A major point in the book deals with a phenomenon Durkheim could not have possibly foreseen: mediated communication and the case of an absent presence. Much of our communication is now mediated through intervening technologies such as print, radio, television and the mobile. The banal exchanges mentioned earlier indicate that co-presence is no longer necessary for sharing petty, ordinary or significant information. Filipinos overseas can keep in close touch with their village families. The exchange of texts allows kin to maintain and even strengthen existing relationships. Filipinos are even more forthcoming in these mediated exchanges than they are face-to-face. Not only are existing relationships reproduced, new identities are forged in the process of these exchanges. This insight is the principal point of the book. The mobile generates new ties and novel socialities. This became obvious early in our research on cellphones in the Philippines. But Ling does all of us a great service by connecting this discovery to its Durkheimian sources.

The book ends with an interesting discussion of the individuating consequences of the mobile. Does being able to remain perpetually in touch with significant and even non-significant others, strengthen small group solidarity at the cost of broader loyalties? Is the steady march towards individualism the final effect of cellphones? While close ties are certainly reinforced by the mobile, it seems that other factors also allow for wider networks of communication. In the Philippines, close networks of kin and friends are certainly effects of the cellphone but the entry of the stranger is also another feature of this technology. The role of mobiles for political and other social mobilizations has also been noted among Filipinos but the data is still too raw for definite conclusions to be drawn. Once more Ling has done us a favor by linking these important sociological debates to everyday practices associated with mobiles. I recommend this book highly not only for enthusiasts of the mobile revolution but also for those looking for contemporary links with the classical sources of our discipline.

Horst, Heather A. and Daniel Miller. 2006. The Cell Phone: An Anthropology of Communication. New York: Berg. 212 pp

Lidia Pola

The book is based on extensive ethnographic research in Jamaica, as part of a project sponsored by the UK Department for International Development aimed at exploring the relationship between new communication technologies and poverty alleviation in four different countries—Ghana, India, Jamaica and South Africa.

Horst and Miller conducted their fieldwork over the course of a year (January to December 2004), focusing on two distinct locations—Portmore, in the outskirts of Kingston, and Marshfield, in Orange valley—considered representative for urban and rural settlements of low-income Jamaicans.

Compelled by the dramatic impact of the newly introduced cellphone on the lives and livelihood of Jamaicans, the authors decided to tackle this particular phenomenon as it was occurring within the wider communication ecologies of the communities. An ethnography of the cellphone in Jamaica, aimed at assessing its impact on the poor, was the result.

The book, grounded in ethnography, goes much beyond it. It is in fact a multifaceted, highly original and innovative piece of work, contributing to different disciplinary domains (actually blurring their boundaries), to anthropological theory, as well as to contemporary debates on new communication technologies and development. It is exceedingly lively and fun to read. The book is cast in a rigorous structure and – above all – informed by a contagious enthusiasm for anthropology and the cellphone.

The project is situated at the convergence of two main bodies of literature: the global impact of the cellphone and the specific nature of communication in Jamaica (see Chapter 1 – Introduction). The starting point is the widest possible consideration of communication, including "locations such as the market or church, media and transport, as well as the specific nature of oral discourse." Within these contexts, cellphone uses are tacked ethnographically with a primary concern for understanding and conveying the unique perspective of the research participants.

This is reflected in the whole book, where the authors' findings are consistently substantiated by core ethnographic descriptions configured as "stories" about individuals and small groups, expressing their experiences in their own specific idioms. However, the focus on the "particular" is in dialectic contrast with the need for generalizations pertaining to other disciplines—including policy—considered in the book. A balance between the two perspectives is constantly re-negotiated through the various chapters.

Chapter 2 - Infrastructure – discusses the role of market players, government and other actors in bringing about the conditions for the cellphone to become a dazzling success in Jamaica, reaching one of the highest penetration rates in the world. Chapter 3 - Location – introduces Jamaica generally and low income Jamaicans in particular, as well as the research sites and the living conditions.

Within this context, provided in more general and analytic terms, are the subsequent core chapters—Possession, Link up, Coping, Pressure—committed to understanding the ways in which Jamaicans both see and experience communication, as expressed through their own idioms, concepts and categories. These are nicely contrasted with "ours" in Chapter 8 - Welfare –

where fields derived from international development (e.g. education, health, crime) are reintroduced, for an assessment of cellphone uses and their consequences, as well as an assessment of the process of evaluation itself.

