Edited by Koen Leurs and Sandra Ponzanesi

Doing Digital Migration Studies

Theories and Practices of the Everyday

Doing Digital Migration Studies

Media, Culture and Communication in Migrant Societies

International migration for work, study, humanitarian and lifestyle reasons is increasingly commonplace, representing an unprecedented movement of people, globally. With these transnational mobilities comes the emergence and establishment of migrant societies with their own distinctive cultures and socialities. These migrant societies however are not necessarily oriented to particular fixed ethnic nor national identities. Instead, they may be formed through other identity signifiers such as feelings of commonality of specific experiences. Migrant societies, moreover, may not be confined to geographical boundaries but due to the digital turn where media and communication technologies and products are ubiquitous parts of everyday life, may exist transnationally in the digital environment. This book series is dedicated to engaging and understanding the role, impact, breadth and depth of culture, media and communication practices in and across migrant societies. The series showcases high quality and innovative research from established and emerging scholars to engage readers in exciting and informed conversations on migrant societies.

Series editor

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Doing Digital Migration Studies

Theories and Practices of the Everyday

Edited by
Koen Leurs and
Sandra Ponzanesi

Amsterdam University Press

Dedicated to

#NoBorders
#MigrantsRightsAreHumanRights
#NoOneisIllegal
#RefugeesWelcome
#WeAreHere
#TechWontSaveUs
#ReclaimYourFace
#ProtectNotSurveil

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Acknowledgements

The cover of *Doing Digital Migration Studies* features a still from the installation *We Are All Made of Light* by Maja Petrić (2018–2020).[1] This installation "utilizes interactive light, spatial sound and artificial intelligence to emulate a constellation in which every person becomes one among the stars." As elaborated in the words of the artist:

> The natural beauty of the universe is evoked to reveal connections between us and the rest of the world that often stay hidden in plain sight. As visitors move through the galaxy of stars, the light is extruded in their shape, living light trails of their presence across the starscape. Once visitors leave, their trails of light remain in the constellation and are added to the collection of trails that others have left behind. With every new visit, the number of light trails increases and reflects the growing history of the space. Each new person visiting the space is immersed in a starscape filled with light that marks the presence of everybody who was part of the piece. Over time, the exhibiting space becomes an archive of people's presence and evidence of how all of us are connected to others, past and present. Such experience raises awareness among visitors about the traces their presence leaves in the space and time that they inhabit. It asks each visitor to consider what does being immersed in this mesh of trails lends us in the understanding of each other and our collective legacy?

This volume is the crowning of many years of collegial scholarly collaborations and intellectual exchanges that have contributed to the interdisciplinary research area of digital migration studies across Europe and beyond in the last decades. Sandra Ponzanesi and Koen Leurs started thinking about these issues back in 2006, when the project *Wired Up: Digital Media as Innovative Socialization Practices for Migrant Youth* was initiated to reflect on the digital media practices of young migrants in the Netherlands,

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1   *We Are All Made of Light* won the 2019 Lumen Prize for Art and Technology, see https://www.majapetric.com/.

of Moroccan and Turkish background, in their interaction with local and global networks for the purpose of learning, playing and finding emotional supports. The project, led by Sandra Ponzanesi in collaboration with Kevin Leander (Vanderbilt University, USA) and Maria de Haan (Utrecht University, the Netherlands) was concluded with a large international conference entitled *Digital Crossings: Digital Crossroads – Media, Migration and Diaspora in a Transnational Perspective* (Utrecht, 28–30 June 2012) which aimed to address the relationship between migration and digital technologies across national contexts and ethnic belongings by focusing on how the notion of migration has undergone significant shifts, coming to signify imaginaries on the move which are not necessarily linked to geographical displacement.

A decade later, Sandra Ponzanesi and Koen Leurs organized another large international conference entitled *Migrant Belongings: Digital Practices and the Everyday* which, due to the protracted Covid-19 health pandemic, was held online (Utrecht, 21–23 April 2021).[2] This conference is the inspiration for the present volume. In this conference, the state of the arts on digital media and migration was showcased by bringing together a wealth of new research and projects in the rapidly expanding field of digital migration studies. The focus on the everyday was meant to steer away from techno-determinism and methodological nationalism, foregrounding the lived experience and creative strategies of migrants, mobile subjects and refugees themselves, who are often digital natives and techno savvy, countering governmental policies of surveillance and increased transnational datafication.

The conference was organized as a closing of the ERC project *CON-NECTINGEUROPE: Digital Crossings in Europe: Gender, Diaspora and Belonging* (2016–2021),[3] which explored digital diasporas in relation to issues of gender, ethnicity and affective belonging, focusing on how new technologies enhance new forms of connectivity between the homeland and destination countries, but also across diasporas (i.e., Somali, Turkish, Romanian) and the impact these have on identity, gender and belonging in European urban centres (London, Amsterdam and Rome). It also explored how these entanglements are connected to and perceived from outside Europe in their homeland countries and transnational settings. The project was carried out by Sandra Ponzanesi as principal investigator

in collaboration with a vibrant team of interdisciplinary and international researchers (Donya Alinejad, Laura Candidatu, Melis Mevsimler and Claudia Minchilli) and various research assistants.[4] The *Migrant Belongings* conference was organized in collaboration with the Diaspora, Migration and the Media (DMM) section of ECREA (European Communication Research and Education), chaired by Koen Leurs, Kevin Smets and Irati Agirreazkuenaga. This specific ECREA section recognizes that transnational and diasporic communications have become a fertile and challenging area for innovative theoretical and methodological approaches; this area of study urges the development of research with a transnational and cross-European orientation, which however is not nation-centric and Eurocentric. We would like to thank the other institutions in addition to the ERC and ECREA that have made this conference possible, in particular our main institution, Utrecht University, our department of Media and Culture Studies and our Graduate Gender Programme. But also the Utrecht University focus areas Governing the Digital Society (GDS) and Migration and Societal Change, as well as the Platform for Gender, Diversity and Global Justice (IOS, Institutions for Open Society) and the GDS Digital Migration special interest group. Open access book funding from the Dutch Research Council (NWO) allows us to make this volume freely available (file no. 36.201.045).

We also thank our conference assistants Julia de Lange and Frederik Kohler for their assistance during the conference and Kathi Amman and Isha Lahiri, who kept this publication enterprise on track. It was a pleasure to collaborate with all the chapter contributors and the special authors we invited to write thematic introductions: Karina Horsti, Mihaela Nedelcu, Athina Karatzogianni, Giorgia Aiello and Saskia Witteborn. Our thanks go also to Maryse Elliot, Julie Benschop-Plokker and Chantal Nicolaes, our editors at Amsterdam University Press (AUP), and to Catherine Gomes, editor of the AUP series *Media, Culture and Communication in Migration Societies*. We are grateful for the generous and engaged feedback by Sara Marino and Supriya Singh who reviewed this full manuscript. Your input helped us sharpen our argumentation. All flaws remain ours. We would like to acknowledge recent collegial exchanges with Kinan Alajak, Amanda Paz Alencar, Çiğdem Bozdağ, Laura Candidatu, Earvin Charles Cabalquinto, Miriana Cascone, Denise Cogo, Rianne Dekker, Huub Dijstelbloem, Radhika Gajjala, Nicholas de Genova, Myria Georgiou, Paul Gilroy, Guanqin He, Radha Hegde, Larissa Hjorth, Engin Isin, Johan Lindquist, Anne Kaun,

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4   More information about the project and team can be found here: http://connectingeuro-peproject.eu/.

Roy Kemmers, Mirca Madianou, Noemi Mena Montes, Veronika Nagy, Annamária Neag, Jonathan Corpus Ong, Albert Ali Salah, Philipp Seuferling, Rob Sharp, Mirjam Twigt, Catherine Wilson, the Cost Action network *Data Matters: Sociotechnical Challenges of European Migration and Border Control* (DATAMIG) and the STS Mig-Tec community, among many others that inspired us in writing this book.

Amsterdam/Utrecht, November 2023

Doing Digital Migration Studies: Introduction

Koen Leurs and Sandra Ponzanesi

In our contemporary world, migration and digital technologies mutually shape one another. They have historically always been intertwined, yet their dynamic relationship is constantly evolving. People on the move mediate their being and belonging in increasing conditions of datafication and digitization. Mobile devices, social media platforms and smartphone apps are used to shape the transnationally connected, and locally situated, social worlds in which migrants live their everyday lives. Connecting with friends, peers and family, sharing memories and information, navigating spaces and reshaping the local and the global in the process illustrate the proliferation of migration-related digital practices. These digital intensifications and accelerations also constitute a Janus-faced development for mobile people as they face increased forms of datafied migration management, algorithmic surveillance, control and biometric classification as well as forms of transnational authoritarianism and networked repression. In this anthology, *Doing Digital Migration Studies*, we bring into focus, empirically trace and theorize the myriad everyday digital practices surrounding migration.

A variety of concerns, debates and commitments are at stake when addressing digital migrant practices in their full complexity. Figure 0.1 is a visual rendering of the kaleidoscope of perspectives that can be mobilized to do digital migration studies. The visual harvest by the visual artist Renée van den Kerkhof captures the complex interplay between oppressive infrastructures reflecting migration regimes and the personal, affective and symbolic agency of everyday technology use. The figure is indicative of the great variety of themes covered in the papers presented at the April 2021 virtual conference *Migrant Belongings: Digital Practices and the Everyday*. With large parts of the world in lockdown as a result of the Covid-19 health pandemic, over the course of three days we held an online PhD workshop and had keynote talks by Paul Gilroy, Saskia Witteborn, Engin Isin, Larissa Hjorth and Nicholas de

Figure 0.1. Visual harvesting of ideas, *Migrant Belongings*. Digital Practices and the Everyday conference, by visual artist Renée van den Kerkhof.

Genova (see the special issue "Digital migration practices and the everyday" published in *Communication, Culture and Critique*, Ponzanesi & Leurs, 2022). In parallel sessions, over 200 papers were presented, with an audience of over 1,000 registered participants. As scholars from across the world connected from their homes, the event was held using the video-conference platform Zoom. Informal gatherings took place in the interactive virtual space platform Gather.town, where we had built a digital rendition of our Utrecht University inner-city campus with the help of our assistants Julia de Lange and Frederik Köhler. The present anthology offers a selection of the exciting and innovative work that was presented at the conference, contributing to the interdisciplinary research area of digital migration studies.

We take digital migration studies as an umbrella term to refer to the study of migration in relation to digital technologies. This is not intended as a new area of academic specialization; rather, with this volume we seek to build further bridges and animate dialogue between the various disciplines that have started to study migration and mobility in relation to questions of digitization, datafication and artificial intelligence (AI), among others. Studies in media and communication, science and technology (STS), migration, and border studies, as well as geography, sociology, anthropology, psychology, gender and postcolonial studies, and human rights, among other

disciplines, have engaged with digital migration. Let us consider notable digital migration studies frameworks from several relevant disciplines, to illustrate how researchers address the top-down workings of institutional, governmental or corporate power, the bottom-up forms of agency in everyday digital practices of mobile people, and the middle-ground resulting from the interplay between top-down forces and bottom-up agency.

1. In media studies, the concept of "digital diasporas" (e.g., Alonso & Oiarzabal, 2010; Gajjala, 2019; Candidatu et al., 2019) promotes the study of how dispersed migrant communities maintain identity and belonging across distance, the notion of "migrant polymedia" (Madianou & Miller, 2012) alerts us to how migrants navigate the communicative affordances of devices and platforms, while the "digital border" (Chouliaraki & Georgiou, 2022) has been proposed to address how digital technologies shape experiences and meanings of migration at the interplay of bottom-up experiences and top-down forces.

2. In sociology, the concept of the "connected migrant" (Diminescu, 2008) can be used to account for everyday experiences of navigating a sense of co-presence in host and homeland societies, while "bio bordering" (Amelung et al., 2021) enables us to consider governmental use of biometric database systems across countries in the European Union to govern mobile people.

3. In information studies, the theory of "digital humanitarian brokerage" (Maitland, 2018, p. 244) provides a critical lens to address how institutional agents including governments, NGOs and the tech sector seek to improve flexibility and efficiency in their provision of humanitarian services, while the concept of "information precarity" (Wall et al., 2017) is useful to account for the fragile information landscape forcibly displaced populations experience in navigating journeys or governmental procedures.

4. In cultural geography, the "biopolitics of mobility" (Tazzioli, 2020) offers a tool to study governmental racialization, labelling and disciplining of mobile people through digitization and datafication; and researchers have developed ways to follow and narrate the "smart(phone) travelling" of irregularized migrants (Zijlstra & van Liempt, 2017).

5. In anthropology, the "autonomy of migration" perspective sheds light on how, through everyday practices, mobile people negotiate, contest and challenge digitization and datafication (De Genova, 2017; Mollerup, 2020), while researchers have also documented trafficker strategies of using "digital black holes" to control the digital connections of Eritrean refugees in Libya for purposes of extortion (Van Reisen et al., 2023).

6. STS scholars alert us to how the inner workings and logics of the infra-structural "migration machine" (Dijstelbloem et al., 2011; Dijstelbloem, 2021) produce, categorize and limit the mobility of mobile people; while increasingly STS scholars call for infrastructures to be adopted as a lens to study from below how migrants negotiate and contest technologized processes by making alternative use of infrastructures (Scheel, 2019; Pelizza, 2020).

7. Governance studies address whether forcibly displaced people who use technologies strategically may become "smart refugees" (Dekker et al., 2018); while also drawing attention to how government agencies are increasingly assessing digital traces of migrants, for example to verify claims of asylum seekers by screening their smartphones (Bolhuis van Wijk, 2021) or carrying out Open Source Intelligence (OSINT) screening of their public-facing social media profiles.

8. Feminist and queer studies have drawn attention to how mobile people digitally mediate affects and emotions while carving out a new home. Studies show they often have to balance obligations of caring at a distance while being controlled or being subject to surveillance within their transnational families or diasporas (Alinejad & Ponzanesi, 2020; Atay, 2017; Shield, 2021; Szulc, 2020).

These perspectives all serve an important purpose in producing new knowledge about migration in relation to digitization, datafication and AI. As we want to illustrate with this incomplete overview of disciplines and concepts, a wide range of specialized concepts has been developed to attend to digital migration from various disciplinary vantage points. However, to date, these discussions have commonly taken place within the silos of individual disciplines (Leurs & Smets, 2018). With this volume we seek to promote exchanges across disciplines.

The interdisciplinary research area of digital migration studies raises ontological, epistemological, methodological and ethical questions (Leurs, 2023). Migrants and the mobile come into being through spatial, legal, procedural and symbolic moves. Border crossing, visa applications, refugee status determination, surveillance, humanitarianism and population census registrations are increasingly digitized, datafied and machine-read. When addressing the ontology of digital migration, we attempt to identify, categorize and understand its basic elements and workings. On the ontological level, we see migration and technology not as separable entities existing a priori. Migration does not exist outside of the realm of digital mediation. Rather, we here propose a relational

understanding of migration and digital media, as mutually shaping digital migration.

We can for example begin to attend to this relationship by addressing the increased intersections between the dominant logics underpinning migration and the dominant logics underpinning technology development. Even though in the last decades international migration has remained stable at around 3% percent of the population, the idea we live in a time of unprecedented migration crisis situations persists (De Haan, 2023). The hegemonic logic surrounding human mobility, resulting from capitalism, imperialism and colonialism, has increasingly made migration into a technology of differentiation. When understanding technology as the production and application of knowledge to tackle problems, the logic of migration has become a technology to distinguish between "good" and "bad" migrants, enabling mobility for some privileged subjects (particularly white, male, heterosexual, elite and able-bodied persons from the Global North), while restricting mobility for others (particularly black, LGBTIQ+ and disabled bodies from the Global South) (Madörin, 2022). In parallel, the dominant logic shaping technological development revolves around trust in "algorithmic reason" to differentiate between and govern the "self and other" (Aradau & Blanke, 2022, p. 3). Based on capitalism, securitization and humanitarianism, technologies are purposefully imagined as neutral tools to efficiently classify populations and thereby govern "normality and abnormality across social worlds and political boundaries" (Aradau & Blanke, p. 3). The complex co-constitution of digital migration resulting from the interplay between these two dominant logics warrants further theoretical development; for this purpose, scholars might draw inspiration from the queer perspective of assemblage thinking (Puar, 2017), new materialism (Barad, 2007) or actor-network theory (Latour, 2005).

Whereas these logics of seeing migration and technology from the top-down perspective of the state and its governing policy frameworks are dominant—to the degree that they are deadly for people pursuing irregular migration routes—there are alternative understandings. Seen from the bottom-up perspective, the autonomy of migration offers an important insight into the logics of everyday lived experiences. The autonomy of migration emphasizes the agency and self-determination of individuals and groups in the migration process. This perspective sees migration as a decision made by individuals and groups, rather than a unidirectional consequence of external forces or structural constraints. From this perspective, migrants are seen as active agents who make choices about when, where and why to migrate, and who exert control over their own lives and experiences during

the migration process. This approach often highlights the ways in which migrants adapt to new environments, create networks and communities, and negotiate their identities in response to changing social and political contexts. For example, in Tunisia, Algeria and Morocco, the Arabic word *harraga* (الحراقة), which can be translated as "those who burn," is used among mobile people to describe their aspirations and activities of "burning" borders that stem from the colonial era through their mobility and expanding living spaces (M'Charek, 2020, p. 418). Through the prism of *harraga*, other "headings for Europe" (Derrida, 1992) have been most forcefully reclaimed by people who "burn up the road" to make it "Europe's" duty to listen to the call of these others decrying the signs of radical closure of Europe's borders (Kaiser & Thiele, 2016).

On the level of epistemology, we can reflect upon how we know what we know about digital migration. A variety of stakeholders produce knowledge about migration and digital technologies. In this book, the aim is to contribute to academic discourse by putting migrant voices centre stage and attending to how migrants live, construct, negotiate and/or resist dominant framings through their everyday practices. While the chapters are written by both migrant and non-migrant academics, the chapters highlight and amplify a variety of migrant voices. The focus is on the digital practices of a wide range of mobile subjects living under various circumstances across geographies. For example, Daniela Jaramillo-Dent, Alencar and Yan Asadchy describe the creative practices of Latin American migrant content creators living in the United States and Spain (see Chapter 10); Marie Godin and Bahati Ghislain share experiences of Congolese refugee influencers living in Nairobi, Kenya, who are seeking to monetize their YouTube videos (see Chapter 6); while Fungai Machirori discusses African and diaspora activist voices advancing cosmopolitanisms (see Chapter 5). In addition, Nishant Shah details the work of Anushka Nair, a migrant performance artist living in the Netherlands who drew attention in her work to the exodus of internal migrants under Covid-19 lockdown conditions in India (see Chapter 8). Catriona Stevens, Loretta Baldassar and Raelene Wilding showcase how Chinese transnational grandparents in Perth, Australia, engage in digital kinning and homemaking (see Chapter 4). These voices provide insight into how everyday digital practices affect and shape migration from below. Besides these chapters, the volume also presents insights from the perspective of the state. Daniel Leix Palumbo addresses how governmental agencies in Germany turn to voice biometrics in their attempt to digitally identify asylum seekers (see Chapter 13). As public-private partnerships proliferate, the perspective of corporations also warrants attention. Luděk Stavinoha

uncovers the technocratic fantasies of consultancy firms promising orderly migration management in Greece (see Chapter 14) and Kaarina Nikunen and Sanna Valtonen explore how datafication shapes the bordering practices and lives of undocumented migrants, showing how, through datafication, digital borders permeate the everyday lives of migrants, whose humanity becomes evaluated and assorted through inconsistent and biased data practices (see Chapter 15).

In recent years, digital media and migration scholars have addressed producers, audiences and texts, focusing on infrastructures, media representations and users, among others. As regards to methodology, both qualitative, ethnographic studies and discourse analysis are conducted, addressing digital migration holistically as a situated, contextual, and complex constellation, while quantitative, survey and data-driven studies are carried out to find patterns, model, predict and visualize mobility, drawing on digital traces. With respect to ethics, to avoid the silencing of the personal, embodied and situated narratives of those on the move, we advocate continued commitment to participatory action and mixed-method approaches alongside aggregation (Leurs & Witteborn, 2021). This way, we can remain attentive to the granular level of everyday life and, in combination with quantitative overviews, we can hold organizations and corporations accountable for injustices, exclusions and human rights violations.

On Doing Digital Migration Studies and the Everyday

'Doing' in the title *Doing Digital Migration Studies* is a term used to refer to the myriad activities needed in pursuit of knowledge production on digital migration. It refers here both to the theoretical exercise of thinking through the relationships between migration and digital technologies, and to methodological acts of elaborating and reflecting on the ethics of one's fieldwork and the intricacies of gathering empirical data. It also covers the agential aspect of media users, who are now active participants and can for example claim their communication rights through acts of citizenship performed through digital media practices (Isin & Nielsen, 2018).

Another key concept of this anthology is that of the "everyday," as we are theorizing media and digital technology not in a void but as embedded practices that affect the more mundane and banal ways of media usage. Avoiding polarization that follows the use of technology as quick fixes for new global challenges (techno-solutionism of biometrics and AI for border control, refugee containment and hospitality management as an example)

or as a new, inescapable system (techno-determinism), the focus on the everyday posits the inherent entanglement of users and technology across different realms of activities and interests, mainly as a continuous and contiguous experience between different forms of socialities and realities. Therefore, it is important to pay attention to the ways in which technology is deployed by governmental and supranational organizations that play a role in the everyday lives of migrants, as well as to study the subjective and affective dimensions of everyday practices as articulated from the bottom up in the form of myriads of transnationally connected, and locally situated, social worlds.

The theories of the everyday evoked throughout this volume reflect several genealogies of critical thinking, including the following:

– The Frankfurt School of critical theory, which emerged in the mid-20th century, developed a number of neo-Marxist critical theories of the everyday that emphasized the ways in which the routines and habits of everyday life can reinforce and reproduce inequality, domination and social injustice. These theories often focused on the role of mass media and consumer culture in dominating people's perceptions, desires and values in everyday life, and on the ways in which people's experiences of work, leisure and social relationships can be shaped by and reinforce oppressive social structures (Nealon & Irr, 2002). From this strand, we digital migration studies scholars can learn that the everyday is something to be critically engaged with, by seeing it as a site for understanding how mobile individuals are increasingly subject to the control of bureaucratic, corporate and technological forces.

– Poststructuralist theories of the everyday, which emerged in the late 20th century, challenged the notion that everyday life can be understood as a coherent, unified and stable concept. The analytic pair of "strategies" and "tactics" proposed by Michel de Certeau, for example, captures the dynamic between how structures such as the built environment can govern, limit and channel people, and how people "make do" with these structures in their everyday tactics (1984). For digital migration studies scholars, poststructuralist theories can be useful to emphasize the ways in which everyday migrant lives are constantly changing, are fragmented and contradictory, and the ways in which people on the move experience everyday life are impacted by the shifting power relations, categories and modes of governance that emerge in a datafied, rebordering world.

– Drawing both on the Frankfurt School and poststructuralist theorists, media theorists have sought to understand how and why media "are treated by everyone as part of the taken-for-granted furniture of ordinary, daily existence" (Scannell, 1995, p. 4). Ien Ang (1991), for example, famously studied television audiences, and, drawing on a Foucauldian analysis of power/knowledge, she found that audience members are active social subjects, who engage with television in contextual, cultural and creative ways.

– Feminist, postcolonial, decolonial and queer theories of the everyday, which have emerged from various traditions, have successfully placed experiential ways of knowing on the research agenda. Researchers in these areas have developed important frameworks to address the ways in which gender, race, class, sexuality, nationality, ability and other forms of social inequality and discrimination shape people's lived experiences, embodiments and emotional processing of everyday life (Ahmed, 2017). These theories provide tools to highlight the ways in which the routines and practices of everyday migrant life and digital practices can reinforce and reproduce historical power relations, roles and stereotypes, and the ways in which migrant individuals and collectives can highlight, resist and transform these patterns of inequality and discrimination in their everyday lives (Ticktin & Youatt, 2022).

– The everyday is also important for the field of cosmopolitanism. We can discern different approaches within discussions on cosmopolitanism. Approaches range from conviviality (Gilroy, 2005), which is an agential modality of choice for togetherness, shared values and bridging in practice, to more inevitable global structures of the "everyday" as imposed by "banal ways" of cosmopolitan coexistence (Beck, 2010; Calhoun, 2003). Achille Mbembe (2018) suggests that for alternative thinking about borderless worlds, we should turn away from Western concepts, and reconsider how everyday life under modernity in Africa has always revolved around pursuing mobility, circulation and networking across borders, to escape the entrapment of confinements, displacement and forced labour.

The everyday is therefore not only to be understood as "locally" and "temporally" determined but as practices that can encompass different relational scales and geographical planes where the personal, the institutional and the systemic will intermingle in mediated communication. The chapters in this volume explore the lived experience and emotional facets of digitally mediated migrant socialities in a variety of socio-cultural and geographic

locales. Such examinations raise important questions about how digital media ubiquity shapes global migration experiences and multicultural media publics across various scales. The contributors to this volume have addressed the everyday from a variety of analytic and methodological perspectives.

A first approach is to use critical theory to analyse the ways in which power, inequality and social domination shape people's everyday experiences. As is reflected by the contributions by Nishant Shah in Chapter 8, Yener Bayramoğlu in Chapter 9 and Moé Suzuki in Chapter 12, critical theory provides tools to focus on the ways in which dominant institutions and corporations use digital forms of control, coercion and persuasion to maintain their power and privilege, and to shape people's perceptions, beliefs and actions in everyday life. By exposing and challenging these mechanisms of control, critical theorists aim to empower mobile people to resist domination and to imagine more equitable alternatives of mobility, movement and border-crossing.

A second approach is to use ethnographic methods to study the details of everyday life and digital practices in a particular context of migration and mobility. As illustrated by Catriona Stevens, Loretta Baldassar and Raelene Wilding in Chapter 4 and Elisabetta Costa in Chapter 5, ethnographers are well equipped to observe, participate in and document the digitally mediated activities, interactions and experiences of migrant people in a particular community or setting, in order to understand how they make sense of their everyday lives and how they navigate the challenges and opportunities of their political, social and cultural environments.

A third approach is to use discourse analysis to study the ways in which people use language and other forms of digitally mediated communication to construct, maintain and challenge the meanings and values of everyday migrant life. As Daniela Jaramillo-Dent, Amanda Alencar and Yan Asadchy (Chapter 10), Daniel Leix Palumbo (Chapter 13) and Luděk Stavinoha (Chapter 14) show, discourse analysis provides insight into the ways in which language is used to express and shape people's beliefs, identities and social relationships, and to construct and contest ideas about what is normal, desirable or acceptable in everyday constellations of digital migration.

Another approach is to revisit the visual modality of representation, challenging existing registers and genres and proposing alternative ways of seeing, as well as of co-creating. This is especially evident in Chapter 1 by Nadica Denić on auto-ethnographic films to describe migration journeys through the notion of an oppositional gaze, Chapter 2 by Irene Gutiérrez Torres on border visuality through archival participatory filmmaking as a way of countering stereotypical media representations, and Chapter 3 by

Rosa Wevers with Ahnjili Zhuparris on AI used as artwork that activates critical reflection on the politics and logics of predictive policing systems. These approaches entail returning the gaze, staging an oppositional gaze, or resignifying existing visual practices and convivial practices which are becoming more and more obvious and relevant in social media. In Chapter 10, Jaramillo-Dent, Alencar and Asadchy discuss migrant strategies through the use of TikTok, and how new forms of creative practices shape platformed belonging. In Chapter 11, Estrella Sendra focuses on the use of Facebook as a virtual festival space to enact alternative forms of rooted cosmopolitanism, and in Chapter 12 Suzuki brings forward the role of virtual reality (VR) as challenging traditional forms of representation and proposing empathy as a new mode of connection in VR films.

Across these different approaches, the questions of common humanity, cosmopolitanism and solidarity are analysed through different lenses and strategies, from the humanitarian communication approach to the intervention of social media activism intervention and the legal perspective and datafication framework. In Chapter 13, Leix Palumbo explores the problematic use of voice biometrics during asylum procedures and the ways in which sounds also become part of an essential datafication procedure in which the "language, accent, everyday sonic" becomes co-opted into regimes of control about origin, authenticity and verifiability that are always prone to error and misrecognition. In Chapter 14, Stavinoha studies how the management of refugees and migration is outsourced to private companies in the name of efficiency, professionalization and automation. This not only reduces subjects to numbers and depersonalized objects of bureaucratic knowledge, but also produces skewed relationships in terms of privacy, safety and trust. In Chapter 15, Kaarina Nikunen and Sanna Valtonen explore how datafication shapes the bordering practices and lives of undocumented migrants. It is argued that datafication involves a temporal shift towards *anticipation* that focuses on predicting, profiling and pre-empting different forms of migration. According to these approaches, the very notion of common humanity and cosmopolitan solidarity is debunked in favour of quantification, abstraction and rationalization.

The various chapters explore not only the reverberations and conse-quences of these new governmental practices but also the incompleteness, discontent and undesirability of technological quick fixes that do not take into account the practices of the everyday. They also consider the importance of doing digital migration as a collaborative, collective and creative dynamic that proposes new forms of engagement with the digital and with the very notion of civic participation.

Finally, what is striking is that despite technological imaginaries of neutrality and efficiency, addressing the everyday as a research site in which to study digital migration reveals the many emotional and affective dynamics at play. Conceptually, theorizing emotion and affect does not so much address the discrete inner states of mobile people but rather the conditions emerging from the relations of people to their social, material and digital surroundings. Attention to such registers opens up new possibilities for investigating emotionality as quintessentially social and always mediated.

Outline of the Book

Doing Digital Migration Studies is divided into five sections, each of which contains three chapters. The chapters were written by 22 contributors, from various disciplinary orientations, at various stages in their careers, who work on various communities in a variety of geographical locations. Each individual section is preceded by a short introduction written by an invited author. The section introductions are brief personal interventions that serve to introduce readers to the theme and field, indicating relevant discussions and possible future research questions.

Section I: Creative Practices

Section I pays serious attention to creative practices as an alternative mode of knowledge production. In this section we address creative practices as forms of social innovation, because creative practices can spur new ideas, interventions and solutions to problems. As Karina Horsti writes in her introduction to this section, the digital mediation of everyday life enables unexpected possibilities for migrants' connectivity, visibility and voice (e.g., Horsti, 2019, 2023; Leurs & Ponzanesi, 2018; Nikunen, 2018; Smets, 2018). The use of digital technology, for example, does not only enable new creative practices for self-expression but also different representational modes that respond to difficult journeys and violent borders through alternative visual, linguistic and technological repertoires. Given the increased accessibility and democratization of mobile media and recording tools, migration becomes part of more complex narratives, which counter the institutional and governmental rhetoric of the traditional broadcasting and national media coverage, while also developing new visual and participatory strategies through the creative engagement of artists, independent filmmakers, curators and journalists who might be migrants themselves. Creativity is, therefore,

perceived as challenging dominant and hegemonic practices, in favour of migrants and civil society organizations that become active agents and narrators of their life stories, everyday experiences and affective archives.

In Chapter 1, media scholar and film curator Nadica Denić conceptualizes migrant auto-ethnographic films through the notion of an oppositional gaze on migration journeys. Documentary film maker and communication scholar Irene Gutiérrez, in Chapter 2, examines participatory filmmaking as a way of countering stereotypical media representations of migration. These films interrogate the "European" gaze by reversing the perspective. Instead of Europe looking at "them," "they" look at Europe and in doing so, make visible the violence Europe produces in its bordering practices. In Chapter 3, gender studies scholar and curator Rosa Wevers examines the politics and logics of AI used in predictive policing systems. The author engages with a special interview with artist Ahnjili Zhuparris and her project *Future Wake* (2021), an artistic web project that examines predictive policing technology through the lens of analysing patterns of police brutality. By shifting the focus from possible future crime offenders to police violence, the artwork activates critical reflection on the politics and logics of predictive policing systems while creating awareness of police-related fatal encounters.

Digitization, datafication and AI contribute to the making of creative practices but also the circulation of innovative forms of visuality and media expressions. How this richness of self-narration and alternative visualities manages to circulate in multiple media platforms, to be distributed through social media channels and archived raises the issue of how and when creative practices can be produced, consumed and re-accessed. The multiplicity of images and narratives creates a potential for the democratization of the collective memory of migration in Europe. Yet the fragmentation and proliferation of film narratives, visual stories and artistic interventions entails a risk of falling prey to governance and control, or hegemonic forms of archiving and cultural distribution. Many creative practices disappear, or are left at the margins of alternative festivals, exhibition spaces and collaborative labs. It is then important to have the digital space as a possibility to interact with the memory of these productions in order to keep them active, accessible and reusable.

Section II: Digital Diasporas and Placemaking

In Section II we address the room for manoeuvre and intervention experienced by mobile people in their use of digital technologies. Digital diaspora refers to the movement of individuals, ideas and information across

digital devices, networks and platforms. It is a concept used to describe how people from all over the world, who share common interests and values, can be connected through digital technology. It is also used to describe how digital technology can help people find a sense of identity, community, and connection to their heritage and culture. In her introduction to the section, the sociologist Mihaela Nedelcu describes digital agency as the degree to which digital practices provide means to "make a difference" (Giddens, 1984, p. 14). She points out the ways in which information and communication technologies have broadened our ability to cross national borders and forge new forms of transnational connectivity. The field of digital migration studies has risen to the task to analyse and study these phenomena in their many facets, from the ways in which technology empowers refugees and undocumented migrants in their perilous journeys and struggle with precarity and vulnerability to the mundane and everyday forms of connectedness (Diminescu, 2008), co-presence (Baldassar, et al., 2016) and digital diasporas (Nedelcu, 2018).

Though the empowering and agential potential of migrants' digitally mediated practices has been widely recognized, less attention has been paid, as Nedelcu argues, to the "micro-fabric" of digital transnational practices. Therefore, not only are more empirical studies needed, but also approaches that take into account the positionality of the researchers vis-à-vis the populations studied and the intersectional dimensions of race, gender and class, keeping in focus the ethics and politics of North-South divides as well as the methodological challenges of accounting for people who live their lives simultaneously embedded in local and global contexts, across national, cultural or social boundaries. As Beck has theorized, "the internet is then not only a space of action or a tool to organize, communicate, and exchange but ... it is a process of becoming a cosmopolitized world" (2016, p. 139). This is due to an unpreceded global condition of interconnectivity and ubiquity, which relies, as Nedelcu (2018) argues, on both the logic of action and belonging which means tackling the continuous ambivalence of being inside and outside, included and excluded, nationally embedded and transnationally involved.

This is reflected in the chapters included in this section, which deal with the ways in which digital media allows for the transformation of individual agency, in making sense of transnational lives increasingly positioned at both the local and transnational levels. In Chapter 4, the anthropologists Catriona Stevens, Loretta Baldassar and Raelene Wilding explore the digital practices of Chinese transnational grandparents in Australia, which generate a sense of belonging and at the same time a sense of disconnection from their

peers in their homeland. In Chapter 5, the digital practitioner and sociologist Fungai Machirori investigates the specificity of African cosmopolitan practices through the analysis of social media such as TikTok or Instagram use by African digital influencers who play a role in wider political issues informed by local, intracontinental and global perspectives. In Chapter 6, refugee studies scholars Marie Godin and Bahati Ghislain focus instead on the role of YouTube for Congolese refugee-influencers living in Nairobi who reach out to their diasporic audiences through creatively developed channels that provided economic niches during the Covid-19 pandemic.

The different uses of digital media, locally informed and transnationally oriented, challenge mainstream narratives and produce different forms of "cosmopolitan" belonging, resistance and creativity. African women influencers help foster their followers' cosmopolitan awareness and change their views of politics (Chapter 5). Congolese refugee YouTubers use their "small acts of resistance" as a way to challenge gender (diasporic) normativeness, showcase refugee talents, change refugee representation within local communities, and enhance refugee interconnectedness, both locally and across borders (Chapter 6). In time, these forms of digital agency could play a key role in forging new kinds of transnational collective action and processes of political change.

Section III: Affect and Belonging

Theories of affect and emotion typically distinguish between the two by emphasizing how emotions are conscious experiences that are given meaning on the basis of one's biography, whereas affects are pre-conscious, and pre-emotional bodily transitions. In doing digital migration studies, we can turn to affect to study the physiological, cognitive and behavioural bodily responses that happen in result to stimuli such as interacting with a family member or loved one living far away through the screen of a device. One might think for example of how an interaction with someone through a video call may cause you to change your facial expression, body language or vocal intonation, or you may feel it in your skin when you get goose bumps. The variety of theories of belonging that exist commonly share an understanding of how individuals are connected to and part of a larger whole, such as a family, community, network or society (Marlowe et al., 2017). We are attentive to how belonging may be produced through digital practices and networks, particularly by drawing out the workings and implications of affective and emotional registers shaping these processes. Belonging is the individual or collective affective sensation and emotional registering

of being accepted, respected and valued, regardless of possible differences. Digital belonging thus can revolve around the sense of connection and acceptance experienced, being an active member of a digital community and the feeling of being seen, heard, valued and appreciated there. This may concern affective perceptions of shared intimacy in digitally mediated long-distance relationships or felt trust in the reliability of fellow community members (Marino, 2015).

