their relations caught up within the flows of the world and of life" (Rodan, 2018). These meshworks are knotted and complex, a series of interdependencies which tug upon each other constructing both selves and organisational structures, the "interactive construction of worlds arising from relationships with others and the environment" (Rodan, 2018). Her use of the meshwork allows Rodan to avoid a technological determinist view, instead offering a more nuanced perspective. While recognising the power that global corporations have over social media platforms, and the lives of those that use them, she also views these as "an interconnected flow going backwards and forwards between individuals and global entities" (Rodan, 2018). Rather than the technology purely structuring the interactions, these relations structure the use of the technology to maintain familiar familial structures. Thus Rodan recognises and acknowledges the agency of all parties, and refuses to oversimply into a reductive paradigm where participants have no agency.

Rodan makes these meshworks visible to the reader through observations of familial interactions. Her exploration takes us into the lived experiences of the family she examines, and the all-pervasive nature of the technologies used. She details how family dynamics, the good and the bad, intimacy, support networks, the expectancy and the invasions of time and privacy are all replicated in the online domain. We are taken into the daily embeddedness of the technological communicative play, amongst the ever-changing elements in the ongoing processes of constructing and reconstructing personhood. We see how the meshwork of relationality allows things to be unsaid or unexpressed without dissolving of the family units' mutual understandings of each other. She examines linking of family

members not just with each other, but with their surroundings in new ways. They are continually augmenting their realities from an occasionally paradoxical perspective, sometimes resisting the communication, overwhelmed but yet still upgrading software and hardware, seeking connection in ever greater volume. While the momentary interactions can be welcome, the meshwork trappings of the technology are always there, even when they wish for time and space of their own.

This article is a fascinating insight into a much larger project, of her ethnographic study of university-educated Portuguese migrants in London, and several concepts emerge what Ingold may refer to as "loose ends" of the meshwork (Ingold, 2012). Viewing Rodan's work through this frame, I would like to tug at these "loose ends" viewing them as a process of opening up, a necessary and exciting part of the meshwork itself. Rodan's work reaches towards multiple future potentials, of new weavings and knotting of such research into other exciting directions. It will be interesting to see the future work and observations from this project.

The loose ends that are tugging and tangling into future thoughts from this work include a feminist angle that simmers under the surface. It demands a second look, particularly in the examination of the "mother-hen" and associated expectations and performativity involved, the absence of the husband from such situations, whether this is commonplace or case study specific (Rodan, 2018). Also, the interrogation of the emoji. Recent research has identified increased cross-cultural communication clarity where "emojis are devices for demonstrating tone, intent and feelings that would normally be conveyed by non-verbal cues in personal communications but which cannot be achieved in digital messages" (Alshenqeeti, 2016). While this may be true in some cases, what Rodan hints at through her observations is the idea that these symbols can enhance it or impede it. Particularly when it comes to the maintenance of casual interactions and conveying emotions,

the fear of falsity and the irreverence that may undermine or confuse genuine emotion (Rodan, 2018).

Most glaringly, though, is the potential for this article to help us to understand how we can maintain intimacy, authenticity and agency in this meshwork of familial technological communications. While this applies at present during the coronavirus pandemic, it will likely also do in our future, through restrictions we will face as a result of the climate crisis. Looking for the cracks of light in the darkness of the now, we are trying to search for possibilities that help us critique and move beyond the darkness and alienation of the present (Bloch, 1995). In offering a grounded approach to technological use for familial bonding, Lisa Rodan counters some of the dystopian critiques of the estranging nature of online platforms, while still noting the sense of unreality and disconnection that they can sometimes produce. Rodan's article offers a picture of how distance need not mean estrangement, how technology reconfigures the spaces and temporality of familial interactions at a distance. We are presented with a vision of how digital communication can become a household strategy, continuing engagement in real-time where "it mitigates the distance of physical worlds in favour of temporally and spatially mediated memory, hope and relationality" (Rodan, 2018).

By offering a concrete relatable example of connectedness, rather than an abstracted academic narrative of technological disparity, this article reminds us of the warmth and messiness of human communications. We can view emerging communicative technologies as a way of extending and maintaining the family, albeit with its intricacies and troubles and despite distance, generational and cultural differences. At a time where a pandemic is driving not just family relations but work and social relations increasingly into the online realm, such analysis gives hope to how we can adapt, maintain and understand our connectivity. Perhaps, social-distancing can

become more of a socio-digital reconfiguring where we can experience new forms of connected moments of kinship.

