

# ‘Doing’ Transnational Families : Distance and Closeness in the Digital Era

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# LIFE OF TRANSNATIONAL FAMILIES

- **transnationalism** as the ways some migrants – not all of them – see themselves, belonging simultaneously to two places, that is two countries – two continents in some cases.
- ‘Belonging simultaneously’ implies at least imaginary ties to two places, and subjective projections of their future onto these places.

# TRANSNATIONALISM IS...

- ...a process, „by which immigrants build *social fields that link together their country of origin and their country of settlement*.
- Immigrants who build such social fields are designated „transmigrants“

- Transmigrants *develop and maintain multiple relations – familial, economic, social, organizational, religious, and political that span borders.*
- Transmigrants *take actions, make decisions, and feel concerns, and develop identities within social networks that connect them to two or more societies simultaneously*

(Glick Schiller et al. 1992)



**A PARTY OFFICE IN TRANSSILVANIA OF THE ACTUAL PRESIDENT OF ROMANIA,  
KLAUS JOHANNIS**

He was elected in the second round especially through the votes from the people living abroad.

*What does this mean concretely in terms of family?*

*....an example from a research project on  
transnational families...*

Nedelcu, M. (2012) Migrants' new transnational habitus: rethinking migration through a cosmopolitan lens in the digital age. *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, 38 (9), 1339-1356.

*IT engineer, male, 43, works in Toronto, Canada:*

„This evening I have to baby-sit. When my wife is home alone (in Bucharest) and she has to go downstairs, for example to prepare dinner, she focuses the webcam on the babies. I keep an eye on them and if one of them starts to cry, I let her know by SMS“ (Nedelcu 2012, p. 1351)

- Is this ,family‘ from your point of view?



# “BEING FAMILY” VS. “DOING FAMILY”

- Thesis 1: contemporary, and especially transnational families have to be conceptualized more by ‘doing family things’ than by ‘being’ a family ...

Shifts (sociological) perspective and analysis away from

- *family as a structure* to which individuals in some sense belong,
- towards understanding *families as sets of activities / family practises* which take on a particular meaning, associated with family, at a given point in time (Morgan 1996).

‘Family’ can be regarded through both  
lenses:

being a social institution *and* being  
defined as family practice

Thesis 2: *'Doing' transnational families*  
will change how we will look at families  
in general

- Why?

Until now *family as institution* was regarded through the lens of so called *methodological nationalism* (Beck & Beck-Gernsheim 2009)

# DISCOURSES ABOUT FAMILIES ARE CHARACTERIZED BY A „METHODOLOGICAL NATIONALISM“

- Ulrich Beck (1944-2015)  
Professor of Sociology at Ludwig Maximilian  
University of Munich (LMU),
- 1997-2015 Professor at the London School of  
Economics and
- 2011-2015 Professor at the Fondation Maison des  
Sciences de l'Homme, Paris.



## DISCOURSES ABOUT FAMILIES ARE CHARACTERIZED BY A „METHODOLOGICAL NATIONALISM“

- Unquestioned relationship between the individual, the family and the state (nation)
- In one-nation-families family loyalty and loyalty to the state mainly go hand in hand; mediated by patriotism and national identity (Beck & Beck-Gernsheim 2009, p. 140)

# DISCOURSES ABOUT FAMILIES ARE CHARACTERIZED BY A „METHODOLOGICAL NATIONALISM“

In the context of nation-state the core of family is a

*„secular version of the Holy Trinity: one household, one nationality and one identity“*

(Beck & Beck-Gernsheim 2009, p. 140)



We as therapists/trainers have to reflect on a possible stance of „methodological nationalism“:

Do we think „family“ implicitly from a national point of view?

My hypothesis is: yes, we do..