The literature suggests that when migrants develop feelings of belonging, they are more likely to be resilient and engaged. In the special issue on *Migrancy and Digital Mediations of Emotion*, Donja Alinejad and Ponzanesi (2020) focus on the importance of emotions and feelings in people's mobile lives and the way these affect features in the everyday lives of transnational migrants: in their experiences of belonging, intimate relationships and aspects of how they experience and respond to political and economic realities (Boccagni & Baldassar, 2015; Skrbiš, 2008; Svašek, 2012; Wood & Waite, 2011). On a global scale, digital communications have always mediated varied aspects of migrancy, from long-distance calls and personal messaging to remittance transfers and access to information about jobs, immigration procedures and smuggling routes. More recently, migrancy has become mediated via platforms, which are essential for new forms of communication and participation (van Dijck, 2013). Alinejad and Ponzanesi discuss the theoretical understandings of emotion and affect—not as discrete inner states but as conditions emerging from the relations of people to their material and social surroundings—which have opened up an array of possibilities for investigating emotionality as quintessentially social and always mediated:

> Therefore, the study of emotions in relation to digital media under condi-
> tions of migrancy emerges as being about what emotions "do" rather than
> what emotions "are." The emotions refer not only to transnational families
> in the traditional sense but also to various forms of digital intimacy such
> as friendships, queer relations, diasporic motherhood, connective services,
> and entrepreneurship (Alinejad & Ponzanesi, 2020, p. 633).

In her introduction to this section, media scholar Athina Karatzogianni discusses her own long-standing scholarly engagement with topics of digital-ity, migration, affect and belonging, along different lines of enquiry. The first line she mentions is in relation to affinity networks dominated by active affective structures for socio-political change, to be seen in contrast to networks dominated by reactive affective structures, which use violence

to achieve their objectives (Karatzogianni & Robinson, 2010). This line of enquiry has moved into the realm of political theory, where the utilization of active/reactive affect dominates networks and movements of hackers, dissidents and whistleblowers. The second line of enquiry concerns the role of affect in digital politics and culture (Karatzogianni & Kuntsman, 2012), which involves cyber-conflict in computer-mediated environments. In collaboration with Adi Kuntsman, Karatzogianni analysed the affective and embodied emotional aspect of resistance beyond the representational and semiotic approach, for example when the affective structures overflow, creating new interfaces between the actual and the digital, such as when digital protests materialize in the physical world, making changes in the political arena through the circulation of affects. In her third line of enquiry, she mentions the return to the "public sphere" where normalization of the affect and role of migrants is evident as part of everyday digitally networked media in less optimistic and dialogical ways. However, through engagement with artists and art production, technologies can still be used to mobilize people in online campaigns and counter misinformation about events taking place in their country of origin.

The chapters in this section explore different takes on the experiences of migration, affect and belonging. In Chapter 7, the digital anthropologist Elisabetta Costa investigates belonging among highly skilled migrants in Groningen, the Netherlands, stuck in the city during the Covid-19 lockdown; in Chapter 8, feminist technology scholar Nishant Shah problematizes the "aporetic body" in digital migration studies; and in Chapter 9, queer media scholar Yener Bayramoğlu theorizes queer digital migration, arguing that "digital technologies utilized in surveillance reinforce the racialized and heteronormative structures of borderscapes" (Bayramoğlu, this volume). Within such digital surveillance environments, two different problems emerge, as Shah states: "Although the geographical restrictions disallow migrants to move, the digital practices are all only geared towards movement which creates a great schism between the imagined and the lived" (Shah, this volume). Migration and belonging acquire different relationships to space and temporality as influenced by affective relations. Migrants mobile people and border crossers may feel stuck, in limbo or out of place, rethinking their social relations through digital relations and reconfigured material embodiment. What remains central is understanding the ways in which virtual relations impact on the lifeworld of migrants in ways that are different from non-migrants and how this helps rethink the role of affect in ideology, for reshaping the imaginary beyond the digital/virtual matrix and its affective capacities.

Section IV: Visuality and Digital Media

In Section IV, we address visuality and digital media as a form of knowledge, power and communication. Visuals online are not politically neutral, but rather always carry certain world views. As part of visual culture, digital practices are embedded in everyday life and used to construct shared understandings of the world. Emergent digital practices on TikTok create, reinforce and possibly contest certain ideologies, beliefs and practices. Visuality can become an important tool for social change, as it can be used to challenge dominant power structures and create new narratives. As visual communication scholar Giorgia Aiello writes in her introduction to this section, visual images have become central to the ways in which migrants view and represent themselves in a variety of digital arenas, including but not limited to social media. Here, representation is more complex than something coming from mainstream media or governed by border crossers themselves. Relations of agency and power make the circuits of visuality not clear cut, but part of a web of producers, receivers and repurposings. It is particularly relevant to see the connection between migration and digital technologies as part of repetitive, mundane and everyday visual productions that are always imbricated in a politics of representation (Aiello & Parry, 2020; Hall et al., 1997; Mirzoeff, 2006).

The chapters included in this section highlight these double-binding aspects of digital visibility. On the one hand, the chapters show that migrants' digitally mediated practices are key to generating solidarity, support and community and contribute to new visual registers and formats, fostering more democratic and inclusive "ways of seeing" (Duguay, 2016). Yet, on the other hand, these self-representations and narrations are dependent on the media affordances and techno-social constraints of the platforms and digital tools migrants use. Their expression online creates "affective publics" (Papacharissi, 2014) that contain both the potentialities and limitations of these new modalities of visuality and visibilization. As Aiello writes, "digitally mediated socialities are both enabled and constrained by the algorithmic logics of particular platforms together with the aesthetic demands of specific media—from the visual formats that are typical of social media platforms like TikTok and Facebook to the immersive and experiential qualities of virtual reality" (Aiello, this volume). In Chapter 10, media scholars Daniela Jaramillo-Dent, Amanda Alencar and Yan Asadchy give an original analysis of the creative practices and platformed belongings of #migrantes on TikTok. This includes not only new, original ways of curating migrant presence online but also clashes with the infrastructure

and forms of censorship and hate responses. In Chapter 11, film scholar and festival practitioner Estrella Sendra highlights the different practices of cosmopolitanism as generated during the International Festival of Folklore held in Louga, Senegal, which activates forms of rooted cosmopolitanism, generated through the virtual space of Facebook, that animate the festival in particular ways. Finally, in Chapter 12, political science scholar Moé Suzuki offers a novel take on the role of virtual reality in the creation of a "human" connection with refugees and migrants, making an intervention not only in the idea of VR as an empathy machine, but also rethinking the ways in which this embodiment generates paradoxes and reactivates stereotypes connected to everyday life, as portrayed in *Clouds over Sidra*, while also attacking the sensorial perception of the viewer and creating a sense of discomfort and disconnect instead of empathy.

It is precisely this affective dimension that characterizes all three chapters. Questions of visuality are connected to the visceral implications of digital media (Marston, 2020). Scrutiny of the emotional, material and sensorial implications of (self)representations can lead to embodied understanding of migrant identities and experiences while not losing sight of the political engagement and the opportunities for activism. This shows migration and digital media are not just a simple interface, but raise all kinds of issues around migrants' participation in digital communication in which agency, performativity and embodiment play out individually as well as collectively. As Aiello so cogently concludes, "Ultimately, the visuality of digital media is a fraught terrain which however also potentially offers uplifting and even liberatory means to take part in networks of solidarity and affirm one's identity in the face of erasure and discrimination" (Aiello, this volume).

Section V: Datafication, Infrastructuring and Securitization

In the final section, we address everyday digital migration practices from the perspective of datafication, infrastructuring and securitization. The relationships between migration, infrastructures, securitization and datafication are complex and multi-layered (Browne, 2015; Pugliese, 2010; Walters, 2018). In media, STS and migration studies, infrastructure scholars seek to open up the "black box" of migration and technologies by revealing the assumptions, ideas and processes that underpin ideologies of migration governance that are baked into technologies (Seuferling & Leurs, 2021). From an infrastructural perspective we can seek to explore "the digital force in forced migration" (Witteborn, 2018, p. 21), for example

by addressing how migration has historically been used as a tool for political and social control, and how this development shapes the contemporary datafication and digitization of migration governance and control. Data collection, analysis, modelling and prediction have become important tools for governments, border agencies and humanitarian organizations to manage and curtail migration (Amelung et al., 2021; Dijstelbloem, 2021). The turn towards efficiency-driven datafication has happened in tandem with an increased securitization of migration. Migration is both a cause and a consequence of the development of infrastructures of securitization. Data is used to identify and track potential migrants, to assess and predict the risk they pose to security and to develop strategies to deal with that risk. As argued above, migration itself operates as a technology, as it is an organized system, based on legal frameworks, procedures and agreements, that increasingly processes, categorizes, decides, creates and delimits the mobility of people digitally depending on how they become known in digitally mediated systems.

In her introduction to the section, Saskia Witteborn states there are important continuities and changes we should attend to in how digital and datafied infrastructures impact upon the material and discursive production of the migrant. As the securitization of migration results in making particularly vulnerable groups of migrant people hyper-visible, she calls for broader awareness of the "systemic, feedback-driven character of governing by datafication and discursive reproduction and the consequences of automated technologies and digital identity tools for algorithmic body politics" (Witteborn, this volume). In Chapter 13, media scholar Daniel Leix Palumbo addresses the distinctive situated context of the German asylum procedure. The German Bundesamt für Migration und Flüchtlinge (BAMF, or Federal Office for Migration and Refugees) is one of the frontrunners in the European digital asylum landscape, advocating for digitalization in the name of transparency, accountability and efficiency. As part of this move, BAMF has since 2017 put to use an automatic dialect recognition system named "The Language and Dialect Identification Assistance System" (DIAS). In the chapter, Leix Palumbo addresses the deployment of voice biometrics as a form of bordering power, which builds on the weaponization of sound. In Chapter 14, media and development scholar Luděk Stavinoha addresses the outsourcing of migration management to the consultancy firm McKinsey in refugee camps on islands in Greece. Drawing on analysis of internal documentation obtained through freedom of information (FOI) requests, Stavinoha explores the role of data practices in the imaginaries of control articulated by consultants. In Chapter 15, media scholars Kaarina

Nikunen and Sanna Valtonen address the anticipatory logic underpinning the datafication of undocumented people in the specific context of Finland. They demonstrate how in the everyday lives of undocumented migrants, borders proliferate as they become mobile and follow people around.

Overall, we would like to emphasize that we have purposely carved out different sections, and invited author (teams) with the specific assignment to include reflection on how they themselves "do" digital migration studies, conceptually, methodologically, ethically and/or empirically. As such, the volume seeks to acknowledge the multiplicity of different approaches and methodologies used within digital migration studies, which stem from different disciplinary backgrounds, including anthropology, media, sociology, migration studies, STS, security, gender and postcolonial studies. As a result, some chapters prioritize empirical work, while others are more theoretical. Some emphasize an ethnographic approach, in combination with specific techniques such as digital ethnography, diaries or digital methods. Other chapters are more conceptual and draw on discourse analysis in combination with critical theory. Each chapter is grounded in its positioning within a debate, carving out the space of the specific intervention and specified approach and material selected. The five separate sections are introduced by agenda-setting colleagues in the field. Their introductions signal the different theoretical and methodological traditions that contribute to digital migration studies within that specific area. The sections therefore purposefully show the kaleidoscopic richness of approaches and methodologies to characterize what we have titled "doing digital migration studies". Doing digital migration studies here thus does not refer to a static, singular or prescriptive way of approaching the interrelationships between migration and digital media, but concerns a growing interdisciplinary research area of interaction and negotiations that explore different ways of making migrant voices emerge.

These sections, chapters and trajectories are not meant to be in any way exhaustive or representative of what is a rapidly expanding field that is very rich in methodological approaches and theoretical discussions. The aim is to foreground original and innovative research-setting agendas in digital media and migration studies. The focus on the everyday helps to magnify the agential experience and creative practices of migrants and refugees, grasping the new possibilities and potentials offered by digital media technologies on the one hand, as well as countering the drawbacks and restrictions posed by increased datafication and surveillance on the other. This is often studied as the Janus-faced articulations of digital media practices, which here become demystified through concrete empirical case studies and critical reflections.

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Section I

Creative practices

Introduction to Section I: Creative Practices

Karina Horsti

Digital mediation of everyday life enables unexpected possibilities for migrants' connectivity, visibility and voice (e.g., Nikunen, 2018; Smets, 2018; Leurs & Ponzanesi, 2018; Horsti, 2019). Particularly mobile technologies have facilitated creative practices for self-expression, also in vulnerable situations such as during journeys across violent borders. Intensification of visual communication, specifically, facilitates mediation across linguistic and other boundaries. Thus, there is a strong argument for democratization and horizontalization of mediation of migration. Mainstream media, state institutions, bordering agents and international organizations no longer control narratives of migration as they did in the broadcast era. Civil society organizations, artists, independent filmmakers and journalists, and migrants themselves produce alternative framings of migration through multiple modalities and creative practices.

They produce alternative visualities and visibilities that challenge hegemonic communication of migration. Two chapters in this section demonstrate through different case studies how individuals and collectives have circumvented bordering agents and humanitarian actors as framing agents and interrupted the dual dominant representation of migrants either as threats or as passive victims. In Chapter 1, Nadica Denić conceptualizes migrant auto-ethnographic films through the notion of an oppositional gaze on migration journeys. Irene Gutiérrez, in Chapter 2, examines participatory filmmaking as a way of countering stereotypical media representations of migration. These films interrogate the "European" gaze by reversing the perspective. Instead of Europe looking at "them", "they" look at Europe and in doing so, make visible the violence Europe produces in its practices of bordering.

In addition to films, alternative visualities of migration originate from mobile phone images and footage taken during perilous border crossings.

These visualities circulate not only among diasporic groups but also often through activist and civil society networks, and through mainstream media reach wider global publics. Digitization affords a particular plasticity of images, audio and audio-visual expressions: it increases the degree to which individuals and organizations can produce new meanings. However, digitization also creates new vulnerabilities. Surveillance technologies are not neutral but often produce or reproduce racial inequality, as Chapter 3 by Rosa Wevers argues. Wevers examines the politics and logics of artificial intelligence (AI) used in predictive policing systems and interviews Ahnjili Zhuparris on the critical potential of art in shifting the focus from (racialized) possible future crime offenders to police violence. The chapters in this section also interrogate complexities inherent in critical engagement. Arts can risk replicating those same structures of power that they aim to criticize. Self-narrations can be embedded into multiple framings, also into those contexts where one would not expect them, such as in public communication by bordering agents. Narratives of violence and suffering at borders are also utilized to prevent migration.

While creative practices and mobile media technologies have opened spaces for new agency and potential for alternative representations, there are substantial concerns. The chapters in Section I also pay attention to these critical aspects of creative practices. Self-narratives can be reframed and circulated in contexts that might not be in the interests of those who originally created them. Ethics of participation and co-creation are complex. Participation is not only limited to the phase of production but should also extend to that of dissemination. Gutierrez stresses that participatory filmmaking requires a multi-layered and multi-staged consent. There are always multiple expectations and power dynamics in the production or dissemination phases. Denić emphasizes that participants can be aware of those expectations, and they can be made visible. But sometimes they might be internalized. For example, there can be the temptation to perform a certain "refugeeness." However, as she continues, auto-ethnographic filmmaking can open a space for rethinking and negotiating such expectations. Film-making is film-thinking. Rosa Wevers's chapter also emphasizes how artistic interventions can direct attention to what is otherwise hidden from the public view in the context of AI, algorithms and datafication. Zhuparris's art elicits an emotional response from the participating audience, and in doing so, an artwork reveals how AI systems are not made of neutral numbers without consequences but entangled with human action and perception. Art can critically encourage publics to interrogate their own role in the production of social inequality.

Finally, what happens to the abundance of self-narration and alternative visualities circulating in multiple media platforms? What kinds of cultural infrastructures allow such stories and images to be found in media flows and accessed in archives? These questions are not a call for an archive in a traditional sense. The accumulation of creative media productions should not be treated as an archive—a metaphor which suggests a static, organized and hierarchical form of memory. Particularly, in contemporary complex media environment, photographs and audio-visual stories circulate in digital networks where they mix and become re-articulated in new contexts (Horsti, 2019). Thus, as a continuation of critical thinking around potentialities and pitfalls of creative participatory practices, I propose paying attention to temporality. The multiplicity of images and narratives creates a potential for the democratization of collective memory of migration in Europe. However, they are often shared within communities of social networking sites, which means that the kinds of narratives and images one comes across also depend on one's social network contacts. Connections are created both by human and automated processes (van Dijck, 2013, pp. 13, 26). Connectivity afforded by algorithms determines accessibility to the vast amount of material on the Internet and social media. Thus, communicative memory in the present media context is significantly shaped by digital circulation and participatory culture (Horsti, 2022). A digital archive is volatile, subject to governance and control. It can be used by technologies of surveillance, as the chapter by Rosa Wevers with Ahnjili Zhuparris reminds us, and put people on the move at risk. It is therefore necessary to think the ways in which creative productions, such as auto-ethnographies and participatory films of migration, become part of Europe's collective memory in the decades to come. How do these oppositional gazes shape Europe and the lives of people involved in the future?

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1. Against and Beyond Mimeticism: A Cinematic Ethics of Migration Journeys in Documentary Auto-Ethnography

Nadica Denić

Abstract

This chapter traces a cinematic ethics of migration expressed in two digital auto-ethnographies of migration journeys, *Midnight Traveler* (Hassan Fazili, 2019) and *Purple Sea* (Amel Alzakout and Khaled Abdulwahed, 2020). The two documentaries utilize digital filmmaking tools to create cinematic aesthetic spaces in which the practice of mediating migration is critically interrogated, including the experience of coercive mimeticism as a process of self-objectification and compliance with the European imaginary of the migrant subject. By providing an analysis of the relation between aesthetics, affect and ethics in *Midnight Traveler* and *Purple Sea*, this chapter proposes an understanding of the two documentaries as affording engagement with autonomy of migration and the process of queering "Europeanness."

Keywords: Ethics; documentary; migration; mimeticism; autonomy.

1.1 Introduction

Migration is at the centre of European news media attention. By following the logic of the European border regime, which is based on categorization, classification and management of migration, digital journalism has commonly focused on relaying information about the journeys and routes that migrants take in order to reach Europe, as well as on migrants' arrival at the borders of European nation states (Casas-Cortes et al., 2014; New

Keywords Collective, 2016). Victimization and criminalization remain the most prevalent techniques utilized in migrant representation, alongside performative engagement with migration by European publics (Chouliaraki & Stolic, 2017). Such modes of representation mobilize pity, fear and irony to invite humanitarian, securitarian and post-humanitarian ethics in relation to migration. While making migrants hypervisible, these discourses commonly exclude the perspectives of migrants themselves. In response, I turn to how migrants utilize digital filmmaking tools to represent their own migration experiences in the form of documentary auto-ethnographies, and in this way invite alternative aesthetic, affective and ethical engagements with migration journeys to Europe.[1] The question guiding this chapter is: How can documentary auto-ethnographies of migration journeys challenge the mainstream discourses of migration and their respective ethics? By examining the relation between aesthetics, affect and ethics in two such auto-ethnographies, I attend to how migrant self-representation via documentary creates an alternative visual register of migration journeys that interrupts the affective economy of news media, as well as invites ethical engagement with the practice of mediating migration and with perspectives pertaining to migrants' position in Europe. This chapter thereby contributes to the research area of digital migration studies by considering bottom-up digital connectivity and meaning-making processes afforded by migrants' digital practices (Leurs & Ponzanesi, 2018; Leurs & Witteborn, 2021).

The case studies central to this chapter are *Midnight Traveler* (2019), directed by Hassan Fazili, and *Purple Sea* (2020), directed by Amel Alzakout and Khaled Abdulwahed. In *Midnight Traveler*, a family documents its three-year journey from Afghanistan to Germany, while in *Purple Sea*, a woman migrating from Syria to Germany records her five-hour crossing of the Mediterranean Sea from Istanbul to Lesbos. The footage of the first documentary was filmed on three digital mobile devices, the latter on a digital camera small enough to be wrapped around a wrist. In both cases, the digital devices utilized enable practices of self-inscription in the recorded footage, which was later used for the expression of their own perspectives via the documentary form. The two documentaries have recently been praised for advancing a *poetics of refraction* by prioritizing opaqueness over transparency, and indeterminacy over representative order (Rossipal, 2021). In addition to such pertinent aesthetic concerns, my analysis expands

1   Documentaries that reflect on the filmmaker's socio-political position and critically engage with the context in which they are made exceed auto-biography and take the form of auto-ethnography (Russell, 1999).

towards affective and ethical engagement afforded by the documentaries'
cinematic choices.

Midnight Traveler and *Purple Sea* have achieved significant successes in
the international film festival circuit and have been taken up by a number
of national and transnational streaming platforms, which grants them
notable positions in the global dynamics of cinema (Iordanova, 2010). This
circulation, alongside their focus on both territorial as well as maritime
migration journeys, turns the documentaries into critical cases for ex-
amining how migrant voices intervene in practices of digital coverage of
migration to Europe. It is important to note that minority self-representation
usually carries the *burden of representation*, in that they can be perceived as
representative of the minority group at stake (Shohat & Stam, 1994). While
I discuss how the perspectives of the two proposed case studies challenge
hegemonic discourses of migration, I primarily address them as examples
in which filmmakers can take control of their own representation, without
these depictions necessarily carrying the burden of being representative of
migration journeys of others.

After discussing the key issues regarding migrant visibility and migration
discourses in European news media in light of aesthetics, affect and ethics,
I will turn to the analysis of *Midnight Traveler* and *Purple Sea.* My aesthetic
analysis of the films will focus on how they utilize cinematic means to
critically interrogate the process of migrant interpellation in Europe, in turn
interrupting the *affective economy* of migration, which entails the circulation
of affects through objects (including bodies) and their transformation into
emotional attachments of their own (Ahmed, 2004). Moreover, I attend to
how such aesthetic and affective engagements advances a *cinematic ethics* of
migration by expressing and evoking ethical ideas that pertain to migration
and migrants' position to Europe (Sinnerbrink, 2016).

1.2 Migrant Visibility and Migration Discourse in European News Media

On the basis of a recent study by Lillie Chouliaraki and Tijana Stolic (2017)
that examined the representation of the 2015 migration "crisis" in Europe,
the following section outlines three common approaches to mediating
migration: the humanitarian, the securitarian and the post-humanitarian
approach. The discourse of "crisis" in relation to migration moreover
reiterates the understanding of large-scale illegalized migration as a
disturbance to an otherwise stable state of events, which conceals the

state of permanent crisis of the European border regime (New Keywords Collective, 2016). First, humanitarian representation relies on victimization of migrants through their massification and infantilization. Massification entails a visually distant depiction of a mass of people, for example in refugee camps or dinghies in the sea, while infantilization predominantly utilizes images of mothers and children in the effort to highlight the innocent vulnerability of migrant bodies. Previous research has pointed out how the discourse of "crisis" in connection with victimization of migrants has been framed as concerning "refugees," whereby the term is applied to subjects deserving of European benevolence (Goodman et al., 2017). Humanitarian representation techniques offer minimal contextualization of migrants' historicity and deprive migrants of their political agency by depicting them as passive, distressed and powerless bodies in need. Victimization of migrants creates a narrative of suffering that, due to being stripped of its political context, aims to mobilize pity and to evoke a humanitarian ethics which would further humanitarian and charitable agendas.

Second, the securitarian approach concerns criminalization of migrants, which is commonly enacted through images of young men, both massified and individualized. The construal of a migrant subject as a threat depicts migrants as active and political subjects, albeit so at the expense of Europe's thriving (Chouliaraki & Stolic, 2017). In this case, the discourse of "crisis" is framed as concerning "mere migrants," which creates narrative subjects who are a threat to European security, economy and values (Goodman et al., 2017). Such representation of agentive malevolence aims to mobilize vigilance, apprehension and fear towards migrants, and to evoke a securitarian ethics that would lead to stricter migration management practices.

Unlike the previous two approaches, which are concerned with the categorization and classification of migrants, the third approach largely concerns the performance of engagement by the European subject (Chouliaraki & Stolic, 2017). It manifests itself through aesthetic playfulness in migrant representation, commonly shared on social media, and through visualities of celebrity philanthropy. In not relying on victimization of migrants, it aims to achieve humanitarian goals through self-reflexive engagement, making its ethical position best conceptualized as one of post-humanitarianism. Nevertheless, its apolitical stance is commonly evocative of irony, which leads to a confirmation of a self-doubt that an alternative state of affairs, in this case concerning the European border regime, is not possible (Chouliaraki, 2013). Another form of performance of solidarity towards migrants is through activism that offers political critique. However, if performed on behalf of,

rather than together with migrants, it can reinforce the marginalization of their voices.

I have so far identified pity, fear and irony as main affects mobilized to evoke humanitarian, securitarian and post-humanitarian ethics of migration. To refer to Sara Ahmed's (2004) example, such an affective economy of migration accounts for how the fear of "migrants" can become an anxiety about the supposed "crisis" and concern, out of love, for the safety of "Europe." This dominant affective economy of migration is further reflected in the manner in which narratives of victimization and criminalization, including their respective humanitarian and securitarian agendas, co-exist and reinforce each other (Casas-Cortes et al., 2014). The narrative of a suffering "refugee" co-exists with a "could-be-a-threat" fear, which reinforces the binary perspective that the inclusion of certain bodies in Europe is justified while others must be excluded. The previously discussed difference in the use of terminology, which differentiates between "refugees," who should be welcomed, and "migrants," who should be excluded, is based on a binary logic of the European border regime that categorizes migration as either forced or voluntary (Gutiérrez Rodríguez, 2018). However, such a clear-cut dichotomy is not empirically tenable, as person's motivations for movement are always mixed and transcend such a binary logic.

While the dichotomy between a "migrant" and a "refugee" is inherent to Europe's judiciary system and migration law, these concepts should not be approached as mere abstractions but rather as reflective of the active processes of categorization, classification and exclusion (Mezzadra & Neilson, 2013). One of the key implications of these processes is that a name conferred to someone is not only a designation, but is reflective of a hierarchical power relation that shapes migrants' realities. As Rey Chow (2014, p. 4) has argued, "by naming something, we confer upon it an identity it does not otherwise have," which is why the name becomes "a form of address, a call." Chow is here referring to the process of *interpellation*, in which an individual is constituted as a subject of a certain ideology issuing the call. Participation in the process is not optional, and the individual might even have specific reasons to conform to the ideology. Seen in the light of interpellation, those who migrate to Europe are, among others, in the process of becoming "migrant" and "refugee" subjects of the European border regime. It is important to the process of interpellation that it does not operate as a negation of the individual, but as an ontological subtraction, a reduction of the self. Instead of migrants' subjectivity being annihilated by the ideology, they are "given a place in the community of relations as performed by the name: he is hailed some thing" (Chow, 2014, p. 6). This is

how migrant interpellation reinforces hierarchies of difference: a person is granted a place in society on the condition of being a suffering, passive, distressed and powerless "refugee," but not otherwise. When such a power relation exists, migrants are expected to objectify themselves to comply to the European imaginary.

1.3   Documentary Auto-Ethnography of Migration Journeys

In this section, I examine how *Midnight Traveler* and *Purple Sea* advance counter-narratives that go beyond hegemonic discourses that either victimize, criminalize or altogether exclude migrants, and instead offer intimate access to directors' critical interrogation of migrant interpellation. The three-year long journey from Afghanistan to Germany that is at the centre of *Midnight Traveler* started after the Taliban put a bounty on Hassan Fazili's head. The family, consisting of his partner Fatima Hussaini and their two young daughters Nargis and Zahra, first sought asylum in Tajikistan, and after having been rejected, decided to present the same asylum case in Germany. They filmed their journey together with three digital mobile devices. Amel Alzakout, the director of *Purple Sea*, fled the Syrian Civil War and was temporarily based in Turkey. She recorded her journey to Europe for her partner, Khaled Abdulwahed, with whom she wished to reunite in Germany. Her crossing of the Mediterranean Sea by boat from Turkey to Greece is the focus of their film.

As I will argue, these documentaries utilize cinematic tools to create a space of agency in which they interrogate the European gaze, reverse the gaze by looking back, and name what is seen. Such a process has been theorized by bell hooks (2014, p. 117) as one of an *oppositional gaze*, which forms a critical aspect of spectatorship that functions as "a site of resistance for colonized black people globally," in turn leading to the development of independent black cinema. *Midnight Traveler* and *Purple Sea* enact an oppositional gaze in the context of contemporary migrant representation in Europe by developing alternative visual registers of migration experiences. That is to say, they not only oppose hegemonic discourses and aesthetics of migration, but create cinematic aesthetic spaces reflective of their own experiences and issues that pertain to their migration journeys. In light of this, I will turn to two scenes, one from each documentary, which grapple with migrant interpellation and its effect on the process of self-representation. As my aesthetic analysis will show, the cinematic rendering of this process enables heterogenous affective engagement with migration experiences, such as with

shame and anger, but also serenity and resilience, which in turn disrupts the affective economy of migration based on pity, fear and irony.

Moreover, in line with the current scholarship in film ethics that argues for an analysis of aesthetics, affect and ethics in cinema as inherently related, I build on the aesthetic and affective analysis by turning to the ethical engagement afforded by the two case studies. A study of cinematic ethics analyses formal, stylistic and narrative choices alongside the subject matter, content and characters of the film, with the aim of understanding the affective and ethical contours of spectatorship that they evoke (Plantinga, 2018; Sinnerbrink, 2016). The relation between aesthetics, affect and ethics in the two films can best be characterized as one of *cinempathy*, which has been conceptualized by Robert Sinnerbrink (2016) as a cinematic ethical experience characterized by dynamic involvement of central and peripheral imagination in a spectator, which evokes both empathy and sympathy. The two are defined as separate but related states: empathy evokes central imagination, the imagining of an other's emotional state from their point of view, while sympathy enables peripheral imagination, the imagining of an emotional state from a third-person perspective. Their dynamic relation allows the spectator to both inhabit ("feel with") and observe ("feel for") a certain situation, to engage both affectively and in an evaluative manner, one directly with the experience of the protagonist and the other with the context in which that experience occurs. In essence, cinempathy is meant to create a "synergy between affective attunement, emotional engagement, and moral evaluation" (Sinnerbrink, 2016, p. 95).

As humanitarian, securitarian and post-humanitarian ethics fall short in articulating an ethics of migration that critically incorporates engagement with migrant subjectivities, my aesthetic and affective analysis of the two case studies is primarily invested in discerning how *Midnight Traveler* and *Purple Sea* evoke cinempathy to advance a cinematic ethics of migration journeys. First, I propose that the films express an ethical idea of the *autonomy of migration*, which is a perspective on migration that attends to migrant subjectivities and heterogenous ways in which migrants exercise mobility, resist systemic exclusion and partake in social formations that have constitutive power and can be seen as a social movement in itself (De Genova, 2017). Second, by critically interrogating the "European question" (De Genova, 2017), which asks what "Europe" is and who may be counted as "European," I propose that the films offer ethical engagement through the process of queering "Europeanness." By this I understand the directors' intervention in the Eurocentric discursive field as one that

queers "Europeanness" by destabilizing a static, nativist and exclusionary understanding of it (El-Tayeb, 2011).

I begin my analysis with a scene from *Midnight Traveler* that takes the form of a confession, in which Hassan Fazili, after more than a year of filming the family's migration journey, for the first time expresses conflictions about his role as a filmmaker: "I'm happy I'm a filmmaker. I love cinema. But sometimes cinema is so dirty." His reflection on filmmaking is sparked by the disappearance of his daughter Zahra, which occurs during the family's stay in a camp in Serbia, as they wait for legal means to continue their journey to Germany via Hungary. After realizing that they have not seen her for more than an hour, they warn others in the camp and start looking for her. In a voice-over, he says:

> A week before this, some men in Germany had raped and murdered a girl. All those thoughts rushed into my head at once. We mobilized everyone in the camp. We looked over here, over there. We went room to room. She wasn't there. We became really worried. I went and looked in the trees. I looked in the bushes. I was upset with myself. Why was I looking in the bushes? For one moment, I thought to myself, "What a scene you're in! You're searching in the bushes." I thought, "This will be the best scene in the film."

Fazili's thoughts are narrated over a long take of a moon barely visible through the branches of a tree. In this part of the scene, he initially shares with us his worry that his daughter might have been hurt, associating her disappearance with the rape and murder of a girl in Germany, who was, like Zahra, a migrant in Europe. His worries lead him to the nearby bushes, and in that moment, he envisions that this, too, could be a scene in the film he is making—and it would be the best one in it. Why would a scene in which a father is looking for his missing daughter in the bushes make for the best scene in the film?

Building on Pooja Rangan's (2017) insights on the documentary aesthetic of immediacy, we can understand Hassan's directorial response in this scene as one of a *humanitarian impulse* in documentary, which uses images of endangered life as a method to demonstrate the humanity of a group or individual being filmed. In this scene, the humanitarian impulse involves the belief that capturing the manner in which Zahra's life is endangered would justify the filming by presenting a humanitarian plea for help. A humanitarian ethics that drives this impulse, in news media as well as in documentary, posits humanitarian aid as the necessary immediate

action for saving endangered lives. This institutes *emergency thinking*, a construction of discourses of emergency and crisis, in which immediate humanitarian intervention takes precedence over, for example, political action, but also over aesthetics and politics of representation (Rangan, 2017). When a person's suffering and endangered life are used as means of humanization, this in turn regulates what it means to be human and constructs humanity as "bare life" (Rangan, 2017, p. 4). Therefore, as Rangan has argued, the humanization taking place is only seemingly an inclusive gesture. Rather, it offers a reductionist understanding of migration in terms of suffering and propagates the figure of a "human" migrant as a one of a "genuine" refugee who needs saving through humanitarian intervention.

Hassan continues by confessing that he briefly entertained the humanitarian impulse that suggested he start filming:

> "Maybe, maybe you should turn on your camera, and look for Zahra with your camera on." It just popped into my head. I didn't focus on it. For one moment, for one second, I imagined seeing Zahra's body. And from the distance, Fatima is running. I have my camera in hand, and I'm filming that moment.

The thought of filming conjured an image of Zahra's body in the bushes. That image presents itself as the best scene in the film because it would not be a scene about any father looking for his daughter, but about a father whose "refugee" daughter went missing; it would be a scene in which their family would have been shown to have suffered pain as immense as that of losing their daughter, thereby revealing the extent to which their lives are endangered. In that scene, no one could question their "refugee" subject position and deservingness of European benevolence.

Building on Chow's (2002) insights on coercive mimeticism as a process in which colonized subjects are encouraged to objectify themselves and behave in accordance with the colonizer's imaginary of the colonized subject, I understand Hassan's confession as reflective of the manner in which those who migrate to Europe are expected to comply with the European imaginary of the migrant subject, to fit the expected subject position of their "refugee," "migrant," or "ethnic" identity. This internalization and incorporation of an imposed identity is part of the interpellation process, "a kind of unconscious automatization, impersonation, or mimicking, in behavior as much as in psychology, of certain beliefs, practices, and rituals," which "give that identity its sense of legitimacy and security" (Chow, 2002, p. 110). It is precisely because an identity is not annihilated but acknowledged, deemed as *some*

thing, even if that *some* thing is subtraction of the self as experienced prior to interpellation, that the person being hailed can still achieve a sense of legitimacy and security by confirming the gaze and being willing to embody the stereotypes expected from them. In the scene at stake, despite the fact that the societal position granted to the migrant as "refugee" is a reduction of the self, it is still a space. Due to the construction of "refugeeness" as deserving of European benevolence (Jovičić, 2021), migrants can feel compelled to perform their "refugee" identity because it could give their reasons for migration a sense of legitimacy. Similar to Rangan's (2017) critical view of the outcomes of the humanitarian impulse in documentary, different forms of self-representation can become performances of "human" migrants in order to comply with the European imaginary of "refugee" identity.

However, Hassan is not filming, and the spectator is presented with a black screen. As soon as he confessed the intrusive thoughts in his head, the camera pans to darkness, cutting to black. While we are affectively immersed, the scene is aesthetically distancing as it refuses to visualize the suffering experienced by Hassan. In this way, we empathize with Hassan while witnessing a critical interrogation of the framing and visualization of the vulnerability of migrants in the context of the European border regime. In a voice-over, he shares feelings of self-hatred: "I only imagined it for a moment. I hated myself so much. I hated cinema. And I couldn't do it. Zahra was found." In the scene at stake, the roles of director, migrant and father blur to the extent that Hassan is unable to enact care for his daughter, which causes him shame. The affective experience of shame occurs after nearly having given in to an impulse that urged him to film a scene that would perpetuate a humanitarian ethics in relation to migration. The personal dimension of that urge, the temptation to perform his family's "refugeeness," turns his shame into self-hatred.

In this scene, the film becomes a site and a facilitator for self-examination, allowing for a confession of the hidden parts of oneself in a controlled manner, which is reflective of Michael Renov's (2004, p. 215) insight that cinematic confessions, "produced and exchanged in nonhegemonic contexts, can be powerful tools for self-understanding as well as for two-way communication, for the forging of human bonds and for the emotional recovery." While Hassan felt self-hatred at having the above-discussed thoughts, he nevertheless found it important to include the experience of being ashamed of himself in the film in the form of a confession. With that gesture, he shared the intimate workings of coercive mimeticism in the form of "refugee" interpellation. In marking himself as vulnerable, as aware of that thought, struggling with the question whether he should

Figure 1.1. Zahra playing in the camp. Film still from *Midnight Traveler* (2019). Courtesy of Hassan Fazili. Copyright The Party Film Sales, Old Chilly Pictures, ITVS, POV | American Documentary.

act on it or not, and realizing that he cannot do it, I understand Fazili as counter-hailing the calling of himself as a "refugee" subject. Moreover, he refused to indulge us as spectators by performing the humanity of himself and his family in such a reductionist manner. In stark affective contrast to this, the refusal to visualize endangered life is juxtaposed with the bright image of Zahra in the sun, smiling at the camera, laughing and running around the camp. Instead of turning Zahra's vulnerability into a vehicle for humanitarian intervention, the documentary highlights her serenity and resilience in spite of her vulnerable position.