Heather McKnight is a Doctoral Researcher at the University of Sussex, United Kingdom.

References

Alshenqeeti, H. (2016) 'Are emojis creating a new or old visual language for new generations? A socio-semiotic study', *Advances in Language and Literary Studies*, 7(6), pp. 56-69.

Bajwa, N.F.H. and McKnight, H. (2018) 'Preface', *Excursions*, 8(1), pp. 1-8.

Bloch, E. (1995) *The principle of hope*. Cambridge: The MIT Press.

Ingold, T. (2012) 'Looking for lines in nature', *Earthlines*, 3, pp. 48-51.

Rodan, L. (2018) 'Logged in: Portuguese transnational families and communication technology', *Excursions Journal*, 8(1), pp. 1-21.

Song, P. and Walline, J. (2020) 'Virtual technologies of care in a time of viral crisis: an ethnographic view from Hong Kong', *Somatosphere*. Available at: http://somatosphere.net/forumpost/virtual-technologies-of-care/ (Accessed: 9 April 2020).

Logged On: Transnational Families and Communication Technology
As published in Issue 8.1, Networks, 2018

Lisa Rodan

Austerity measures introduced in 2011 in Portugal and around Southern Europe were soon followed by the collapse of local labour markets (Knight and Stewart, 2016). At the height of the Portuguese unemployment crisis in 2013 up to 120,000 Portuguese nationals were leaving their homeland every year to look for work overseas (Pires, et al., 2014). For the first time in Portugal's long history as a country of mass migration there was a significant graduate contingent amongst the migratory masses, double what it had been 10 years earlier, and the UK was their preferred destination (Pires, et al., 2014). Those who graduated from Portuguese universities after 2011 were born in the 1980s and came of age at a time of social and technological change unimaginable to previous generations (Correia and Martins 2006, Da Silva et al 2017). Portugal joined the EU in 1986 after 40 years of dictatorship and isolation from the outside world; the ensuing huge infrastructure and education investment in the country brought with it a general feeling of prosperity and belonging to the wider world (Da Silva, et al., 2017; Pina Cabral, 2017). The generation who grew up in this environment now shared a similar outlook and aspirations to contemporaries from around Europe (Pina Cabral, 2017). This outlook included a cosmopolitan view of the world which had been facilitated by a range of new institutions which encouraged travel and study abroad (Pine, 2014) and the digital technologies which

administered and enabled access to them. Thus, for the first time, there was a migrant group coming out of Portugal that was highly educated and technologically literate to a level that linked them to peers in the local labour markets of their migratory destinations. This signalled a major shift from previous Portuguese migratory trends, where the overwhelming majority of migrants were of a rural, uneducated background, and so individuals depended on kinship networks to establish themselves in their new countries.

This paper explores how contemporary emerging forms of digital communication, which are part of the technological revolution and cosmopolitan outlook of the early 21st century, are intertwined with and challenge the everyday socialities of long-established transnational kinship networks. Sociality is a term which has been widely debated in anthropology but can be loosely taken to mean the way humans subjectively engage with the physical and psychic dynamics of the world around them throughout their lives in a formative way (Long and Moore, 2012). This article interrogates how different generations use technology to maintain the household and how relationships are mediated by the modes of immediate, visual communication of today's technology. I argue that kinship and sociality are part of an intricate interweaving of both individual aspirations and experiences and wider cultural aspirations of self-actualisation (Appadurai, 2004) as well as the structural realities of a particular moment in history, i.e., the reduced opportunities available in European labour markets in the years following the 2008 financial crash. I locate the effects of such changes within a centuries-old tradition of mass migration out of Portugal, a historically peripheral country within Europe that has always had a larger population than its labour market can support. This multi-layered historical and social analysis thus examines how the increased educational attainment, urbanism and cosmopolitanism within Portugal, as well as the

changing life expectations that they bring about at both individual and family levels, exist alongside transnational digital communication.

I draw on 12 months of ethnographic qualitative fieldwork carried out with university-educated Portuguese migrants in London aged between 23 and 36 years old. This research consisted of regular meetings with individuals with whom I established contact through conversation exchange websites or through friends. Our meetings consisted of informal conversations, lunches and dinners at each other's houses, or more formal encounters structured around language lessons. Many of my informants' social and educational experiences and practices mirrored my own, thus blurring the lines between "research participant", "researcher", and "friend". As part of an anthropological discussion, these co-constructed relationships shape and focus my data. Reflexivity regarding my own role and influence in the ongoing discussions and perceptions of the space I shared with my informants provides extra contextual detail in which to ground my hermeneutic argument.