# CONCEPT OF ACCULTURATION - AN IDEOLOGY?

- ...main theoretical approaches in psychology and (systemic) psychotherapy are deficit-based frameworks, referring to concepts like „acculturation stress“ or „ambiguous loss“ etc. (see Bacigalupe & Cámara 2012, Beck & Beck-Gernsheim 2009, 2010)
- But: these frameworks does not necessarily take into account socio-economic and political realities from a wider ecosystemic perspective

# TRANSNATIONAL CONNECTIONS, EMERGING TECHNOLOGIES: *EASING AND COMPLICATING*



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John Stanmeyer, World Press Photo of the Year Award

















TOGETHER













# THE IMPOSSIBLE FAMILY PORTRAIT

- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sHm9syqnFDI>

- The number of internet connections increased from 2001 to 2011 globally by 528 %; one third of the global population has internet access (Miniwatts 2012 in Greschke 2014)



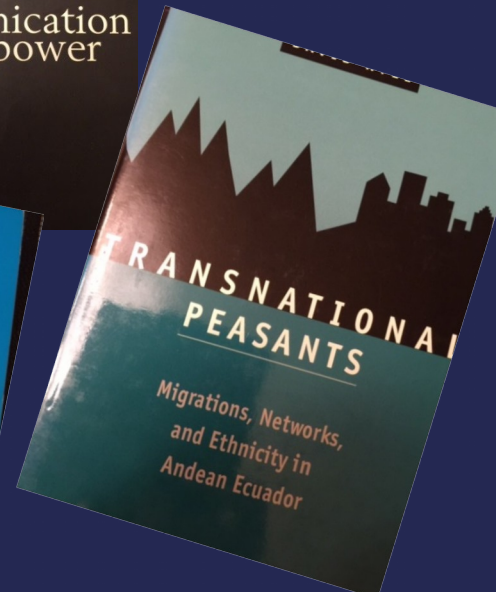
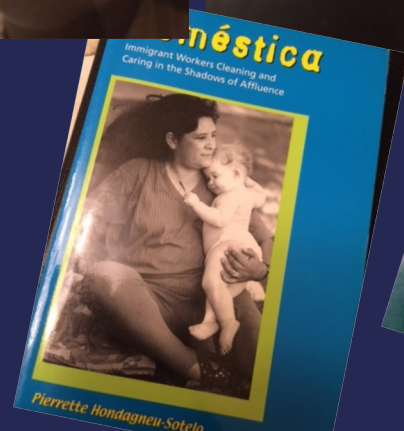
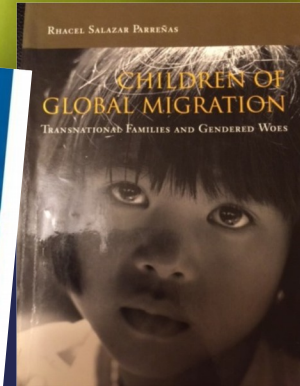
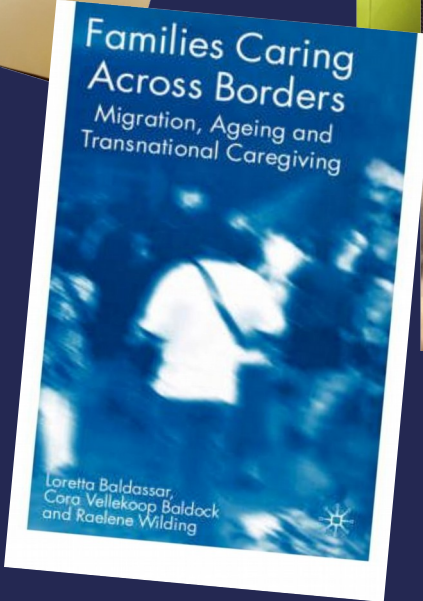
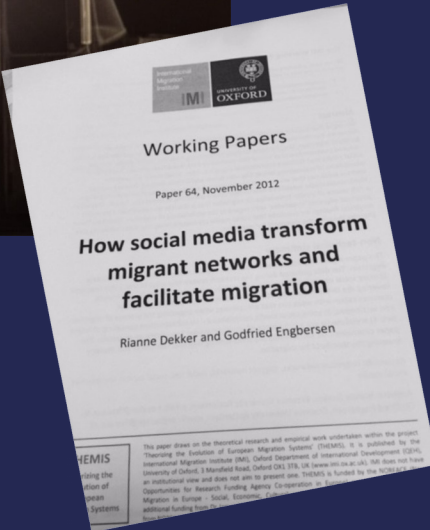
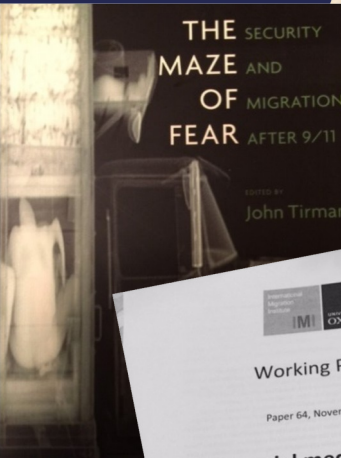
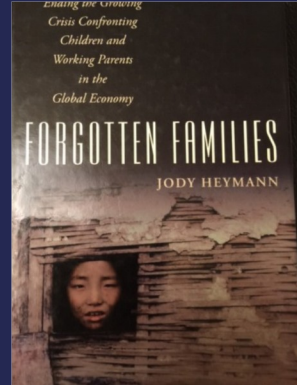
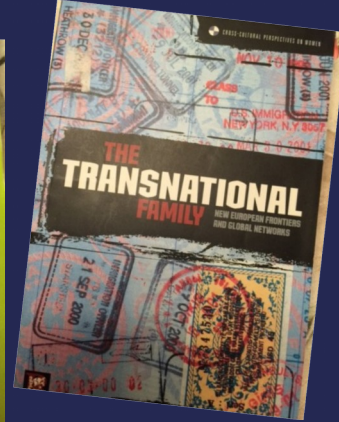
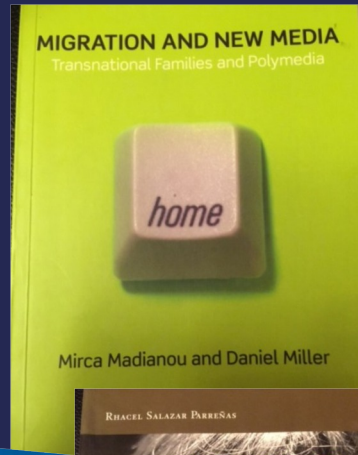
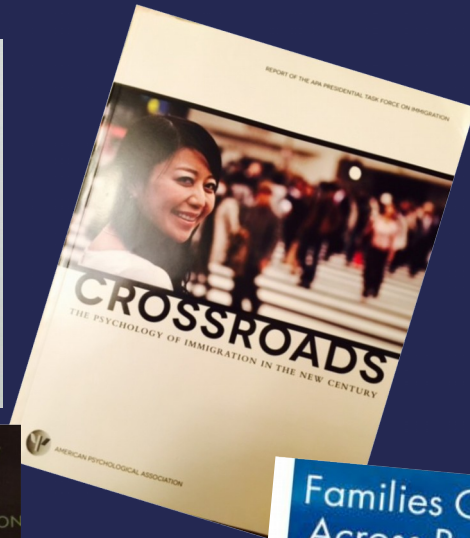
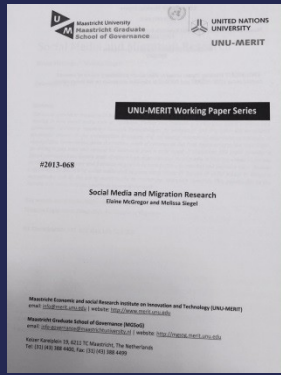
- „Families usually change more rapidly than family therapy concepts“ (Roberts 2005, p.409)