In creating a visual register representative of a multiplicity of affective states in relation to migration, *Midnight Traveler* offers engagement with the process of exercising a person's mobility and autonomy against and beyond the European border regime's practices of categorization, classification and exclusion, with the documentary thereby enacting a reflection on the practice that has been conceptualized by Nicholas De Genova (2017) as one of *autonomy of migration*. I understand *Midnight Traveler*'s enactment of autonomy of migration as twofold. The documentary first reflects the family's migration journey, which is driven by the desire for mobility in spite of the border regime that aims to foreclose it, and by the perseverance to claim autonomy of asylum, namely the seeking of asylum in the country of one's choice (De Genova & Tazzioli, 2018). Second, in resisting coercive mimeticism that would entail a performance of his position as a subject deserving of European benevolence, Fazili demands recognition on his own terms, and not on the terms of the border regime that has led to the

illegalization of the family's mobility in the first place, which leads him to develop an alternative visual, affective and ethical register of migration.

While *Midnight Traveler* mobilizes shame alongside serenity and resilience to reveal the affective experience of interpellation and coercive mimeticism, *Purple Sea* first and foremost expresses anger towards the European imaginary of the migrant subject. The documentary is almost entirely shot from beneath the water surface, as the boat Amel Alzakout boarded capsized soon after departing from the Turkish coast, leaving the passengers floating in the Mediterranean Sea. After noticing a helicopter hovering above the capsized boat and filming the tragedy unfolding at Europe's maritime border, Amel offers overt criticism of the European mediation of migration journeys and its participation in the entanglement of humanitarian and securitarian ethics:

> I hear a helicopter. What is it doing here? It whirls up the waves. I see a red light inside a helicopter. Are they filming us? Where will the images end up? On YouTube? On TV? Regular news or breakings news? What do you call us? Refugees? Criminals? Victims? Or just numbers? Fuck you all! Stop filming!

Amel's direct confrontation with those she can feel interpellating her as a "refugee," "criminal," "victim" or merely a "number," is one of anger. Her visual register of this moment includes the helicopter filming the tragedy while in a voice-over she critically interrogates the complicity of digital journalism in the transformation of the Mediterranean Sea into a dangerous maritime border for migrants. While the underwater footage from Amel's point of view evokes empathy, her criticism of the helicopter's distant mediation of the deadly event turns the spectator into a witness of European border regime's oppression of migrants. Over the course of the film, *Purple Sea* continues to utilize voice-over narration to create a space of agency that transgresses the trauma that the director lived through during her journey to Europe. An important scene in the film recounts a dream Alzakout had. In the dream, her back is submerged below the surface of a "purple sea," while she floats and feels the warmth of the sun on her skin. Juxtaposed with the footage of a capsized boat, the image she represented with her words reveals a process of overcoming the fear impressed by the journey to reach a state of calmness.

In *Midnight Traveler* and *Purple Sea*, ethical engagement is afforded by the creation of cinematic aesthetic spaces that evoke both central and peripheral imagination. That is to say, both documentaries offer the spectator a third-person perspective into the socio-political context of the filmmakers'

migration journey, thereby eliciting sympathy for the suffering endured by migrants under the European border regime's violent and deadly policies. Engagement of peripheral imagination is entangled with the first-person points of view of the directors, both visually and through the use of voice-over narration, which elicits empathy with the issues directors identify as pertinent to their journeys. While empathy enables central imagining of the directors' perspectives, it should not be thought to involve an assimilation of directors' experiences. Rather, as Sinnerbrink (2020, p. 286) has argued, "one can share a character's perspective, imagining centrally from their point of view, feeling *with* them as to what their experience involves, while nonetheless distinguishing oneself from that character." By way of cinempathy, the two case studies evoke empathy with the directors' experiences as well as encourage ethical evaluation of the context in which those experiences take place, thereby offering a complex understanding of how migration journeys, as well as the process of their mediation, have shaped directors' perspectives.

The two documentaries' cinematic engagement with migration resonates with Sandra Ponzanesi's and Marguerite Waller's (2012, p. 7) conceptualization of postcolonial cinema, which, "while maintaining engagement with collectives, refocuses on the specificity of the individuals." As they elaborate, "protagonists are not represented as ego ideals or everypersons, though, but as multi-dimensional figures—often marginalized, subordinated, displaced or deterritorialized" (pp. 7-8). In their own respective manners, *Midnight Traveler* and *Purple Sea* challenged the humanitarian, securitarian and post-humanitarian manners of representing migration, as well as the identities that these modes of representation imposed on the directors. The directors' respective expressions of shame and anger as co-existing with resilience and calmness interrupt the affective economy of migration characterized by pity, fear and irony by revealing a multiplicity of affective experiences that reflect the process of establishing one's autonomy of migration. Their shame and anger could, if reduced to passive suffering or agentive malevolence, be used as vehicles for promoting humanitarian or securitarian ethics. However, when contextualized, these affective experiences are disclosed as disagreements with the oppression of the European border regime that can be characterized in terms of suffering: not of suffering as a passive state but as an activity in response to their encounter with humanitarian and securitarian migration agendas. That is to say, Ahmed's (2010, p. 210) reflection on the experience of suffering proposes that to suffer "can mean to feel your disagreement with what has been judged as good," which makes suffering "a receptivity that can heighten the capacity to act." Suffering, as

we witness in the two documentaries, is active and generative, and leads to the development of the filmmakers' own documentary perspectives. In the above-discussed scenes, Fazili's and Alzakout's oppositional gazes are at work by not only resisting dominant forms of representation but opposing them by creating a cinematic aesthetic space for their own experiences that includes the affective complexity of their gazes. In engaging both central and peripheral imagination of the issues pertinent to their own migration journeys, their visual registers separate from hegemonic ones by inviting recognition of their autonomy of migration, both in terms of migration journeys and in terms of their mediation.

This leads me to how *Midnight Traveler* and *Purple Sea* queer a static and exclusionary understanding of "Europeanness."[2] Autonomy of migration and the process of queering of "Europeanness" are two separate but interrelated manners of ethical engagement with migration experiences. By claiming their space autonomously, both as migrants to Europe and as directors of documentaries on migration, the directors, in my understanding, queer a nativist understanding of "Europeanness" that has interpellated them in oppressive manners. Their disillusionment and critical interrogation of the European border regime's management of differently categorized and classified migrant subjects moreover provide a possibility to recalibrate it. In bringing to the fore the relationship between their personal experiences and the politics in which they occur, and, in doing so, challenging the political myths in relation to migration, the documentaries emphasize the relationship between personal and political (Plantinga, 2018). They engage the "European question" by revealing the oppressive dimension of the European border regime and its mediated counterpart in the form of humanitarian, securitarian and post-humanitarian representation of migration. By holding "Europe" accountable for that oppression, and by persevering in their efforts to reground their homes in Germany, the directors invite reflection on how "Europe" can rid itself of its immigration complex. Moreover, in refusing to perform the roles assigned to them, the directors challenge normative, nativist and purist conceptions of "Europeanness" as an identity space defined in opposition to "migrantness," "refugeeness" and "ethnicity." For Fatima El-Tayeb (2011, p. 174), the queering of "Europeanness" has "the dual function of inserting European minorities into the ongoing debate around the continent's identity and of reclaiming their place in its history." Therefore, by exercising their autonomy of migration and by advancing

2   Rather than reinstating "queerness" as a norm, queering of "Europe" is an ongoing and permanent process that challenges normativity (Rosello & Dasgupta, 2014).

their own cinematic gazes in opposition to the European imaginary of the migrant subject, the directors set in motion an imagination of "Europe" and "Europeanness" as inclusive of migrants and of the plurality of their voices.

1.4 Shifting the Frames of Migration

I have shown how *Midnight Traveler* and *Purple Sea* interrupt the dominant affective economy of migration characterized by pity, fear and irony, by engaging the spectators with the generative potential of shame and anger, as well as their co-existence with a multiplicity of other affective states. Rather than positioning their directorial focus outside of the process of coercive mimeticism, the directors reflect on their experience of and struggle with internalized oppression. Imposed identities are not absent from these auto-ethnographies but included in the gaze that aims for resistance to them. In this process, digital cameras become tools of self-care in the development of their own visual registers of migration journeys. The films thereby reflect how digital mobile media can be utilized by migrants as agentive European citizens to bring visualities to the fore that challenge hegemonic discourse (Baker & Blaagaard, 2016).

As I have argued, by evoking cinempathy, the films advance a cinematic ethics of migration that is expressive of autonomy of migration and the queering of "Europeanness." These ethical positions and processes can be understood as *frame shifters*–they form stories that encourage perspective-taking, which is "the ability to consider an issue, event, problem, or person from varied or alternative perspectives or frameworks" (Plantinga, 2018, p. 225). *Midnight Traveler* and *Purple Sea* destabilize the hegemonic discourse on migration by presenting alternative encounters with the migrating subject and the "European question" and encourage the shifting of the Eurocentric frame that victimizes, criminalizes or excludes migrants, towards solidarity in the form of recognition of migrants as autonomous citizens claiming their space in Europe.

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2. Archival Participatory Filmmaking in Migration and Border Studies

Irene Gutiérrez Torres

Abstract

In this chapter, I report on the role of archival participatory filmmaking in migration and border studies to challenge border epistemologies from below. Through the analysis of three workshops held in Ceuta, Madrid and Vitoria-Gasteiz, I provide new perspectives on this methodology as a safe space for undocumented migrants to create self-representational films about their border-related experiences. I adopt a visual ethnographic approach that emphasizes participation, belonging and everydayness in contexts of exclusion. First, I explore the interplay between participatory filmmaking, migration and border studies. Secondly, I unpack the potential of using archival participatory filmmaking to transform unseen private footage into public films. Finally, I address ethical and methodological considerations and offer recommendations for good practice.

Keywords: archival participatory filmmaking; self-representation; border; migration; ethics; visual methods

2.1 Introduction

The [filmmaking] workshop prompted me to write down my journey and document it with images. Some of them are included in my book, "Á Moi, Vivant Invisible" (Diallo, 2020). I made a short film with the images we collected during our stay in the CETI [Temporary Centre for Immigrants] and the new ones I have been recording while living in Madrid and Paris.

This opening statement was made by 23-year-old Alseny,[1] who fled from Guinea Conakry and arrived in Ceuta five years ago. It illustrates the willingness of people who migrate to belong and be visible on their own terms, a claim that has become even more appalling and urgent in light of the tragic events that took place in Melilla-Nador, on the Moroccan-Spanish border, on 24 June 2022.[2] As a filmmaker born and raised in the border city of Ceuta, working on collaborative projects with migrants[3] since 2009, I find that Alseny's words reflect how participatory filmmaking has the potential to turn border encounters into an opportunity to strengthen migrants' audiovisual skills. According to their views, participatory filmmaking is not a magic bullet to improve their filmmaking abilities. However, it is a way to intervene in stereotypical representations of migration while contributing to collecting and generating audiovisual data on borders from first-hand experiences. Participatory filmmaking (PF), also named participatory video (PV), is a participatory visual arts methodology that involves a group or community in the co-creation of their own films (Lunch & Lunch, 2006). It combines scientific knowledge production and social action as part of long-term research projects addressing community needs or social problems (White, 2003; Milne et al., 2012).

Since its foundation,[4] PF has been an inherently political methodology devoted to civic engagement through cinema. Because its principles are

1   To watch Alseny's video presentation about his participation in two of the here analysed archival participatory filmmaking workshops, see https://vimeo.com/725372556.

2   On 24 June, the Moroccan security forces killed at least 40 Sub-Saharan migrants in their attempt to cross the border between Nador (Morocco) and Melilla (Spain), according to the NGO Walking Borders. The videos and images shared on social media, showing the young men mortally wounded by beatings or left to die without any medical help for more than eight hours, have shocked public opinion. They have also revived the ethical debate about the negative impact of these terrible images on people, including the families of those killed. To know more about the massacre, see Hedgecoe (2022). The full report from Walking Borders (2022) can be found via the reference list.

3   People categorized as migrants are not homogenous, and their experiences intersect with aspects of social origin, race, gender, sexual identity or ethnicity. Moreover, the often ambiguous distinctions between "undocumented migrants," "irregular migrants," "forced migrants," "economic migrants" or even "refugees," should not override the fact that people have the legitimacy to migrate (e.g. Casas-Cortes et al., 2015). In this chapter, I use the category "migrants" in line with how most participants referred to themselves in the workshops or films as people who had autonomously crossed transnational borders.

4   While some date the principles of participatory filmmaking back to Dziga Vertov's Film-Eye movement in the 1920s, it is more common to consider the Fogo Process as the first PF project. It was set by producer John Kemeny and film director Colin Low (1967–1968) in the framework of the National Film Board of Canada's programme *Challenge for Change/ Société Nouvelle* (CFC/ SN), which ran from 1967 to 1980 and produced more than 200 films and videos.

linked to emancipatory and decolonial methods, it shifts power relations away from an authoritative expert, whether this expert is a filmmaker or researcher, to raise the voice of those whose perspectives are missing from mainstream discourses (Shaw & Robertson, 1997).

PF encompasses a wide range of practices such as self-portrait, performance, re-enactment, storytelling, oral and visual testimony, reflexive voice-over, reflexive and traditional in-depth interviews, reflexive video viewing and interactive modes. For this reason, some scholars argue that it is better to approach it from a practical perspective (High et al., 2012) or the conditions it has to meet (Pettit et al., 2009). Indeed, exploring its experimental nature gives practitioners the freedom to innovate and develop their own ideas about PF in each context, preventing it from being treated as a unity, a single methodology, approach or movement (High et al., 2012). In the field of academic knowledge production, PF has enriched established studies that consider video as a method with critical dimensions (Harris, 2016) or as a medium to create videographic ethnographies that generate empathetic encounters between the subjectivities of researchers and participants (Pink et al., 2017). Practice and product are equally important in PF. Therefore, it is crucial to analyse the content, process and context of both the workshops and the resulting films.

Recently, scholars have seen the potential of visual methods to challenge migrant (Lenette, 2019; Smets & Ahenkona, 2023) and border (in)visibility (Kudžmaitė & Pauwels, 2022) in a collaborative way. In this regard, and following Kudžmaitė and Pauwels (2022), PF can make geopolitical and symbolic borders more visible while eliciting information and comments from the participants about their border-related experiences, encouraging them to produce their own data and find innovative ways to disseminate their knowledge through film. Like digital media production among refugee-background youth, PF can provide a set of "embodied multimodal literacies" (Michalovich, 2021, p. 30) that communicate across different transnational and local spaces and expand social networks. Moreover, PF enables non-reading and non-written literacy in contexts where the participants use their second or third language. Similarly, it has been seen as a methodology aimed at regaining confidence and assertiveness among displaced people while learning new creative skills (Sarria-Sanz et al., 2023).

Furthermore, self-representational PF in refugee studies has contributed to challenging labels, creating a sense of agency, and building gendered narratives among participants in collaborative filmmaking practices that may influence policy (Lenette et al., 2020). Indeed, much of the current literature pays particular attention to how PF promotes the creation of films

that can serve as powerful counternarratives (Frisina & Muresu, 2018) while allowing protagonists to narrate their border-crossing experiences in a safe way (Gatta, 2019). Therefore, if visual methods help to make migration and border experiences more visual, audiovisual methods can also materialize them in aural and haptic ways. For this reason, and because border narratives are central to shaping spaces and thereby determining a safe space, the use of PF in migration and border studies must acknowledge the need for situated ethics (Capstick, 2012) and sanctuary (Lenette, 2019).

When PF entails archival collection among its practices, namely archival participatory filmmaking (APF), it uses (1) "respondent-generated" audiovisuals created by participants for a particular workshop, (2) collected audiovisuals of "unknown or known provenance" recorded prior to the workshops, or (3) "generated audiovisuals" (Pauwels & Mannay, 2020, p. 17). In migration and border studies, this approach allows for the collection and production of audiovisual data on and at the borders from the perspective of "ordinary people" and, in particular, postcolonial migrants. The multiple possibilities of the audiovisual to embody border crossings from on-the-ground footage recorded by people who migrate serve to promote empathy through the production of "multisensory embodied experiences" (Pink & Leder Mackley, 2013). Furthermore, the "migrant gaze" has been the focus of documentary web series (Cati & Grasilli, 2019), humanitarian documentaries and migrant-themed film festivals (Ostrowska, 2019) aimed at fostering intercultural understanding of the migratory phenomenon. In the same vein, theoretical approaches to humanitarian media have considered the notion of migrant witnessing crucial for developing the affective aspect of audiovisual media and its role in (self-)mediatizing the border (Chouliaraki & Musarò, 2017; Gutiérrez, 2022). Likewise, participatory filmmaking can also be a means of migrant memory-making of "empathic telling and listening" (Horsti, 2019, p. 238). Indeed, provoking the empathy of spectators through the use of cinematic strategies, such as haptic visuality and embodied witnessing from the point of view of the person who migrates, is one of the crucial goals of activist documentaries on migration (Briciu, 2020). Thus, the self-representational documentaries produced through APF practices may contribute to mobilizing audiences to take an active role concerning migrant populations, which should be seen as an added value to the experience of both the participants and the audiences of their films.

Drawing mainly on previous literature that addresses how bordering practices affect everyday lives by creating growing exclusionary "grey zones" of citizenship, identity and belonging (Popescu, 2012; Yuval-Davis et al., 2019), this chapter positions APF as a methodology that reveals the border on a

day-to-day basis. It also explores the potential of APF to materialize how "the act of bordering happens at the border and far away from the border itself" (Jones & Johnson, 2014, p. 2), seen from the perspective of people who migrate. Furthermore, it addresses how APF practices can embody the multiple dimensions of borders visually, aurally and haptically. It, therefore, highlights APF's contribution to acknowledging the border as a liminal site where colonial difference is exposed (Anzaldúa, 1987) through the collection, creation and assemblage of on-the-ground footage that functions as border images/narratives (Schimanski & Nyman, 2021) and border art (Amilhat Szary, 2012). In doing so, it offers a reflection on the methodological implications and ethical challenges arising from three APF workshops involving people who have migrated from Cameroon, Guinea Conakry, Mali, Nigeria, D.R. Congo, Angola, Ghana, Morocco, Western Sahara, Pakistan, Dominican Republic, Cuba, Uruguay, Paraguay, Colombia, Nicaragua and Spain. The common goal of the workshops was to create self-representational documentary films that provide a situated understanding of migration and border experiences.

Five main questions drive the analysis of the workshop and the resulting films: (1) How did the participants address the issues they felt were meaningful when referring to their migration- and border-related experiences while doing the APF? (2) How did they engage with archival footage? (3) To what extent did the methods included in APF enable them to gather and produce visual data on borders and migration? (4) What are the main challenges the filmmaking and screening processes pose in each case? (5) How can APF safely contribute to a plurivocal approach to migration representation? Finally, the analysis applies van Liempt and Bilger's (2012) recommendation to avoid the "migration bias," as the participants of the three APV analysed are part of diverse groups and come from different social frameworks. In this chapter, I draw on impressions from the three case studies to establish a chart of good practices in the procuration of safety in hostile, interstitial and unstable environments. Last but not least, I want to account for my positionality as a white, middle-class researcher granted funding to organize the three APF workshops under conditions of privileged mobility.

2.2   Archival Participatory Filmmaking in Migration and Border Research

Further scrutiny of how migrants translate their situated knowledge on borders and everyday bordering experiences through APF practices reveals

various foci. Since the early 2000s, especially during and after the so-called "European migratory crisis" in 2015, digital footage created by migrants during their journeys has been circulated among different actors to contest those same borders. For instance, Leurs et al. (2020) have addressed how (1) migrants, (2) media professionals, (3) governments and corporations, and (4) artists and activists have used migrant (self-)representations from both top-down and bottom-up perspectives. Nevertheless, they may have a double edge, as they may circulate to promise visibility and recognition but may also lead to new forms of otherness (Leurs & Smets, 2018). Moreover, recent scholarship has analysed the role of digital footage recorded by Syrian refugees during their migratory journeys as part of digital news (Chouliaraki, 2017) or used under the label of "refugee cinema" (Van de Peer, 2019).

Furthermore, the use of migrant footage recorded at the Moroccan-Spanish border in independent documentary films has been examined as political and cultural interventions from below (Cerdán & Fernández-Labayen, 2015) or as embodied and self-mediated acts of witnessing and dissent (Gutiérrez, 2022). Indeed, one of the main goals of undocumented migrants in creating self-recordings at the Moroccan-Spanish border is to visualize how they develop place-making tactics over forbidden places (Fernández-Labayen & Gutierrez, 2021). Similarly, self-narratives of border crossing to Britain have been seen as a genre of social resistance and political transformation (Wolfe, 2021). Such literature underlines that the use of migrants' self-representations has transformed the practices of journalism and filmmaking and has become part of the governmentality of migration. However, further reflection is needed on how these self-representations can be created or mapped, collected and repackaged through APF.

The non-digital media-centric paradigm of digital migration studies (Leurs & Ponzanesi, 2018; Leurs & Prabhakar, 2018) is instrumental in this task. This paradigm takes online-offline relationships as the central unit of analysis to understand the relationship between migration and digital media technologies. It helps to map the videos that people who migrate circulate in terms of agency, empowerment, voice or co-presence (Leurs & Smets, 2018) or, instead, in terms of physical, affective or symbolic immobility (Fernández-Labayen & Gutierrez, 2022; Smets, 2019). Reused as part of self-representational films during APF practices, they are an account of migrant poetics and politics (Leurs et al., 2020) that challenge border epistemologies from below to bring societal awareness and change. In other words, it allows for examining of how the films made in APF workshops provide spaces to renegotiate a sense of belonging to a place, even if it is a transit place.

2.3   Three Case Studies

> The participants have acknowledged that the woman on the TV news
> who arrived in Spain on the raft was [like] their mother. It was not only
> the work of making the film that raised awareness among them but also
> the internal process of valuing what their parents did.

With these words, Carlos Cordovilla and Itzíar Aduna, coordinators of
the workshop held in Vitoria-Gasteiz, Basque Country, reflected on the
intergenerational dialogue and collaboration generated through the practice
of APV. The three workshops analysed here consisted of collecting and
producing archival footage created by the participants, sometimes with the
help of their friends and relatives, on their first-hand experiences of migra-
tion. The workshops involved brainstorming, storyboarding, screenwriting,
writing of narration, writing of song lyrics, (audio)visual archive gathering,
image and sound recording (including voice-over and music), video viewing,
editing and postproduction, subtitling, media and social media campaign,
and film distribution. The workshops took place in Ceuta (July 2018), Madrid
(September 2019), and Vitoria-Gasteiz, Basque Country (2018–2020). The
three films resulting from these workshops have essential commonalities:

1. They seek to amplify the voices of people who migrate.
2. They offer first-hand accounts of how geopolitical and symbolic borders
   are intertwined in the everyday.
3. They have been screened in local, national and international environ-
   ments and are publicly available on the online streaming platforms
   Vimeo, YouTube, and the Mobility Cinema Archive online database[5].
   Indeed, the fact that the dissemination of the films was a common desire
   from the beginning helped to make the collective effort to complete
   them as a successful joint achievement.

Additionally, the film *Round Trip* has been added to the catalogue of recom-
mendations *Media & Information Literacy*[6] of the United Nations Alliance
of Civilizations (UNAOC). As can be read in Table 2.1, the analysis of the

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5   The Mobility Cinema Archive online database can be found here: https://humanidades-
digitales.uc3m.es/s/cine-de-movilidad/item/5315.

6   An initiative of the UNAOC in partnership with UNESCO to support the global multi-language
outreach of information and resources on media and information literacy: https://milunesco.
unaoc.org/mil-resources/viaje-de-ida-y-vuelta-round-trip-2/.

Table 2.1 Characteristics of the three case studies, including the workshops (process) and the films (results)

Name and duration of the films	Place and date of the workshops	Country of origin of the participants	Collaborating entities	Fieldwork and post-fieldwork activity	Provenance of videos and recording dispositives	Screenings
Migrant Life 10'	Ceuta 23/07/18 03/08/18	4 (♂) Ages: 18-22 Guinea Conakry	Association San Antonio	APF Field notes In-depth + follow up interviews Screenings, Q&A Instant messaging (WhatsApp) Telephone + in-person conversations	Respondent-generated Known provenance Smartphones	III Film Festival "A Home" Vimeo (37 views) University Carlos III of Madrid
The Way it Goes 14'	Madrid 02/09/19 13/09/19	11 (♂&♀) Ages: 19-26 Spain, Cameroon, Guinea Conakry, Cuba, Uruguay	Institute of Cinema of Madrid (NIC) Animal Ars Cultural Association	APF Field notes In-depth + follow up interviews Screenings, Q&A Instant messaging (WhatsApp) Telephone + in-person conversations	Respondent-generated Known provenance Smartphones	IV Film Festival "A Home" Vimeo (138 views)
Round Trip 23'	Vitoria-Gasteiz 09/2018 05/2020	23 (♂&♀) Ages: 14-22 Spain, Morocco, Niger, Ivory Coast, Ghana, Dominican Republic, Colombia	12 Nubes Conservatory of Vitoria-Gasteiz School of Arts of Vitoria-Gasteiz	APF Field notes Screenings, Q&A In-depth + follow up interviews Instant messaging (WhatsApp) Telephone + in-person conversations	Respondent-generated Known provenance Smartphones Sony photovideo cameras	12th Sozialak International Unseen FF 5th Diversimacine Festival MAX Diversity FF Mehodo International Youth Visual Media Festival Fukuoka City Diaspora Festival of Black and Independent Film Youtube (1496 views)

workshops and the resulting films have been combined with in-depth interviews, informal conversations and instant messaging exchanges to better understand the experiences narrated in the films and the challenges of the creative process. Finally, the three workshops had multiple collaborators, including individuals, local NGOs and private and public educative entities. As they were trusted by the participants beforehand, they played a facilitating role in many respects. The modalities of informed consent were verbal, written or video-recorded, depending on personal preferences.

Migrant Life

One two-week workshop took place in July 2018 in the North African city of Ceuta, on the border between Morocco and Spain. The Spanish colonial exclave serves as a fortress to dismiss Sub-Saharan and North African migrants entering Europe. The participants, Alseny, Habib, Richard and Cherif, arrived from Guinea Conakry two months before the workshop. They stayed at the Centre for Temporary Stay of Immigrants (CETI), as is the usual containment procedure for all undocumented migrants entering Ceuta and Melilla. According to the Spanish Minister of the Interior at the time, Fernando Grande-Marlaska, the CETI had one of the highest average occupancy rates in its history in the summer of 2018, with more than 700 residents staying there. This was due to the entry of a group of 602 migrants who jumped the fence of Ceuta on 26 July, causing the collapse of the Centre's services. The participants recorded and collected several smartphone videos of the exceptional situation, which provoked tears of joy in the agglomerations at the entrance of the Centre, endless queues to access the dining room, and a strike organized by the residents after learning that the 602 new incomers had been sent back to Morocco by the Spanish Ministry of the Interior. Every morning from Monday to Friday, we met at the Asociación San Antonio, two kilometres from the CETI, where some of the CETI residents go to learn Spanish and use the computers connected to the internet. San Antonio was seen as a trustworthy and safe place, suitable to avoid unnecessary risks while transferring and openly commenting on the videos. Each participant filmed one sequence in a different space. They edited the 10-minute documentary film together using iMovie. I projected the timeline on the wall, which helped them to make decisions regarding the final structure. *Migrant Life*, as they wanted to title the short film, speaks about the dangers they faced while living in Morocco and crossing the border by sea. It talks about the uncertainty of their future and provides insight into how the CETI is experienced as a place of "being stuck" while,

at the same time, it projects a feeling of beginning. Further discussions with the audience in Madrid during the screening of the film at the III Film Festival A Home[7] raised the essential question of when people who migrate to Europe, especially those from Sub-Saharan countries, can make films that are not self-representational. This critical reflection is a key takeaway for new pathways to be explored in future research.

The Way It Goes

Another week-long workshop, held in September 2019 with 15 participants, took place at the Instituto de Cine de Madrid, a private film school that provided a classroom equipped for six days. It was a parallel activity to the IV Film Festival A Home, where the resulting 14-minute documentary film, centred on the notion of home, was scheduled to be screened. Alseny, one of the participants in the Ceuta workshop, was hired as a film trainer. He was waiting for his legal status as a resident, as were eight of the workshop participants. In six days, they:

1. collected personal footage of different places—physical and symbolic—that they labelled as "home";
2. identified which places in Madrid were associated with a sense of home and which were not, and why;
3. recorded the places in Madrid in two shooting teams;
4. individually recorded the places where they lived or temporary stayed in Madrid;
5. wrote and recorded voice memos with personal reflections on home;
6. screened the footage, listened to the voice-overs and discussed the relationship between them;
7. drew the structure of the film on the whiteboard.

The film was remotely edited and subtitled by Julieta, Mía and Patricia, participants who were film students at the time, over a period of two weeks using Adobe Premiere. They followed the comments of all the participants until everyone was happy with the final cut. In the process, ethical reflections

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7   A Home is a multidisciplinary project of exhibition, creation, research and training held by Anima*Ars (A*ARS) since 2016 in Madrid. It explores autobiographical audiovisual forms that connect cinema and other arts to establish a dialogue on the notion of "home" as a transit between the personal and the public, between the psychological and the anthropological. For more information, see: https://unacasafestival.com/.

Figure 2.1. Nine of the eleven directors of *The Way it Goes* in the film's Q&A at the Círculo de Bellas Artes de Madrid, IV 1st Person Film Festival A Home. Madrid, 6 November 2019, Photo by Irene Gutiérrez.

emerged from the mix of experiences of voluntary and forced migration, exposing different levels of dispossession (both material and symbolic) and provoking debates on how the status of illegality is reinforced across borders and becomes a long-term precariousness. The subsequent dialogue with the audience questioned whether self-representative films can offer a real awareness of the situation of undocumented migrants and opportunities for them to negotiate their agency.

Round Trip

Destiny and Obehi, two of the 23 participants in a long-term workshop (2018–2020), directed the 23-minute documentary film *Round Trip*, which was edited with Adobe Premiere by one of the workshop's participants and students at the Vitoria School of Arts. The other participants were involved in music composition and interpretation, dialogue translation and subtitling, 2D map animation, poster design, a trailer, the music video for the original theme song, and developing a multimedia campaign. They were migrants and young people with a migrant-background who lived and studied in El Pilar, a multi-ethnic and multicultural neighbourhood of Vitoria-Gasteiz

(Basque Country), where 12Nubes works.[8] Carlos Cordovilla and Itzíar Aduna, the coordinators, supervised all the stages of the workshop. They pointed out that El Pilar is a neighbourhood with more type-A schools (Spanish language only) because the educational system applied in the Basque Country, where schools are divided according to Spanish or Basque language, does not take into account other languages such as English, French or Arabic. Consequently, although most of the workshop's participants are trilingual, their language skills do not count in a system where linguistic segregation often overlaps with spatial, racial and ethnoreligious exclusion (Fernández-Labayen et al., 2022). Another notable aspect of this workshop was the lack of material related to the migratory experience of the partici-pants or their parents. This led them to collect videos, photographs, letters, and oral histories about their journeys, which triggered intergenerational collaboration and dialogue. The collection of materials and footage activated the flow of knowledge between families, inspired the title of the and allowed them to recreate their parents' topographies on a 2D map.

These three workshops demonstrated how archival participatory film-making enabled participants to collect personal archives and footage to be repackaged and reused, thus transforming private, unseen archive and footage into public films. However, as a methodology used in migration and border research, it is worth identifying potential pitfalls that may undermine the practice of AFP at each stage, such as specific tensions between theory and practice, namely a "theory-practice disjunction" (Shaw, 2012, p. 233).

2.4   Ethical and Methodological Considerations

Every PF workshop, whether initiated by practitioners or researchers, is embedded in power structures that inevitably condition its dynamic and scope, such as an unequal legal and socioeconomic status between research-ers and participants or the participants themselves. Moreover, choosing PF as a methodology does not necessarily disrupt the status quo as academics carry out research, which institutions or agencies often fund to fit their own agendas. For example, conflicts between academic agendas and real-life project implementation may be found in the employment of resources and technology (semi-professional video cameras or smartphones, in-person or remote editing), the selection of the film genre and topic (documentary,

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8   12Nubes is a local initiative that explores integral education in schools as a tool for social transformation in contexts of exclusion. For more information: https://12nubes.kalezkalevg.org/.

fictional or re-enactment techniques; self-representational films on migration or border-related stories) or the recruitment of collaborators and participants (technology, time, mobility, genre or language divides). These factors may strongly affect the nature of the research when working with persons in vulnerable situations or hostile environments. Viewed in this mode, a profound reflection on the critical components that can determine the success or the failure of using APF in migration and border research is inseparable from the assurance of safety and ownership of the participants at all stages. In this section, I highlight the specific strengths and weaknesses of using this methodology in migration and border research by addressing some of the disjunctions between theory and practice that arise along the way. I do so by unpacking the balance between ownership and collaboration, recruitment biases, the crucial role of multi-layered and multi-staged informed consent, and the challenges of editing and dissemination.

Balance Between Ownership and Collaboration

In the three cases, the main goal of using different designs of APF was to ensure the participants owned both the process and product. For instance, while the process in the Ceuta workshop consisted of creating one sequence per participant, there were discussions on how much time each one should appear on the screen in the final cut. Exposure was not an issue in this workshop. Hence, "questioning the empowerment framing" (Shaw, 2012, p. 227) of every APF practice can help us to ensure a balance between ownership and collaborative work at every stage. The workshop's design encouraged people from different educational levels and socioeconomic backgrounds to perform together by promoting the co-authorial modality of the films. This was the main reason for including film and art students in the second and third workshops. It implies acknowledging that every skill is precious, whether technical, communicative, linguistic or artistic. Besides amplifying voices, APF means promoting agency without being paternalistic. It means, on the one hand, enabling horizontal dynamics of collaboration and dialogue as the core of the creative practice of filmmaking and, on the other hand, provoking further recognition and response from those who watch the resulting film (Plush, 2015). Thus, PF has the potential to serve, on its own terms, as an ongoing critical media literacy aimed at deconstructing labels (Lenette et al., 2020), allowing participants to negotiate their self-representations amongst themselves while testing their views with the audience. However, the three workshops raised the question of whether extending the methodology beyond self-representational narratives would be more effective in deconstructing

labels. They also brought up reflections on providing valuable guidelines to participants in storytelling and aesthetics without interfering with their own creativity and spontaneity in framing. Finally, the workshops dynamics called for consideration of shorter but individual films as products, time and resources permitting, to further develop personal in-depth narratives through a rotating recording dynamic in which each participant plays the role of director, sound designer, cinematographer or editor while collaborating in each of these filmmaking practices.

Recruitment Biases

The question of how participants are involved in the many diverse stages and aspects of the APV practice within a more participatory design (Takeda, 2021) demands that researchers reflect on a fundamental right and concern: non-participation as a matter of protection and resistance against external audiences or unwelcome agendas (Milne, 2012). For example, in the Ceuta workshop, two young males refused to participate from the beginning because they did not want to be located in Ceuta. At the same time, two others left the workshop on the third day because they felt that filming in the CETI could be problematic. Previously, 80% of the users who attended the daily activities set in the Centre for Immigrants of San Antonio were men, and half of them did not have a mobile phone. Similarly, two young girls declined to appear in the film *Round Trip* because their parents doubted the benefits of their public exposure. The lesson is that the design of the workshops failed because it exposed mobility, technology, safety and gender bias. This suggests that we should be critical and reflexive about recruitment criteria and participation dynamics, and assume that everyone's experiences and situations are unique.

Multi-level and Multi-stage Informed Consent

It might be difficult to identify in advance what might be wrong with a project design, but it can be identified during the workshop by using a multi-level, multi-stage consent procedure as a possible game changer. A policy of transparency, trust and respect must take precedence over any outcome, which means examining the reasons for non-participation and withdrawal. Participants must be clearly informed about every aspect of the workshop. From day one, they must know that they can contribute to shape the research and that they can stop participating at any time without being asked for an explanation. In addition, the consent form must reflect the two modalities in which the personal data and films will be disseminated, i.e.

for scientific or public purposes. For instance, the personal data may be pseudonymized, while the participants may decide not to appear in the films, to hide or blur their faces, or to use only their voices (see Gutiérrez, 2023). In the Madrid workshop, no one's face was shown; in Vitoria-Gasteiz, one of the protagonists is framed with his back turned and wearing a hooded jacket. For example, Alseny, Cherif, Habib and Richard wanted to show *Migrant Life*, but they decided to show it when they knew the date of their departure from the CETI, and to present it at a film festival only after they had been assured that some of them would be able to travel to discuss it with the audience. Indeed, knowing the reception processes in advance may prevent participants from publicly exposing themselves when a film's audience may be problematic (Kindon et al., 2012). Consent therefore needs to be revisited at certain points, particularly in the middle of the process and when the films are finished. This could help to identify and address issues of discomfort, loss of interest, internal or external pressure or stigmatization. Finally, I propose for further analysis how to make informed consent an active site of participants' intervention in the research.

Editing and Dissemination Challenges

In APV practices, time is often limited to the development of a hands-on workshop covering the creative and technical aspects of an entire filmmaking process (Lenette et al., 2020). In the Madrid workshop, the lack of time during the editing stage was an issue mentioned in the participants' final feedback. Although it was inspiring and enriching to incorporate everyone's feedback into the final cut, the three participants in charge of editing were also overwhelmed by not being able to export the final cut until everyone had given an opinion. This also led to an increased responsibility to complete the film before the festival deadline. The length of the workshop was therefore a design flaw. By contrast, the fact that there was more time for editing in the Vitoria-Gasteiz workshop helped the participant in charge of editing to win a scholarship to study at the School of Art. In this respect, the editing process can be adapted in any workshop design—for instance, making shorter individual films that do not demand a laborious editing process. Beyond the NER (non-editing-required) modality, there are several options for editing one or two-minute films using free mobile applications, or creating films shot in a single sequence. These alternatives could allow everyone to edit, avoiding the often default decision of choosing those participants who already know how to do it when time is short, which may affect the sense of ownership. In addition, time (and resources) must be allocated after the

fieldwork, as the practice of self-mediation in APV implies that the films are disseminated, accompanied and discussed by the participants.