In this paper I focus on a case study of one individual I saw often in London, and her parents, who I met in London and later stayed with in Portugal. To form relevant insights into transnational digital kinship practices and their embeddedness in everyday socialities, I employ a phenomenological approach to sociality (Long and Moore, 2012). As opposed to a Durkheimian view of bounded entities controlled by "society", this approach contends that people participate in ongoing interactive construction of worlds arising from relationships with others and the environment (Pina Cabral, 2018). Our dwelling in the world and rhythms of experiences with our environment make up part of what Ingold (2011) refers to as a "meshwork" of things and their relations caught up within the flows of the world and of life.

The effectiveness of affective attachments to media environments as part of an ongoing construction of life worlds through habits and routine is

well documented across the disciplines (Tuan, 2004; Seamon, 1979; Leurs, 2015). Marks (2000) suggests that prioritisation of vision over other senses is part of a Western ocular-centrism and that senses are actually culturally embodied. Cultural memory can thus be sensually stimulated by skilful manipulation of digital mediums (Marks, 2000). Elliott and Urry (2010) refer to "affect storage and retrieval", exploring how people navigate mobile worlds, using technology to evoke memory such as through picking a song on an iPod or phoning their daughter. Within anthropology, Madianou and Miller (2012) also discuss different communication mediums, such as Skype calls and instant messengers. Exploring how these mediums frame communication, they suggest that expressing love, the propensity to misunderstandings, and the simulation of situations of co-presence at family meals are all phenomena that can be managed by their informants through choice of technology.

My analysis begins to fill a gap in the existing literature on transnational communications in the migrant context. As discussed above, the theme of affective relationalities appears in Miller and Madianou's (2012) study of Philippine migrants in the UK and their children in the Philippines. However, the swiftly changing mediascape of the last few years means that very little else has been written on the effects on kinship of the immediacy afforded by smartphone technology in the transnational context. Existing literature on communication by letters (Thomas, et al., 1996), mobile phone use (Thompson, 2009; Parreñas, 2005b; Chesley, 2005; Rakow and Navarro, 1993), phone cards (Vertovec, 2004), email (Wilding, 2006) and texting (Uy-Tioco, 2007), whilst useful in establishing ways the "social glue of transnationalism" (Vertovec, 2004) appears, are partial in their analysis of sociality and intimacy. This is due to the limits of previous communication technologies themselves in affording the immediacy and multi-sensory access between transnationally linked lives that technological developments of the last ten to fifteen years have brought about. It is

precisely these developments that signal an unparalleled shift in transnational socialities across kinship networks. Here time and space themselves are fragmented and reconfigured into "micro" and "meta" moments of relational experience between kin, as well as challenging individual understandings of personhood. The following analysis is in three parts, focusing firstly on how sociality is expanded by new technologies, then the struggle and resistance to this expansion, before finally discussing 'micro' and 'meta' moments and their temporal and spatial effects.

Sofia's new iPhone: expanding sociality

In a café on Deptford High Street, with the thrice weekly market bustling outside, Sofia told me about her new iPhone. Her brother, who was studying for a Master's degree in Barcelona, had ordered it for her on Spanish EBay and then taken it back to their family home in Portugal for her to pick up the next time she was there. "But now I think I have to send it back! The battery doesn't last!", and she shook it in frustration.

Tapping away at it, she explained, "I didn't have room for the Facebook Messenger app on my old one, just Facebook, but now I have Messenger… oh my god, I spend so much time on it! The bus on the way back the other night, the whole journey, I was chatting with everyone, ping ping ping, my mother was there and she just wanted to chat and I wanted to!" She laughed and shook her head. "Typical Portuguese mother hen! She needs the constant attention, she misses me. My father, he doesn't need so much contact, he is happy with face to face, but my mother, yes," she paused and wrinkled her nose, "but at the end I felt strange. It didn't feel natural".

Watching Sofia's face glow with an otherworldly light reflected from her new machine, it struck me that the device in a sense was her portal to another world. The device's enhanced memory meant she now had more apps and more connectivity. She had always texted me in the past as she couldn't afford to update her mobile data every month for WhatsApp. Now

she had found a new package, with increased data, to complement her increased storage. The pay-as-you-go mobile phone packages on offer in the UK had greatly expanded in the past year, with a lot more flexibility afforded to those unwilling or unable to commit to a two-year contract. Buying her own handset at a cut-price rate on the online black market had immediately activated a new form of relating to existing kinship networks. She teased me for being "left behind" on my older Android operating system which kept crashing and, laughing along, I mused to myself on the ever-increasing power of global corporations over intra-familial communications. Apple, the manufacturer of Sofia's iPhone, had just joined companies such as Facebook and WhatsApp in the ongoing meshwork of relatedness between Sofia and her friends and family. Maintaining the newly established frequency of contact, which had become the norm for transnational families, required not being "left behind" but ensuring access to constantly evolving technology.