Foto: Anselm Busshoff

## The new reality... virtual intimacy - ICTs as new family members

Borcsa - Milano October 2015



# Transnational Families and Social Technologies: Reassessing Immigration Psychology

Gonzalo Bacigalupe and María Cámara

*Social technologies—mobile phones, the wide availability of international phone calls, and the mainstreaming of Internet connectivity and social media—are becoming a cornerstone of the immigrant family experience. Information communication technologies (ICTs) are supporting the transformation of family networks into transnational ones, with potentially significant consequences in the psychology of immigration and family mental health. Social technologies may be influencing and mainstreaming the transnational experiences while families are finding resilient ways to confront the difficulties posed by immigration. Computer-mediated communications among transnational families are a source of compelling opportunities and a challenge for clinicians to adopt an ecosystemic perspective and address these new circumstances.*

*Keywords: Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs); Immigrant Families; Transnationalism; Social Psychology*



# SIN PAÍS

A FILM BY THEO RIGBY



# FAMILY PROCESS

VOLUME 50 • NUMBER 1 • MARCH 2011

Family Process: From Beginnings to Tomorrow  
Evan Imber-Black

1

## SPECIAL SECTION: THE ORIGINS OF FAMILY PROCESS

Family Process 1962-1969  
Christian Beels

4

## MIGRATION: ENHANCING WELL-BEING

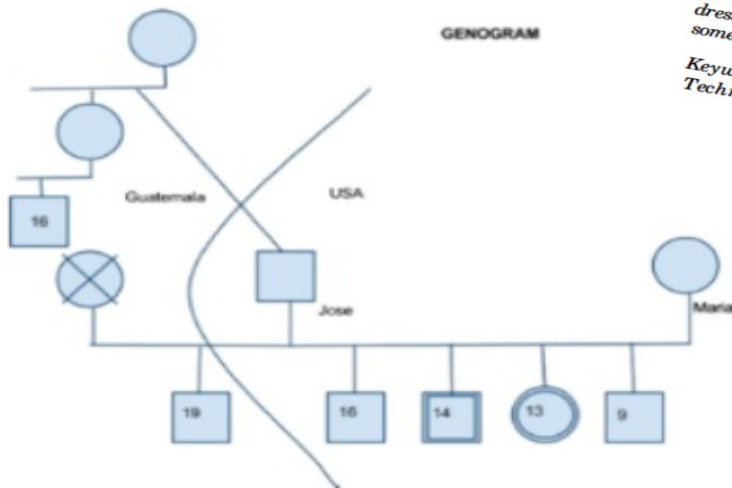
Virtualizing Intimacy: Information Communication Technologies and  
Transnational Families in Therapy  
Gonzalo Bacigalupe and Susan Lambe

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Secondary Migration and Relocation Among African Refugee Families in  
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## Virtualizing Intimacy: Information Communication Technologies and Transnational Families in Therapy

GONZALO BACIGALUPE, EDD, MPH\*  
SUSAN LAMBE, M.A., PH.D. CAND.†

All abstracts are available in Spanish and Mandarin Chinese on Wiley Online Library (<http://wileyonlinelibrary.com/journal/famp>). Please pass this information on to your international colleagues and students.

Information communication technologies (ICTs) are a ubiquitous feature of immigrant family life. Affordable, widely accessible, and highly adaptable ICTs have transformed the immigrant experience into a transnational process with family networks redesigned but not lost. Being a transnational family is not a new phenomenon. Transnationalism, however, has historically been reserved for the wealthier professional and political immigrant class who were able to freely travel and use expensive forms of communication before the emergence of accessible technologies. This paper systematically reviews the research literature to investigate the potential impact of ICTs on the lives of transnational families and how these families utilize them. The wide penetration of ICTs also puts into question some of the ways in which scholars have conceptualized the immigrant experience. The appropriate use of technology in family therapy should strengthen culturally competent and equity-based approaches to address the needs of these families. A family therapy with a transnational family illuminates some of the potential that these technologies introduce in the practice of relational clinicians.

Keywords: Immigration; Families; Transnational; Information Communication Technologies

Fam Proc 50:12-26, 2011

Example:



Sravanthi Agrawal 10:57



you must go here next time you are in flight

1



Call history



me

how are we go time?