The above suggestions may be useful for people who are considering working with this methodology to ask why, how and under what conditions it can be implemented to achieve a win-win design that ensures the avoidance of harm to participants by taking into account the situated ethics of the specific spatio-temporal conjunctures. As creative processes and practices are inherently dynamic, the methods and ethics involved in APF can be challenging during research, so practitioners need to stablish transparent communication at all stages and are expected to be flexible in the face of specific or unforeseen needs. In addition, the performative nature of audiovisuals may involve traumatic experiences or bring sensitive personal information to the surface, requiring additional measures to prevent causing emotional distress. The same applies to a workshop on the border, even if it is "on the safe side." The border is an iconoclastic space surrounded by feelings of fear and mistrust, where images and devices are often stolen, confiscated, sold or taken in exchange for favours. Therefore, when the APF workshop takes place on the border, it must be conducted safely or not at all.

2.5   Conclusion

In this chapter, I have discussed the possibilities and limitations of doing archival participatory filmmaking to map and collect unseen footage of first-hand experiences of border crossing and everyday bordering practices. Drawing on three workshops, I argue that APF can encourage participants to become producers of their own data and views, and generate innovative ways of disseminating their knowledge through films that aim to promote empathy among audiences. The collective process of film-thinking and filmmaking foregrounds the role of the audiovisual in materializing and contesting territorial and symbolic borders. The analysis has demonstrated the potential of APF practices in migration and border research to provide a safe space for self-representation and self-mediation through the catalyst of filmmaking. Their films have fostered empathetic responses from audiences by raising significant issues on how people who migrate are represented. However, for APF to enrich migration and border research in a way that is safe and enriching for participants, it is desirable to balance ownership with collaboration, to identify biases in the recruitment criteria, to use a multi-level and multi-stage informed consent, and to pay particular attention to the time factor of the design, given the challenges of the editing

process and the subsequent dissemination of the films. These concluding remarks encourage a critical APF practice to contest migration and border epistemologies from below. It continues recent debates promoting the use of (audio)visual media in digital research on the everydayness in migration and border studies, with specific recommendations for good practice.

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3. Embodying Data, Shifting Perspective: A Conversation with Ahnjili Zhuparris on *Future Wake*

Rosa Wevers with Ahnjili Zhuparris

Abstract

This chapter discusses the artistic project *Future Wake* (2021) by Ahnjili Zhuparris and Tim van Ommeren that examines predictive policing. By shifting the focus from possible future crime offenders to possible future victims of fatal police encounters, using visual and affective means rather than expert knowledge and statistics, the artwork activates critical reflection on the politics and logics of predictive policing systems. The chapter first situates predictive policing in a context of securitization, and discusses how it enhances structures of discrimination. In the second part, Wevers interviews artist Zhuparris about the aims of *Future Wake*, discussing the artistic and technical process of creating the project, the politics of data, and the role of art in critical discussion on surveillance and AI.

Keywords: predictive policing; art; police brutality; data; surveillance.

3.1 Introduction

Technological surveillance and datafication have not only been widely criticized and examined in scholarly debate but also in the domain of the arts. Acting as canaries in a coal mine, artists have generated attention for some of the harms, hidden injustices and ethical problems that are produced by the use of networked surveillance technologies (Stark & Crawford, 2019; Wevers, 2023). The artistic interest in this topic proliferated with 9/11 and the following period of securitization resulting from the "war on terror"

(Buzan & Wæver, 2003). Artists such as Jill Magid turned the gaze back at the operators of CCTV (closed-circuit television) cameras to expose their position of power;[1] others explored tactics such as camouflage with the aim of resisting surveillance. The Snowden revelations in 2013 led to another wave of interest in the topic, with much focus on privacy and the ways in which digital behaviour is placed under surveillance (Monahan, 2022; Stark & Crawford, 2019). Artists such as Hito Steyerl started to critically investigate the visuality of surveillance systems, and were committed to reveal invisible surveillance structures to create awareness of their ubiquity and embeddedness in larger systems of power.[2] More recently, with the emergence of biometric surveillance and predictive policing, artists have turned to examine the algorithmic conditions of surveillance and their political implications (Vries, 2019; Wevers, 2018). In 2020, artist and activist Paolo Cirio for example created a series of photographs called *Capture* that showed faces of French police officers, which he collected from publicly available images of street protests in France.[3] Cirio used facial recognition software—which usually is targeted at civil protesters—to process the images. The work was intended to provoke a discussion on the unequal power dynamics at work in the use of these systems, and eventually got censored by the French government.

This interaction between art and surveillance has become known as "surveillance art" (Brighenti, 2010). As John McGrath and Robert Sweeny note, surveillance art "allows us to act upon our surveyed/surveying world in a way which, however momentarily and playfully, destabilises binary forms of power and control" (McGrath & Sweeny, 2010, p. 91). Characteristic of this artistic engagement with surveillance is the fact that artists not only make work *about* but often also *with* technologies of surveillance such as CCTV cameras, drones or biometric software. By closely intervening into the logics of the system, artists try to expose covert prejudices, assumptions and norms that feed the system's operations.

My ongoing research is committed to investigating the critical potential of surveillance art and how it mobilizes sensory-driven knowledge that disrupts naturalized, hierarchical and invisible surveillance structures. I investigate this thematic through different registers: in the form of cultural

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1   More information can be found on the artist's website: http://www.jillmagid.com/projects/evidence-locker-2.

2   An example can be found in Steyerl's video installation *How Not to Be Seen: A Fucking Didactic Educational .MOV File* (2013).

3   More information can be found on the artist's website: https://www.paolocirio.net/work/capture/.

Figure 3.1. Still 1 from *Future Wake* (2021). Courtesy of Zhuparris and van Ommeren.

analysis as well as through curatorial practice. In the fall of 2021, I was invited to present about my curatorial research at an event for cultural professionals in the field of (digital) art, culture and design in Utrecht, the Netherlands. Here, I met Ahnjili Zhuparris, a Netherlands-based scholar and artist who presented the art project *Future Wake* (2021) that she created in collaboration with designer Tim van Ommeren. For *Future Wake*, the artists used predictive algorithms to spark discussion on the political implications of predictive policing. However, instead of criminalizing citizens, the project makes predictions about who might become a victim of a fatal encounter with the police. By shifting the focus from possible crime offenders to police crimes, *Future Wake* prompts reflection on the politics of predictive policing systems. Rather than using statistics, the interactive website approaches these pressing issues in an affective, audio-visual manner.

When you visit the interactive website of *Future Wake*, you stare straight into the eyes of five faces. In the background you can see different surroundings: a gas station, a palm tree, a suburban neighbourhood. The faces—predominantly Black and Brown—are positioned in a frame which is occasionally interrupted by small glitches. They are accompanied by small pieces of information: a location, a date and a count-down clock. When you click on one of the faces a new page appears and a voice starts to speak:

> Two deputies are responding to a domestic violence situation at a motel around 3:30 p.m. When they arrive, they will find me in a car with a gun. Police will say I pulled out the gun and pointed it at them. The police will shoot and kill me.

This chilling story, told by a calm and warm voice, is not real but might become so in the future. It was generated by AI and based on past data about police killings in the US. The project draws attention to the racialized violence of police brutality in a more affective way than numbers and statistics tend to do. As the count-down clock reminds us, in 169 days, 12 hours and 17 minutes this speculative story might become reality.

Predictive policing is a form of big data surveillance in which historical crime data is analysed for the purpose of predicting in which geographical areas there is an increased likelihood that crime will occur (Brayne, 2017). Predictive policing has also been used to make "predictions" about which individuals are likely to become involved in criminal activity—as was the case for the now discontinued heat list of the Chicago Police Department (Gorner & Sweeney, 2020). While predictive policing systems tend to be installed as more objective and efficient solutions for police work, their operations are far from neutral. As sociologist Sarah Brayne argues:

> What data law enforcement collects, their methods for analyzing and interpreting it, and the way it informs their practice are all part of a fundamentally social process. Characterizing predictive models as "just math," and fetishizing computation as an objective process, obscures the social side of algorithmic decision-making. Individuals' interpretation of data occurs in preexisting institutional, legal, and social settings, and it is through that interpretive process that power dynamics come into play (Brayne, 2017, p. 1004).

Thus, rather than forming an antidote to discrimination, researchers including Ruha Benjamin (2019), Wendy Chun (2021) and Rashida Richardson et al. (2019) have shown that predictive policing systems actually reinforce racial discrimination in criminal investigation. This can partly be explained by the data that are used. In their investigation of PredPol, one of the dominant predictive policing systems in the US, Richardson, Schultz and Crawford show how the algorithm makes predictions based on "dirty data" that are "produced during documented periods of flawed, racially biased, and sometimes unlawful practices and policies" (Richardson et al., 2019, p. 15). As a result, predictive policing systems further increase racial discrimination, by leading to the over-policing and targeting of predominantly Black neighbourhoods in the United States (Benjamin, 2019, p. 66; Chun, 2021, pp. 18–20).

While predictive policing systems used in the US are developed by commercial companies, the police of the Netherlands—the context

from which I write this chapter—developed its own systems for predictive policing. In 2014, CAS ('criminaliteitsanticipatiesysteem' or crime anticipation system) was tested in four police districts, to be later installed throughout the Netherlands in 2017. CAS is a system that is designed for the prediction of crimes such as theft, burglary and robbery (van Schie, 2022, p. 139). The effectiveness of the system has not been conclusively scientifically proven, and similar to commercial programs such as PredPol, the system works in racialized manners and reproduces existing inequalities (van Schie, 2022, p. 156). Another example is the Sense project, that analysed data of vehicles driving around the city of Roermond to predict potential pickpockets from Eastern European countries.[4] In 2020, Amnesty International published a report on the Sense project, in which it analysed the system as "discriminatory from design to execution" (2020, p. 6).

The incorporation of AI in systems for criminal investigation, border control and surveillance can be understood from within a larger context of securitization, which encompasses the governmental strategies of risk prediction and prevention that evolved after 9/11 and the "war on terror". In this post-9/11 context a new security dispositive arose in which Western governments proclaimed to be in a "state of emergency" that would justify far-reaching security measurements (Buzan & Wæver, 2003; de Graaf & Eijkman, 2011). As gender and postcolonial scholar Christine Quinan points out, securitization should be understood as:

> a highly political and ideological endeavor that is reliant on constructed binaries. For example, dichotomies such as inside/outside and citizen/ terrorist become critical to the maintenance of homeland security, as such discourses are built on the notion that there is a threat to be contained or excluded. Furthermore, from this construction emerges an us/them binary, where the us is constructed as normal and the them is seen as abnormal or deviant (Quinan, 2017, p. 186).

In addition to this binary approach to security, securitization is characterized by a shift from a reactive to a pre-emptive view on security that does not respond to any concrete threat but is aimed at risk control (de Graaf, 2012). Predictive policing systems, designed with the aim of "anticipating and predicting" future criminal activity on the basis of historical criminal data,

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4   It must be noted that the Dutch police itself does not regard the Sense project as a form of predictive policing.

are one of the various ways in which this risk-thinking is technologically materialized (Scannell, 2019).

While systems for predictive policing are installed under the guise of "making society safer," the question that emerges is who is included and who is excluded from this sense of safety. As critical research has shown, the deployment of new surveillance technologies in the context of securitization has led to the profiling, targeting and Othering of individuals and communities who do not embody the Western, white, cis-gender, heteronormative, secular and non-migrant norm (Browne, 2015; Madianou, 2019; Magnet, 2011; Puar, 2007; Quinan, 2017; Sanchez Boe & Mainsah, 2021). Rather than having their safety secured, they risk becoming marked as "suspicious subjects" and are subjected to further surveillance and criminalization.

3.2   Interview with Ahnili Zhuparris

In confronting spectators with possible future victims, *Future Wake* forces us to consider to what extent predictive policing systems make society safer, how this safety is defined and who is excluded from it. For the present chapter of *Doing Digital Migration Studies* I interviewed one of the creators of the project, Ahnjili Zhuparris. Zhuparris is a PhD candidate, data scientist and artist. For her PhD research, she develops machine learning algorithms to analyse fully remote clinical trials. In her artistic practice, she creates space to critically reflect on processes of datafication and their interrelations with systems of power. We discussed the aims of the project, the techniques and creative process through which it was developed, and the importance of art in discussion on the socio-political implications of surveillance, securitization and datafication.

Rosa Wevers (RW): How did you come up with the idea of *Future Wake?*
Ahnjili Zhuparris (AZ): Tim and I are both Black artists, and I am a data scientist, so instinctively we were drawn to the Mozilla Foundation's open call for Black Artists interrogating AI.[5] Using this premise, we thought about Sam Lavigne's *White Collar Crime Risk Zones* project,[6] in which

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5   See: https://foundation.mozilla.org/en/blog/announcing-8-projects-examining-ais-relationship-with-racial-justice/.
6   The project is a critical commentary on predictive policing software as well as crime prediction websites. By shifting the focus from "street crimes" to financial crimes, it exposes some of the biases underlying the uses of big data applications for criminal prosecution and the ways in which it is understood and represented. See https://lav.io/projects/white-collar-crime-risk-zones/.

he used predictive policing algorithms to predict white collar crimes in Manhattan. While surveillance systems could once be described by the Panopticon model, where a single authority system surveilled the masses, today's surveillance systems have multiple authorities surveilling the masses. Drawing on this principle, we wanted to depict a future in which civilians could pre-emptively police the police through an equally biased and flawed lens. That is how we landed on *Future Wake*.

RW: How would you position the project in your larger artistic practice?
AZ: I am relatively new to the digital art world, however, I am not new to the world of surveillance and AI technologies. For me, *Future Wake* was a good stepping stone into using art to question and communicate issues in the ever-expanding world of AI surveillance and algorithmic violence. Algorithmic violence refers to violence that is either justified or created by algorithms.

RW*:* When you say algorithmic violence, are you drawing on the work of artist and researcher Mimi Onuoha, who proposed: "Algorithmic violence refers to the violence that an algorithm or automated decision-making system inflicts by preventing people from meeting their basic needs. It results from and is amplified by exploitative social, political, and economic systems, but can also be intimately connected to spatially and physically borne effects" (Onuoha, 2018)?
AZ: Yes, I think it is the perfect term to describe how algorithms are used today, especially to algorithmically "wash away" people's responsibility, because now people can blame the algorithm for its decision rather than pointing out a single person or single entity. For me, *Future Wake* was a starting point in deciding in how I wanted to explain AI to the general public.

RW: The project focuses on the geographical context of the US. Why did you choose this setting, and could you imagine a project like this also being developed in the context of Europe?
AZ: We actually wanted to create a Dutch version, but we chose not to for two reasons. Fortunately, there are so few fatal encounters in the Netherlands that there is not enough data to do a similar project. It still happens, but not on the same scale as in the US. And the other reason is that even though there are a few cases, we could not find any open-access databases with European police-related fatal encounters, or at least not a unified one. The US is more consistent or unified, so it was quite easy to find data about the citizens, either through newspapers or from Freedom of Information Acts.

I also have a personal connection to the US: I grew up in New York until I was nine. … I remember a few years ago that a family friend was murdered. He got shot in his head after a fight on the street. It was so telling that when my aunts told me about it, they were like "it was definitely the police!" And it could have been anything, right? But the initial response was to blame the police. In the end, it turned out that it was not the police who killed him. Nevertheless, this first response is very telling of how violence is perceived in Black communities in the US.

RW: The title of the project, *Future Wake*, signifies a state of mourning—a wake is a watch or vigil held when a person passes away. Do you in fact see the project as an act of mourning, or as an invitation to engage in it?
AZ: We see often that mourning of and grief for a victim fuels activism and the demand for a reformation of a system. To activate a critical response towards these AI systems, we wanted to elicit an emotional response from our audience members. Hence we framed our predictions as victims who would be mourned after their future deaths to deepen the emotional weight of our statistical predictions.

RW: The project not only responds to predictive algorithms, but also builds upon a predictive algorithm that you designed yourself. To what extent is it possible to get an insight into the algorithms of predictive policing systems such as PredPol?
AZ: For *Future Wake*, I took two different approaches to building the predictions. The first was using simple time-series forecasting. So this is saying: "a death happened on this day, a death happened on that day. So for future days, what is the likelihood of a death happening within a day or two days or a month or so on?" So you use the previous date as an indicator of future dates. The other approach that I used, and that I would argue is closer to what the predictive policing systems are doing, is using contextual data. That means that I looked at the weather, previous crimes, poverty levels, current gang violence and all these contextual and environmental clues to make predictions about the future. I was not able to mimic the contextual data-based predictions for two reasons. One was that a lot of data that predictive policing systems use is more or less real-time, such as looking at real-time traffic events, or emergency calls, or known ongoing activities in the area (such as parties, or sporting events). It was impossible for me to find a real time-database for all places in the US to make the predictions. And two, I really had no idea how their data was processed as well (it is

not known which variables were deemed more important than others or if variables were processed hour by hour or day by day). So it was very difficult for me to speculate.

RW: How did you continue?

AZ: What I did was remotely trying to mirror how predictive policing systems work. For the cities that we chose, which are the five most populous cities in the US, I downloaded all of their demographic information. I also looked at general crime data, so I could usually find how many shootings there were per zip code, what was the number of rapes and so on. I put all of these data points together and then I tried to predict what would happen the following day. Unfortunately, the data was quite noisy because the data sets differ per city and they are not unified. Sometimes the granularity of the data (the level of detail) was different. So for example, in New York, maybe they would give me the crime data for each day, whereas in LA maybe it would be per week or per month. I did my best and I tried to make predictions based on that data. And then I compared the predictions for both the time-based approach and the contextual approach. It turned out that the first model that I made, the time-series forecasting, was much more accurate than the contextual model. That can mean two things. Either the contextual model was just really bad, or it is saying that the time-series forecasting algorithm that I made is actually really good, which also means that the number of fatal encounters with the police is so regular that you can just predict when the next one would happen based on previous dates. It is unnerving.

RW: *Future Wake* combines the artistic and human-driven strategy of storytelling with AI. Could you talk us through the creative process that led to this project? Why did you choose to work with storytelling as a creative practice, and how did you transform the generated data into the faces and stories that we see in *Future Wake*?

AZ: Data and algorithms are too often distilled into numbers and statistics, it is important to remind ourselves that humans are in the loop. By transforming our data and predictions into digital victims, we brought the human into the foreground, and the numbers and statistics into the background. The final but most important step was to use art and audience interaction to connect the viewer with the generated victims. By using deepfake technology, we enabled each generated victim to tell their story directly to the audience. We quite literally let the data do the talking.

Figure 3.2. Still 2 from *Future Wake* (2021). Courtesy of Zhuparris and van Ommeren.

To generate the future events, we used the historical events from the police datasets to train machine-learning models to predict the number of deaths (categorized in terms of race, gender and cause-of-death category) on a given day in the five most populous cities in the United States. Based on the day, race and gender category, we predicted the geographical coordinates of the event. Based on the geographical coordinates, we trained a GPT-2 model to generate a story based on other events that happened in the same area. To generate the videos, we used the profile pictures of the victim (found in Fatal Encounters) to train a Generative Adversarial Network (GAN). The trained GAN was then used to generate the facial characteristics of the victims' faces. This two-step approach used the victims' historical data to collectively tell a story about the future.

RW: The faces that are generated in *Future Wake* reflect how already marginalized communities in the US are overrepresented in databases of fatal police encounters. Which databases did you use to generate this new data? AZ: We used the Fatal Encounters[7] and Mapping Police Violence[8] databases. Both databases were created by civilians, who used media and police reports to gather information. While the FBI also has a database, we found that the database only had a fraction of the cases found in the civilian databases. This is because the FBI relies on police agencies to volunteer in collecting the relevant information.

7   https://fatalencounters.org/.
8   https://mappingpoliceviolence.org/.

RW: I am reminded here again of Mimi Onuoha's work, specifically her artistic project *Library of Missing Datasets*, for which she traced blind spots and omissions in otherwise data-saturated spaces. The artist argues that the moments when data are missing can give us important insights about the politics of data:

> The word "missing" is inherently normative. It implies both a lack and an ought: something does not exist, but it should. That which should be somewhere is not in its expected place; an established system is disrupted by distinct absence. That which we ignore reveals more than what we give our attention to. It's in these things that we find cultural and colloquial hints of what is deemed important. Spots that we've left blank reveal our hidden social biases and indifferences (Onuoha, 2018).

A striking example in this regard is the *Migrant Files* project, a civic initiative of activists and journalists from Europe who collected and analysed data on migrant deaths and disappearances in Europe.[9] While European borders are extensively surveilled, and biometric information of migrants who have arrived in Europe is stored in centralized databases such as EURODAC and the Schengen Information System, data about migrants who pass away or go missing in their journey to Europe is not centrally documented by European governmental organizations. The intervention of the *Migrant Files* project, which entails both identifying the absence and collecting, contextualizing and analysing the missing data, brings urgent awareness to the Othering and dehumanizing workings of Fortress Europe and whose lives are considered worth documenting (Leurs, 2018).

Turning back to the missing data about fatal police-related encounters, could you reflect on the discrepancy between databases created by civilians and by the US government? What does the missing data tell us?

RW: Your answer shows how the question of what data is available, and what data is lacking or even erased is a very political issue. And related to that, the question of representation also matters. How does data represent? Who extracts data, who does it represent and who not? Your project makes an intervention into these questions by, as you say "letting the data speak," by bringing the human back into the loop. Could you reflect on what you find important when working with data and algorithms in a critical manner?

9   https://www.themigrantsfiles.com/.

AZ: I think the main issue with data now is that it completely lacks context. It is an issue for my PhD research as well. Basically people are distilled into machine-readable information, but that is totally taken out of context. And so, at least for *Future Wake*, we try to overcome this. We tried to put data about people and violent incidents back into the context by showing their location, by letting the victims tell the background story of what happened. Think about the death of Georgy Floyd, a well-known recent example of a fatal encounter with the police. Even though many people have watched the video and followed what happened before and after, in the existing databases Floyd was just a single row of data with ten parameters such as "black, male, died from a chokehold." These parameters totally remove the gravity or the weight from the incident. It removes what the premise was from what happened. It removes how many people, both in-person and online, watched this video and took his death to heart, and completely removed the movement that his death sparked. So I think for me, to make data more valuable and in a way that is emotionally meaningful for someone, would be to put it back into context.

RW: In addition to the artistic part of the project, *Future Wake* also exists of an important informative component. When entering the web project, visitors can learn about the methods and datasets that you have used. The website also offers background information that explains how predictive policing systems operate, how their predictions are flawed and how these systems automate and conceal biases and can further reproduce discrimina-tion through the over-surveillance of marginalized groups. Why did you decide to include this in the project?
AZ: We believe that transparency should be the primary assessment of an algorithm prior to its deployment. Transparency is the first step towards enabling a critical democratic inspection of AI. Transparency also allows the public to demand changes when an algorithm predicts an erroneous event. We wanted to exercise those values by showing the inner workings of *Future Wake*.

RW: Predictive policing is only one example of the growing integration of algorithmic surveillance systems in processes of securitization. In the context of Europe, for example, biometric data of migrants are automatically cross-referenced with criminal databases, leading to the (re)production of racialized inequalities, as well as to the criminalization of migration itself (M'charek et al., 2014). Another example can be found in the use of facial recognition algorithms in UN refugee camps, in which refugees are

required to give away their biometric data to get access to humanitarian aid (Madianou, 2019). How do you look at this development from your perspective as an artist and a programmer? Why do you think that these systems are given so much power?

AZ: The appeal of algorithmic surveillance systems is their ability to automatically process data with both speed and accuracy. The processed and curated data supports the decision-making process. It is important for us, as artists and programmers, to be the curators of data. We need to remind ourselves and our audiences that data represents a historical extension of ourselves. These historical traces can and will be used to influence our future decisions. We should challenge the allure of the efficiency of new technological systems by inverting these systems to expose their biases, flaws and potential harmful applications.

RW: *Future Wake* repurposes AI for social justice by exposing racist structures rather than automating them. I see the project as an example of the way in which AI can be used for "diagnos[ing] current inequalities" and revealing discriminatory structures of the past, as Wendy Chun has recently suggested in her book *Discriminating Data* (2021, p. 2). How do you look at this potential of AI?

AZ: We agree. We see our project as a stepping stone to challenge the algorithmic systems that police us. We hoped that our audience members would think critically about the design and applications of *Future Wake*. We have been asked about how the dataset was created, the accuracy of the predictions and the biases of the AI models. By allowing the audience to think critically about our work, they would then have the critical framework to analyse actual predictive policing systems. Further, if audience members considered our project to be unethical, perhaps our project would be a public mirror to question if law enforcement should be using the same technologies.

RW: *Future Wake* offers an affective and audio-visual entry point into research on the power structures in which AI systems are embedded, and opens up discussion on the ways in which these systems reproduce structures of inequality. Why was it important for you to make this intervention through art? More broadly, what is your take on the role of art and creative work in discussions on the political implications of the datafication and securitization of society?

AZ: Speculative and critical artworks should interrogate AI systems by exposing their impact on human lives. Rather than assessing AI systems in terms of numbers without consequences, art brings humans back into

the loop. It is important to remind the audience that algorithms take data from humans, and their outputs or predictions are used by humans to make decisions. Too often, data are distilled from the context in which they were gathered, and too often, the impact of the algorithms is made invisible.

3.3   Concluding Reflections

In examining predictive policing, *Future Wake* also draws attention to larger issues concerning the politics of data. The project challenges dominant ways of representing data, that are characterized by visual minimalism and consequentially perceived to be neutral and objective (D'Ignazio & Klein, 2020). Building on the work of feminist philosopher Donna Haraway, feminist data scholars Christine D'Ignazio and Lauren Klein argue that data visualities tend to reproduce a "god trick," that establishes a distance towards the viewer. Data are accordingly experienced as if they present a complete and objective overview of the subject matter that they represent. The fact that data is always partial and biased remains invisible. By transforming abstract data points into faces, *Future Wake* destabilizes this neutrality and objectivity of data, and highlights how real people are impacted by such datafied predictions. In doing so, it invites an emotional and embodied response to data, which is in line with what D'Ignazio and Klein have posited as an important principle of data feminism and a way to move beyond the "god trick" (D'Ignazio & Klein, 2020).

Moreover, *Future Wake* encourages the spectator to take a critical look at the way in which algorithmic processing and data have been used to create the project. The *Future Wake* website makes information about the design process transparent and accessible, and renders explicit how biases and gaps in the approach are part of the databases and algorithmic process. The website project states for example: "Just as predictive policing has inherent risk, *Future Wake* also has inherent risk. These statistical models can only predict what it has seen before; history only repeats itself. Both tools can only offer the probability of an event happening, and each prediction can be wrong or even dangerous."[10] While predictive policing systems are built upon values such as efficiency, *Future Wake* subverts such functionalities by working towards justice. In that way, the creators of *Future Wake* encourage the spectator to ask critical questions about data: How is data represented?

10   https://www.futurewake.com/#/data-and-methods?tab=2.

In whose interest and for whose goals? What does this dataset include or leave out?

Future Wake is designed as a critique to algorithmic violence but also makes use of predictive algorithms to allow citizens to predict police brutality. In doing so, it potentially risks reproducing forms of algorithmic violence itself. For instance, in drawing attention to racialized violence in the context of police brutality, the artist had to work with existing databases that categorize people into machine-legible categories of race and gender—which are categories that impose simplistic and external views on gender and race without considering the subject's self-identification (Browne, 2015; Keyes, 2018). In our conversation, Zhuparris explained that the project has received some critical responses addressing such issues, mostly in the form of questions about how the data for the project was processed and what biases were part of it. During our conversation, Zhuparris also reflected on the different effects that the project might have for different audiences: I think one of the flaws of *Future Wake* is that some people might miss that we criticize predictive policing. On a superficial look it might just seem as if we wanted to show that not only can you use predictive policing to predict burglaries and fires and rapes, you can also use it to predict when the police would kill someone. So it could be understood as if we just identified another application for the algorithm rather than just critiquing it.

Zhuparris is not the only artist facing such tensions in working critically with AI. As Kate Crawford and Luke Stark observe, "in challenging structures of technological, economic, and institutional power through art incorporating digital technologies, the artists themselves risked replicating those same structures of power" (Stark & Crawford, 2019, p. 449). When working with AI and "getting their hands dirty," important political and ethical issues become apparent that artists are forced to deal with and take accountability for.

For projects such as *Future Wake,* the critical potential not only lies in the end result but also in the design process itself. In the case of Future Wake, this "dealing with" is visible in the contextualizing part of the web project in which spectators are made aware of the methods and data that are used, and the inherent flaws of the approach. *Future Wake* is explicitly not presented as a technical solution, but as an instigator of discussion that invites critical interrogation of biases rather than obscuring them. By explicitly attending to such hidden "attachments, values, absences, and biases in data," art holds the potential to activate a process of critical reflection, which is "a process by which the interwoven social and technical dynamics of data are made visible and accessible to judgment" (Loukissas, 2019, p. 162). In *Future Wake,*

such critical reflection is activated in relation to the topic of security. By turning the logics of predictive policing upside down, the project both exposes how these systems work and allows citizens to critically examine power in policing practices. In doing so, *Future Wake* makes tangible how social justice should be central to discussions on security.

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Section II

Digital Diasporas and Placemaking

Introduction to Section II:
Digital Diasporas and Placemaking

Mihaela Nedelcu

Digital migration studies have considerably broadened our understanding of how information and communications technologies (ICTs) have enhanced the "online migrants"(Nedelcu, 2009) ability to act across national borders as transnationally "connected" (Diminescu, 2005; Leurs & Ponzanesi, 2018), "co-present" (Baldassar et al., 2016), "smart refugees" (Dekker et al., 2018) or "digital diasporas" (Nedelcu, 2018). Furthermore, the "exceptional attention" (Leurs & Smets, 2018) given to forced migrants' digitally mediated practices highlights the key role of mobile technologies and social media in empowering refugees and undocumented migrants in their everyday struggle against precarity and exclusion (Nedelcu & Soysüren, 2022). Yet, although existing scholarship has concentrated on digital technologies' agentic dimension with regard to mobile and dispersed populations living transnational lives, as well as mobilizations of diasporas, the micro-fabric of digital (transnational) agency is still being overlooked. In-depth studies, varying researchers' positionalities, disciplines, and analysis of specific populations are needed in order to develop a greater understanding of how people "make a difference" (Giddens, 1984, p. 14) by using ICTs to act across borders.

Moreover, the current accessibility of digital technologies beyond social class, age and the North-South divides has opened up new possibilities for transnational lives and imaginaries to take shape without the necessity to be mobile. Increasingly, such technologies allow ordinary people to live their lives simultaneously embedded in local and global contexts, across national, cultural or social boundaries. In his unfinished work on the new era of social "metamorphosis" (i.e., a historical turn, distinct from traditional understandings of social change), Beck raised awareness that "the internet is then not only a space of action or a tool to organize, communicate, and exchange but ... it is a process of becoming a cosmopolitized world" (2016,

p. 139). Grounding on this perspective, I argue for the case that digital transformations of agency are woven into a larger cosmopolitization process that "happens 'from within'" (Beck & Sznaider, 2006, p. 9). Partially driven by an unprecedented global interconnectivity and communicational ubiquity, this process relies on "both-and" logics of action and belonging (Nedelcu, 2009), reflecting that one and the same can be simultaneously included *and* excluded, politically active *and* disengaged, online *and* offline, nationally embedded *and* transnationally involved, and so on. From this perspective, it becomes urgent to understand how digital technologies "metamorphose" human agency considered "as a temporally embedded process of social engagement, informed by the past (in its habitual aspect), but also oriented toward the future (as a capacity to imagine alternative possibilities) and toward the present (as a capacity to contextualize past habits and future projects within the contingencies of the moment)" (Emirbayer & Mische, 1998, p. 963).

The chapters in Section II open up interesting new avenues for discussion that could potentially move beyond the field of digital migration studies. First, they document a profound transformation in individual agency, as different categories of (migrant and non-migrant) populations in various contexts are able to live (and make sense of their) transnational lives, and position themselves both at a local and transnational level. This is the case for: Chinese transnational grandparents in Australia whose everyday digital practices help improve their settlement conditions, whilst these same practices also generate a sense of disconnection from peers in the homeland and loss of opportunities to age well (Chapter 4 by Catriona Stevens, Loretta Baldassar and Raelene Wilding); African digital influencers who use social media such as TikTok or Instagram to encourage debate on pressing political issues informed by local, intra-continental and global perspectives (Chapter 5 by Fungai Machirori); Congolese refugee YouTubers living in Nairobi who draw on diasporic audiences and creatively develop YouTube channels to open up digital (economic) niches during the Covid-19 pandemics (Chapter 6 by Marie Godin and Bahati Ghislain). Second, the digital transformation of agency mechanisms is linked to digital forms of grassroots cosmopolitanism that give voice to minorities and challenge hegemonic Western narratives. By advocating a non-Western, African research positionality, Machirori (Chapter 5) argues that the use of digital media recentres discursive power and creates a counternarrative for a different view of the African continent, and the world. Acting as "digital vanguards" (Gerbaudo, 2017), social media influencers from the South or from a migrant background contribute towards building political

consciousness within counterpublics, beyond diasporic communities. Finally, as has been empirically suggested in this section, digital agency has the potential to trigger various social changes. For instance, by challenging mainstream narratives, African women influencers help foster their followers' cosmopolitan awareness and change their views of politics (Chapter 5). Congolese refugee YouTubers use their "small acts of resistance" as a way to challenge gender (diasporic) normativeness, showcase refugee talents, change refugee representation within local communities, and enhance refugee interconnectedness both locally and across borders (Chapter 6). In time, these forms of digital agency could play a key role in forging new forms of diasporic and transnational collective action and processes of political change.

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4.   Friendship, Connection and Loss: Everyday Digital Kinning and Digital Homing among Chinese Transnational Grandparents in Perth, Australia

Catriona Stevens, Loretta Baldassar and Raelene Wilding

Abstract

This chapter explores how practices of digital kinning and digital homing enacted through smartphones shape the experiences of Chinese older adults in Perth, Australia. Transnational grandparent carers must balance the risks of diminished social networks with the benefits of providing intergenerational care. Some form strong friendships in Perth, but many yearn for a leisured life with their friends in China. Findings illustrate the central role of digital migration practices in transnational families and friendships, not only sustaining distant support networks, but also building new communities in host settings. However, for some, the co-presence afforded through WeChat may intensify feelings of loss and dislocation. Observing these digital practices reveals the emotional geographies that characterize the lives of aged migrants and transnational caregivers.

Keywords: social media; transnational friendship; retirement migration; care circulation; transnational caregiving.

4.1   Introduction

Each morning the "Perthtown Sisters Group"[1] WeChat feed flares into activity from first light. Gifs of bunches of roses, smiling babies or rotating peonies

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1   Perthtown here is a pseudonym. The "Perthtown" Sisters Group (*Perthtown jiemei qun*) live and meet in a Perth suburb. All participants are similarly anonymized in this chapter.

greet the "sisters"[2] of this friend group (and the few male members) with a cheery, flashing *Zaoshang hao!* (Good morning). Festivals and public holidays, whether Chinese or Australian, occasion different messages, from *Huan Du Guo Qing* (Happy National Day) to "Be my valentine ♡♡♡." On fine days, fans of plaza dancing[3] message each other to confirm their early practice sessions in the local park. During the summer months, the most enthusiastic will be crowded around a tablet propped on a picnic table by 6:30 am, squeezing in time in their busy day to copy the popular routines streamed by dance troupes in China before the temperature rises. An early start means they can return home to their chores of the day, readying their grandchildren for school, waving their adult children off to work.

The women (and men) who make up this group are all members of the rapidly growing cohorts of transnational grandparents who spend time in Australia on both temporary and permanent visas caring for grandchildren to support their adult children's return to work. The care work they provide is essential to the family's economic wellbeing and allows these older adults to fulfil important grandparenting roles. Yet for many, being in Australia comes at a cost, since they must leave behind long-established friendships that inform their social identities and wellbeing, as well as forgo retirement plans that promise free time to pursue their interests. Regular plaza dancing, picnics in the park, and similar in-person gatherings highlight the high regard for social connection and physical activity shared by participants, but it also underlines a less obvious but equally important dimension: the important role of digital migration practices as a mechanism for building new friendships to facilitate settlement at point of destination as well as sustaining existing relationships with people back "home."

This chapter illustrates how Chinese older adults who have followed their children in migrating to Australia incorporate digital practices into their everyday lives. Building on earlier studies, we draw attention to two digital practices that are evident in the data presented below: digital kinning and digital homing. We define these as everyday digital practices because they mimic, mirror and extend the kinds of daily exchanges and activities that are central to sustaining friendships, families and social worlds in offline contexts. Because these practices are quintessentially everyday, they enable the simultaneity and daily mutuality that occurs when people are physically

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2   Women of this generation usually address their friends as "older sister" or "younger sister" and rarely identify each other by given name.

3   "Plaza dancing" or "square dancing" (*guangchangwu*) is a popular pastime in China, so named for the public plazas where dancers meet to practice and perform.

proximate. These quotidian practices, enacted through smartphones, shape the migration and settlement experiences of transnational grandparents.