Global corporations have always played some part in transnational relations, from the phone companies who provided the expensive long-distance calls of the pre-digital age to local post office networks who delivered letters and cassettes between previous generations of transnational families (Madianou and Miller, 2012; Thomas, et al., 1996). However, none of these entities had a fraction of the power and influence that today's global corporations have over national governments (Harvey, 2005). Indeed, the increasing power of global multinationals such as Apple and Facebook over Sofia's lifetime is well-established (Varoufakis, 2017). I do not subscribe here to the technological determinist view, which suggests individuals are pawns in the hands of the big companies, but propose an interconnected flow going backwards and forwards between individuals and global entities. Sofia's own reflections revealed her to be not a passive consumer but a mindful user of technology. A consciousness of the power of social media over her daily activities was clear in her constant negotiation with it as a medium to maintain her relationships, which evolve and change according to how they

are mediated. The letters and cassettes of previous generations have been replaced by smartphones and their algorithms, which allow her to relate to her family back home in new ways, as well as expanding her sensorial experience of the world within and around the phone.

A few months later I had a chance to see how digital technology functioned across generations within the same family. Ana, Sofia's mother, had invited me to stay with them in Portugal after we'd met in London. Sitting in her kitchen in Matosinhos, a suburb of Porto, she kept up a steady patter of family anecdotes and opinions on everything that was going on in the world as she flurried around. She looked just like her daughter: short wild black hair and bright black eyes with many of the same expressions and gestures. She was a physiotherapist at the local hospital but off work for the week as her department was on strike. Throughout our conversation, Ana would frequently consult the device lying on the counter. "Ah, you like francesinha [a type of sandwich]? I'll ask Zé the best place" or "I have no idea how to get into the Wifi; here, let me ask Paulo" and, in a graceful dance between the handset and the sink of potatoes she was scrubbing, she would WhatsApp one son in Belgium or the other in Spain. Seconds later, a reply would buzz with instructions for the router or a link to a restaurant. Apart from contacting her children, Ana also digitally augmented all her conversations, sometimes falling silent whilst she looked for links with which she would excitedly interrupt her husband, João, a psychiatrist at the same hospital, if he had started talking in the interim.

I recalled the often appealed-to, Portuguese "mother hen" analogy, and wondered how this fitted in with what I knew about this particular family. My time alone with Ana had shown that her digital augmentation occurred whether or not her husband was present. Was her animated hopping from question to answer via the instant gratification of her iPhone an extension of her natural energy? Ana often referred to herself as an "animated person", a description Sofia's twin brother Zé would rephrase as

"hyperactive and annoying" when he arrived the next day on a weekend home from Barcelona. Sofia, too, had referred to her mother as "constantly energetic". It seemed that being "animated" was a big part of Ana's sense of self at the level of her family. However, I began to see this energy in a different light. We went daily to buy fish, vegetables, and bread from small shop-holders in the neighbourhood, to whom she presented a stoical acceptance of her children's lives abroad. "What is there for them here?" she would say with a rueful shrug to the sympathetically nodding fish seller, "I have to let them get on with it!" Ana later told me she often lay awake worrying about her children's futures and found it hard to relax. Many months later, her daughter told me she had started seeing a psychiatrist.

The energy of her frequent references to her children and the availability of ongoing communications throughout the day could thus be as a solution-driven reaction to the alternatives of stoical acceptance of their options and choices on the one hand, and worry regarding their long-term futures on the other. In this sense, heightened communication through the day enhanced, rather than diminished, the psychic engagement and ongoing relationality with her children that the physical separation may otherwise have threatened to rob her of. Ethnographies of less immediate forms of ongoing communication have shown similar effects (Thompson, 2009; Parreñas, 2005b; Vertovec, 2004; Wilding, 2006; Uy-Tioco, 2007). The ability for constant communication meant that Ana could access specific moments of her children's daily lives in a sensorially-rich way whilst, at the same time, she was restricted by time and space to an interaction that was necessarily fleeting.

