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Maria C Marchetti-Mercer, Leslie Swartz, and Loretta Baldassar *(editors), Transnational families in Africa: Migrants and the role of the information technology*. Publisher: the Wits University Press, 2023. Pp. 224. ISBN: 978-1776148653.

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This book is a culmination of the efforts and collaboration of more than 13 researchers from different parts of the world, coordinated by Wits University. In terms of the writers' backgrounds, it is a book written by experts ranging from sociology, anthropology, clinical psychology, linguistics, and public health researchers. This rich background takes stock of the international nature of this group, their diverse education backgrounds, and some also being migrants themselves with stories resonating with the participants they interviewed.

The book has ten chapters segmented into three major parts. The first part has two chapters dealing with the conception and setting of the research agenda, challenges, and opportunities. The conception of the idea of transnational families during the COVID-19 outbreak had its own challenges for the researchers, especially when they had to convene the teams through online channels. The second part is composed of six chapters, each punctuated with a specific experience of transnational families and depth of analysis from the editors. It includes collections of personal narratives of migrant life and experiences of individuals who have to withstand the experiences of distant lifestyles. Using a qualitative research approach, the researchers cover five countries, nine interviewers, and 80 participants. As the editors admit, "this book is a reflection of these many intersecting and pervasive details that shape the ways in which individuals engage with technology and the ways technology shapes relationships" (p. 44).

The editors of this book have examined how modern technology in the form of ICT is shaping relationships as well as transforming and collapsing distances. In other words, their discussion is about the evolution of modern technologies and how transnational families use and struggle to keep in contact or create co-presence, caregiving, and remitting to keep family life going. The interviews and the focus of the study are on three main dimensions of the communities of transnational families. First is the internal migration from rural

to urban South Africa. Many of the migrants to South African cities "migrate to Gauteng because it is regarded as the economic center of South Africa" (p.19), where family members move from different rural enclaves either for jobs, education, and the like. These South Africans experience the first form of alienation, where those who leave family members in the rural areas are challenged by differentials of demands. Such individuals remit to make siblings and other elder members live a decent life. But the unsettled issue was how individual family members managed and used ICT to get in touch with each other. The editors' one consistent thematic issue that comes out very clearly in the book is the question of equality and inequality when it comes to access and the general know-how surrounding mobile phones. The second aspect is the immigrants from outside South Africa. These come from neighboring countries, like Zimbabwe, Malawi, DRC, and from non-SADC countries like Kenya.

So the editors have given full chapters for each of these types of immigrants' experiences. The messages from individuals' interviews from these countries bring out many interlocking issues about xenophobic issues, alienation, isolation, and disconnectedness as a result of failure of family members from using modern technologies but also loss of connections, poverty, unemployment experiences, and the hustle of everyday life. These are also tales of happy decisions that such members were able to find alternative ways of rescuing families, adding more income to desperate members and the lives and experiences of foreign professionals. But in such contexts, families also found in many cases disillusioned because separation brought other consequences especially the weakening of the family bonds between parents and children or sometimes among siblings or just loneliness caused by the distance. The third is the South Africans who were leaving the country for other greener pastures in the United States of America, Canada, the United Kingdom, the Arab Emirates, Australia, and New Zealand.

Again, the experiences of this category as discussed in this book were different, since most of these families came from affluent individuals who could maintain physical connection by visiting family members in their second country or such individuals did the same by visiting parents and grandparents back in South Africa. The message again does not correlate with other migrants whose life experience was of desperation and struggle. But such South Africans are presented as middle class, experts, and technocrats who leave South Africa voluntarily just like the Kenyan experiences. The only underlying case is how such individuals keep their ties with distant families either through Skype, WhatsApp, instant messaging, and other modern technologies. The complaints in this group are typical of affluent classes of people, the editors indicate that the interviewed people viewed the absence of intimacy; being unable to touch, hug, or enjoy a cup of tea/coffee was a negative side of the ICTs' mediated

communication. The editors of this book have brought the very exciting life stories of their interviewed persons. It is true that a migrating person may be viewed as a disgruntled person who is constantly seeking affiliation and warmth of a family. However, the people who are presented in this book, whether refugees or a group of individuals who were seeking greener pastures either from within South Africa or from DRC and other African countries, all struggled with ICT-mediated communication. Such struggles vary widely across the interviewed persons. The first is the use of the phone. The editors have shown us how technology pushed other people out of communication because of a lack of data, internet connections, the type of phone (smartphone or not), and the lack of knowledge of operating them and the absence of physical connections with family members. This book also provides a very clear case of how the COVID-19 experiences affected the editors' research experience but also exacerbated the use of Zoom, phones, WhatsApp messaging, and video sharing. The book shares all different kinds of access among its transnational family of interviewed people.

The strength of this book lies in three aspects. First, this is a very ethnologically grounded book, with each chapter having separate sections in which editors provide details about the ways they interacted with the interviewers and the processes in which the data were collected and analyzed. This gives a sense of seriousness and coordination on the part of the team. Such coordination proves itself in the ways the messages and stories interconnect across migrant families. So for someone interested in understanding how modern qualitative research can be done, this book is a typical answer. Second, the intergenerational linkages of researchers, a combination of senior, experienced, and well-established researchers and those who are just being introduced to academia, are perfectly interwoven to the extent that it provides a lesson on how modern academic grooming can be and should be done. The third and last is probably a small grey area in the book, which is Chapter Nine. Looking at other chapters and how they relate to this chapter, it is obvious that the editors are doing a lot of unnecessary repetitions in this particular chapter.