By digital kinning we mean "the processes of engagement with new technologies for the purpose of maintaining social support" (Baldassar & Wilding, 2020, p. 319). This includes the ways in which intimate and familial relationships that might otherwise remain dormant can become re-invested with the sense of "mutuality of being" (Sahlins, 2011) that characterizes close kin relations through practices of digital connection. It also includes the facilitation of new support network relationships, which are brought into being through digital kinning practices (Howell, 2007) highlighting the processes of *becoming* kin, not on the basis of biological ties, but on the basis of what is done, performed and exchanged. These new supports are especially important to ease the isolation often experienced by older migrants who might struggle to meet new people given limitations with language as well as limited ability to be mobile and get out and meet people. Furthermore, these digital kinning practices often require facilitation by others, emphasizing their social relational and intergenerational nature.

"Digital homing" entails the use of digital technologies and social media to maintain national, ethnocultural and community identities in order to actively produce a sense of home and belonging (Wilding et al., 2022; Baldassar et al., 2020). While both digital kinning and digital homing refer to the ways in which digital practices sustain and maintain social and cultural bonds, they help to emphasize different dimensions of those practices. Digital kinning helps to draw attention to the role of digital practices in sustaining familial and kin-like bonds of mutuality of being. Digital homing, on the other hand, emphasizes the ways in which digital practices connect a migrant to familiar spaces and practices of belonging that extend beyond the family, to include community, national and cultural norms and practices. Nevertheless, we acknowledge that there are important overlaps between the two, as becomes clear in the case studies below. Digital homing, for example, can sometimes be focused on domestic home practices of the family, while digital kinning can exceed the family to incorporate communities of close friends and peer groups.

The case studies presented in this chapter illustrate how digital practices support familial and cultural identities and protect against the diminished social networks that migration in later life can entail. However, the transnational connectivity afforded by smartphones and the ubiquitous Chinese social media platform of WeChat do not uniformly guard against feelings of loss or isolation. Indeed, some examples suggest that the simultaneity

of connection now available to transnational grandparents can make the sense of distance from old friends seem more painful.

4.2   Chinese Transnational Grandparents in Perth

Perth, the state capital of Western Australia, is a city of nearly two million situated on the eastern shores of the Indian Ocean, as close geographically to Singapore as it is to Sydney. Perth has the important advantage of being on the same time-zone as China but is nonetheless a far less popular destination among migrants from China than the booming metropolitan centres of Sydney and Melbourne on the eastern coast of Australia. However, the number of Chinese people living in Perth has grown dramatically over recent decades. In the 25 years from 1991–2016, the China-born population increased nearly tenfold from 2,959 to 25,724 (Stevens, 2020, p. 56). Migrants from China living in Perth come from a range of class backgrounds and subnational regions of origin, the diversity of which increased following the targeted recruitment of skilled labourers and tradesmen to support the Western Australian resources boom that began in the mid-2000s (Stevens, 2022). Despite this diversity among working-age migrants, the older adults who participated in this study are all the parents of people who first came to Perth as international students, joining their adult migrant children to be closer to grandchildren and provide much-needed family care.

International students from China initially hailed from more affluent or outward-facing parts of the country like Beijing, Shanghai, Fujian or Guangdong (Gao & Liu, 1998), only later diversifying to include people from all over China. This pattern is reflected in the transnational grandparents who participated in this study. Older participants, the parents of earlier student migrants, are all from Beijing, Shanghai or Nanjing, while younger participants include those from other places of origin, such as Dongbei and Sichuan. They are all however from urban backgrounds with a reasonable degree of education and literacy, despite the interruptions to education that they may have faced in their youth, as the example of Mrs Zhang and Mr Xu described below shows. One exception is a single participant who is originally from a village in central China and has lower literacy than the rest of the sample, but her story is featured elsewhere (Baldassar et al., 2022) and does not appear in this chapter.

The case studies presented in this chapter are drawn from interviews that were conducted over a period of 16 months from April 2017 to August 2018 in Perth, Western Australia. Sixteen participants (eleven women and five men,

including four married couples), were interviewed in Mandarin; interview recordings were transcribed, translated and coded using NVivo. This work comprises part of a larger study that explores how older adults in Australia from nine country of birth groups use digital media to maintain relations of care and support (e.g., Baldassar & Wilding, 2020; Wilding et al., 2020; Baldassar et al., 2020; Wilding & Baldassar, 2018).

Unlike other chapters in this volume that draw on newer methods to do digital migration studies (e.g., Stavinoha in Chapter 14 who proposes freedom of information requests as a methodological innovation), we instead primarily utilize the more traditional "analogue" methods of in-person interviews and participant observation to shed light on digital worlds. In choosing these "small data approaches" (Leurs & Witteborn, 2021, p. 16), we recognize that digital practices are but one part of our subjects' everyday lives and that the broader circumstances of their family migration and friendship networks affect how they engage with new technologies and attach meaning and emotional value to digital exchanges. This is particularly true for older migrants who are far from digital natives, only coming to learn new digital skills later in life, but nonetheless agentially and innovatively deploy social media to maintain relationships that have been built through other forms of communication and togetherness over the course of many decades.

However, much as the lines between online and offline worlds are blurred in the lives of our participants, similarly our research methods encompassed Chinese grandparents' digital spaces of communication, connection and to-getherness alongside real-life gatherings such as picnics in the park. Although participant recruitment occurred offline, through in-person conversations and telephone calls with personal contacts, one author (Catriona Stevens) regularly engaged in online community groups and spaces mediated through WeChat and smartphones. This online participant observation not only provided insights into the frequency and forms of online exchange used by grandparents living in Perth, but it also helped to normalize her presence in offline worlds. Similar strategies for building connection and community utilized by grandparenting migrants can also work to support researchers doing digital migration studies (Nguyen et al., 2021).

4.3   The Digital Lives of Transnational Grandparents

A growing literature addresses the roles of grandparents within transnational families, including those who care for children "left behind" (Da, 2003; Pantea, 2012; Peng & Wong, 2016), and those who travel to provide care in the

host country (e.g., Zhou, 2013a; Wyss & Nedelcu, 2019). These caregivers play an important role in supporting the workforce participation and economic security of their children, new migrants who in Australia typically arrived under student and skilled migrant visa pathways (Hamilton et al., 2021a; Nguyen et al., in press).

Yet in doing so, these older adults must navigate migration and social policy regimes that condition the options and choices available, particularly as they consider their own increasing needs for care as they age. Seen as a "dangerous" burden to host country welfare states (Braedley, 2019), transnational grandparents must navigate visa restrictions for older adults that affect grandparenting practices, in particular, continuity of care. As temporary visa holders, these ageing visitors must regularly travel between countries (Hamilton et al., 2021b; Merla et al., 2020; Nguyen et al. 2021), often taking turns with other extended family members. This enforced mobility shapes the future plans and ageing aspirations of these older adults in ways that are ameliorated through digital migration practices (Chiu & Ho, 2020; Baldassar et al., 2022).

The experiences of transnational grandparents shed new light on forms of "middling transnationalism in later life" (Ho & Chiu, 2022) as grandparents make choices from positions of relative privilege or disadvantage. On one hand, they compare the emotional and practical benefits of proximity to adult children in host settings versus lifelong social networks at home. On the other, they must weigh up differential access to pensions, medical and care services, and accommodation, material support that may be restricted in the destination setting (Hamilton et al., 2018; Ho & Chiu, 2020; Hamilton et al., 2021b). Transnational grandparents are thus constrained by mobility regimes that impact their access to visas and other necessary resources. At the same time, they are embedded within transnational flows of emotions, friendship, family and care. Their participation in these flows are shaped by their culturally-informed preferences and expectations of intergenerational relationships with grandchildren and adult children (Wilding et al., 2020), as well as personal and familial biographies of support, care and love (Baldassar et al., 2007; Finch & Mason, 1993).

As the experiences of these Chinese grandparents make clear, transnational family life adds new complexity to navigating the cultural logics of appropriate intergenerational care. While cohabiting with children who provide filial care throughout older age was once an unquestioned cultural expectation, these norms of families providing intergenerational care are changing, both within China (Fong, 2006; Du, 2013; Yan, 2016; Qi, 2015; 2018; 2021; Zhao & Huang, 2018) and for people whose adult children have gone

overseas (Zhou, 2013b; Tu, 2016; 2018; Zhang, 2014; Chiu & Ho, 2020). Accessing formal aged care services, including residential care, is increasingly accepted as a legitimate solution to the "grey tsunami" of the ageing baby-boomer cohort within China (Chen, 2016, p. 133; Chiu & Ho, 2020). Chinese older adults with children overseas may now plan to provide for their own care needs as they age (Tu, 2016; Baldassar et al., 2022). Yet, despite these changes, filial piety and the desire to provide intergenerational care still frame the emotional dynamics of many migrant families, resulting in feelings of guilt for those children unable to access family reunion visas for their "left behind" parents (Ran & Liu, 2021) or of shame for parents who must justify their "unfilial" children among their peers (Tu, 2016; 2018).

A key resource for navigating the challenges of transnational ageing is digital technologies, which are now integral to the caregiving practices of transnational families. Where communication technologies were once prohibitively expensive, widespread access to social media and video calling has transformed how transnational care practices are sustained across distance (Madianou, 2016; Baldassar, 2016; Nedelcu, 2017). Furthermore, while digital technologies were once considered the domain of young people, it is now clear that older adults are highly motivated to develop their digital literacy in order to participate in transnational family relationships (Nedelcu, 2017). As mediated emotional care across distance becomes increasingly accepted by both ageing parents and their adult children as an alternative or compensatory form of filial devotion (Tu, 2016), older adults in transnational families are often proactive in learning the skills necessary to connect with loved ones overseas.

Although the case studies presented in this chapter all feature transnational grandparents who are competent WeChat users, not all aged migrants have such high digital literacy. Earlier generations of Chinese grandparents in Australia (Baldassar et al., 2022), or less well-educated transnational caregivers (Nguyen et al., 2021), for example, must develop new digital skills or risk social isolation. To bridge these gaps, digital kinning processes may also be facilitated by third parties, whether through adult children acknowledging their parents' needs and actively supporting the development of new knowledge and digital literacy (Baldassar et al., 2022), through participation in formal training in digital skills and online communication (Baldassar et al., 2022), or even through online ethnography as researchers may themselves prompt greater demonstration of digital competency because of their interest in older participants' online worlds (Nguyen et al. 2021).

The use of communication technologies can generate feelings of comfortable everyday co-presence (Nedelcu & Wyss, 2016) and ambient copresence

(Madianou, 2016), providing the necessary close contact that characterizes a mutuality of being, making it possible to more fully participate in daily family life, including engaging in family conflict (Ivan & Nimrod, 2021), and even bearing witness to feelings of neglect, loneliness and anxiety (Baldassar, 2016). Prior to the advent of polymedia environments, transnational family members were often "protected" from conflicts and "bad news," in particular serious illness, inadvertently resulting in a sense of dislocation and alienation from family life that challenged their ability to share a mutuality of being (Baldassar, 2017). In contrast, new "care technologies" (Ho & Chiu, 2020) have now become constitutive of transnational family life as they sustain emotional co-presence across distance (Baldassar et al., 2016), permitting ongoing digital participation in affective economies without the need for physical proximity (Wilding et al., 2020). This chapter highlights that for grandparenting migrants such transnational emotional exchanges are central to maintaining relationships not only with the biological family members they have left behind but also, sometimes more importantly, with the friends with whom they have shared the decades of their lives. Moreover, digital migration practices are emerging as an essential dimension of settlement and homing; transnational grandparents actively use social media as a tool to make new friends at point of destination as well as to sustain established homeland relationships.

4.4   Case Studies – Creating Connection and Belonging Through Everyday Digital Practices

Mrs Ma[4] (58)[5] is among the most active members in the Perthtown Sisters Group, sharing greetings and trending videos in the group feed several times a day. What is less evident when viewed through the lens of this single WeChat group is the ways that this content is actively circulated through multiple groups, many with overlapping members both in Perth and in China. Mrs Ma is in constant contact with her husband, siblings, friends and workmates back in her hometown with whom she chats and messages every day. She is, she says, a member of over 10 hometown WeChat groups, and she finds it difficult to keep on top of all the content posted because she is so busy with housework and caring for her two grandchildren:

4   The case of "Mrs Ma" is also discussed in Baldassar et al. (2022). All names are pseudonyms.
5   Participant ages indicated are at the time of interview in 2017/2018.

> I can read news on my phone, now you just need a phone to read news. Sometimes I do not have time, and I can only read news on my phone when I use the toilet!

These snatched moments are essential to Mrs Ma's wellbeing as a transnational grandparent. She says she could not live without her phone, which is her constant connection with friends and family in China. Her husband has remained in their hometown as he is unable, she thinks, to adapt to the different life in Australia, and so she regularly returns to visit him, "changing shift" with her son-in-law's parents every few months. Her everyday participation in WeChat groups, copying and posting content between the feeds, commenting on friends' posts, and sharing news items, scandals and funny videos, sustains her presence and identity in social circles both in China and Australia. These digital practices simultaneously fulfil her need for both home making and for providing and receiving transnational family care (Wilding et al., 2022). She feels her relationships are unaffected by her repeated absences as she seamlessly picks her life back up in each context on return. She is not yet sure where she will live when she moves into older old age, and so her digital practices in the present enable her to plan for alternative ageing futures either in Australia near her daughter or in China with her husband and siblings (Baldassar et al. 2022).

Mrs Liang (72) is another active member of the Perthtown Sisters Group. Despite being over a decade older than Mrs Ma, she and her husband continue to return to China on a regular basis to visit friends and family and to take care of personal administration like their pensions. However, unlike Mrs Ma, they have determined that they will both grow old in Australia near their only child and grandson. This was not an easy decision; they had not originally contemplated life in a foreign country when their son went overseas for postgraduate study. Adapting to Perth and finding new social connection took several years:

> Life is more convenient in China and more lively. Here, in the beginning it was rather boring, but now it's better because I have lots of friends … He [her husband] had great difficulty getting used to life here, it's only really improved in the last couple of years. Because I've made lots of friends more recently, so he has also made friends with my help.

Perth WeChat groups are central to Mrs Liang's sense of place making. As well as the Perthtown Sisters Group, she has also joined a folk dancing group, an English learning group, and a vegetable-growers group comprising older

migrants from China spread throughout Perth with a common interest in gardening. While these groups are all active online, they are mirrored in real-world activities as members meet to rehearse their dances or to admire each other's harvests, sharing seeds to propagate the following year. Through her English group, Mrs Liang has also established a circle of friends comprising others hailing exclusively from the northeast of China with whom she and her husband regularly lunch, enjoying foods specific to their home region.

In addition to her greatly expanded social circles in Perth, hometown relationships continue to be very important to Mrs Liang. She is in regular contact with siblings and old friends through WeChat groups and video calls. She feels her established hometown relationships have qualities that have not yet been matched in Perth:

> There is no major change [in the nature of our relationships]. I mean, between [old] friends you can talk more freely, with some friends you can always be sure of sincerity.

What is striking about these case studies is the important role of digital migration practices for social identity and wellbeing in BOTH host and home country. These older migrants have limited command of English and often face considerable caring and housekeeping responsibilities. This combination of factors can restrict their capacity to make new friends in host settings. Their everyday digital practices allow them to establish local networks through shared interests like dancing and gardening—what we call digital homing. At the same time, these digital practices ensure kin and friendship networks are built, sustained and expanded through online co-presence and emotional exchange—what we call digital kinning.

4.5   Case Studies – The Limits of Everyday Digital Connectivity

Although many transnational Chinese grandparents in Australia maintain active local friendship groups while simultaneously nurturing their home-land networks through digital kinning and digital homing, not all are so fortunate. In deciding to join their children and grandchildren in Perth and become aged migrants to a strange land, older adults risk diminished social networks and the sense of a lost opportunity to age well among their peers. Even among those with high levels of digital access and digital literacy and dynamic online lives, the physical distance from old friends is felt keenly,

and for some made more intense by the way they can continue to observe through the medium of WeChat the ongoing everyday experiences and real-life connection that they are missing out on as a result of their migrations.

Mrs Zhang (68) and Mr Xu (65) are two such aged migrants who have experienced this sense of disconnection from the close friends and colleagues with whom they shared the decades of their lives. Born in the early 1950s in a large city in central China, they came of age during the tumultuous period of the Cultural Revolution. The bonds forged during those formative years, when urban middle school students were initially at the forefront of revolutionary agitation and then later sent away from their families to live in rural areas, have stood the test of time. Mrs Zhang recalled the densely networked social lives they enjoyed in China:

> In China we met up once a month with friends that have retired. … Every month there would be an announcement and we'd go somewhere to meet up and talk and eat together. That's one group of friends. Then there are also our classmates from the "lao san jie"' generation.[6] It's been several decades now, fifty years, and we are closer than ever! Hahaha, we've all got lots of free time now … And then there are the "send down youth" friends. We were sent down to the countryside together, so we have strong feelings for each other.

Mrs Zhang retired in 2005 at the age of 55, eight years before her husband could do so at 60.[7] She first came to Perth in 2008, making several lone visits to support her daughter and new grandchild. Once Mr Xu had also retired, they faced a choice. While deciding whether or not to move, Mrs Zhang initially felt reluctant to leave her rich social world behind. However, after talking it through with close friends, she concluded that her circle would shrink as she aged, no matter whether she remained in China or not. In the end, the pull of their only child and grandchildren in Australia proved too great.

WeChat has afforded an ongoing sense of connection that might under other circumstances have been lost. Mrs Zhang video chats regularly with

6   *Lao san jie* is an expression to describe the Red Guard generation who were in high school during the first three years of the Cultural Revolution (1966–1969), and whose education was interrupted when up to 18 million young people were directed to leave the cities and instead live and work in villages for the best part of a decade (Jiang & Ashley, 2013).

7   Under China's mandatory retirement age policy, most urban residents end their working lives at 50 or 55 for women and 55 or 60 for men, depending on occupation. Within China, older adults typically assume more grandparent caregiving duties after retirement (Feng & Zhang, 2018).

her siblings, cousins and close friends, and takes pleasure in following the lives of old colleagues, classmates and village friends through WeChat groups. Yet this pleasure is also inflected with sadness and loss. Mrs Zhang is regretful that she can no longer meet up with these close circles of friends. She observes that she and Mr Xu see photos posted online of their friends together and feel pained that they have missed out because they are in Australia. At the time of interview Mrs Zhang and Mr Xu were planning a return visit to see their old friends and mark the fiftieth anniversary of their experiences as rusticated youth. Visits home are a feature of transnational lives perhaps best theorized as a dimension, or at least, in relation to digital migration practices (Baldassar, 2022).

Although they have some friends in Perth that they met through attending English classes, Mrs Zhang feels her social life in Australia lacks the richness and emotional depth of what she has left behind in China. Mrs Zhang's digital migration practices sustain important homeland relationships, the friends with whom her "mutuality of being" has been established over many decades. But despite her high levels of digital literacy, she has not yet found a vibrant local community like the Perthtown Sisters Group, nor made friends through shared interest groups like those enjoyed by Mrs Liang. These experiences suggest that, while digital migration practices may be an effective resource older migrants can use to build new networks, this is not universally the case. Individual circumstances, including family care arrangements, personal dispositions and/or geographic location may affect digital settlement, and further research should explore what kinds of interventions at a community or policy level might be required.

4.6   Discussion and Conclusion

The chapter has presented cases of Chinese transnational grandparents in Australia engaging in practices of digital kinning and digital homing to both maintain relationships and cultural and social identities back "home" and also to build new social networks in Perth. The experiences of these aged migrants illustrate the centrality of everyday digital migration practices, even for older cohorts not normally seen as digitally agentive. Furthermore, the case studies presented foreground friendships, both near and far, as an important dimension of the emotional geographies of care for transnational caregivers, extending digital migration theories that have long acknowledged the importance of digital media within transnational families.

These examples illustrate that digital practices are as important to building co-ethnic communities in host settings as they are to sustaining transnational networks of family and friends. Both digital kinning and digital homing, including acts of sharing online content (alongside real-world exchanges) that create and sustain cultural and social identities at the point of destination, support the wellbeing of older adults who have moved away from their hometowns and familiar social worlds in later life. For the grandparenting migrants in this cohort, WeChat is therefore both an essential "care technology" (Ho & Chiu, 2020) that maintains distant relationships, and also a resource or tool that can be used to effect settlement processes, establishing new friendships and a sense of belonging in Perth.

The digital migration practices of the "sisters" of the Perthtown WeChat group allow them to build important new relationships and social identities in Perth. They share not only the pleasures of leisure activities like plaza dancing, but also the challenges of their new lives in Australia, exchanging information and mutual support to navigate daily issues like schooling, shopping, transport and healthcare. It is precisely the everyday nature and frequency of such regular online exchanges, including the daily joys and challenges, of concern and frustration, advice and care, which engender the "mutuality of being" central to digital kinning, while creating the extra-familial spaces of belonging that are central to digital homing. The circumstances of their migrations risk social isolation as they entail busy days spent as housekeepers and grandparent carers in sprawling, unfamiliar Perth suburbs. Digital co-presence with other transnational grandparents in Perth guards against the loneliness and poor settlement experiences that may otherwise occur and builds co-ethnic digital practices and connections that also translate into real-world activities.

Digital media are here shown to be a resource that older migrants may use to settle and are not necessarily an enjoyable space in and of itself. Rather, the role of digital media in the settlement of transnational migrants is best understood as a mechanism by which people seek to embed themselves in offline relationships, places, groups and activities. Engaging social media as a tool to maintain relationships can be time-consuming, creating challenges for those who are busy caring for grandchildren. As Mrs Ma indicates, sometimes it is even necessary to use her limited private time while sequestered in the bathroom to keep up with online content. Yet, active participation in digital media spaces shapes the everyday life experiences of grandparent carers far from home.

There are limits, however, to the benefits of digital connectivity. For some older migrants, the co-presence afforded through the medium of

WeChat may intensify feelings of loss and dislocation as they observe from afar the lives of homeland friends in which they can no longer fully participate. Grandparent carers like Mrs Zhang actively maintain their valued distant friendships, engaging "care technologies" that through practices of digital kinning sustain relationships across distance. This co-constitution of care with communication technologies (Ho & Chiu, 2020) safeguards membership in friendship groups built over many decades and provides the depth of emotional connection that characterizes a mutuality of being but also includes painful emotions of loss and of longing to be together, a key dimension of transnational relationships (Baldassar, 2008; Marchetti-Mercer, 2017; Sampaio, 2020). The case studies included in this chapter are all from a generation who are independently incorporating WeChat into their social lives, both in China and Australia, part of the widespread adoption of WeChat that has fundamentally transformed group communications, personal messaging and the distribution of news and information among Chinese migrants (Sun & Yu, 2022). Our participants are autonomous digital actors who actively create new techniques to build cultural and social identities and bolster relationships in both places of departure and destination. They are also all from more educated and urban backgrounds. Yet levels of digital access and digital literacy vary among older migrants, affecting their ability to enact digital practices that sustain their relationships and cultural identities. As we have discussed elsewhere (Baldassar et al., 2022), aged migrants with lower literacy, or limited digital access, may not enjoy the same kinds of settlement experiences and typically face diminished social networks both in Australia and at "home." Transnational ageing comprises a diverse range of types of migration and ageing experiences (cf. Ciobanu et al. 2016; Horn & Schweppe 2016); digital migration studies similarly explores how this diversity is reflected in online practices or lack thereof among older migrants.

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5.   An Exploration of African Digital Cosmopolitanism

Fungai Machirori

Abstract

Normative articulations of cosmopolitanism have recently come under criticism for their omission of non-Western cosmopolitanisms. As a result, cosmopolitanism from below has emerged, bringing with it a sharp focus on alternative forms of cosmopolitanisms. One such alternative is digital cosmopolitanism, which this chapter explores from an African positionality. A range of important African voices and platforms have emerged within the African and global diasporic digital discursive space. This chapter highlights some of these and asks if and how they might collectively constitute an African digital cosmopolitanism rooted in African digital representational agency that counters cynicism about the agency of Africa and Africans.

Key words: digital cosmopolitanism; African digitality; cosmopolitanism from below

5.1   Introduction

I have been engaged in the African digital sphere for over a decade—as a blogger, researcher and activist—and have had the privilege to watch African digitality evolve in that time. From my beginnings as a blogger, firstly for a Zimbabwean community blogging network called Kubatana and then onto my personal blog *Fungai Neni*, I have witnessed space grow for more critical engagement and debate through uptake of social media and what I refer to as African self-initiated platforms. In 2012, I founded a women's web-based platform called Her Zimbabwe, which has been researched academically multiple times (Carelse, 2017; Leccese & Lanson, 2015; Mpofu, 2016; Mpofu,

2018) and received various local and international accolades in its time of operation over the next five years.

Retrospectively, I realize that my thinking on implementing the project was always rooted in positioning Zimbabwean women's discourse within a cosmopolitan frame of reference. The idea for the project arose from my Master's dissertation which sought to understand how Zimbabwean women in Zimbabwe, and Zimbabwean women in the diaspora, could better connect and share experiences. My thesis recommendations—which suggested exploring what the digital discursive space could offer towards Zimbabwean women's community building efforts—developed into what then became Her Zimbabwe. Eventually, this digital discursive space became not only a space for Zimbabwean women to connect to each other across different geographical locations, but also a space for non-Zimbabweans to engage with Zimbabwean women's narratives about themselves and with more general feminist issues. This, as well as my interactions in other digital spaces, has made me curious to give meaning to this worlding experience of Africans engaging within African *and* global digital spaces, and how this recentres discursive power and disrupts the conventionally accepted top-down flows of information from the West to the "rest" (Machirori, 2022).

5.2   Scope and Aims

There is a long history of the conception of cosmopolitanism as a normative idea of the world (Christensen, 2017; Delanty, 2014; Harvey, 2015; Ponzanesi, 2020), as well as a moral and ethical responsibility, with deep roots within philosophical thought. In this form, the idea of the global citizen references a figurative way of life, or of being in the world.

Over the years, however, this version of cosmopolitanism—what we refer to as normative cosmopolitanism—has experienced what Delanty (2012) refers to as a "paradoxical fate" and has come to be viewed by some scholars as a "tainted utopia" (Rose, 2015). This is largely because most uses of the concept have tended to be figurative and/or vague, as a result of cosmopolitanism's ancient roots in ethical and moral thought. Further, the historical complicity of cosmopolitanism with amoral and oppressive systems such as colonialism and slavery, as well as its heavy affiliations with class elitism, privilege and other exclusionary socio-political practices have seen the concept come under scrutiny. It has been observed that the values and principles of German philosopher Immanuel Kant—one of the foremost thinkers within normative cosmopolitanism studies—remained rooted in

the West and its notions of civilization (Mignolo, 2000; Papastergiadis, 2012, Ramadan, 2015, Uimonen, 2020), with some of his works making claims of inferiority of non-white racial groups (Harvey, 2015; Kleingeld, 2007).

Another critique of normative cosmopolitanism is its orientation towards "the other'" and "others," particularly migrants and/or minorities. These groups are commonly viewed in two ways: either as naïve powerless subjects who can only *perform* Western worldliness (and therefore cosmopolitanism) or as subjects who ought to be grateful (ingratiating) for the hospitable cosmopolitan care of those hosting them (Christensen, 2017). Normative cosmopolitanism also tends to call for a breaking away of minorities from their local and national ties in efforts towards assimilation.

In the following chapter, I explore recuperative forms of cosmopolitanism which challenge these normative stances. Despite cosmopolitanism emerging from a Western genealogy, the term is now being used more and more within a post-Western context to interrogate the nexus between the local and global (Delanty, 2012): what we may reference as cosmopolitanism from below (Ingram, 2016; Kurasawa, 2004; Neilson, 1999). One of its many forms is digital cosmopolitanism. Digital cosmopolitanism explores the power of the internet, and other digital tools and platforms, to distribute worlding experiences created by digital publics and counterpublics who re-centre discursive power by challenging the idea of static flows of communication (fixed in the direction of the West to the rest of the world).

In introducing the idea of *African* digital cosmopolitanism, my aim is to employ digital cosmopolitanism from an African worlding viewpoint. My intention is to highlight how a continent and its people—often maligned as lacking agency and currency—are appropriating Western digital tools to share complex, humorous and even latent counternarratives to African cynicism to build rich continental and diasporic solidarities and to transmit African culture globally. In so doing, I see them positioning the world in Africa, and Africa in the world.

5.3 African Self-Representation Within the Digital Sphere

Early into the 21st century, certain forms of African self-representation have gained significant global mainstream traction. This is, in large part, as a result of the convergence of technology, diaspora and culture (Gabay, 2018; Nothias, 2019). At the same time, increased digitality is creating avenues for Africans on the continent to engage with the African diaspora—and the world—and push back against reductive narratives about Africa, and

Africans, as inherently inept and lacking agency; what is often referred to as Afropessimism. Featuring diverse African content that broaches culture, identity, feminism, sex and sexuality from a continental and diasporic outlook, blogs and multimedia channels have served as crucial outlets for activism, conversation and community. Some of the more prominent of these blogs and platforms include *Africa Is A Country*, *This Is Africa*, *Okay Africa*, *MsAfropolitan*, *Voices of Africa*, *HOLAAfrica!* and *What's Up Africa.* As the examples show, many of these online spaces deliberately draw attention to their Africanness even as they challenge a simplistic stance on the continent. The phrase "this is Africa," for instance, was popularised through the Hollywood movie, *Blood Diamond*, as a trope to refer to corruption and perceived danger across the continent (Dokotum, 2014). Therefore, when a platform like *This Is Africa* appropriates the phrase to name itself, it challenges the negative connotations associated with it to claim a new narrative that cultivates digital agency. Furthermore, it unsettles a static notion of Africa.

The same is evident with the website *Africa Is A Country*, launched in 2009, whose name intentionally plays on the way many outside Africa still view an entire continent of 54 vastly different countries as one undifferentiated space with a singular narrative, or as the Nigerian author Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie (2009) cautioned in her viral TED talk, "the danger of a single story." The website is thus named to destabilize the existing narratives of the African continent and, as the blog's founder Sean Jacobs further reflects, "to capture how Africans think about their continent in dynamic relation to one another and to globalization" (2015), while simultaneously declaring that "Africa is indeed a 'country,' an imagined community whose 'citizens' must reinvent the narrative and visual economy of Africa" (2016).

Published for African women, by African women, *HOLAAfrica!*'s documentation of alternative narratives about African women's sexuality establishes an empowered counterpublic that enables African women to "carve out an existence" in the broader conversation about women's sexuality, rather than confine them to the margins (McLean & Mugo, 2015). The site thus serves as a "mirror that is held up to other African women" while simultaneously reflecting back to the world, thereby enabling all women to engage with alternative views that challenge dominant narratives about a collective (sexual) identity (Mugo & Antonites, 2014).

Despite social media use still being concentrated among Africa's "digital elites," Twitter, or X as it is now known, is an indisputable discursive force in Africa's social media terrain (Royston & Strong, 2019). Twitter's adoption among Africans was driven by two key Twitter moments, namely the 2011 Arab Spring and the 2010 FIFA World Cup, with the latter constituting the

first case of a global Twitter experience geographically centred in Africa (Royston & Strong, 2019). The centring of the African continent gained further impetus through other memorable contemporary events such as the Obamas' visits to Senegal, Tanzania and South Africa in 2013 (#POTUS/ #FLOTUSinAfrica), the death of Nelson Mandela in 2013 (#Mandela, #Madiba), and the 2015 visit of Pope Francis to Kenya, Uganda and Central African Republic (#PopeinAfrica, #PopeBars).

Twitter has also facilitated space for Africans to build community, entertain and challenge Western stereotypes (Cheruiyot & Uppal, 2019). The amorphous group of Kenyans known as "Kenyans on Twitter," or #KOT, that initiates and discusses various political issues via Twitter (Nyabola, 2018) provides a pertinent example. When Kenya is derided by Western media, or when a national tragedy strikes, #KOT and its ancillary hashtags have had focused impacts, such as getting Western news media to apologize for nonfactual reportage on the country (Kaigwa, 2017; Tully & Ekdale, 2014) and crowdfunding for issues of social concern (Nyabola, 2018). When CNN referred to Kenya as a "hotbed of terror" in the 2015 build up to US President Obama's visit to the country, #KOT rallied under the hashtag #SomeoneTellCNN to share their disapproval of the broadcaster's framing. In the 24 hours after the news story, the hashtag was used more than 75,000 times (Nyabola, 2018), and as a result of the overwhelming response, CNN International's managing director flew to Kenya to apologize personally for the report (at the time, Kenya was a major advertiser on CNN's international channel).

A recent significant shift in audience demographics has occurred as these newer social media platforms have dominated. While Facebook and Twitter users now tend to be in their 40s, Instagram is attracting users in their 30s, and TikTok is attracting those in their 20s and younger—often referred to as Gen-Z (Haenlein et al., 2020) for entertainment. Nevertheless, activism, knowledge-building and information exchange are also important features of TikTok. Because of the visual nature of presentation of the social media narratives that Instagram and TikTok convey, they stand a greater chance of gaining the attention of the news media and contributing to shaping narratives about activism-related causes such as American police brutality against black victims (Eriksson Krutrök & Åkerlund, 2022).

As mentioned, TikTok is Gen-Z's domain. As such, it affords researchers an opportunity to "observe the process of generational self-definition in a social context" through the self-representations that Gen-Z shares on the platform (Stahl & Literat, 2022). This, along with the popularity of other platforms like Snapchat and Twitch, has given rise to the emergence of a range of new young social media influencers (Haenlein et al., 2020).

One such social media influencer is the Senegalese and Italy-based TikTok sensation Khaby Lame. Stitching his own videos with problematic "life hack" videos and hardly ever speaking, Lame provided humorous commentary by performing a signature shrug of his shoulders accompanied by a look of bemusement. As Horowitz and Lorenz (2021) observe:

> Using the social media app's duet and stitch features, Mr. Lame, 21, capitalized on the momentum of viral and often absurdly complicated life hack videos ... by responding to them with wordless, easy-to-understand reaction clips in which he would do the same task in a much more straightforward manner.

In June 2022, Lame became the TikTok user with the highest number of followers across the whole platform. He currently has 162.2 million followers (as of December 2023).

Another striking example is the 21-year-old Kenyan Instagrammer and TikToker, Elsa Majimbo, whose videos first went viral during 2020's Covid lockdown. In an interview with *Teen Vogue*, for which she made the cover, King (2021) notes that Majimbo's digital style stood out among the emergent TikTok and Instagram voices at that time because of her simplicity:

> Her props weren't fancy. No filters were used. She manages to be confident without seeming self-absorbed. Usually, her setup involves a face-to-camera take in a spare room of her family's Nairobi home, potato chips in hand, and thin, black 90s-style sunglasses on her face. Viewers weren't transported to another world but more so were made to rationalize the ridiculousness of the one they were in.

King's article points to the universality of Majimbo's aesthetic, which goes beyond just an appeal to Gen Z; she stands out because she narrates an experience that is both very local and globally translatable. In a piece that I wrote about her, I note:

> In one of her early lockdown videos posted to Instagram on April 27, 2020, Majimbo pokes fun at people who keep insisting that "We are going out after lockdown", and quips, "Are *we* going to pay for my Uber?" (2022)

There was, also, a universalizing element to Majimbo's anti-sociality that resonated with many users globally, as they navigated the pandemic. Majimbo—with 2.5 million Instagram followers, 1.5 million TikTok followers

and over 350,000 Twitter followers (as of December 2023)—also uses her platforms to discuss political issues such as the colourism she has experienced as a darker-skinned Kenyan, political protests and movements on the continent such as the 2020 Nigerian #ENDSARS movement against police brutality, and race protests under the global #BlackLivesMatter hashtag in 2020. She has since been engaged by international media and brands including Valentino, Comedy Central, Bumble, the Nickelodeon Kids' Choice Awards and Netflix's sub-brand Strong Black Lead.

Similarly, 23-year-old Lasizwe Dambuza, with 1.5 million Twitter followers, 2 million Instagram followers and over 800,000 YouTube followers (as of December 2023), has been able to nurture an audience based on his humorous skits that provide incisive commentary on South African socio-political issues. For instance, during 2020's Covid-related lockdowns, Dambuza produced videos that poked fun at the various double standards—across race, class, gender and healthcare access—that different people with Covid-19 were experiencing. Furthermore, Dambuza has been open about being gay since the inception of his YouTube channel in 2017, and his videos often discuss his experiences as a gay man in South Africa, broaching many cultural responses to homosexuality (Andrews, 2021).

It is crucial to situate these young African digital cosmopolitans as both local and global digital citizens, engaging in multiple political discussions and thus shaping a global digital youth culture informed by local, intra-continental and global astuteness. As Jacobs (2015) observes, the irreverent youth culture of both young Africans on the continent and within the African diaspora cannot be ignored as it contributes significantly to online political culture and the cultivation of a specific kind of African modernity.

Examples such as the ones that I broach point to how African digitality is allowing Africans to engage in their own conversations while simultaneously providing worlding experiences. The examples also show how Africans online are using digital platforms and spaces to connect to one another and the world, therein building important solidarities that seek to redress different manifestations of the status quo. In the following section, I substantiate the concept of cosmopolitanism from below as briefly introduced earlier.

5.4   Cosmopolitanism From Below: A Response to Normative Cosmopolitanism's Deficiencies

Kurasawa (2004) uses the concept of cosmopolitanism from below in an effort to demonstrate that cosmopolitanism is a transnational practice in which

participants "construct bonds of mutual commitment and reciprocity across borders through public discourse and socio-political struggle." Kurasawa does not view such transnational social integration as requiring cultural assimilation, but rather as acknowledging global diversity which can be advanced through "criss-crossing webs of affinity between multiple groups from around the world" in a decentralized and dynamic fashion.