Like her daughter's, Ana's relationship with her phone is an example of the integration of an emerging form of non-human materiality into the ongoing construction of a world shared with others. (Dis-)Continuities of space are made more stark by the physical absence of her children, contrasted with their virtual presence, accessible through her phone. As with

Sofia, the temptation to be constantly connected is facilitated by the sophistication of the apparatus and the increasing availability of affordable data packages and high-speed internet connections. Therefore, the form of the phone as an object in her life is not something external within a "network", but an integral part of an emerging form of "reality" which goes beyond the limits of sensory physicality in a way more static forms of past communication were unable to do. The disintegration of the phone's material boundaries has been woven into Sofia's and Ana's life-worlds through habitual use, via what Merleau-Ponty would refer to as "knowledge in the hands" (discussed in Moores, 2012, p. 46), the repeated sharing and manipulating of relational flows which are both affective and informational.

In Sofia's words, these ongoing relational changes across time and space can lead to a feeling of strangeness, seeing the digital world as unnatural and asocial. Yet the digital world is also a means to an ongoing and intensified relatedness with those who, due to mutual ongoing, dynamic, interactions have shaped and continue to shape her very personhood. As Boellstorff (2008) points out, technology has long been a central part of human experience, as both a tool and product of human effort. Citing the example of the printing press, he reminds us that technology has revolutionised human existence in the past but, throughout, we remained essentially human, albeit with new kinds of potential. However, this is not to underplay human struggles between feelings of "strangeness" and the enjoyment of augmentation of human potential, and how everyday practices mediate these feelings transnationally between family members.

Expanding Sociality: Strangeness, Expectations, and Resistance

Sofia smiled apologetically as she finished using her phone and pointedly put it back in her bag. She looked thoughtful. "I struggle with social media actually, I'm usually so independent but with this I distract myself so easily, I only mean to look up one thing and suddenly I'm there for hours chatting.

I think it's stopping people being able to engage face to face. I study theatre and there we learn how to communicate a message with our faces, but with computers you can't do that! I'm not a very tactile person, not so emotional, but people on Facebook chat to me and say things they wouldn't dare face to face! They send hearts, I send hearts ... do I mean these hearts? It's not real! It's not human! I wish I could ignore them all".

For Sofia, the impact of a sudden increase in digital participation manifests itself as "not real" compared with previous forms she was more used to throughout her pre-migration dwelling in the world. The impact of her more technologically-advanced phone has made itself felt; the increase in participation has been sudden and plentiful, and forms a direct contrast to how she had understood herself until then, a theatre student who communicated with her face, who valued "real, human" interactions over digital ones. This personhood jostles with an awareness of wider structural factors which inform her daily practices.

Referring to an incident the week before, when she had been trying to meet another Portuguese girl for the first time in Liverpool Street station after her phone had died, she said, "I knew what she looked like but we hadn't said where to meet... I realised how dependent we are on these things now, for the most basic tasks! But, in a way, I liked it, being escaped from the phone. I would like to escape in general, I wish I could delete myself from social media sometimes! But my mother, she likes to FaceTime. I use WhatsApp, Facebook, but that's it! No Instagram, no Snapchat, it's enough, there's too much out there!" She put her face in her hands and screamed in mock frustration. "...But what can we do?"

Sofia's discomfort with changing digital kinship practices is expressed most when the intensity of her family household in its changing forms begins to impact upon the rhythms of her new life in London. Whilst constantly highlighting her 'independence' in surviving day-to-day within the gig economy of catering and babysitting, as the daughter of two middle

class professionals, Sofia also frequently referred to her privileged position of knowing her parents could help her financially should she require it. Their increasing presence throughout her day, afforded by new technology, was intertwined with her awareness of her ongoing dependence on them and expressed itself as "strangeness". Sofia describes this discomfort as a restriction of certain senses in favour of others. The awareness of physical, wide space jostles with intimate spaces of vision and hearing which activate what Marks (2000) would call "cultural memory" via a material form (her phone). Sofia's experiences as a member of her childhood household world now intermingle with those of another world altogether, that of her London world: the sounds of the train station, the smell of fast food, and the bright lights of the train platforms.

