

## **Migrant domestic workers, digital communication technologies and emotion work in critical pandemic times**

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### **Abstract**

With the rise of the digital age, migration scholarship has increasingly grappled with the Janus-faced nature of digital technologies. On the one hand, migrants leverage information and communication technologies (ICTs) to assemble multiple sources of (mis)information and assistance, connect with family and build networks, and mobilise support to participate in digital activism and claims-making. On the other hand, a whole suite of digital technologies has been developed and used to strengthen technological surveillance and control of migrant bodies. In this context, this paper focuses on the role and meaning of ICT use among Southeast Asian women who move to Singapore as migrant domestic workers under the disciplinary regime of temporary migration, where migrants are valued as unencumbered labouring bodies and separated from their families. Based on in-depth interviews and photovoice exercises with Indonesian and Filipino domestic workers in Singapore, the paper explores two related themes: (a) how information-gathering and decisions regarding healthcare and food care practices are mediated across borders through the use of ICTs, primarily the smartphone, between the migrant and left-behind family members during the critical times of the COVID-19 pandemic; (b) how digital tools are not only important resources for time-sensitive decision-making when borders harden (or totally shut) against bodily travel, they create a virtual 'always-on' space for 'temporal emotion work' (Lois 2010) to cope with the increased precarity of pandemic times. The spaces of digital communication and their affordances are not only animated by the flurry of everyday decision-making relating to 'doing' transnational family but have longer-term consequences for navigating migration decision-making at critical junctures, including whether to stay, when to return, and for how long more the migration project should be sustained.

### **Biography**

**Brenda S.A. Yeoh** FBA is Raffles Professor of Social Sciences, National University of Singapore (NUS) and Research Leader, Asian Migration Cluster, at NUS' Asia Research Institute. She was awarded the Vautrin Lud Prize for outstanding achievements in Geography in 2021. Her research interests in Asian migrations span themes such as gender, social reproduction, and

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