This mixing, therefore, does not lend itself to the loss of individual and collective cultural distinctiveness (Kurasawa, 2004; Sen, 2015). Rather, connection patterns remain diverse, incomplete and non-universal with engagement enriched by embracing the dynamics of local and cultural specificities, rather than avoiding them. A clear example of this is the previously discussed platform, *HOLAAfrica! HOLAAfrica!'s* contributors, for instance, hail from various African countries including Nigeria, Namibia, Ghana, Kenya, Tanzania and Zimbabwe and are encouraged to make submissions in local African languages (Mugo & Antonites, 2014). And so *HOLAAfrica!* simultaneously influences global discourse around queer women's sexuality (setting a global agenda and challenging the established notion that knowledge production around sexual diversity flows from the West to the rest of the world), while shaping a continental and even vernacular perspective.

Thus, cosmopolitanism from below does not signify "placelessness," or "being from nowhere or everywhere at once" (Kurasawa, 2004) but instead embraces multi-layered identities and attempts to accommodate different cultural ways of thinking and acting and to listen to the voices of those often erased from normative cosmopolitan discourse. And so, such cosmopolitanism sees those engaging with it acknowledging and addressing uncomfortable problematic power differentials and surrendering positions of control, thus forming transnational bonds of solidarity and reciprocity through critical discourse and socio-political struggle. I now briefly introduce the concept of adjectival cosmopolitanisms, which falls under cosmopolitanism from below.

5.5   Adjectival Cosmopolitanisms

Referred to as adjectival cosmopolitanisms (Harvey, 2015), or "new cosmopolitans-from-below," (Neilson, 1999, p. 2) many forms of hybrid cosmopolitanisms have recently emerged. These include, for example, postcolonial cosmopolitanism, vernacular cosmopolitanism, subaltern cosmopolitanism, discrepant cosmopolitanism, indigenous cosmopolitanism, feminist cosmopolitanism, Afropolitanism and digital cosmopolitanism

and can be read as a "corrective to hegemonic cosmopolitan projects" (Zeng, 2014, p. 140). This family of concepts, which sits under the broader umbrella of cosmopolitanism from below, seeks to assess the usefulness of cosmopolitanism as an analytical concept in today's society. Glick Schiller and Irving (2015) observe this practice of linking cosmopolitanism with modifiers that connote its opposite meaning (such as vernacular, ghetto and rooted) as a way of challenging the easy equation of cosmopolitanism with mobility and itinerancy—as previously discussed—thus challenging normative cosmopolitanism's conceptual boundaries and analytical utility. This, in turn, pushes the concept of cosmopolitanism to greater rigour.

Ponzanesi (2020) assesses that the emergence of these cosmopolitan neologisms attests to the need to preserve the ideals of cosmopolitanism while also being conscious of emerging new realities. This is crucial because the common conflation of minoritarian perspectives with the subnational, and cosmopolitanism with the global, denies the worldliness of the former and particularity of the latter, thus robbing each of conceptual complexity. Furthermore, the compound form of these cosmopolitanisms marries two concepts together in such a way that new meanings emerge. For example, subaltern cosmopolitanism can be imagined as neither "subaltern" nor "cosmopolitan," but instead as a naming practice of thinking and connection that is transgressive and entails the border crossing discussed earlier. Ponzanesi further notes that the pluralization of cosmopolitanism into cosmopolitanisms recuperates cosmopolitanism by opening it up to other forms of cosmopolitanism that have been erased within history and classified as "unauthorized forms of cosmopolitanism" (2020, p. 2). And so, reclaiming them becomes a politically defiant act for those who are often othered. I now place my focus on digital cosmopolitanism.

5.6   Digital Cosmopolitanism

New digital tools and platforms have long been recognized for their role in generating new forms of community and engagement which blur the boundaries of the private and the public (Hull et al., 2010), enabling the emergence of virtual social spaces that are neither geographically bounded nor bordered and which allow for "the discursive construction of hybridized cultures" (McEwan & Sobre-Denton, 2011). Due to the popularity of social media, more people are connected through the internet and digital and social media. This has facilitated a "global-local orientation to the world that allows individuals to engage in virtual community-building and participate in communication

to build 'global citizenship', thus fomenting contact spaces for intercultural communication and consciousness raising (Sobré-Denton, 2016; Ponzanesi, 2020). An example of this is the #AfricansInUkraine hashtag. With 5.8 million views (as of May 2022), the hashtag represented an important digital node of crowdsourced knowledge and activism with Africans in Ukraine, and globally, shedding light on the plight of Africans during the Ukraine crisis. Just as importantly, the hashtag was also furthered by non-Africans who posted videos to inform and educate their own audiences.

By its very nature, the digital is cosmopolitan in that it allows for fluidity and multiple forms of knowledge, and knowledge-making. As such, there is a growing body of work that looks at cosmopolitanism in the digital age. Ponzanesi (2020, p. 4) states that:

> Digital cosmopolitanism is, therefore, intended as the power of the internet to engage with the other and shape new networks of solidarity, contributing to intercultural exchanges, global justice, and new types of subpolitical activities/counterpublics.

A postcolonial framework highlights how, through the nexus between technological innovation and migration, new challenges and opportunities have emerged for redefining cosmopolitanism in the digital era with the emergence of "a new citizen of the world, who is both rooted and routed, and whose global interactions are marked by the use of social networks" (Ponzanesi, 2020). In this vein, it is interesting to look at the hyphenated identities of some of these African digital cosmopolitans. Minna Salami, the author of the *MsAfropolitan* blog, identifies as "a Nigerian-Finnish and Swedish writer and social critic" (Salami) and lives in the United Kingdom. Sean Jacobs, the founder of *Africa is a Country*, is of South African origin and lives and works in the United States. One of the cofounders of *HOLAAfrica!*, Tiffany Kagure Mugo, is a Kenyan living in South Africa. The act of being rooted in African identity, but also being routed to various localities and contexts via migration and mobility, adds complexity to the idea of flows of communication. Where, then, do we locate Africa and then the West, if the African digital cosmopolitan is deeply enmeshed within both?

Hall (2019) further notes that virtual articulations of cosmopolitanism occurring via these technology-mediated networks are opening space for "soft cultural cosmopolitan relationships" which are characterized by curiosity and openness towards other cultures, with mutual reflexivity emerging from these intercultural exchanges. This is no surprise as cosmopolitanism

is intrinsically linked to notions of mediation, voice, solidarity, hospitality, space and openness.

With the popular uptake of TikTok, a new social media channel through which young Africans can express creativity and political consciousness has emerged. A few African moments that have gone viral continentally and globally via TikTok. One such is the #JerusalemaChallenge. The #JerusalemaChallenge was sparked by an Angolan dance troupe's dance routine to the South African hit song *Jerusalema* by Master KG and featuring Nomcebo Zikode. The hashtag (which had generated 652.2 million TikTok views by May 2022) inspired similar videos from around the world of people dancing to the song and challenging others to do the same.

The fact that a gospel Zulu song became an anthem for collective Covid-19 solidarity and entertainment is significant. Many users would not have understood the words of the song or even identified the religious genre it belonged to. Given the restrictive regulations of the time—and limited opportunities for travel and engagement with other cultures and cultural spaces during Covid-19—it makes sense that this trend would enjoy virality. As Kabir notes:

> Like the revival of line dances during the Black Lives Matter protests, "Jerusalema" went viral during the coronavirus pandemic because the dance challenge enacted a simple way to connect and build community: especially at a time when people were hungering for these possibilities.

As with the example of the #AfricansInUkraine hashtag, #JerusalemaChallenge points to emergent digital solidarities from below.

Sobré-Denton (2016) further views virtual cosmopolitanisms as "a space for social justice and intercultural activism" that brings together local and rooted activists through social media, thus allowing for a transnational exchange of ideas, amplification of voices and increased momentum for movements beyond what might be possible within local grassroots activism. Mobility is thus reconceptualized as not just physical, but also digital, which opens cosmopolitan practice up to new areas of analysis. Cosmopolitanism from below—and by extension, digital cosmopolitanism—is not synonymous with the travel exploits of normative cosmopolitanism since one can be cosmopolitan without leaving their birthplace and within contexts of stasis; all that is needed is "a fundamental openness to otherness … rooted in the imagination" (Eze, 2015). Cosmopolitanism from below, therefore, opens itself up to the possibilities of "solidarities from below" whereby individuals and groups from different parts of the world form political alliances of a

networked character, featuring thick global social relations. Digitality aligns with this as it allows for the mobility of hashtags and conversations even within contexts where physical travel is not always possible.

5.7   African Digital Cosmopolitanism

What then makes these different platforms and voices constituent of an African digital cosmopolitanism? While they have disparate audiences, uses, politics and forms, I see them collectively creating a digital cosmopolitanism that is uniquely African because of the uniquely pessimistic idea of Africa that prevails globally. In their own different ways, they inscribe Africa and African culture, history and practices into the global digital discursive space, while simultaneously creating their own digital space that the world can engage with.

I see African digital cosmopolitanism creating new counterpublics which challenge cynicism about African agency. Some of these emerge through active efforts to build communities of practice (such as blogging platforms). Jacobs (2016) discusses the form of *Africa is a Country* as a space that broaches the offline and online divide, as well as an academic journal and an open-source journal. That he also refers to *Africa is a Country* as an open-ended journal and blog (as opposed to a website) seems to be with the intention to position it in a sense of communality and semi-informality.

Yékú (2017) observes that in the online African literary space of blogs, authors *and* readers have cultivated agency to contribute to these narratives and challenge the idea of storytelling as consisting of a singular voice of authority as was more evident during the print era (Yékú, 2017). What emerges is a decentralized medium of communication that is based on participation and interactivity pointing to "ideas that gesture back to the representational strategies of oral literature in pre-colonial Africa" (p. 262). Thus, the African digital cosmopolitan turn, and its new forms of storytelling, can be seen as contributing to a return to the more open-ended and fluid forms of precolonial African storytelling. It is important, however, to nuance an understanding of oral cultures where—as (Ong, 1982) observes—thought and expression were sometimes structured and ordered in ways that could also be deemed conservative and highly systematic in efforts to avoid a loss of knowledge.

Other counterpublics, however, emerge less consciously; for example, when an individual like Majimbo appropriated Instagram and TikTok to share a Kenyan narrative of a global pandemic which gained extensive and

universalizing social media traction, thus latently pushing back against mass scepticism around Africa's capacity to survive the Covid-19-crisis. A similar argument can be made for the #JerusalemaChallenge and other viral African social media trends that emerged during the pandemic, such as the #GhanaPallBearers hashtag. The Ghanaian pall bearers are a group of men who engage in flamboyant funeral rituals in which they dance as they carry the coffin of the deceased on their shoulders. They were first featured on BBC Africa in 2017, but only went viral via the #GhanaPallBearers hashtag early in 2020 in the wake of the Covid-19 pandemic. The group quickly became the face of global efforts to encourage people to stay at home, and to sanitize their hands, and were edited into several videos of people engaging in risky behaviours (e.g., reopening of malls and in-person protests) as part of public health messaging. The search term "dancing pallbearers" was mentioned at least 60,000 times by English-speaking Twitter in April 2020, representing more search queries for the term than in the previous history of Twitter altogether (Paquette, 2020). Ultimately, all these acts of self-inscription into the global digital discursive space challenge ideas around Africans' perceived incompetence at fashioning their own narratives about their own lives, building communities and solidarities therein.

In the previous section, I asked where we then locate Africa and the West, if the African digital cosmopolitan is enmeshed within both. What then, is the meaning of the qualifier "African"? In his paper at an international conference on African literary futures hosted at Bayreuth University, Cole (2017) asks this pointed question. What does it mean to deliver such an address at a European university in a country which played an infamous role in Africa's colonial history with the Berlin Conference of the late 1800s serving as the officialization of Europe's "Scramble for Africa"? In offering a response to what makes the conference African, even if it is held beyond the geographical bounds of the continent, Cole (2017) states:

> So, what makes this an African conference, paradoxically, is the fact that we are here, in Germany—against all odds, from Kant, via Hegel, to Wagner and the present forms of exclusion, which cannot imagine Africa. Our Africa, we insist, must be understood in as capacious a sense as Europe is.

And so, just as Cole calls for a dynamic understanding of the complex and contradictory facets of an African conference taking place in Europe, I take a similar stance on qualifying a digital cosmopolitanism that is African. This is not, however, to equate digital cosmopolitanism, operating within

a postcolonial and political framework of cosmopolitanism from below as already discussed, with Kantian and Hegelian perspectives. Far from it. It is instead, a further politicization of this discourse which seeks to insert Africanness within two realms—cosmopolitanism and digitality—that have historically marginalized it. This worlding experience situates Africa in the world and the world in Africa, by challenging linear and top-down ideas of knowledge flows. And so, it becomes less about such digital cosmopolitanism challenging flows of information in a linear sequence (from the West to the rest of the world) and replacing it with another (from the rest of the world to the West). Flows are far more complex and, sometimes, even contradictory and represent multiple mobilities, formats and identities that cultivate digital agency.

But it is important to state that elites exist, even among minorities. Since cosmopolitanism manifests within an unequal world, it is not equally accessible to all; as such, what seem like free choices made from a cosmopolitan outlook are essentially governed by social, financial and economic capital. Privilege, class and power still play significant roles within cosmopolitanism from below, and therefore digital cosmopolitanism. Lindell and Danielsson (2017) define this capital as cosmopolitan capital; that is the resources that individuals make use of to gain or maintain their positions in fields of influence as these increasingly become transnational. This is evident within African digital cosmopolitanism where platforms and actors make use of different forms of capital to elevate their various agendas and profiles. Cosmopolitan capital often dictates who is listened to, and who is not. And this can lead to the closing of spaces for other voices as others become more dominant.

Would Khaby Lame, granted Italian citizenship only in 2022 despite having lived in the country for almost all his life, have attained this status if he had remained an unknown factory worker as he had been before becoming the TikTok sensation he now is? An exploration of (digital) cosmopolitan capital brings with it conversation around the exceptionalism often expected of Africans to be deemed acceptable within Western spaces. A further point of conversation is how such exceptionalism then creates schisms between African diasporic voices and African continental voices. For example, who gets to give a TED Talk about Africa? And from what positionality? Diasporic platforms and voices, with their proximity to the West, have sometimes been read as not being representative of the "real" (situated) Africa, and even sometimes seen as crowding out space for non-diasporic African platforms and voices. As Adenekan and Cousins (2014) observe, the cosmopolitan perception of contemporary African discourse is problematized by the

idea of the cosmopolitan (in this instance, the cosmopolitan writer) as the mouthpiece—and thus a key gatekeeper—of African culture. Werbner (2006) further questions where to place minority elites within postcolonial nations who are concomitantly seeking multicultural or global citizenship, while attempting to uphold their vernacular cultures which are seen as a hindrance to the universalising ideals of cosmopolitanism.

The fact that social segregation by gender, language, class and tribe still thrives and that most Africans still have little or no access to the internet (Yékú, 2017; Dabiri, 2016; McLean & Mugo, 2015) further complicates the idea of African digital cosmopolitanism. And even among those who are privileged to have access, there are still authoritarian governments—ready to effect internet shutdowns at the first signs of mass online dissent—to contend with. A thoughtful example to look at within the realm of collective sociality and intracontinental discourse is the hashtag #IfAfricaWasABar, which went viral on Twitter in 2015 as it crowdsourced the perspectives of Africans about different countries within the continent through personalizing them as stock characters in a bar. While mainly humorous, these personalizations simultaneously spoke to socio-political and historical issues relating to different African countries' nationhoods, and perceptions of self and one other. A few examples include the following;

> "#IfAfricaWasABar the Nigerians manning the toilets would be making more money than the bar itself."
> "#IfAfricaWasABar Zimbabwe would be that unemployed guy who can surprisingly afford to turn up everyday."
> "#IfAfricaWasABar you know Mauritius, Seychelles and Cape Verde would be sitting up in the VIP, judging the rest of us."

Because the hashtag was in English, most participation was from Anglophone Africa and its diaspora (Cheruiyot & Uppal, 2019). Of the 200 tweets analysed in Cheruiyot and Uppal's study, only 21% were geolocated to an African time zone or location, which was largely confined to urban populations, reflecting an urban bias in terms of technology access. Furthermore, they observed an aesthetic to the bar which is imagined in the tweets as "modern," with wines and spirits served on a bar counter or table, by bartenders. They note:

> The idea of a local village beer joint … was out of the picture for most tweeters. The tweet exchange suggested that the engagement involved the affluent, urban and perhaps young Africans.

Equally, one can ask what version of Africa is being conveyed digitally. Is it representative? But a counter to that line of questioning is also important to interrogate. Does it have to be representative and can it ever really be, given that we are already collapsing a continent of over 50 countries into one collective imaginary?

5.8   Conclusion

As has been shown from the beginning of this chapter, the whole cosmopolitanism project constitutes a paradox of multiple contradictions. This further complicates it while simultaneously salvaging it, raising questions around how it can be employed as a framework for assessing worlding experiences.

Amid these multiple tensions, cosmopolitanism from below—and its attendant adjectival forms—offers a space for the "other" to create and share various forms of cosmopolitan practices that would otherwise be overlooked by normative cosmopolitan projects. Digitality further allows us to expand the range and reach of these cosmopolitan practices. It has been especially meaningful in an African and diasporic context for the continent and its voices to inscribe their digital cosmopolitan practices into the greater digital discursive space, while also creating strong counternarratives, and counterpublics, to Afropessimistic stances. This, I believe, is playing an important role in challenging the linear colonial model that sees Africans as passive recipients of Western knowledge and culture. There is agency, creativity, robust politics and complex networks and solidarities to be found within African digital space.

As a practice, African digital cosmopolitanism counters dominant, and often negative, ideas about African (digital) agency and opens up an important further gateway analysing African digitality and cosmopolitanism. With regards the latter, it is important to note that my omission of debates around Afropolitanism has been deliberate. The concept offers rich thoughts and counterthoughts around what an African cosmopolitanism might look like, but requires far more printed space and time to be effectively incorporated within this conversation. In many ways, I embody my own research; an African rooted within the continent but simultaneously routed to the world through many profound experiences and engagements that I would not otherwise have had without my digital access and curiosity. Many questions still abound around what African digital cosmopolitanism may look like more substantively. My hope is that this chapter offers a starting point.

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6. YouTube Became the Place Where "I Could Breathe" and Start "to Sell my Mouth": Congolese Refugee YouTubers in Nairobi, Kenya

Marie Godin and Bahati Ghislain

Abstract

Congolese refugees in Nairobi, in particular the youth, have recently engaged in the creation of YouTube channels. While some channels existed before the pandemic, this activity has considerably expanded since. This chapter explores this new form of business online that generates income through digital mediation. YouTube channels not only offer a potential way to earn money but also present a mediated social environment that can induce changes in refugees' everyday lives. The ethnographic case studies indicate that Congolese refugees use these channels to potentially "make a living," but more importantly, as a "way to exist," to "make a life"; YouTube as You-to-be as mentioned by one of our interlocutors.

Keywords: Congolese refugees; Nairobi, YouTubers; diasporic belonging; everydayness.

6.1 Introduction

Kenya is currently hosting 654,147 registered refugees and asylum-seekers (as of 3 September 2023, UNHCR, 2023a), with Somalian refugees being the most numerous (335,142), followed by refugees from South Sudan (170,177), the Democratic Republic of Congo (58,779) and Ethiopia (36,654). The Kenyan government has an encampment policy, with the majority of refugees living in the Dadaab (42.9%) and Kakuma (42.2%) refugee camps. Today, there are approximately 92,778 urban refugees living in the city of Nairobi (14.9%

in total), the majority of whom are Congolese, Somali, Ethiopian and South Sudanese (UNHCR, 2023b).[1] The Congolese refugee community has reached a population of approximately 34,216 and is currently the largest refugee nationality in Nairobi.

The protracted conflict situation and the renewal of conflicts in the eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) have led many Congolese from both North and South Kivu to flee their country. For safety reasons, the majority of Congolese refugees who have fled from the DRC to Kenya have sought refuge in the city of Nairobi. Many did not want to seek protection in the camps (including both the Kakuma and Dadaab refugee camps), either because they feared a lack of security or because of their past experiences in other countries of refuge. While a significant amount of research has been carried out on the topic of refugee livelihoods in Kenya, the second biggest refugee-hosting country in Africa after Ethiopia (see Betts et al., 2019), studies on the Congolese refugee community, in particular in Nairobi, are still quite rare, with a few exceptions (Tippens, 2019; Omata, 2020a; 2020b).

In Kenya, both the Citizenship and Immigration Act of 2011 and the Refugee Act of 2006 support refugees' right to work. However, up to this point, refugees' right to work has been extremely limited, with the majority seeking employment in the informal sector (O'Callaghan & Sturge, 2018). With the encampment policy in place, refugees living in the city also tend to be criminalized (Campbell, 2006). In November 2021, a newly signed Refugee Act acknowledged that a "recognized refugee shall have the right to engage individually or in a group, in gainful employment or enterprise or to practice a profession or trade where he holds qualifications recognized by the authorities in Kenya." (Part V, 28 (5), Kenya Refugee Act, 2021).

In reality, however, many constraints persist. Many Congolese refugees do not have refugee status and those who have some documents are often not recognized beyond identification by UNHCR or other INGOs. Therefore, many refugees cannot use the documentation they have to either open a bank account and/or register their phone numbers. Another important limitation in terms of access to jobs involves resentment, discrimination and occasional violence from established small business holders within Kenyan society, as some perceive refugees to be a threat to their livelihoods (Campbell, 2006).

For all of these reasons, developing economic activities online has become more attractive, especially for young refugees. This chapter looks

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1   Out of 90,312 refugees and asylum seekers in Nairobi on 31 October 2022, there were: 33,616 from DR Congo; 23,543 from Somalia; 13,588 from Ethiopia; 8,587 from South Sudan (available at: https://data.unhcr.org/en/country/ken/187).

in particular at the development of YouTube channels as a new way to make a living. Whereas only a few YouTube channels existed within the Congolese refugee community before the Covid-19 pandemic, this number mushroomed during the pandemic as people were forced to stay at home. YouTube channels not only offer a potential way to earn money but also present a mediated social environment that can induce changes in refugees' everyday lives. The chapter argues that a focus on the economic component of these so-called livelihood activities tends to ignore other aspects linked to these pursuits.

The chapter first returns to the time of the pandemic and its impact on the lives of Congolese refugees living in Nairobi. The second section provides a theoretical framework to go beyond a Western- and Global-North-centric conceptualization of YouTube influencers looking at refugee-led tech entrepreneurship, as a way for refugees to organize and create opportunities outside or alongside the realm of the humanitarian/state system in the context of the city. The third section explains the methodology used to collect the data. The fourth section presents two empirical ethnographic case studies to highlight the type of social change Congolese refugees generate through their YouTube channels.

6.2   Covid-19 and its Impact on Refugees' Livelihoods in Nairobi

To prevent the spread of the virus in March 2020, Kenyan authorities rapidly implemented measures, imposing lockdowns and curfews on city residents, which made it extremely difficult for urban refugees to continue making a living in the informal economy. The government measures consisted of two extended lockdown periods involving both public closures and the outlawing of private gatherings to various degrees. One of the measures that greatly affected refugees' livelihood was the ban on hosting public gatherings; this made the lives of street vendors and hawkers almost impossible due to the loss of daily customers. In addition to the president's national curfew order, churches were closed, along with all other public places, such as restaurants and bars. Moreover, all of these measures were strongly enforced by the police. Public transport was limited (authorized to use only 30% of their capacity), and at one point all movement outside the counties of Nairobi was also prohibited, preventing refugees from doing business in the city as well as beyond it in counties such as Kwale, Kilifi, Mombasa and Tanariva.

As a result, many refugees lost their jobs, especially small business owners travelling outside Nairobi County to carry out their hawking activities. For

example, based on interviews conducted during the pandemic by Bahati Ghislain, the co-author of this chapter, those who used to sell two to three *bitenges* (Congolese print fashions) before the pandemic could go an entire day during the pandemic without selling a single *kitenge*.[2] Many refugees who used to work in small shops, such as beauty or hair salons ("barbers"), started to lose their jobs as fewer customers came. Those working as watchmen were also asked to accept a much lower salary since many people were fighting for the same job.[3] In addition, many refugees did not want to find themselves on the wrong side of the law, for example for not wearing a mask, especially during the first phase of the pandemic. Going out meant a greater risk of being arrested by the police in an increasingly hostile environment for refugees in the country. In this context, in March 2021, a 14-day ultimatum was given by the Kenyan government to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) to develop a plan to close the country's Kakuma and Dadaab refugee camps (The Sentinel Project, 2021).

Refugees also avoided going out during the pandemic because they feared getting sick. Interviewees also mentioned the lack of support from organizations such as UNHCR and international non-governmental organizations (INGOs) during the Covid-19 period. Their situation was worsened by the failure of the government to recognize refugees as "vulnerable" in the context of the new cash transfer programme created specifically to protect the most vulnerable households against the impact of the pandemic (Omata, 2020b). Thus, refugees who caught the virus did not have enough money to pay their hospital bills. As a consequence of all of these factors, many refugees lost much of their daily income and often had to use the only savings they had left to meet the basic needs of their families. As argued by Müller (2022), Covid-19 was not a major cause of change in refugees' everyday lives, "but rather an additional stress that re-enforced pre-existing forms of precarity."

As a response to these challenges, local churches and Refugee-Led Organizations (RLOs) played an important role in raising the alarm within the community for vulnerable families and organizing the collection of food and medicine several times a week at the local level (Omata, 2020b; Betts et al., 2021). The solidarity among refugees increased over time, with friends sharing food or borrowing money from each other. As refugees did not

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2   *Kitenge* (singular) and *bitenge* (plural) are Swahili for a piece of fabric often worn by women.
3   Refugees working in beauty salons before the pandemic could earn up to 500 KSh per day before the pandemic; during the pandemic they were only earning 100 KSh or at most 150 KSh per day. Those working as watchmen, who previously earned 5,000 KSh to 8,000 KSh per month, were asked to accept 1,500 KSh or at most 3,000 KSh per month, since many people were fighting for any job (based on an interview with a businesswoman by Bahati Ghislain).

benefit from the government's social protection programme, RLOs provided Congolese refugees with survival kits as well as soap, sanitizers and face masks, allowing them to continue their daily economic activities. During the pandemic, WhatsApp groups became a common platform through which information could be shared directly with the refugee community. RLOs colluded with refugee leaders as well as church leaders to ensure that every piece of information was translated correctly into various mother tongues and shared with community members. Before the pandemic, diaspora humanitarianism (Aden et al., 2020) was well developed, relying on WhatsApp and MPesa, the online transfer money system in Kenya, to collect funds in order to support communities back in Congo, in particular internally displaced peoples (IDPs). These channels were quickly redirected and re-activated to support the local refugee community during the time of the pandemic. These observations within the Congolese refugee community in Nairobi resonate with the strengthening of localized networks and relations to cope with both the material and non-material aspects of the Covid-19 pandemic as highlighted by Müller (2022) in her study of Eritrean and Ethiopian communities and lived citizenship in Nairobi, Addis Ababa (Ethiopia) and Khartoum (Sudan).

However, in addition to these new forms of "digital everyday humanitarianism" that mainly rely on local and diasporic networks, new types of income and jobs also appeared during the pandemic. One businesswoman told Ghislain in January 2022 that many refugees had entered the *boda-boda* (motorbike) business. This business was successful because most people preferred to ride a *boda-boda* rather than a *matatu* (a form of urban public transport). Riding a motorbike was perceived as a safer form of transportation than taking a small van carrying up to 14 passengers. With people forced to stay at home, mobile phone data usage increased, and as consequence, a new informal Internet-sharing market began to emerge. With their smartphones, Congolese refugees started to sell access to their WiFi hotspots for private use. For instance, people would commonly buy a certain amount of Internet data usage for 100 Kenyan shillings (KSh) and then share it with 10 nearby refugee households paying 20 KSh each. More generally, small business entrepreneurs were not only forced to change their working hours due to the government-imposed curfew but also decided to move their presence online by developing new ways to do business remotely. In some cases, going online during Covid-19 became a way to make a living and to connect with people in the community. As one of our interviewees who created his YouTube channel *Kanyamukwengo comedy* described (see after), referring to a Kinyamulenge saying:

Uhiriye mu nzu ntabura aho apfunda umutwe: When the house gets burnt and you are inside, obviously you will find a small space where you can put your head. Like if you can call for assistance or just to escape the smoke! That's just what happened to me. I just found a small space where I can fix my head to be heard.

The outbreak of Covid-19 and the closure of local businesses was like the burning house, and the digital space—and more specifically, YouTube—became the place where he could breathe and start "to sell his mouth" through comedy, as he put it. He began his new economic activity by recording 30-second videos via his Techno smartphone—a cheap Chinese Android smartphone—and uploading them via WhatsApp and other social media platforms such as Facebook.

6.3   Forced Migration, New Technologies and YouTube Channels

Research exploring the use of new technologies by people on the move has increased swiftly following the so-called "European refugee crisis" that emerged in 2015–2016. Over time, the research focus on the dimensions of survival and navigation has slightly diminished (Gillespie et al., 2018; Dekker et al., 2018), giving rise to a more comprehensive research approach examining refugees' material, psychological and social needs and how these needs can be met by mobile technologies (Alencar, 2020). More importantly, while the majority of the studies have mainly focused on people fleeing the Syrian conflict as well as people from Afghanistan and Iraq for a very long time, a new set of papers are now looking at how refugees within Africa are themselves relying on new technologies when travelling within Africa as well as towards Europe with a particular focus on the planning, movement and immediate arrival (Ennaji & Bignami, 2019; Hounsell & Owuor, 2018; Stremlau & Tsalapatanis, 2022). Many studies have also shown that people often stick to basic websites and social media applications and services. These social media platforms such as Facebook, YouTube, Instagram, LinkedIn, Twitter, Snapchat, Skype, WhatsApp, and Viber are often considered as more reliable, easily accessible, and widely used (Dekker et al. 2018; Kaufmann, 2018).

More recently, there has been a growing research and media interest in the role of social media platforms, in driving and enabling migration. For instance, a short BBC documentary has recently asked the following question: "Are migrant YouTubers influencing others to travel to the EU?" (BBC, 2021). "Migrant TikTok" is used as a term to collect the public posts of

migrants on the road; it has become a way to capture the constant stream of new information through the logics of the algorithm and its viral component. In this media ecosystem, TikTok video comment sections can also be used by migrant brokers to advertise their services (Herbert & Ghoulidi, 2019). In parallel, international organizations such as the International Organization for Migration (IOM) are also interested in the use of social media platforms to broadcast specific messages. For instance, the IOM Regional Office for Central America, North America and the Caribbean recently launched a campaign highlighting migrant YouTubers called the #IamaMigrant Challenge aimed at "combating negative discourse against migrants through the creativity of migrant YouTubers who are ambassadors of their countries of origin" (IOM, 2018). The idea behind the campaign is to cultivate empathy and change perceptions towards newly arrived migrants. However, as argued by Myria Georgiou (2022, p. 272), while migrants are more and more present as agentive speakers in digital mediascapes, they are often allowed to do so within a "digital order of appearance" as outsiders and as individuals who fit within given categories: between the entrepreneurial or vulnerable migrant with no claim to equality of reparations.

In the context of the Global South, where the majority of refugees originate, many studies have been conducted to understand how current tech solutions put into place by humanitarian actors meet refugee needs (Hounsell & Owuor, 2018). Awad and Tossel (2021) have argued that a common critique of the development of digital innovations in forced migration contexts is that they often rely on a needs-based approach, where needs are being defined by humanitarian agencies in order to protect and assist refugees. The underlying belief is that access to mobile phone and Internet services has become as important and crucial to refugees' safety and security as access to food, shelter and water (UNHCR, 2016). Still, few studies examine how migrants and refugees on the move or in protracted displacement situations have developed their own "digital making-do practices" (Alencar & Godin, 2022). As argued by Galis and Makrygianni, ICTs create imaginary passages for migrants "between the ground zero/war zone and the desired destination spaces, and between the route and destination spaces and the homeland" (2022, p. 8). In a recent chapter, Alencar and Godin (2022) reviewed the case of Venezuelan refugees in the city of Boa Vista, Brazil. They found that some refugees have been creating YouTube channels to showcase their experiences in the city as well as their frustration at being deprived of useful information as well as being misrepresented (p. 377). Similarly, the work of Jaramillo-Dent et al. (2022) on Hispanic migrant TikTokers living in Spain and the US is also relevant. Based on an analysis of 198 TikTok

videos, the authors develop the concept of "platformed belongings" enabling migrants "to reclaim their rights and negotiate existing symbolic boundaries by achieving different levels of visibility within this platform" (p.5578, see also Chapter 10 by Jaramillo-Dent, Alencar and Asadchy).

Our chapter sheds further light on how Congolese refugees living in Nairobi have been investing in YouTube channels in order to improve their everyday lives. As argued by Ponzanesi and Leurs (2022), the focus on the everyday allows to capture transactions happening with and through the use of various media, including digital platforms, allowing for a diversification of co-presence as creating possibilities for alternative counterpublics (Fraser, 1990) that can emerge outside of the mainstream representation of demonization, vilification and othering of the migrants. Theoretically, it builds on the work of Candidatu and Ponzanesi (2022, p. 266) and others that understand "digital diasporas as part of everyday practices by situating them in particular contexts and revealing the socially diverse practices and engagements of different groups and generations." This chapter therefore aims to question the nature of Congolese refugee YouTube channels and the emancipating and transformative dimensions of the digital space during migration processes. Before discussing the two ethnographic case studies, we will briefly present the methodology in the next section.

6.4   Methodology

First, a mapping of existing initiatives in the digital economy led for, by and with refugees was conducted both locally in Nairobi and remotely between September 2021 and December 2021. The majority of refugees lack access to laptops; smartphones are the most common mode of internet access. After this first exploratory mapping, the decision was made to focus only on the case of YouTube influencers, a new phenomenon emerging within the Congolese community which has been amplified since the onset of the Covid-19 pandemic. Based on a snowballing method sampling different Congolese neighbourhoods, more than 60 YouTube channels whose owners live in Congolese-concentrated areas in Nairobi were identified. In particular, these covered neighbourhoods in Kayole, Kasarani, Githurai and Umoja 1, 2 and 3 (and to a lesser extent Mihango, Nijiri, Rongai and Kitengela). These neighbourhoods are mainly populated by Congolese refugees from the Banyamulenge community. Most of them speak Kinyamulenge, a mixture of the Kinyarwanda language and the Kirundi language. Following this mapping, we then conducted 20 in-depth face-to-face interviews with

YouTube channel owners during two periods of ethnographic fieldwork: one in February 2022 and another in August/September 2022.

During these periods of ethnographic fieldwork, we were able to "follow" both online and onsite several Congolese refugee YouTubers, subscribing to their channels in order to get a better understanding of their videos. It was critical to move between an analysis of digital artefacts (YouTube videos) and the context of the videos' production and consumption. As argued by Leurs and Prabhakar (2018, p. 252), migrant experiences of communication and mediation should be considered as "situated in distinctive power-ridden social, cultural, historically and localized settings." For instance, in locally following some influencers in the field, we could capture the extent to which their YouTube channels constituted their primary economic activity or if they were more secondary. We could also understand the series of other economic activities taking place around the production of digital business. Based on this mapping, it appears men are more represented than women and that young people are much more prevalent in this niche compared to the elders in the community. YouTube influencers exert widely varying levels of impact. Some are followed by thousands of subscribers at the local level as well as beyond it, in the broader diaspora. Others have only hundreds of subscribers at the local level, circumscribing their influence. These channels serve a vast range of purposes. Some channels are mainly dedicated to creating a positive narrative about refugees in Nairobi, offering a platform for people within the community to appear online and reveal their talents. Channels can also be used for entertainment purposes, to raise awareness about refugees' rights, to promote Banyamulenge culture and reconnect with people and traditions back home and in the diaspora, to inform about current events in the DRC, to preach the gospel and promote Congolese music.

In the next section, we analyse two ethnographic case studies that illustrate how these channels are about more than just making money. The first YouTube channel was selected for its content, which primarily aims to challenge social norms within the community increasing the sense of belonging to the local Banyamulenge community. The second was selected to illustrate how these video channels can expand, diversify and consolidate the connections between refugees and diasporas near and far (and sometimes beyond) subverting the local and national political economy dynamics.

First Case Study: The Grand Nile Studio YouTube Channel

Bonheur arrived in Kenya in 2014 at the age of 18. Originally from Minembwe, she had first moved to Rwanda at an early age with her family before coming

to Kenya, a common destination for resettlement. When they arrived, they decided not to go to a camp but to travel instead to a settlement called Kayole in Nairobi. With these moves, Bonheur's education was interrupted many times; by the time she arrived in Nairobi, she had not completed her primary education. Despite trying to re-enrol in the Kenyan school system, she eventually dropped out. In addition, her family needed her to work. She first tried to make a living by singing in a choir in a Kenyan church while also helping her mother in a small hotel restaurant in Kayole. Working at the hotel, she could earn up to 1,000 KSh per week. In 2018, she married. While she and her husband sang in the Kenyan church to make a living, they would also invite young people from the community into their homes, where they would talk to them about marriage and provide counselling and advice. However, when the Covid-19 pandemic hit, it became much harder to pay their bills and rent, even with support from the Kenyan church. During the first lockdown, her husband started a YouTube channel called *Grand Nile Studio.* As Bonheur says:

> Yes, like, we were stuck in the house, like, finding way to ... You see, like, doing nothing. So, like, by that time you think a lot. You spend, like, big time together. So, that's when he had that inspiration to start a YouTube channel ... I think Covid-19 has changed, like, our lives a lot, not even just for the refugees, even for other people. Because you see in this time of lockdown, people came to realize that it's not all about getting something from your boss. Maybe we should not be waiting for someone to call you and hire you and give you a job. By then, like, the restaurants were shut, the churches – we couldn't go to sing. There were no jobs. So, many people started even to think, what can I do? How can I use my talent? So I think COVID-19 has helped people to see their potential.