10:57 AM



Sravanthi Agrawal

we have 10 more with her

10:57 AM

more with her

10:57 AM

<http://indigardens.com/>

10:57 AM

we must get this done

Call history



Sravanthi Agrawal

http://indigardens.com/indigardens-debates-indigardens-company-research-part-viii-10-10-2018-10-10-2018

10:57 AM

<http://indigardens.com/>

10:57 AM

<http://indigardens.com/> - let's try this tonight

we have 10

Type a message here



## Technology in families and the clinical encounter: results of a cross-national survey

Gonzalo Bacigalupe,<sup>a</sup> Maria Camara<sup>b</sup> and  
Laura E. Buffardi<sup>b</sup>

Information communication technologies (ICT) are an integral part of contemporary family life, though the existing research about its impact is scarce, less than definitive, and individually based, as well as failing to attend to cross-cultural and cross-national dimensions. This study investigates how family clinicians construe the impact of ICT in the clinical context. A survey directed at family clinicians ( $N = 258$ ) in four countries (Canada, Mexico, Spain and the USA) was designed to gather data on their beliefs about the impact of the emerging ICT on families and on their own clinical practice. The study found differences in the use of ICT across countries and correlation analyses showed there were more positive attitudes about the impact of emerging ICT on family dynamics among the clinicians whose use them the most.

### Practitioner points

- A constructive attitude towards emerging technology may enhance the effective use of technology in family therapy.
- The use of technology for personal and professional purposes by therapists may elicit appreciative conversations with families about its impact on family processes.
- Emerging digital technologies may enable clinicians to involve family members in virtual exercises and participation.

*Keywords:* families and information technologies; clinicians and information technologies.

### Introduction

Families are connected. Technologies that enable virtualization – e-mail, social networks, videogames, and mobile phones – are increasingly becoming the medium by which families ‘interact, develop and

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# FAMILIES AND THE WIDER SOCIOECONOMIC PERSPECTIVE

Transfer of money is about 250 billion \$ per year in world families – more than total amount of money given in state aid to all underdeveloped countries (Beck & Beck-Gernsheim p.142).

## NEW PHENOMENON: GLOBAL CARE CHAINS

- Love and care become „commodities“: exported, imported
- Globalized work in families (family services like child rearing or elderly care) constitute the „gold of the poor“, a „resource“ that can be exploited by the richer.

# CARERS FOR THE ELDERLY

- Italy: estimation around 774 000 home helpers, 90% of whom are foreign nationals, most of them employed privately as carers for the elderly (Beck & Beck-Gernsheim 2009 p. 108)
- The more north in Europe the less, the more south the more... e.g scandinavian countries provide the most services while e.g in Spain and Italy the dominant idea is that the family is the responsible agency for child and elderly care

# GLOBAL CARE CHAINS AND CARE DRAIN

- Often children give the impetus to emigrate – (wo)men want to earn money for a better future of their children
- Eastern Europe: whole villages without mothers: „EU orphans“ e.g. *Romania*: according UNICEF 350 000 children with one parent, 126 000 children with both parents living/working abroad; *Moldova*: every 3rd child grows up without one or both parents
- Siblings or relatives are taking the role of the parents
- Importance of new technologies of communication



# A TEMPORARY CONCLUSION...

We have to face *higher complexity* in working with families/systems: “the global other” is already part of all families, being them migrants or not

*Real and virtual communications* are not dichotomous in the lives of (transnational) families, nor should they be in clinical practice.

- We need new concepts and methods in working with trans-national families and systems with deterritorialised and transcontext lifestyles, e.g. Genogram 4.0 (Borcsa & Hille 2015)

Will be published in:

Borcsa, M. & Stratton P. (2016). Origins and Originality in Family Therapy and Systemic Practise. EFTA Book Series Volume 1. Springer International.

- „Can we conceive of a society in which people stop inquiring into the identity of their biological father, their biological mother, and the place and country in which they were born, so that the quest for identity and the sense of belonging can be pursued along quite different paths?“

(Beck & Beck-Gernsheim, p. 165)



# MEDITERRANEA

- [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qaALVBbde\\_A](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qaALVBbde_A)



A final remark....

A group of people, likely refugees, walking in a line, silhouetted against a bright background. The image is used as a background for the title text.

# EFTA Declaration on the European Refugee Crisis

PLEASE VISIT:

[WWW.EUROPEANFAMILYTHERAPY.EU/](http://WWW.EUROPEANFAMILYTHERAPY.EU/)

THANK YOU FOR YOUR ATTENTION!