Sofia's discomfort exists alongside an acceptance of the increased convenience of instant communication as part of an ongoing construction of kinship negotiated across constantly changing notions of space and time. Sofia posits the positioning of her feelings about her mother within this meshwork as the reason she cannot "escape" this engagement as she wishes. Madianou and Miller (2012) suggest that transnational mothering through instant technology mediums is a long-distance form of control from mother to child, which allows the continuing "performance" of motherhood, alleviating the guilt migrant mothers feel for leaving their children. In Ana and Sofia's case, the balance of reciprocity is far more nuanced that Madianou and Miller make out. There is an element of obligation in Sofia's need to remain engaged with social media, in order to continue allowing her mother to perform her "mother hen" role, notwithstanding the emotional labour involved for both women. Sofia's understanding of digital communication use sits alongside her personal framework of ethics and the complications of a relationality within her family that is both intensified and maintained by transnational communications.

Digital Technology: Place, Space, and Time

Sofia laughed as I told her that my parents were far more attached to their devices than anyone I knew who was our age, and often ignored me when they came to visit, my father watching endless YouTube videos and my mother constantly checking her phone for updates and videos from her family on the other side of the world. "Well, they do love their phones, but they're not quite that bad! My Dad has completely changed his initial attitude, I remember when there were first emails and he was like, Email, Email? Write letters! Letters! But now he is always posting stuff on Facebook and typing away. My Mum too, she has her iPad and I think they are old and they have had enough of each other, haha, maybe like your parents! So, when they are together maybe they use their phones and iPad. But when we are together no, we still talk, still engage, social!"

This conversation came back to me when I spent time with Sofia's parents a few months later and the nuances of their intra-family relationships became clearer. I was staying in her childhood room on the first night in her parents' home and had wondered about the tense atmosphere between her parents, who only spoke to each other through their children when the latter were online. Lying in bed, I read through the flurry of instant Facebook messages Sofia was sending, explaining that her parents were going through a hard time in their marriage and telling me not to worry if it felt weird. It gave a new meaning to her previous comments, back in London, about their ignoring each other in favour of their devices as "perhaps they were bored of each other". Expanding her own analysis from my position as an onlooker but also a guest in their home, the atmosphere I picked up on whilst I was present was indeed lightened by the virtual "presence" of one of the children when they did respond. This virtual presence could thus be seen as an emerging household strategy to managing intra-family relationality across space and time. The instant relationality offered by digital communications allows the expansion out of an (uncomfortable) intimate,

shared space of two (or a potentially lonely space of one as a consequence of the discomfort) towards a wider shared household, albeit one mediated by, until recently, unfamiliar versions of "real" space and time.

I propose that the digitalisation of kinship embodies an ethically understood form of temporally and spatially restricted sociality within households. Sofia's immediate interpretation of digital kinship is a somehow less ethically-sound version of the "real" sociality of her family "all being together", where devices are ideally absent and what I call ongoing 'micro-moments' of affect are present. These "micro-moments" are part of a wider sociality that is only achievable via ongoing face-to-face contact, where sensorial experiences are shared: what Sofia understands as "real". At a household level, Sofia justifies her parents' rejection of these 'micro-moments' in favour of their devices when their children are absent (physically or digitally) as "being bored of each other" – the household is physically fragmented and therefore these ethics of 'real' sociality do not apply.

As we will see, the temporary digital reunification of the household through technology provides a space which suspends ongoing hostilities – the accumulated "micro-moments" of positive and negative affect which are a natural part of family life – in favour of a performed, idealised kinship which is restrictive, in terms of its spatial and temporal boundedness. This restrictedness is due to the necessary compression of the thousands of "micro-moments" of everyday affect which make up family life into what I will call "meta-moments", a form of sociality more suitable to the temporal and spatial reconfigurations of the long-distance video call. As we will see, these "meta-moments" exist within the wider meshwork of relationality between members of the family, leaving much unsaid or expressed but communicating sufficiently to maintain the household's relationships.

We were drinking vinho do porto (Port wine, the local speciality) after dinner one night when a WhatsApp call came from Sofia. "Ha!" said Ana, wagging her finger at me, "it's just because you're here! Normally she

wouldn't bother". Dinner for us had been tins of conservas (tuna and other fish, a speciality of Matosinhos) and bread, which were now piled up around us, tiny material remnants of Matosinho's collapsed industrial past releasing the scent of tuna into the air. The night before, when Ana had been texting and attempting to call all three children throughout dinner. Paulo, Sofia's twin brother who was doing an internship in Brussels, had picked up, and the phone was subsequently placed at the end of the table for us all to see him. Tonight, Sofia could be seen walking home from the bus stop, the desolate streets of North Greenwich behind her, drizzle falling softly and occasionally plopping onto the screen. Ana pulled her chair up close to me and, reaching over to plug in her phone, rested it against the tins of tuna, instructing me to fill Sofia in on our day. I felt awkward and tried angling the phone to include her husband, who had been a quiet bystander during most of Ana's dinnertime conversation. Ana moved around, tidying up, and we had a four-way conversation about dinner and Sofia's evening waitressing job, João saying little but sitting up a little straighter, his eyes a little brighter as he spoke to his daughter.