In fact, money was not Bonheur's primary motivation to get involved in the channel. It was only afterwards, when viewership began to grow, that she began to consider it a business opportunity. Bonheur now takes the stage to talk to people, typically a married couple or someone who is preparing for marriage. She explains that being a refugee is hard. Sometimes people are desperate to get married, especially young girls, who may view a husband as someone who can sustain their material needs. For that reason, she tries to raise awareness within the community, encouraging women to avoid getting married too early and supporting them in choosing the right husband. The challenge of transnational marriage between the refugee community in Nairobi and those who have resettled in Canada or the United States is a

topic close to her heart. On her channel, Bonheur also addresses the issue of intermarriage. She does not believe that "a Munyamulenge should [only] marry a Munyamulenge." However, within the community, this expectation persists, leading to pressure—especially from parents and elders. Those who have entered into mixed marriages often feel the need to leave the community, and many go to live in other neighbourhoods where they can have more privacy and live in peace.

Today, Bonheur has become more popular than her husband, and she uploads the majority of their channel's videos. Now she is even seeking training so that she can do more work by herself and rely less on other people's skills to film and edit her videos. In terms of her audience, she targets both the local Congolese refugee community as well as resettled refugees in the "near" and "wider" diaspora (Van Hear, 2006) in particular to challenge gendered normativity. Men run the majority of the YouTube channels within Nairobi's Banyamulenge community. It remains rare to see women on such platforms; when a woman starts a channel, gossip typically spreads quickly, casting aspersions on her reputation. Starting a YouTube channel has not been easy for Bonheur but has nevertheless been a transformative experience for her and other women in the community. For one, she has gained confidence by speaking in front of the hundreds of people who follow her videos and chatting with them in the comments. She has also strengthened her conviction that she can do the things that matter to her, rather than be confined to other people's expectations of her as a Congolese refugee:

> Being a refugee, you are recognised [because] you live here in Nairobi. So, like, for maybe UNHCR, it's not a problem for them but it's tough! It's tough because, like, even though sometimes you walk, like, trying to find that small job, like, "You, refugee. Look at [the] Congolese!" But that can't, like, stop you from doing what you love and do it fine. So, I think you can do better you can grow your business if I can say that. You can, like … Yeah! You can do big things even though we are refugees. It's you, working hard. If you can work hard and get that big audience … Yeah, you can expand your dream.

Bonheur's channel is not yet monetized,[4] as she is currently struggling to obtain her refugee ID. Without this card, she cannot gain access to a PayPal or bank account and cannot receive money. Despite these limitations, she

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4   To know more about YouTube monetization requirements: https://vidiq.com/blog/post/how-to-monetize-youtube-channel-beginners-guide/. All the steps required to do so make it

strongly believes that digital is the way to go. The debate surrounding the digital livelihood for refugees often tends to be quite descriptive looking at the opportunities and obstacles that refugees face in the digital economy (ILO, 2021) without explaining the reasons underlying such decisions. Some refugees have been earning some money through their online activity, but many others are still investing in that space, hoping to move away from their current economic activity.

Second Case Study: Kanyamukwengo Comedian YouTube Channel

Kanyamukwengo was born in the Democratic Republic of the Congo in 1993 in Mibunda, in the Mwenga territory, South Kivu. In Congo, he worked as a livestock keeper. He moved to Kenya in 2016 at the age of 23, fleeing conflict back home. In the beginning, like many refugees, he worked in a barber shop in the municipality of Kitengela (in Kajiado county, located in south capital of Nairobi) where he earned around 50 KSh per day. Kanyamukwengo then moved to Lavington (a residential suburb of Nairobi), where he worked in another hairdresser's shop in 2019 and 2020. When the pandemic started, they had to close the shop due to the lack of customers. It was at that point that he decided to change career and do comedy on social media platforms. In the beginning, he just posted short videos on WhatsApp and shared them on Facebook, but it soon became something bigger as people were stuck at home. As he had not managed to open a bank account in Kenya due to the limitations that refugees face, he had to rely on someone's else. It is with the support of an acquaintance who used to live in Nairobi but is now resettled in the US that he has managed to access to the money he made online. Because of their friendship, he sends Kanyamukwengo the money every month minus a commission via WorldRemit.

As he describes to us:

> You know YouTube, it is all about the talents or what you can do for people. It's not like selling kitenge … if I wake up in the morning and then I take them and put them in the bag. I go on the streets and start asking people to buy. And eventually people will buy but on YouTube, I don't think it is for everyone. You must have a talent or content that you want to share.

extremely hard for refugees to receive payments via their channels and have to develop a set of strategies in order to get paid.

Figure 6.1. "Be careful in this election period / Going back at home earlier" (Mwirinde Muriki Gihe Camatora / Gutaha Kare Ningombwa). Video by Kanyamukwengo, still from https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=50hbtrRn_VM.

Although he started by targeting the local Banayamulenge refugee community living in Nairobi, he soon developed a much larger viewership. The language spoken on local YouTube channels in these areas is mainly Kinyamulenge, increasing the audience, previously limited to Banyamulenge, to Rwandans and even Burundians all over the world. Viewership of Kanyamukwengo's channel is now greatest in Rwanda, followed by Kenya and then the USA, Burundi and Uganda. People from other countries are also watching, especially in countries where refugees have resettled: Canada, Australia and the US. The YouTube channel has now more than 57.7K subscribers and over 6.6 million views (as of December 2023). As the comedian has said himself, he feels like he is leading a government online: "it's Kanyamukwengo nation." His channel promotes Banyamulenge culture through comedy. As he explains:

> In the Banyamulenge community we have some children who were born in exile. Others are growing up and others are even getting married yet they don't know anything about the Banyamulenge community. So, when we are acting we try to act in a way like … to show the culture of the Banyamulenge people. We show them those are the taboos that we can't do in our culture. Those are the things that you cannot do and then other things are done in this way. So, you see in that we are trying like to bring

the flashbacks of what happened at home to those who were able to grow up there. And also for those who have not been there so that they know what used to happen there. It's something that promotes our culture and at the same time we entertain larger audiences from other communities.

The channel aims at both education and entertainment. In August 2022 general elections in Kenya were organized and Kanyamukwengo and his team (two Congolese refugee women) decided to upload a video to warn refugees about not getting involved in the presidential election campaign. Not all refugees are connected to local and international non-governmental organizations and therefore can easily miss important notices. As many in the community follow Kanyamukwengo's channel, the comedian took the official guidelines written by the Department of Refugee Services (DRS). He then translated them and uploaded a video entitled "Be careful in these days of election / Go back home earlier / It's important" (*Mwirinde murikigihe amatora / Gutaha kare ningombwa*) and which gathered more than 15,000 views at the time of the elections (see Figure 6.1 and Figure 6.2).

In this short drama, Kanyamukwengo plays the role of a local chief sensitizing dwellers of his area to follow the guidelines provided by the government, cautioning them against falling into the trap of getting involved with Kenyans talking about politics but also inviting members of the community to store enough food, gasoline and water during the time of the elections. As he says: "I am trying to protect my audiences which means the refugee community." In addition, he also invites his local audience to share what they have with their fellows Kenyans living in the same neighbourhood referring to the time back home when you could find a man with 100 cows and one with one cow or even sometimes none, but all of them were drinking milk. He therefore asks his fellow citizens to do the same in this period: "Even if he or she is a national, please call him or her secretly and give a few kilograms of maize flour or rice so that all us we can survive." The channel, therefore, fulfils multiple purposes that go far beyond making profit: it creates a community online that gathers the local refugee community with diasporic communities in the "near" and "wider" diaspora but also beyond with viewers located in the Great Lakes Region (DRC, Rwanda and Burundi). In addition, many other opportunities have emerged with the YouTube channel, thanks to the increasing popularity of the actors involved in the show. They are often invited to perform at weddings or record advertisements for refugees as well as Kenyan businesses on different YouTube channels. We therefore argue that there is no such thing as a digital economy versus an offline urban economy, showing how both
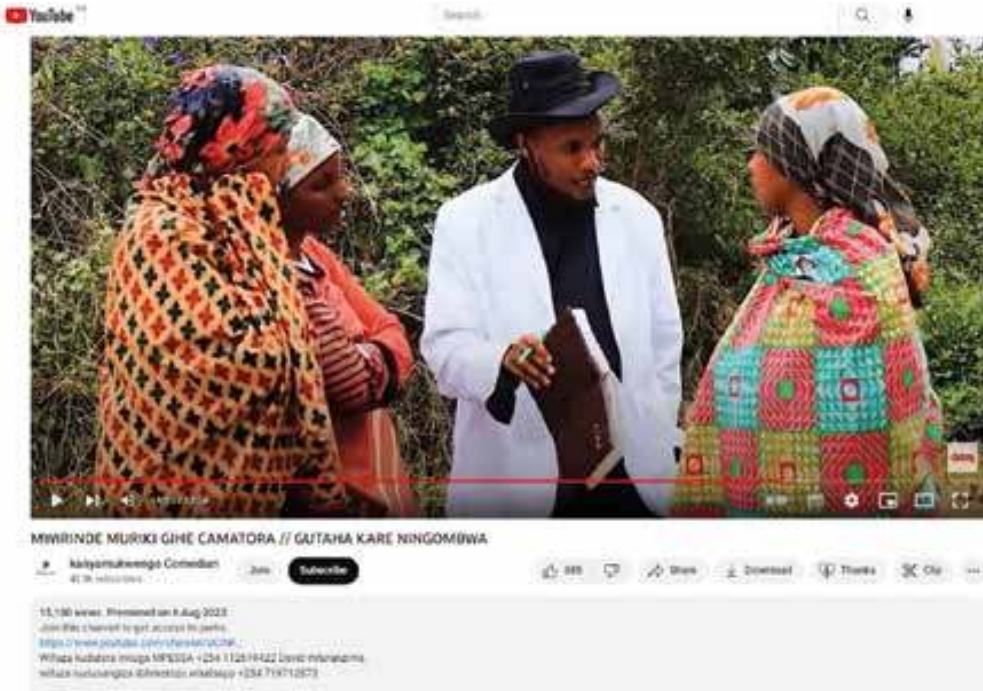
Figure 6.2. "Be careful in these days of election / Go back home earlier // it's important" (Mwirinde murikigihe amatora / Gutaha kare ningombwa). Video by Kanyamukwengo, still from https://www. youtube.com/watch?v=50hbtrRn_VM.

are often interconnected in various and complex ways, evolving alongside one another, supporting and/or complementing each other.

6.5   Discussion and Conclusion

This exploratory ethnographic project focuses on the emergent topic of digital livelihoods and refugees. It offers an original perspective on the ways refugees participate in the so-called "future of work" through in-depth case studies of YouTube influencers within Nairobi's Congolese Banyamulenge refugee community. This research critiques the literature on refugee livelihoods and self-resilience for its excessive focus on the profits and benefits that refugees can accrue in the informal sector, describing mainly how people work and survive in the shadow of the state. In doing so, other dimensions linked to the expansion of economic activity among Congolese refugees are being overlooked.

When discussing this idea of "refugee digital livelihood," the motivations to engage in the digital world are often overlooked as if it were a choice refugees make among others at one point in time. However, looking at Congolese refugees' work and life trajectories, the digital world has often

come after many attempts to find a job at the local level. For many who are highly qualified, after having gained the skills from their country of origin, and/or after having been trained in the Kenyan system, the limitations they face at the local level often push them to consider alternative economic opportunities such as those provided by the online world. In a context where refugees do face exclusion and discrimination at the local and national level, the digital world has opened up new opportunities for refugees, in particular the youth who are trying to find alternative ways to make a living.

In investing in YouTube channels, Congolese refugees are creating their own digital economic niche in order to transcend the employment limitations they face. They reject discrimination by locals due to their refugee status while at the same time creating independent online businesses with resources spread across the local, transnational and diasporic communities. Congolese refugee YouTube influencers are also changing narratives about refugees not being a burden. The time and money refugees invest into the online space indicate that these activities are not just about income but close to what Duffy (2015) defines as "aspirational labour," a "forward-looking and entrepreneurial enactment of creativity." Congolese refugees, in particular the youth, invest in YouTube channels as "a space for recognition" (inspired by Honneth, 2020) in which their skills and talents can be recognized. As in this case, Bonheur contributes to improving the social inclusion of women not only on the platform but also in daily life by challenging diasporic gendered normativity. This way of venturing into the online world also reveal how refugees are finding new ways to integrate socio-economically—especially the youth—into changing refugee narratives at the local, diasporic level, but also at national and global level. In the context of severe restrictions experienced by Congolese refugees, as depicted in the case of the *Kanyamukwengo Comedy* YouTube channel, they are strengthening a sense of belonging to an imagined Banyamulenge family locally, back home and at different locals within the diaspora. The expansion of the "digital diasporic space" through YouTube channels has therefore become a source of both affective and economic support. The content posted on these channels is also about building a bridge between the local community and the refugee community such as in the case of Kanyamukwengo inviting members of the audience to reach out to Kenyans in need of assistance over the election period. Other channels not described here are also investing in English and Swahili content not only as a way to increase their income but also to create a "safe space" where both refugees and Kenyans can interact with one another.

Last but not least, new ways of engaging in everyday acts of diaspora humanitarianism have appeared since the pandemic, with the digital being

at the centre of it. While before the pandemic, the online communication platform WhatsApp was and still is the one more commonly used by Congolese refugees in Nairobi, YouTube channels have become invested as a way to share the stories of the beneficiaries back home. As the pandemic resumed, the needs of the local refugee community in Nairobi have decreased and attention has been redirected towards the homeland with YouTube invested as space to not only raise awareness but more importantly to share the stories of people back home. Moving between WhatsApp and YouTube, a new informal humanitarian system is taking place, that creates new avenues for "translocal spaces" where social relations between members in the diaspora and people back home can be maintained, restored and/or re-imagined.

These case studies of YouTube influencers indicate that Congolese refugees use these channels to potentially "make a living," but also as a "way to exist" ("Yu-to-Be" as mentioned by one Congolese YouTuber), a transformative space in which they can expand their agency in the digital age (Nedelcu, 2018) as well as create "new spaces of belongingness" (Ponzanesi & Leurs, 2022).

Acknowledgement

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Bahati Ghislain is a refugee from the Democratic Republic of the Congo who arrived in Nairobi (Kenya) in 2008. Since then, he has worked for several organizations in the humanitarian sector including HIAS Refugee Trust of Kenya where he worked for more than a decade as a community outreach worker in Kasarani, an area in northeastern Nairobi. Since 2017, Bahati has also worked as a research assistant for the Refugee Economies Programme based at the University of Oxford as well as for Tufts University (USA). Lastly, Bahati is also a refugee rights advocate, founder of the Refugee-Led Organisation Kintsugi (Nairobi-Kenya)and chairman of the Refugee-led Organization of Kenya (RELON-Kenya).

Section III

Affect and Belonging

Introduction to Section III: Affect and Belonging

Athina Karatzogianni

As quite a few scholars would attest, there is considerable serendipity and luck involved in research and the topics one ends up investigating over the years. My engagement with digitality, migration, affect and belonging, which are the subjects that are wonderfully discussed in this section, occurred because several separate lines of enquiry converged from 2009 onwards in my research collaborations and funded projects.

The first line of enquiry involved affinity networks dominated by active affective structures for sociopolitical change in contrast to networks dominated by reactive affective structures which use violence to achieve their objectives. This differentiation was used in our work with Robinson to insert rhizomatic and network theory into the world-systems approach (Karatzogianni & Robinson, 2010). This line evolved into further escapades into political theory, writing about the utilization of active/reactive affect in network movements, "Russian hackers," Chinese dissidents and whistleblowers (Karatzogianni & Robinson, 2019; 2017; 2014; Karatzogianni, 2015).

Concomitantly, a second line of enquiry involved the role of affect in digital politics and culture (Karatzogianni & Kuntsman, 2012), which moved me beyond the digital media, social movement/resource mobilization, and conflict theories which I integrated into the cyberconflict theoretical framework to explain conflict in computer-mediated environments (Karatzogianni, 2004; 2006; 2009). Because of my collaboration with Adi Kuntsman, I saw the need to analyse affective, and by extension embodied, even if unrecognized, emotional aspects of resistance and to move beyond the representational and the semiotic approaches. I argued that affective structures mediate between the actual and the digital virtual. This spectrum of affect relates to the interface between the actual and the digital, which contains the virtuality of possibilities of what may or not happen. In certain cases where affective structures overflow, the possibility of the digital

materializes in the physical world. I termed that point before a digital protest, for example, materializes in the physical world, "Revolutionary Virtual" (Karatzogianni, 2012a). In the epilogue of that volume *The Politics of the Affective Digital*, I argued optimistically that recognizing affect and the internal governance of our feelings and emotions in relation to the digital can potentially make a difference to the political: the circulation of affect and the digital archive of feelings and images can enable both the recognition of the feelings of the Other and the fight for change against bankrupt liberal representational democracies or authoritarian variants (2012b, p. 249).

I recovered from that optimism due to a third line of enquiry I engaged with as Principal Investigator for the European MIG@NET[1] project, where I led teams in the UK, Greece and Cyprus into examining pro-migrant and anti-migrant conflict and activism on digital networks between 2010 and 2013. In the edited collection we published stemming from that work, it became evident to me that everyday digital networked media have been transforming the "public sphere" both descriptively and normatively, and in turn that the digital public sphere is being shaped by discourses, affect and mobilizations in the thematic areas of crisis, migration, conflict and culture (Karatzogianni et al., 2016). These three lines of enquiry converged eventually and pushed me to collaborate and engage with artists who were invited to exhibit and discuss their work with academics on the topic of forced migration and art around its signification (Karatzogianni et al., 2017).

More recently, as Principal Investigator for DigiGen,[2] I witnessed adolescents co-researching with us on ICT and civic participation using digital storytelling workshops as a technique, which produced a story about their anger and their political engagement as a migrant from a country that is not mediatized in the UK news media, and the ways they are using digital technologies to mobilize in online campaigns and counter misinformation about events taking place in their country of origin (Karatzogianni et al., 2022).

Having shared my own experiences researching migration, affect and belonging, I have found that the three chapters in this section—Elisabetta Costa investigating belonging among highly skilled migrants in Groningen in Chapter 7; Nishant Shah problematizing the "aporetic body" in digital migration studies in Chapter 8; and Yener Bayramoğlu theorizing queer digital migration in Chapter 9—have influenced my thinking in terms of key ideas I plan to work with in my future scholarship. The latter provides a context within which migrants and non-migrants indeed operate, as

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1   https://www.mignetproject.panteion.gr/.
2   https://www.digigen.eu.

Bayramoğlu argues: "Digital technologies utilized in surveillance reinforce the racialized and heteronormative structures of borderscapes" (Bayramoğlu, this volume, p. 219). Within such a digital surveillance environment though, two different problems emerge, as Shah states: "Although the geographical restrictions disallow migrants to move, the digital practices are all only geared towards movement which creates a great schism between the imagined and the lived" (Shah, this volume, p. 208). In this sense then, these migrants are stuck, or are in limbo, they cannot move, which means they are questioning their relationships and they may rethink social relations with people living around them during a pandemic, as demonstrated by Costa:

> Residents with non-migratory backgrounds did not question their relationship to the city they inhabited, and did not interrupt their social relations with people living there [...while] migrants experienced intensification of transnational relationships, the interruption of interactions with local inhabitants, and a significant disruption of their sense of place and their feelings of belonging (Costa, this volume, p. X).

The three chapters taken together demonstrate that although migrants and non-migrants operate in a racist and heteronormative digital surveillance environment, it is the migrants, because of their aporetic body, who have to engage with movement-demanding digital technologies, despite the fact that they are stuck and/or are movement-restricted. That in turn impacts their imagined and lived relation, disrupting their sense of place and feelings of belonging. Even before that, however, if we presuppose that there is an imagined, lived and "virtual" (digital materiality) of relation (to the Other or to structures), what we should be discussing in the future is how central affect is in forming the differences in the virtual relation of the migrant, in comparison to the virtual relation (to the Other or to structures) of the non-migrant. In one stroke, we would be continuously returning to the role of affect in ideology, and how disruptions due to migration can influence all relations: imagined and lived, and, we may confirm yet again here, also the digital/virtual matrix and its affective capacities.

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7. Digital Communication, Transnational Relationships and the Making of Place Among Highly Skilled Migrants during the Covid-19 Pandemic

Elisabetta Costa

Abstract

This chapter contributes to the growing field of digital migration studies by exploring the relationship between digital communication practices, (im)mobilities and everyday experiences of place among professional migrants living in Groningen, the Netherlands, during the Covid-19 pandemic. Under the disruptions resulting from restrictions on movement and social life, digital communication reshaped their experiences of (im)mobility and perception of the global and the local. On the one hand, social media enabled mobility from offline to online and enhanced transnational connections; on the other hand, non-digital practices recreated new forms of emotional attachment to the local space of the city. This study foregrounds questions on intra-European mobilities and migration, and the role of digital media in shaping social relationships, mobilities, and place-making.

Keywords: Covid-19; (im)mobility; the digital; social media; highly-skilled migrants; place-making.

7.1 Introduction

Over the last two years, my more frequent daily interactions are with the yoga trainer on YouTube, and with my dad on Skype!

Federica,[1] an Italian woman in her mid-30s who has lived in Groningen with her partner for almost five years working as communication officer at the university, in this way jokingly described her social contacts in the two winters during the coronavirus pandemic. She ridiculed herself because the yoga trainer on YouTube replaced her richer social circles of local acquaintances and colleagues she had before the pandemic. In a similar way, Rob, a German man in his early 40s who worked remotely for a European organization in Amsterdam, often complained about sitting alone every day in front of the computer at home. He confessed that his rewards at the end of the day were the long walks in the park while talking on WhatsApp with friends living around Europe. For several days in a row, he had no face-to-face contact with other human beings, with the exception of his partner. These two European residents based in Groningen spent the months of the Covid-19 lockdown and partial lockdown engaging in communicative practices with people living in different parts of the world, but had very few mediated interactions with friends and acquaintances in Groningen. The local was not inhabited online during the pandemic. What are professional migrants' digital practices revealing about the role of digital communication during the pandemic, their desires and practices of mobility, and their attachment to physical locations and online places?

This chapter explores the lived experiences of highly skilled migrants, broadly defined as highly-educated middle-class individuals who crossed national borders to move and work in a different country. The Covid-19 pandemic shaped their social life, mostly through forced immobility and heightened digital communication. During the two years following the outbreak of Covid-19, I participated in several conversations with internationals living in Groningen, the Netherlands, who liked discussing how their relationships to family and friends, and their attachment to the city, changed during the pandemic. On a few occasions, they questioned their presence in Groningen and their life as foreign residents: "What are we doing here? Why are we here?" Groningen was viewed as a cosy and comfortable base from which to frequently travel elsewhere for work or leisure, and where to enjoy work-related events and activities. But during the pandemic, both travel and work-related events were interrupted. From being one among many other lived localities in the context of high geographic mobility, Groningen became the place where they were now forced to be, a place emptied of all the activities that brought them there in the first place. Professional migrants' *mobile sense of place* (Polson, 2016) and their sense of belonging across multiple localities and groups, were significantly disrupted by the lack of

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1   All research participants have been anonymized through the use of pseudonyms.

mobility. While they were physically stuck in the city, social media enabled mobility from the offline location of the city to multiple online places made up of transnational connections. My research participants did not give up on their desire for mobility. Rather, they moved online, and there re-experienced their transnational relations. Through the use of digital communication technologies, they recreated a new sense of place largely detached from physical locations. As a result, the digital played little role in strengthening and facilitating connection to the city and people living in the city, with the only exception of dating apps. The digital instead strengthened pre-existing transnational relationships and forms of belonging, and on some occasions opened up new global contacts and social worlds. By contrast, the sense of belonging to the physical location of the city was recreated through new daily routines in which digital technologies played little or no role, such as solitary daily walks in the parks and in the city outskirts, bi-weekly strolling at the fish markets, visiting of historical buildings, and dinners with small groups of friends when allowed by government measures. These and other daily and weekly routines recreated a new sense of control over a physical space that people inhabited but did not feel they fully belonged to.

In her epistemological manifesto on the connected migrant, Dana Diminescu (2008) stressed how mobility and connectivity define the migrant in the 21st century. Along the same lines, Nedelcu (2012) emphasized the transnational and cosmopolitan life of modern migrants in the digital age. More recently, a growing body of literature is examining the life of mobile and transient migrants (Gomes, 2017; Lee, 2020), and the concept of "digital place-making" (Halegoua, 2020; Halegoua & Polson, 2021; Hjorth, 2012; Wilken & Goggin, 2012; Fast et al., 2018), viewed as the "use of digital media to create a sense of place for oneself and/or others" (Halegoua & Polson, 2021, p. 574) within the context of mobility and migration. Other research has specifically examined social media usage and the making of place among mobile middle-class professionals (Polson, 2015; 2016; Kraemer, 2014; 2018). And in 2021, the *Routledge Handbook to Mobile Socialities* (Hill et al., 2021) demarcated a new area of research that foregrounds the relation between mobile media, mobility and sociality. This chapter contributes to the emergent area of research that investigates the ways in which digital technologies contribute to the life of highly skilled mobile professionals. It takes up the question of the role of digital communication among mobile migrants during the period of forced immobility brought on by the pandemic, and shows the relationship between digital communication, mobility and everyday experiences of places.

I informally talked to friends and acquaintances throughout 2020, 2021 and 2022, and in the autumn and winter of 2021/2022 carried out ten

Figure 7.1. The author is conducting an interview with a research participant who was waiting for the results of a Covid-19 PCR test. Photo by Marina De Giorgi.

semi-structured interviews. Because public places like restaurants and cafes were either closed or at high risk of Covid-19 infection, I conducted the interviews at home. On one occasion, I conducted an interview wearing an FFP2 mask because the interviewee was waiting for the results of a PCR test after being in close contact with a colleague who had tested positive (see Figure 7.1). Despite Covid-related difficulties in meeting people face-to-face, after several months of digitally mediated interactions, all research participants and I preferred in-person rather than online interviews. The digital fatigue affected us all. The choice of carrying out interviews without online observation of digital interactions was determined by the private and individualized nature of the communication practices I studied. WhatsApp, Facebook Messenger, SMS, but also YouTube or Skype were mostly used as private and semi-private places that could not be examined via digital content analysis or online participant observation, research methods that are best suited for the study of public and semi-public online platforms.

7.2   Groningen and Its International Population

Surrounded by the countryside and intensively cultivated farmlands, Groningen is a university city and the largest urban centre in the North of the Netherlands. It is the capital of the province of Groningen, and an important

city for Drenthe and Friesland, the other two less densely populated rural provinces of the North. Located less than 200 km away from Amsterdam, Groningen portrays itself as a vibrant and progressive city. It has around 235,000 inhabitants, and students make up a third of its total population (OECD, 2020). The inhabitants of the metropolitan Randstad area tend to view Groningen as a remotely located city, and would rarely take a train to visit it. At the same time, the inhabitants of Groningen tend to look down on people from villages and rural areas living in the same province, and they view themselves as the urban inhabitants of the North. The international population moved to the city to work at one of the three universities (the University of Groningen, the Hanze University of Applied Science, and the University Medical Centre), in businesses affiliated with big multinational companies such as Shell or Philips, at the Google Data Centre in nearby Eemshaven, in high-tech start-ups, and in some cases also to enjoy the lively cultural and music scene. Attracted by the relatively low cost of living, several cycling paths, the quiet lifestyle, and the beautiful nature surrounding the city, many highly skilled migrants view Groningen as a very good place to live most of the year. Yet, at the same time, they enjoy the possibility to have frequent travel and keep a mobile lifestyle. This chapter focuses on international professionals working at the University of Groningen either as academics and support staff, and their partners or former partners. Internationalization became one of the main focuses on the agenda of the university, which attracts more than 5,000 international students and 1,200 international staff members, around 20 percent of the total. Both the city and the university are characterized by a tension between international and local ambitions, at an institutional and individual level. For example, the Dutch local population is fluent in English, and often welcomes progressive and well-educated foreign-born residents. On the other hand, Dutch social circles tend to remain closed to internationals, who more often engage with international or mixed groups of friends. This trend can be seen as a consequence of internationals' poor Dutch language skills, but also of what was often perceived, by some of my research participants, to be the more individualistic and less convivial Dutch sociality. A tension also characterizes the attitude of many professionals employed at the University of Groningen: their desire for a state of transience and temporariness in the city goes hand in hand with aspirations for a more permanent and open-ended stay, which is also encouraged by employment contracts that are viewed to be more advantageous than those in other Dutch and European cities. Transient and mobile migration has been foregrounded in recent literature (among others see Gomes, 2017; Gomes et al., 2017; Lee, 2020; Polson, 2016; 2019)

and is often contrasted with permanent migration. Yet, the life of highly skilled professionals included in this research is characterized by desires for both permanency and mobility, with one existing in close connection with the other.

7.3   Digital Communication, Place-Making and Mobility

An extensive body of interdisciplinary literature has shown how contemporary forms of mobility and the diffusion of digital technologies have created new forms of connection and attachment to places (e.g., Halegoua, 2020; Hjorth, 2008; Polson, 2016; Urry, 2007; Wilken, 2011; Wilken & Goggin, 2012). In the context of increased mobility and digitalization of everyday life, scholars have called for analysing the role of digital technologies in shaping the meanings that people give to places in terms of "digital place-making" (Halegoua & Polson, 2021; Motta & Ava, 2016). Places are viewed as constituted through people's interactions, relationships, practices and routines that are also mediated by digital technologies. The study of digital place-making has been approached from a variety of disciplines and theoretical perspectives, such as geography, media studies, anthropology, design studies and information studies. And it has adopted a variety of methodological approaches, such as discourse analysis and ethnography. This chapter views place-making as the interplay between spatial materialities, digital technologies, sociality and culture, which transforms a *space* into a culturally charged *place* (Motta & Ava, 2016). It builds on the anthropological understanding of places (Kraemer, 2018; Low, 2009; Low & Lawrence-Zúñiga, 2003), which stresses the role of social relationships, technologies and material culture in the making of places, and highlights places' mutable characters.

In this chapter, I show how my research participants replaced the lack of geographic mobility and face-to-face transnational interactions brought by the pandemic with the mobility to the online place of social media, inhabited by friends and acquaintances from different parts of the world. When Covid-19 hit Europe and the Netherlands, the new everyday routines of forced immobility led to a collapse of meanings associated with the city of Groningen, and to the search for online interactions with people living elsewhere. In a previous work (Costa, 2021), I conceptualized "immobile mobility," the (im)mobility from the offline physical place of the home to the online digital place of social media among homebound women in the southeast of Turkey. In a completely different geographic and social context, but similarly characterized by forced immobility, highly skilled migrants

used and experienced social media as digital places in their own rights. Also, Miller et al. (2021) argued that the digital can create a place within which people live, showing how the smartphone has become a transportable home, especially within the context of migration and mobility. The authors argue that the transportable home erases distances, but can also erase experiences of proximity in physical locations. Miller and colleagues (2021) also show that the movement to the online place of social media and digital apps does have consequences for the ways localities are lived. Also in Groningen during lockdown, social relationships in digital places had consequences for meanings and feelings associated to physical locations. In most cases, online transnational communications and interactions went hand in hand with disengagement from local relationships, and contributed to recreating a mobile sense of place (Polson, 2015) that was a constitutive element of highly skilled migrants' lives well before the pandemic started. The pandemic and the ubiquitous presence of social media took to the extreme a trend that was already observed by Joshua Meyrowitz (1985) in relation to the development of mass media: the detachment from spatial physical settings. Examining social relationships and interactions during the pandemic, we can see that highly skilled migrants did not give up on their practices of mobility when stuck in the city. Instead, their online social relationships and interactions contributed to the making of digital places that had very little connections with the physical space of Groningen. At the same time, they engaged in new non-digital practices that aimed at recreating an attachment to the physical location of Groningen in the new conditions of everyday life.

7.4 The Digital Peak in the First Wave of the Covid-19 Lockdown

All interview narratives identified two main timeframes: the first months of the pandemic and lockdown in spring 2020, and the two winters of 2020/2021 and 2021/2022. The summers of 2020 and 2021 were not included in the analysis as they were characterized by the lifting of restrictions, a return to travelling and to a sort of normality. All research participants described the spring of 2020 as a period with massive use of social media to communicate with friends and relatives abroad. Zoom, Skype, Google Meet, Facebook, WhatsApp, Messenger, Twitter and Viber were creatively used for several hours per day to keep in touch with relatives and friends living abroad, while interactions with people living in Groningen became less intense and frequent. Before the outbreak of the pandemic, connections

with friends and colleagues in Groningen were mostly based on face-to-face communications and gatherings in public spaces, such as cafes, restaurants, museums and universities. Very few of these relationships moved online.

Federica, the Italian woman introduced at the start of the chapter, described in great detail how, in the spring of 2020, her local activities and interactions with people in Groningen were completely interrupted. Through WhatsApp text messages, she barely kept in touch with her Groningen best friend. Even with her, conversations were poor and limited because there were no events to organize, and "nothing to look forward to." By contrast, Federica talked to her family in Northern Italy every day on Skype, sometimes even several times per day. Relatives became her main interlocutors. She organized online yoga sessions for her parents to emotionally support them while her grandmother was in the hospital. She had daily collective calls on Skype with her two parents and three siblings, and frequent individual calls with each of them. The family group on WhatsApp was particularly active too, as well as the one-to-one interactions with each member of the family. She particularly appreciated the possibility to have long conversations with her older brother, who had been previously very busy managing a restaurant and thus unavailable for calls at comfortable times. She felt closer to her family than ever before. She also intensified her interactions with an old friend from Italy with whom she previously had only sporadic conversations. Interactions with two WhatsApp groups with old friends from Italy also intensified, as well as calls to other friends spread around the world. WhatsApp and Skype were the most used platforms that fulfilled her search for intimacy, support, and private connections. By contrast, the more public-facing Instagram and Facebook were perceived as being inappropriate for her need for emotional proximity with friends and family.

Federica's experience of Groningen was completely disrupted by the start of the pandemic, forced immobility and transnational digital communication. She described in detail how, in those few months, she did not view Groningen any longer as a place of social relationships, a place to inhabit and identify with. Activities and relationships located in Groningen vanished, and as a result, the city as a place of meaningful sociality disappeared too. Her life was lived inside her house, in her street, and in Italy through digitally mediated communications. She no longer felt Groningen to be a place of belonging. She claimed:

> I could not experience Groningen as a city. In those months, I could only view me, my house, my street, and Italy. There was nothing between the street where I lived and Italy. But Italy was unreachable, and it would

have been so for a while. It was like if Groningen did not exist for me anymore. Even if I went out for a stroll, all shops were closed. Everything was closed and nothing was going on.

Similarly, Chrissy, a 37-year old woman from Greece, extensively used her mobile phone to communicate with her family. She had long daily calls on Messenger with her extended family in Greece and the UK. They shared information about the lockdown and rate of infections in their country of residence, and satisfied their need for deeper and meaningful connections. They had fun using filters on Messenger to experience a sense of lightness that helped them cope with the heaviness of the situation. Chrissy also had daily calls on Viber with her nuclear family of origin based in Greece, which includes her two parents and one sister. And she had daily calls on Messenger with her nephew and godson, with whom she also played games. She used to call her grandmother every day. She would share with her relatives several images related to the pandemic, such as pictures of a deserted Groningen. And she would receive photos from her hometown in Greece. The spike in video calls and communication on Viber stopped at the start of the summer of 2020, and it did not come back anymore with the following waves of the Covid-19 pandemic.

Federica's and Chrissy's intensified usage of digital communication to enact intimacy and care remotely was common to many other professionals living in Groningen. While Federica and Chrissy interacted a lot with their biological families, Rob, the German man introduced at the beginning of the chapter, intensified communication with his friends spread around the world. Rob had a very mobile adult life, and lived in eight different cities around Europe before spending five years in Groningen. When the pandemic hit the Netherlands, he was recovering from major surgery that disrupted his life, and the lockdown forced him to continue his convalescence at home. In the spring of 2020, he communicated several times a day with friends scattered around Europe, in London, Paris, Milan and Istanbul. He had frequent individual and group video calls and regular interactions on WhatsApp with many of them. A WhatsApp group with other three friends based in Brussels, Rome and Paris became the place for hundreds of daily text messages, memes, pictures and jokes, as well as serious political and philosophical conversations. He went back to Facebook to scroll the feed to see what his old friends and acquaintances around the world were doing, and to reach out to friends via Facebook Messenger. He enjoyed listening to an old friend who played live music on Facebook, and dancing in front of the screen with his music in the

background. Like the other research participants, he did not use social media to maintain contacts with friends from Groningen, but to communicate with people across the globe. He felt close to them as never before. He explained:

> We were all sharing similar experiences of immobility even if living apart. And it seemed organic that I felt closer to them. We were away from long working days at the office and from travelling around the globe for work. I can surely argue that in my personal experience, forced immobility and digital technologies erased distance!

Rob's emotional attachments to physical places and people from older times became more important than ever before, and filled the vacuum left by uncertain futures.

All the interviewees recalled using social media to maintain in touch with dear ones abroad, and only sporadically with friends and colleagues from Groningen. Previous research (Costa et al., 2022; Esteve-Del-Valle et al., 2022) showed the important role of WhatsApp and other platforms in creating feelings of proximity at distance during the first wave of Covid-19 among non-migrants living in different European cities. Yet residents with non-migratory backgrounds did not question their relationship to the city they inhabited, and did not interrupt social relationships with people living there. Digital interactions replaced face-to-face communications, especially closer contacts and strong ties. By contrast, in the first wave of the Covid-19 pandemic, mobile professionals' experience was characterized by the intensification of transnational relationships, the interruption of interactions with local inhabitants and significant disruption of their sense of place and their feelings of belonging to the city of Groningen. I explain this difference as a consequence of skilled migrants' attachment to multiple places and mobile life.