The final section - Evaluation – is most intriguing in trying to address the gap between qualitative/anthropological research. Its assumptions, methods and findings, and policy makers' need for analyses and recommendation fitting their own agendas and visions. Is qualitative research any use for policy? The answer is positive, if "the primary contribution of ethnography can be to turn the phrase 'it all depends' from a negative critique of policy into a positive foundation for policy." A policy dialectically in tune with the contradictions of reality.

"Link up"—as a specific communication modality of low income Jamaicans, related but not subsidiary to their strategies of "coping"—is probably the most valuable contribution the study offers to the anthropology of communication. Evidence leading to such a conceptualization first emerged from the author's analysis of cellphone use.

While the average duration of a phone call in Jamaica in 2004 was 19 seconds, the lists of contact numbers memorized in the phones reflected peculiar networks of relationships, of a very heterogeneous composition and amazing size. These included relatives in Jamaica and abroad, friends, lovers, neighbors, church and schoolmates, down to more or less casual acquaintances, which could be useful someday. Contacts were kept regularly activated by very short calls, in which the most important element was not the conversation, but the fact itself – in Jamaican terms – of 'linking up." The authors found that this kind of calls dominated in the phone usage of low income Jamaicans. This led to the identification of a practice of networking related indeed to exchange of favors and money, but not exclusively "functional," even in a rural population where, on average, more than 50 percent of household income derived from social networking rather than work.

On the basis of other evidence derived from their research, as well as from relevant anthropological literature, the authors point out that Jamaican communication no longer appears as a means to some other end, but networking —or linking up—seems to be brought about by a desire to forge links that is felt as valuable in its own right. And the cellphone lends itself superbly to support this mutual desire—or even compulsion —to create relationships.

This is one of the many reasons—expounded in the book—why Jamaicans consistently consider the cellphone as a "blessing." It helps them in "begging and giving" (a micro economy of exchanges), in eliminating "pressure" (re-establishing their well being by means of social contacts), as well as in "linking up," as seen above. However, the picture is more mitigated if fields delineated by the convention of international development and other governing bodies are considered for assessment. Every

beneficial effect seems to be counter-weighted by drawbacks brought about by the new opportunities offered by the tool. If the balance is generally positive in the field of "health," the picture is contradictory in the case of "crime" and cellphones seem to be more detrimental than beneficial in "schooling." This makes it difficult, but not impossible, to formulate suggestions for public action, with the caveat that ethnographic finding must be constantly updated and monitored, since any policy action can lead to unforeseen effects. The authors have in fact compiled policy recommendations for their sponsoring agency, which would be very interesting to peruse (unfortunately, the provided web link is not active at the moment this review is written).

Horst and Miller have produced an excellent piece of anthropological work, while at the same time fulfilling their obligations toward their sponsoring agency, in the form of an assessment of cellphone consequences for low income Jamaicans.

The double task they were faced with permeated the book with a constant dialectical shift among disciplines, methods, languages and perspectives. The richness of ethnographic evidence presented by the authors allowed them to go beyond ethnography and contribute to the anthropology of communication, the anthropology of media as well as the centrality of networking relationships. They participated in the contemporary debate on new technologies and society, while remaining coherently faithful to their academic assumptions and ethics. They actually built bridges between academia and the multiple actors outside it, which are part of our contradictory, ever changing world. Finally, Horst and Miller provide a model for other scholars interested in this field, thereby stimulating a collective effort for comparative research.

Pertierra, Raul. 2007. The Social Construction and Usage of Communication Technologies – Asian and European Experiences. The University of the Philippines Press. xi - 228 pp.

Tomasito T. Talledo

There are eleven essays collected in this book that includes the Introduction by the editor. They were remarkable papers read at a conference of international scholars on communication technologies that was ably supported by Asia Europe Foundation (ASEF), Asia Foundation and the Embassy of Finland in the Philippines. As gathering like this rarely happens in the country, the editor underscores its significance by stressing that this is "the first attempt to discuss the