I was very aware of how many places, bodies and temporalities had flitted in and out of their small living room in the last couple of days. Sofia and the London summer rain at the end of the table where Paulo, sitting in a dark living room in Brussels, had been the night before. João beside me, perhaps, as Sofia told me was usually the case, with half of his mind in Minho, a region in the north of Portugal where his elderly father had been dying for the last ten years. These "meta-moments" of communally constructed memory and kinship are what the "micro-moments" of time-compressed video-calls hinge on. What was actually said was perfunctory and functional but nevertheless contributed towards the "meta-moments" of kinship which go beyond spoken language, activating shared memories and imaginations. Digital kinship felt like it was at its vortex here, at the site of the original household where "meta-moments" existed as the ghosts of past

relationships, ongoing conflicts, and affections of present and future imaginations wove in and out of each other. The backdrop was the smells and sounds of the Portuguese summer evening and their northern European equivalents, so close through the screen, yet a great distance away.

Conclusion

The dichotomy of migration and movement versus staying and being still is one within which the structural realities of global organisations and national borders weave in and out of the most particular of concerns, intra-human affective socialities. The global has provided both the technology for superior and more immediate access between family members who are separated by oceans, as well as the socioeconomic conditions of a local labour market that has no room for young people graduating into it. In this way, the quantifiable markers of global profit and loss are meshed together with human sensory experiences themselves, whilst at the same time ensuring a continuing physical "apartness" of familial bodies once technology has been switched off, which it eventually must be.

We have seen how this expanding relationality feeds Ana's natural energy as a "mother hen", as well as the constant concern about her children's precarious migratory situations. For her daughter Sofia, moving through a spatially separate pattern of practices, the integration of new materialities into her daily sensorial practices is felt as a struggle and gradually accepted as a new form of family sociality. This struggle manifests as a conflict between the "real" and the "unreal"; it challenges the meaning of sensorial experiences and contradicts previous forms of personhood and daily practices. It is not a denial of but part of the process of creating new life worlds in itself, achieved by dwelling in environments of relationships, spatialities and experiences.

The experience of migration and transnational relatedness has long been an alternative way of looking at ongoing experiences of relatedness and

the technological jump over the past decades has provided a new and fascinating lens through which to view it. Generational use of technology, within this urban, educated family, is just as relevant for the older as for the younger generation. The migration literature I have cited throughout this paper shows that this has always been the case. The most advanced mode of communication at the time has always linked generations of transnational families across the centuries, whether through letters or cheap cell phones. These studies also introduce the older generation's increased dependence on technology to fill the gaps their children have left in the household, which can be felt at differing levels of frustration by the children themselves (Madianou and Miller, 2012).

This paper expands these arguments through the case study of Sofia's family, which shows an immediacy and ease of access to each other unparalleled by previous technologies of communication. This is a significant shift in sociality, through the condensation of "micro-moments" of everyday practices and interactions into "meta-moments" via digital tools which, I have argued, convey affect in a way that is unique to the newest communication technologies. What Sofia's story shows is how "micro- moments" – co-existence and communication in everyday physical relationality between family members – can be managed through "meta- moments" – the continuing performance of remembered or imagined kinship at the individual and family level on a temporally and spatially constrained basis. These "meta-moments" convert digital communication into a household strategy, by providing the opportunity for continuing household engagement in real time, where the effect of thousands of "micro-moments" can be revived. Here we can see how the nuances of individual households react in different ways to spatial and temporal manipulations of digital communications, expanding meshworks of worlds, integrating historical sensory experiences as well as memories of past relationalities. As a household strategy, it mitigates the distance of physical worlds in favour of temporally and spatially mediated

memory, hope and relationality. Both the struggle against and acceptance of these ever-changing elements are part of ongoing processes of personhood. Moving out of or rejecting such forces and the developments they bring is as difficult as rewriting experiences of the past which have been central to forming who we are and what we desire of life.

Lisa Rodan is a Doctoral Researcher at the University of Kent, United Kingdom.

References

Appadurai, A. (2004) 'The capacity to aspire: culture and the terms of recognition', in Rao, V. and Walton, M. (eds.) *Culture and public action*. California: Stanford University Press, pp. 59-84.

