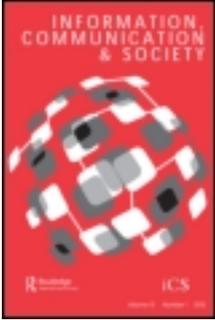


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Migration, diaspora, and information technology in global societies

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BOOK REVIEW

Fortunati, L., Pertierra, R., & Vincent, J., *Migration, diaspora, and information technology in global societies* (1st ed.) (New York: Routledge, 2012), xviii, 271 pp., ISBN 978-0-415-88709-0 (hbk) \$133.00, ISBN 978-0-203-14860-0 (pbk), Kindle \$45.00.

As I write this review in mid-September 2012, there have been protests not just in the Muslim world, but in Western Countries against what appears to be an appalling piece of anti-Muslim film making by a Hollywood soft-porn producer and rage against satirical French cartoons is growing. The film of course is of no relevance to this review, but the instant nature of protest around the world is, because Islam is the religion of many global migrants.

Thus, within hours, websites, Facebook and other media have been filled with controversy over the issue. In Australia itself, there has been one (and hopefully only one) outbreak of violence between a very small group of fundamentalists and police. As a consequence of the protest in Sydney, the media has been filled with discussion about bifurcated identities in this country of immigrants. It should no longer be a surprise to us that instant connections and global co-presence rather than absence, the bane of previous generations of migrants, is now the rule in most countries. As the editors suggest, for many migrants, information and communication technologies (ICTs) have become a new ecosystem that contains the here and there, the here and now, and the present and the absent in a formidable new, and constantly emergent way.

This collection on migrants and ICTs is, therefore, of great relevance if one lives in a settler society like Australia, but it is also of relevance to more apparently traditional and seemingly monocultural countries. This includes countries where multiculturalism is not yet politically acceptable (or what constitutes national identity is undergoing significant stresses – for example, France), even though they have significant ‘minority’ populations who, as in Australia can be people moving from one status to another, from immigrant, to resident, to citizen, to expatriate, and returnee. The book provides a wide variety of perspectives to understand an increasingly important issue in a global world: the positive and negative effects of ICTs on, not just (thankfully) the usual suspects – affluent, Westerners, but other groups as well – people from Jamaica, different groups of Sudanese refugees in Australia and other immigrant children from diverse communities,

Filipinos (particularly women) in their huge diaspora, Bulgarians abroad, expat Paraguayans, a Congolese cyber-church, Moroccans, Russians and Turks in Germany, and internal and external Chinese diasporas. We see this more and more in our own lives: in my local high street shops, the shop keepers are listening to radio, TV or the internet in Chinese, Hebrew, and Russian, and elsewhere in Melbourne, Arabic and African languages are familiar. In fact, as Bortoluzzi makes clear, English, like other languages has become pluralized into a multiplicity of subspecies for different purposes (Bortoluzzi, Chapter 2). And of course, robot language is becoming more familiar as we cheat with translation engines.

At this point, I will take up other ideas raised in the book and point to one or two excellent chapters that appear to provide very useful concepts for appropriation, though others may of course find other sections of the book more relevant to their work. The Introduction by the editors makes clear that migration often results in a kind of cultural hybridization, and many migrants now live 'media-saturated' lives, aborted in multiple worlds. The essay by Hepp, Bozdog and Suna (Chapter 11), makes the point that three sorts of hybrid identities appear to emerge amongst Moroccans, Russians, and Turks in Germany that of those focussed on their country of origin, those focussed on local-ethno-specific relationships, and those who are more world or globally oriented. Diasporas should not be seen in a homogenized way. Their typology is based on communication-mapping exercises conducted by interviewees, something is usefully illustrated through the drawings placed in the chapter. The complexities of just what constitutes culture and identify in the 'homeland' is of course has been highlighted through Anderson's influential concept of 'imagined communities' (Anderson 1991), and this lies behind several papers' reference to the relationship of diaspora to homeland (quite explicit in the case of the Bulgarian-language media diaspora (Stoyanova & Raycheva, Chapter 9), and in different ways to Paraguayans abroad (Greschke, Chapter 8). But for a group like the Filipinos – more like a quarter of the nation – ICTs have become critical in keeping dispersed families together. Interestingly, it is reported that they are the world's greatest users of text messaging, and messages are often phatic in nature – that is, they indicate presence, connection and solidarity, in a kind of ritual exchange (Pertierra, Chapter 7), and in many ways, this parallels the experience of expatriates from Jamaica (Horst, Chapter 2). But it was the chapter about a Congolese cyber-church that I found so interesting, because it provides a fascinating insight into the mix of technology and religion in Africa and beyond: 'When a revelation comes it's like a phone...the ring is here right in my heart... God is technology' (citing Pastor Joshua) (Garbin & Vasquez, Chapter 10, p. 157). This harkens back to the beginnings of radio evangelism in the 1920s in North America, perfected by others through the decades on TV.

We can extend the writers' observations beyond Christianity, and suggest that many religious movements' networks 'create de-territorialized virtualities that are more vivid and all-encompassing than mundane reality [lending] itself

to the instantaneous and simultaneous consumption of the sacrality across multiple sites and scales' (op. cit., p. 168). It can all be so deeply *personal*, even though you are not *there*, and this is certainly a reflection that could be used to understand the success of certain terrorist groups online.

The book also makes clear that the concept of 'self' is deeply culturally embedded, and this is where the chapters about the Chinese use of ICTs are so interesting. Law (Chapter 13) writes about the massive internal migration in China and the possibly negative effects ICTs are having on the second generation of migrants as they retreat into endless hours of robotic and cheap game-playing, escaping from both their workplace leading to even more isolation from their families. This may well also be the case with the Chinese migrants living in Prato, Italy (Denison & Johanson, Chapter 15) and as well, paralleled in the study by Cheng (Chapter 15), which explores the withdrawal from personal connection which is so important in Chinese life.

Consequently, the book contains much to think about and develop for future research, particularly from fine-grained inter- and cross-cultural perspectives and all chapters should be read carefully.

But as usual, and this is not the fault of the authors, the hardback edition is outrageously expensive and the rented Kindle edition is \$45.00.

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