Boellstorff, T. (2008) *Coming of age in second life: an anthropologist explores the virtually human*. New Jersey: Princeton University Press.

Chesley, N. (2005) 'Blurring boundaries? Linking technology use spillover, individual distress and family satisfaction', *Journal of Marriage and Family*, 67, pp. 1237-1248.

Correia, F. and Martins, C. (2006) *Media landscapes*. Lisbon: European Journalism Centre (EJC).

Elliott, A. and Urry, J. (2010) *Mobile lives*. London: Routledge.

Harvey, D. (2005) *A brief history of neoliberalism*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Ingold, T. (2011) *Being alive: essays on movement, knowledge and description*. London: Routledge.

Knight, D. and Stewart, C. (2016) 'Ethnographies of austerity: temporality, crisis and affect in Southern Europe', *History and Anthropology*, 27(1), pp. 1-18.

Leurs, K. (2015) *Digital passages: migrant youth 2.0. Diaspora, gender and youth cultural intersections*. Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press.

Long, N. and Moore, H. (2012) 'Introduction', in Long, N. and Moore, H. (eds.) *Sociality: new directions*. Oxford: Berghahn Books, pp. 1-25.

Madianou, M. and Miller, D. (2012) *Migration and new media: transnational families and polymedia*. London: Routledge.

Marks, L. (2000) *The skin of the film: intercultural cinema, embodiment, and the senses*. London-Durham: Duke University Press.

Miller, D. (2017) 'The ideology of friendship in the era of Facebook', *HAU: Journal of Ethnographic Theory*, 7(1), pp. 377-395.

Moores, S. (2012) *Media, place and mobility*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.

Parreñas, R. (2005a) 'Long distance intimacy: class, gender and intergenerational relations between mothers and children in Filipino Transnational Families', *Global Networks*, 5(4), pp. 317-336.

Parreñas, R. (2005b) *Children of global migration: transnational families and gendered woes*. California: Stanford University Press.

Pina Cabral, J. (2017) 'Familial persons in dark times', *SIEF (Société Internationale d'Ethnologie et de Folklore) Conference, Ways of Dwelling: Crisis-Craft-Creativity*. Göttingen, Germany, 26- 29 March. Göttingen: SIEF.

Pina Cabral, J. (2018) 'Modes of participation', *Anthropological Theory*, 18(4), pp. 435-455.

Pine, F. (2014) 'Migration as hope space, time and imagining the future', *Current Anthropology*, 55, pp. 95-104.

Pires, R.P., Pereira, C., Azevedo, J. and Ribeiro, A.C. (2014) *Emigração Portuguesa. Relatório estatístico 2014*. Lisbon: Observatório da Emigração e Rede Migra, Instituto Universitário de Lisboa (ISCTE- IUL), Centro de Investigação e Estudos de Sociologia (CIES-IUL), e Direção-Geral dos Assuntos Consulares e das Comunidades Portuguesas (DGACCP).

Rakow, L. and Navarro, V. (1993) 'Remote mothering and the parallel shift: women meet the cellular telephone', *Critical Studies in Mass Communication*, 10(2), pp. 144-157.

Seamon, D. (1979) *A geography of the lifeworld: movement, rest and encounter*. New York: St Martin's Press.

Thomas, W., Znaniecki, F. and Zaretsky, E. (1996) *The Polish peasant in Europe and America*. Urbana: University of Illinois Press.

Thompson, E. (2009) 'Mobile phones, networks and communities among foreign workers in Singapore', *Global Networks*, 9(3), pp.359-380.

Torres da Silva, M., Brites, M., Figueiras, R., Correia Santos, S., Amaral, I., Maropo, L., Jeronimo, P., Espirito Santo, P. and Pacheco, L. (2017) 'Between traditional and social media: news repertoires in Portugal', *Participations: Journal of Audience and Reception Studies*, 14(2). pp. 283-300.

Tuan, Y. F. (2004) 'Sense of place: its relationship to self and time', in Mels, T. (ed.) *Reanimating places: a geography of rhythms*. Aldershot: Ashgate, pp. 45-56.

Uy-Tioco, C. (2007) 'Overseas Filipino workers and text messaging: reinventing transnational mothering', *Continuum: Journal of Media and Cultural Studies*, 21(2), pp. 253-265.

Vertovec, S. (2004) 'Cheap calls: the social glue of migrant transnationalism', *Global Networks*, 4(2). pp. 219-224.

Wilding, R. (2006) 'Virtual intimacies? families communicating across transnational contexts', *Global Networks*, 6(2), pp. 125-142.