7.5   Transnational Relationships in the Winters of 2020/2021 and 2021/2022

The research participants perceived the use of digital media during the first lockdown as "exceptional," as a way to "go back to the roots," and as "a moment of deep nostalgia." They all portrayed it in contrast to a more ordinary usage of social media in the autumn and winter of 2020/2021 and 2021/2022. In these months, long video calls on Zoom, WhatsApp and

Skype, and the massive sharing of memes and images were replaced by less intensive usage of social media.

At first, the research participants tended to minimize the amount of online interactions with relatives and friends, but when asked to open WhatsApp, Telegram, or Facebook Messenger, and describe their list of actual interactions, the findings were quite different. Peter, for example, a man in his early 40s who worked at the University of Groningen as an assistant professor, found out that he had WhatsApp interactions with 55 different individuals or groups in the time frame of 48 hours. And he estimated that this number was reflective of his average WhatsApp usage during the partial lockdown, and that more than half of these contacts were friends and acquaintances living outside the Netherlands. Peter recognized that his usage of WhatsApp increased significantly during the pandemic, and was embedded in local habits that emerged during this period. He described his long walks in the park, which replaced the exercise he used to take at the gym, and were always combined with long calls with friends living abroad or the recording of long audio messages. He installed WhatsApp on his computer and used it during the day when he worked from home alone. When working from the office in pre-pandemic times, he did not use WhatsApp because he could easily chat face-to face with colleagues. WhatsApp communication replaced all those opportunities of face-to-face interactions that disappeared with the lack of office work, social events, travels and mobility. But even in this case, digital communication facilitated mostly transnational interactions. WhatsApp sustained relationships with acquaintances, friends and colleagues abroad that Peter used to meet in his frequent pre-pandemic travels that did not take place anymore. Relationships with friends from Groningen did not move to WhatsApp or other social media.

Federica, who had used social media on a massive scale to communicate with her family in the spring of 2020, described a similar pattern. She significantly restricted her network in Groningen, and stopped contact with many local acquaintances and friends, such as three international colleagues she used to see at work almost every day for lunch and occasionally outside work, and two others she used to hang out with in the evenings. She spent the months of partial lockdown seeing only five or six close friends. At the same time, Federica, exactly like Peter, became more active on WhatsApp with friends living abroad. She did not necessarily strengthen the relationships with them, but the frequency of interaction increased.

Todd is another research participant. He is a musician from the US who had lived in Groningen for 18 years. During the pandemic, all his work-related

activities, music gigs and private classes, were disrupted. He spent a lot of time at home playing music on his own and online. For him, the most remarkable novelty brought by social media during the two years of pandemic was the possibility to play music with other musicians spread around the world, and to post the tracks on YouTube, Instagram and Facebook. He ended up playing with musicians from different countries in Europe and the US, some of them completely new to him. He described this as an amazing experience that reminded him of the reasons why he started playing music in the very first place, which was not the pursuit of money or fame, but rather the possibility to talk to "people's soul" and to "make them happy." He appreciated the spontaneity of these activities, which were not performed to generate income, and brought him joy and new connections with artists around the world. The other noteworthy digital-enabled activity was the weekly group Skype calls with his brother and sister in the US.

Peter, Federica and Todd, like other interviewees, greatly relied on social media to engage with people abroad and fulfil the space left empty by the absence of work-related activities, social and sport events, and travels. At the same time, they all pointed out high levels of digital fatigue and the need for outdoor non-digital experience. Walking became a regular common practice that counterbalanced the excess of indoor digital usage. Groningen was lived through the practice of strolling around the city centre, parks or in the outskirts of the city around lakes and fields, alone or in the company of one friend. Some interviewees mentioned the weekly or biweekly walk at the farmer's market as an important practice to maintain a connection with the city. Others stressed the importance of long jogs in the countryside or the search for new nice nature spots. Another participant gave a thorough description of how the lack of interaction with people from Groningen was compensated by a new interest in the history of the city. His daily walks revolved around the discovery of new old buildings and identifying edifices he had seen in a documentary on Groningen he had watched before. Social media played little role in maintaining a connection with people living in the city. Attachment to the city was instead maintained through a wide range of non-digital solitary practices.

In the two autumns and winters during the pandemic, when government lockdown restrictions were in place, the research participants intensified their communication with friends and family abroad. Transnational online interactions did not have the same extraordinary character they had in the first few months of the pandemic, but became a routine embedded in new daily schedules made up of work-from-home, solitary walks and limited face-to-face encounters.

7.6 Concluding Thoughts

The government measures to control the spread of the coronavirus generated new routines of digital communications that shared similar patterns among my research participants. The movement to digital places of transnational relationships replaced pre-pandemic physical mobility and a mobile sense of place, two important components of highly skilled migrants' life. In this conclusion, I show that enhanced digital communication during partial and full lockdown had consequences for my research participants' experiences of physical locations. Some experienced an emotional detachment from Groningen. Rob, for example, described how, over these two years, he increasingly felt he did not belong to the city anymore. He said:

> Perhaps in pre-pandemic days, this feeling of disconnection was simply more unconscious because you could easily jump on a plane and visit a friend in London or Athens. I had no idea what being stuck here was like!

Social media became Rob's home where he spent a few hours every day. He added:

> This feeling of not-belonging reminded me of the concept of imagined communities! Social media have become my imagined communities, my place of belonging where I can hang out with friends.

The feeling of not-belonging also characterized Chrissy's experience. Chrissy spent the winter of 2020/2021 in her home country. When her job moved entirely online, she decided to go back to Greece to spend time with her family and close friends. She then went back to Greece again for a few months in the summer of 2021, and again for a few weeks over Christmas in 2021/2022. She remained in Groningen since January 2022. During this period, online and offline local connections were limited to a few close friends, and face-to-face activities remained limited despite the re-opening of restaurants, shops and universities. When the usual weekly Friday drinks with colleagues started again in February 2022, she did not participate. Yet, her daily mediated interactions with family in Greece continued to be an important part of Chrissy's everyday life. Over the five years she spent in Groningen, her emotional life was divided between her hometown in Greece and Groningen. But the pandemic brought the balance back to Greece. At the time of the interview in February 2022, she did not feel as connected to Groningen as she had before. She viewed the city as a place to work and move away from as soon as possible to go back to her

home country. On the other hand, Bettina, a 54-year-old woman and mother of two who had lived in Groningen for almost six years, explained to me that life under the pandemic strengthened her attachment to the city, despite the augmented interactions with transnational contacts on social media. WhatsApp interrupted the boredom of her life, broadened her horizons, and put her in touch with people and events elsewhere. She used to obsessively check her smartphone for updates from friends spread around the world, to the point that her teen daughter was keeping track of how many minutes she spent on the phone every day. At the same time, at the start of the pandemic, Bettina started a new professionalizing course that put her in touch with new people. Thanks to this course and her children's school network, she did not isolate herself from local contacts. She declared with a bit of a smile:

> Well, I feel like I had the Stockholm syndrome! I have been complaining about my life here in this city all the time, but after these two years, I feel like I am now emotionally closer to it. My connection to this place has strengthened. I could not travel anymore, I had to stay here all the time, and I've developed new friendships.

Peter similarly felt that his emotional connection to the city was not threatened during the pandemic, even though he spent long hours every day talking with friends around the world. His pre-pandemic life was largely spent outside the city, travelling for conferences and research trips. The lack of mobility forced him to be in Groningen and reinforced the relationships he had with a few closer friends.

All the international professionals I talked to recognized the increased frequency and significance of digital transnational communication with friends and family during the two years of pandemic. Against the backdrop of forced immobility, highly skilled migrants moved to social media to experience multiple places and maintain a mobile lifestyle. By doing so, they reorganized multiple belongings and affiliations online. In most cases, but not all, transnational online socialities, as well as the suspension of in-person social and work activities, contributed to detaching them from the physical location of Groningen. Thus, digital practices of online place-making did not affect attachments towards the physical locations in a linear and direct manner. Instead, they recreated multiple belongings to different online and offline places that were profoundly disrupted by the pandemic. Social media enabled the move through places and the crafting of a mobile self in the context of forced immobility. While the people described in this chapter do not speak for the thousands of other skilled migrants living in Groningen and elsewhere in

Europe, they nevertheless shed light on the importance of mediated relationships in the making of digital and non-digital places. They also address the role of digital communications in recreating mobile selves and a mobile sense of place when opportunities of physical mobility are limited. These stories also call for more research that foregrounds the study of digital technologies, social relationships and the production of places in the context of mobile migration.

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8. When Immovable Bodies Meet Unstoppable Media Circulation: The Aporetic Body in Digital Migration Studies

Nishant Shah

Abstract

In this chapter, I seek to unpack the ways in which the idea of the migrant body is constructed through digital technologies as a heterotopic body in motion. Drawing from discourse in digital cultures around conditions of migration—both for bodies and data—I argue that the ways in which the body is imagined to move mimics the pathways through which data is made to be mobile. In the process, I offer digital affect as a way of interrupting this focus on relentless circulation, again, both of data and bodies, and instead look at the body that is being digitally moved and physically stuck, creating conditions of aporia where self-intelligibility and determination often remain unresolved.

Keywords: digital migration; affect; immobility; data circulation.

8.1 Introduction

It is in the very nature of digital migration studies to focus on conditions of dislocation, movement and travel, because the body in question is a body that is in motion. In fact, the severe roadblocks—literally and figuratively—that a migrant body experiences in traversing geographical and other boundaries, have often been seen as an obstacle or a problem that needs to be addressed because of the (in)visible violence they exert on people on their migrant journeys. Much of the attention of digital migration studies has been on how migrants use, appropriate and creatively expand digital technologies

to enhance and augment their migration processes and experiences. At the heart of this discourse is the concept of circulation—the movement of data, information, bodies—and how we relate to it. It is possible to identify some of the thematic trends in digital migrant studies in how we discursively shape and identify the body of the migrant and its relationship with digital technologies.

In this chapter, I seek to unpack the ways in which the idea of the migrant body is constructed through digital technologies as a heterotopic body in motion. Drawing from discourse in digital cultures around conditions of migration—both for bodies and data—I argue that the ways in which the body is imagined to move, mimics the pathways through which data is made to be mobile. I establish that we need to resist the idea of a body which can be easily moved, be in motion or be mobile, which digital communication technologies often present in their vectoral modelling of the world. In the process, I offer digital affect as a way of interrupting this focus on relentless circulation, again, both of data and bodies, and instead look at the body that is being digitally moved and physically stuck, creating conditions of aporia where self-intelligibility and determination often remain unresolved.

8.2   Technology Usage

It is no surprise that some of the biggest areas of interest in the field are migrants' use of digital technologies to conceptualize, plan and catalyse their migration processes. The use of digital technologies has not only offered material imaginations of migration but has also led to a vast proliferation of discussion boards, experience sharing forums and testimonials that help people seeking migration to build the aspiration and the future of their migrant destinies.

Drawing upon the work of anthropologist Arjun Appadurai (1996, p. 4), who, in his significant thesis on modernity had made the connection be- tween "electronic mediation and mass migration," Koen Leurs and Kevin Smets (2018) make a powerful argument about the ways in which the forced migrant at the centre of the so-called "European refugee crisis" is often visually and discursively portrayed as smart-phone carrying, technologically savvy, digitized migrant. In their special issue on *Forced Migration and Digital Connectivity in(to) Europe*, they remind us that:

> media and communication technologies have historically played an
> essential role in the everyday lives of migrants across the world. Migrants

have maintained networks and relationships across distance and borders
through exchanging letters and audio-cassettes, setting up diaspora
newspapers, transnational radio stations, accessing satellite television,
engaging in transnational telephone conversations and sending remit-
tances (Leurs & Smets, 2018, p. 2).

They also offer a compelling overview of "various conflicting digital
migration imaginaries," showing the large landscape of organizations,
actors, institutions and bodies that shape the idea of who is a migrant
and what kinds of governmental, informational, datafied, and networked
migrant practices are focused on, when studying these digital migration
practices.

It is important, to take from their intervention, that the idea of a migrant's
relationship with technology usage is not merely about the migrant as using
technologies, but the migrant as also shaped by a complex ecosystem of
networked digital technologies that mark, control, govern and facilitate
the migration processes, through a sophisticated system of surveillance
networks and data management practices.

The very act of migration, in many of these political acts of refuge and
asylum seeking, is extremely tightly managed through digital infrastruc-
tures. Technologies become the double-edged swords that allow migrants to
enter into new negotiations with digital technologies even as their identities
are calibrated by those controlling their movement, legitimacy and rights.
Sound artist and educator Pedro Oliviera, in his video installation *The
Grounds From Which to Speak* (2020), draws attention to the fact that digital
biometric technologies are an intimidating combination of the technical
and the aesthetic, where systems of visualization and sound define and
conform the legitimacy of the migrant body. He shows how the sounds
and accents of people seeking asylum on the European borders are be-
ing collected by machine learning technologies to create soundscapes of
legitimacy (2019), which convert human speech into machine norms, thus
"calibrating within a set of normative assumptions that, in effect, convey
white supremacist modes of seeing and listening" (2019, p. 2). His work
is echoed in Tom Western's (2020) critical analysis that reminds us that
sound is "at the centre of migration" and we need to pay attention to how
"political subjectivities are made through sonic practices in the present,
and connecting these to histories of movement" (p. 295) (see also Chapter 13
by Leix-Palumbo.

The migrant body is often studied in this duality of using and being used
by digital technologies to create a sense of control and management of a body

that is primarily seen as being in motion, and its milestones being collected as data points that circulate with the movement of the biological body.

Appropriate Technologies

The ambiguity of the term appropriate is useful in understanding the second set of digital media practices that create discursive attention for the migrant bodies. This is the body that is both appropriating technologies that it is not historically seen as rightfully owning, and the body that is appropriated by technologies into performing particular roles and practices online to gain legitimacy and find an audience for its states of transition.

Radhika Gajjala's landmark work exploring the ways in which cyberspaces have become the nodes at which various locals connect and disconnect in the production of the global is a significant study that helps understand how the subaltern body and context are erased and reconstructed to default imaginaries, by thinking of the subaltern (or the migrant) as necessarily outside the fold of the digital. In her participatory ethnography project with weavers and artisan women who are approached by online and social media labour management platforms, Gajjala (2013, p. 9) shows how specific kinds of subaltern bodies—marked by underprivileges of gender, caste, class, ethnicity and nationality—were negotiating technocultural agencies and performing acts of "digital migration" into environments like Second Life, by "moments of displacement and replacement as their avataric bodies shifted their offline subjectivities into affective dispersals." Gajjala's focus continues to reinforce how the idea of the appropriate was inscribed and also recalibrated with these new bodies finding their space in these practices of digital migration.

The question of technologies and their appropriation—often under the guise of digital literacy—also brings forth a new kind of body to be studied: The body that has to be migrated into the digital technological space. Asha Achuthan, in her intellectually expansive philosophy of science and technology in India, *Re:Wiring Bodies* (2011), shows that the body of the indigenous woman was always marked with technologies in two ways: First, as a body that is dissociated from the modernity and advancement of technology, thus marked by absence and loss, and second, as a body that is incapable of managing the technologies that it has access to, and is thus dangerous and in need of control. Achuthan's work reminds us that there is a perpetual anxiety about what the body, migrating into digital technologies, would do with those technologies, because the imagination is that it might not know what might be appropriate within these spaces.

So rampant is this anxiety about what the migrant body will do with these technologies, that as Elizabeth Losh shows us in *Selfie Democracy* (2022), it becomes a standard trope in both migration studies that exoticizes the content and practices of migrant media use and in digital media policies that imagine the migrant body in conjunction with digital technologies as a cyborgified threat that will destabilize the social order in its excesses and ignorance. Much of the attention in digital migration studies is on how the body is used, translated and rendered in digital worlds and how these worlds map back onto the physical contexts of the body as it moves through multiple registers and domains.

Intimate Technologies

There is a profound intimacy between migrant bodies and the technologies of care and pleasure. Larissa Hjorth (2017), in her comprehensive work on cell-phone usage in the Asia-Pacific, demonstrates how the mobile phone becomes not just an extension but also a palimpsest of migrant life. From the migrant workers in Hong Kong who have left their families behind to look after other peoples' families, to the "digital diaspora" which keeps in touch with families and friends through distributed media channels, Hjorth shows that intimacy is not just personal but also transactional and social, giving us the idea of "mobile co-presence," also seen in Hjorth's solo exhibition at the Gyenoggi Museum of Modern Art in Seoul, *Still Mobile* (2010).

At the same time, as Denise Tang Tse Se, (2017) argues in her study of queer lesbian community organizations in Hong Kong and other parts of Asia, these technologies also facilitate micro-migrations: The affordance of stepping out of the known context, the confined social circles and the restrictive mores, to form new forms of kinship and new bonds of connectivity, as queer bodies perform acts of temporary migration, to return to the points of origin but always with the possibility of escape. This is a condition that Tejaswini Niranjana and Eunsoo Lee (2022) also point out in their ongoing ethnographic project with "digital intimacy" that looks at how the publicly confined bodies of young women in India and China "migrate," not to the online spaces, but to physical spaces facilitated by these digital tools. It also raises the accompanying question of mobility and mobile phones, which, as Gerard Goggin (2021) points out in his book on *Apps*, remains intertwined so that mobility without the mobile phone remains almost unthinkable.

All of these three thematic tropes are useful because they critically show us that the ways in which the migrant body is constructed through digital technologies are simultaneously multivocal and migratory. The

migrant body and the digital technologies of circulation often mimic each other, traversing through parallel but interconnected and intersectional forms of circulation and control. All of these different modes of thinking through the migrant body and its relationship with the digital are crucial because they help us in understanding the ways by which mobility, mobile technologies and migrant bodies all throw up important clues about what digital migration studies can focus on and what disciplines and approaches it can exploit in these investigations.

8.3   The Body that Shall Not Move

Having conducted this symptomatic review of some of the major body-digital technology frameworks and approaches, I still think that the digital migrant body that this essay began with offers an exceptional disruption of the dominant discourse. This is a body that I am calling the aporetic body of digital migration—a body that has all the trappings of being a migrant body but is also stopped from being mobile or migrant. A body that is caught in a strong paradox where it is instituted as migrant and is also forcibly held back from being mobile, thus creating a strange conundrum of how it could be studied. It is a body that cannot move—is in a state of confinement, immobility or exile. It is a condition of a would-be-migrant or future refugee, not yet dislocated or in motion, but also not allowed to be so. It is a body that has always been at the margins of digital migration studies: We study the asylum seeker who did make it, looking at their digital media practices, but what do we do with and know of the parent who is left behind, who will never move, but still has performed the act of migration, and lives through the mediated digital experience? Identified as "mobility bias" (Schewel, 2020), the fault lines of these inquiries reveal the thinness of approaches when it comes to addressing the "affective and symbolic immobility" (Smets, 2019) that confines people to address or imagine themselves as mobile.

   The Covid-19 pandemic and its longue durée of lockdowns, confinements and enforced mobility perhaps brought this migrant and dislocated body to the fore in dramatic ways. I can make this more concrete by looking at a particular performance staged in Arnhem, the Netherlands, in the early days of the global pandemic lockdowns.

   On 20 June, 2020 Bengaluru-based Indian performance artist Anushka Nair, then living in the Netherlands, set up a public performance on the streets of Arnhem. Titled *Naming the Unnamed* (*2020*), it was a durational performance that followed the hours of a 9-to-5 work day, as Nair focused

Figure 8.1. Performance artist Anushka Nair, performing the task of naming the unnamed migrant workers in India who died trying to return home during the Covid-19 lockdown. Photo by Anushka Nair.

on the predicament of migrant workers in India in the wake of the Covid-19 pandemic. The glass wall behind her was covered in rice flour patterns, reminiscent of the *Kolam Rangoli* decorative art that marks many Hindu Brahmin household entrances across many states in India. Nair replaced the traditional stone powder with white flour, which she also used to adorn her own performing body, as she sat with a bowl of rice, some thin marker pens and tweezers, on a street that saw people moving around cautiously, following the dictates of the "smart lockdown" in the Netherlands.

In times when proximity was pathologized and touch was suspicious, Nair invited people to sit across a table from her, hands sanitized, masks worn, as she pointed to a scroll of names. The participant in the performance was asked to pick a name and help her write it on a grain of rice, painstakingly, using tweezers and a pen to write a name of a stranger, concentrating on both the shape of the letters as well as the arduousness of the task. The performance was a re-staging of traditional temple bazaars where skilled artisans write the names of loved ones—at childbirth, at marriage, at death—on a grain of rice, and preserve them in pendants, jewellery or small bottles to mark the auspicious moment when the blessings of the deity are being sought.

As the day went by, more people, largely local residents from Arnhem, joined her in checking off a name on the scroll and writing those names on rice. As people wrote these names, giggling, squirming, sighing in frustration, infuriated by their lack of the skill required to perform the task, sitting and meditating on the laborious act of commemorating, Nair talked to them. She talked to them about the state of the pandemic and the ways

Figure 8.2. Participants in the performance performing the labour of writing names on rice to revitalise the names otherwise forgotten. Photo by Anushka Nair.

in which it is shaping our lives dramatically. She talked to them about the difference between infrastructure-rich countries like the Netherlands and less regulated countries like India where state and social support were not available to many (Jesline et al., 2021). She told them about the horrifying stories that were emerging from India, where, in the face of a complete nation-wide lockdown without any warning and with minimal economic support, thousands of migrant workers tried to walk "home" (Express Web Desk, 2020) as they sought either to be close to their families or to escape hunger and starvation in the face of financial poverty—the imagined home left behind and aspired for, offering some hope of well-being (Ranjan, 2021).

As the trains and buses were halted and borders between states were closed, measures fuelled by extreme anxiety of cross-over transmission of Covid-19 and the threat of contagion spreading along the lines of move-ment, the migrant workers often found themselves in a state of limbo. News started trickling in, of workers, often with small children, dragging their meagre belongings, being stopped at state borders, where they were stuck with minimal care, not allowed to proceed further, and not able to return from where they had started. In the 21 days of the lockdown, at least 200 migrant workers reportedly died, as they walked, trying to cover thousands of kilometres on foot, in the hope of survival (Banerji, 2020). There is a distinct possibility that the number of people who died in trying to achieve these acts of internal migration and were stopped by law enforcement, contained by border control, hosed down and sterilized with chemical agents, and left to die without support or shelter was much higher. In the days when

"shelter and place" had become the mantra, it was clear that home was a site of privilege, both as an imaginary as well as a destination.

Nair's performance had many elements to it. Like most of the Indian diaspora, unable to travel back to the country, and living in perpetual anxiety about the health of family and communities back home, she realized that connection in any meaningful way would be impossible. The pre-pandemic nature of international travel and the ease of connectivity had often been the emotional lifeline of those leaving families and loved ones behind in order to go and live in other countries. With the flights suspended and mobility an impossibility, there was very little material connection beyond WhatsApp family chat groups and video calls—both of them too transactional and not intuitive for inter-generational conversations and communication. The only connection left in those days of suspended mobility was memory, stories and sharing. Nair's invitation to write on rice was a way of establishing contact with something material, something familiar, something ritualistic—something intimate that the digital connection did not offer.

However, the primary focus of *Naming the Unnamed* was not the resolution of a personal state of anxiety. It was an act of political intervention, in which the statistics of Covid-19 deaths were being reclaimed as human names, bodies and people. Even as we normalized graphs and visual charts as a way of representing human loss, death and suffering, Nair wanted to dig deep under those visualizations to recover the names and the people who were being swept into deathly oblivion. Making space for holding memories, and meditating on those who were lost as numbers on a statistical curve, she invited people to express their own anxieties and stories of living with the threat of terminal loss. The act of reclaiming the names was even more poignant because Nair's performance constantly reminded the participants of their own privileges and small paranoias when compared to massive infrastructure failure and apathy of countries that could not afford the burdens of such lockdowns. By focusing on some of the most underprivileged and underserved communities of migrant workers in India, forcing us to learn their names, to remember them, to acknowledge their loss, even when we did not personally know them, Nair initiated gentle conversations to turn our fears inside out. Without downplaying the anxiety of the individuals and their personal struggles, she elicited reflections on the need to also think of people outside our immediate circles, and to talk about distance, death, migration, longing and belonging, in poetic, intimate, and poignant ways.

Nair's own focus was on the need for creating spaces where something as commonplace as rice can become a medium of creating an affective network of holding, caring and connecting with the global state of suffering

and anxiety (TNN, 2020). As she wrote in her Facebook post announcing the performance,

> Let me name the unnamed. A hundred and more migrant and daily wave workers from India were displaced and helpless due to lack of food and unemployment as the world came to a standstill due to the Coronavirus. The systemic ignorance of their needs plunged them into a crisis even deeper than the virus itself (Nair, 2020).

In her performance, she wanted to highlight a number of questions, such as: "Who are these people? What are their names? ... Can we acknowledge and remember them?" It was a powerful performance about grief, remembrance, connectivity and the capacity to offer our time, attention and empathy to those we are distanced and detached from, by geography and difference.

Even though Anushka Nair does not focus on it, I think her *Naming the Unnamed* gives rise to another question: That of the migrant body that is migrant *in potentia.* Her work evokes a strange conundrum of the digital practices of migration for a body that aspires to migrate, to move, to be mobile, but is restricted from doing so. Migrant workers, already migrants and settled in their new home, suddenly became trapped, unable to un-immigrate back to the imaginary home that they were marked by. It is these migrants are marked by all the trappings of migration but are only able to perform it through digital media that I draw from Nair's performance to present them as a new figure of attention for doing digital migration studies.

8.4   The Aporetic Body

This is the new body that challenges us to expand the scope of digital migration studies. I call it the aporetic body. Jacques Derrida (1976/2016), in his formulation of "possible-impossible aporias" gave us the theoretical apparatus to understand affective paradoxes which are made possible only through their impossibility. As a part of his deconstructive criticism, he identified aporia as "a point of undecidability, which locates the site at which the text most obviously undermines its own rhetorical structure, dismantles, or deconstructs itself" (p. 17). His critical apparatus encouraged the deliberate seeking out of contradiction, and not its resolution but its revelatory capacities that help understand the forces that sustain it. Luce Irigaray further develops the idea of the "aporetic turn" when she contends that in Western culture, women are defined as aporetic subjects—described

in terms of deficiency or atrophy, as the other side of the sex that alone holds a monopoly on value: the male sex (1985, p. 69). Thus, she begins a quest for "sexual difference" by which both sexes are considered as genuinely different rather than opposites or complements of each other.

The migrant body under question carries traces of both these frameworks. The migrant, in the case of the erstwhile migrant worker in India who was trying to re-migrate towards the origin that is called home, is a truly aporetic subject. On the one hand, these migrants are marked by all the trappings of being a dislocated subject. They are removed from home, have mediated communication with families and communities left behind, send money to support their dependents, consume local language art and media forms, and use the cell phone extensively to stay in touch with their roots. Most of these migrants, who were willing to traverse back "home" would not consider themselves migrants. Many have lived in those spaces for decades, forming homes, families, and kinship in their new urban centres of livelihood and life, and would have called themselves "local" in much the same ways that Walter Benjamin's "flaneur" (1982) was local. And yet, in times of crisis, when the cities suddenly shut down, when businesses were locked up, and non-unionized workers were left to their own devices, their first instinct was to return home.

As public transportation came to a halt, and porous state borders went into lock-down, their embodied experience of migration, as well as the assurance that their cell phone would give them access to the different communities of migrant settlements, started them off on this arduous journey "home". However, they realized to their dismay that the identity that they had discarded—that of a migrant—was truly being taken away from them, and that the possibility of migration was now no longer available to them.

The aporetic body of digital migration studies is this body that was marked by motion but which was not allowed to move. It is a body that has the complete digital infrastructure of imagining and managing its mobility but is confined and contained by the same technologies that otherwise gives it affordances of migration. It is a body which has "come out" only to be pushed back into the spaces of invisible containment, suddenly rendered helpless because its survival skills and identities of migration have been taken away from it. Many died, almost as if the taking away of their migrant, nomadic identities was not just the death of their subjectivity but also their biological demise at the hands of a callous and careless state apparatus that saw these migrant bodies as vectors of contagion and as disposable in the midst of a national health crisis. Many returned to their spaces of precarious living, where their migrant labour practices were shut down, their migrant

settlements looked at with suspicion, and the only space for them to exercise their migrant identities was through digital infrastructures of WhatsApp message groups and social media chatter.

This then produces the aporetic digital migrant: A person who is recognized through and marked by the processes of migration, thus being inscribed into the subjectivity and negotiations of a migrant community and its political economy. A person who is then shaped to be migrant, never allowed to be settled or stationary, and installed into labour circuits that keep them uprooted and moving in order to facilitate a mobile work force. A person who, despite generations of living and accruing of life and property, will always be marked, in context and through community structures, as not-belonging to the new land, being continually shaped in the aspiration of "going back home." A person who is also immersed in the nostalgia of a "lost home," and uses digital technologies to both recreate and stay connected with that home that they would one day recover. And then, paradoxically, or perhaps aporetically, this is also a person who will never be allowed to materially realize this practice of return. The person will be thought of as migrant even though they will not be allowed to move or travel any more between the points of origin and living. Unlike a person in exile or a person who has escaped home, this is a migrant who is now only capable of circumlocution through digital practices without ever a chance to return. The aporetic migrant is in the orbit of the home, and never moves dramatically far enough to make a break from the home but is also not allowed to chart new pathways back to home.

The aporetic body is one that is marked physically for migration but is allowed only digital circulation. In physical sciences, this condition of aporia is identified in thought experiments as a state in which an immovable object meets an unstoppable force, thus creating an impasse of passage. The digital migrant in these conditions occupies this peculiar space, where the geographical restrictions disallow them to move, and the digital practices are all only geared towards mobility and movement, thus creating a great schism between the imagined and the lived, the aspirational and the contained. Coming to the fore with the Covid-19 pandemic, this aporetic migrant is a new subject that digital migration studies will have to acknowledge and reckon with, realizing that it is at the same time a subjectivity that migration studies scholars and researchers also started experiencing when the mobility that they had taken for granted went away, leaving them struggling to understand how to do their research when they were also subject to the confinement charm of "shelter and place.'

8.5   The Unbearable Lightness of Digital Affect

This chapter is a call to theorize, conceptualize and understand the peculiar condition of the aporetic turn that the recent global events have ushered in. While there were always bodies unable to move or able to move only at great risk, the idea that the migrating body is also an immovable body is a new and interesting challenge. The digital movements of these immovable bodies can be studied, but they cannot be the answer. The accelerated circulation of data that precedes the body, the ways in which the body is assigned meaning, value and worth without its knowledge and consent, and the extraordinary systems of surveillance and exclusion that it would lead to—this digital circulation without physical movement, would be precarious business. The idea that immersion in virtual worlds, or discussion forums, or DIY channels of content creation might offer a way out of the immobility will have to be abandoned. In fact, interventions in digital technology and media studies would have to pay specific attention to making sure that the information and digital practices of these immovable bodies are not dissociated from their lived experience and context. As Kelly Kim, from South Korea, has repeatedly pointed out (2021), the scope of data has to be defined—digital data cannot be allowed to circulate and expand indefinitely because it installs the individual in systems of valuation and worthiness that are beyond the individual's consent or capacity to comprehend.

Digital affect, I am proposing, is the force that breaks through this aporia. There has been a growing interest in affect studies and how digital technologies engage with the cultural politics and material cultures of affect in recent times. Many of the theorists and practitioners of digital affect have been able to show a different site of inquiry—not a third space between the physical and the virtual, but a comprehensive space that encompasses both simultaneously—where our inquiries might be able to break through the impasse of this aporetic body. While there are many incredible affect theory scholars and there is some very persuasive scholarship that also looks at the role of digital technologies in production, circulation and management of affect, I will draw inspiration specifically from two powerful and compelling scholars who present digital affect as a methodological tool rather than just as an object of analysis.

Wendy Chun approaches digital affect through the frameworks of habituation and habits. In her 2008 book *Updating to Remain the Same*, Chun looks at another kind of impasse that is often experienced by female-identifying people in online spaces: On the one hand, they are habituated into conditions of revealing, being invited to micro-document their lives,

feelings and experiences for consumption. On the other hand, they are constantly shamed and gaslighted when their stories become critical or question the structures of power that they are in negotiation with. Chun points out that this is not a paradox but an impasse, where the body is first habituated into revealing and then put into the habit of accepting the blame for that revelation. In her work in software studies, Chun takes her cue from Eve Sedgwick (1997), eschewing a "paranoid reading"—one in which all our political energy is invested in the revelation of the known problem, and instead employing a "reparative reading," in which through whimsy, experimentation and creative interventions, we think about repair and reconstitution of this body at the centre of the problem. Chun offers us the idea of affect as the space that escapes the habituation and instead becomes the space of inhabitation. If we transfer this framework to our question, it opens up a new site of inquiry and a new framework of approach for digital migration studies, where we look at the ways in which the affective dimensions of these immovable bodies are put into circulation—instead of looking at their literal productions or their digital contexts, we focus on the different states of migration, each one of which can be broken down further into an affective one, which allows for a conversation that is about longing, belonging and ownership thus allowing for the aporetic body to migrate not merely into the digital but also into the affective realms, that build communities, solidarity and compassion.

The work of Maya Indira Ganesh is not dissimilar to Chun, but it belongs in a very different register of scholarship. In her brilliant work on the making of an autonomous vehicle and the ethics of decision making (2022), Ganesh identifies another aporetic condition that is embedded in the proverbial "trolley problem." The trolley problem presented to us as a question of machine ethics, is about an autonomous trolley that, when faced with the chance of an accident, has to choose which direction to veer towards and whom to hit, immediately posing the question of the "values" that such a trolley would have take into consideration in making its choice. In her multi-stakeholder ethnography and collaborative co-creation practice, Ganesh points out that if we take the seemingly impossible-to-solve trolley problem as a given, then no creative solution is going to find a way out of the problem. Echoing Derrida's idea of aporia, she insists that the trolley problem is solvable only in its insolubility. Hence, instead of looking at the impasse—or the aporia if you will—we need to look at the discursive building of the problem itself. Gesturing towards Foucault's genealogical approaches, Ganesh proposes that what is needed in these moments of irresolution, is to look at the discourse that supports the aporia. The ways

in which specific narratives of aporia are presented, experienced and emotionally made to proliferate often make us believe that they are the *naturalized* options, and sometimes the only options. It is an interesting inversion to position affect not merely as an experience of these narratives but as a construction of these, thus looking at machine circulation and the physical confinement as enforced in order to produce affect. In this, we no longer focus on the experience of digital migration, but focus on the affect that this particular kind of digital migration is supposed to produce, as a form of governance and maintenance of status quo.

Within digital migration studies, the role of affect and the ways in which affect is used as a form of producing aporetic migrant bodies, are still not fully developed. We do not have a critical apparatus that can include affect both as material infrastructure and as a site of inquiry that breaks through the gridlock of immovable bodies and unfettered digital circulation. The aporetic turn of the global pandemic shows the fault lines where our theoretical frameworks falter and thus give us the opportunity of expanding the scope of our conceptualization. At the same time, the recent experiences also warn us that the aporetic body is not an occasional one but one that has always been present and made invisible, and a state that we can all be ushered into at any point, and thus a body that needs to receive more attention through the frameworks of digital affect. This is why I return to the performance of Anushka Nair: what she was facilitating, in naming the unnamed, was neither the movement of people, nor merely the circulation of their data, but the affect of this condition which built solidarity and conversations between two sets of immovable bodies that can find digital connections in a grain of rice.

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9. Queer Digital Migration Research: Two Case Studies

Yener Bayramoğlu

Abstract

After outlining theoretical debates within queer digital migration scholarship, this chapter focuses on two case studies. The first case deals with how queer refugees from the Middle East engage with digital platforms, particularly with dating apps. The messiness of experiences with such apps comes to the fore; while they can help migrants find love or practical support, they also reproduce racist structures. The second example traces the production of an online podcast series. This project provided an opportunity for diverse participants to celebrate and reflect upon the legacy of older generations of Turkish queer migrants and queer public figures. The process of its production also revealed fragmentation among the queer diaspora and highlighted the challenges of fostering queer intergenerational dialogue digitally.

Keywords: queer migration; digital media; diaspora; Turkey; Middle East.

9.1 Introduction

There is a growing scholarly interest in understanding how border regimes and migration patterns intersect with normativities relating to sexuality and gender identities, and how migrants from outside the landscapes of hetero- and cisnormativity cope with a world shaped by racist anti-immigration policies (Altay et al., 2020; Luibhéid & Chávez, 2020). Queer migration scholarship, as Eithne Luibhéid (2008) observes, has not only drawn on but also enriched several bodies of research, including feminist, race, postcolonial and globalization studies. Over the last couple of decades, scholars have explored a wide range of topics including, but not limited to,

queer migration politics that challenge the normative perspectives at the intersection of immigration politics and queer rights (Chávez, 2013); how the quantitative approaches, evaluations and statistical data that shape discourses on migration erase the struggles of queer migrants (Manalansan, 2018); the temporality of being in limbo and the sense of experiencing a "slow death" in places such as Turkey, where queer refugees await resettlement in the Global North (Shakhsari, 2014); or how humanitarian imagery portraying queer refugees reduce manifold queer migrant stories to a unidimensional representation of a suffering subject (Saleh, 2020). A relatively recent addition to this exciting growing body of literature, to which this chapter aims to offer a contribution, is concerned with how digital media are entangled with queer migration.[1]

Of particular interest here are possible directions, methodologies and theoretical explorations within queer digital migration research. In the following, I present two case studies drawing on my past research. The first focuses on how queer refugees from the Middle East engage with digital platforms, particularly with dating apps. I discuss the messiness of their experiences with dating apps, which turn out to not only help them find love or arrange liaisons, but also reproduce racism. While dating apps can be appropriated by migrants to address needs beyond those anticipated by the apps' creators, such as finding accommodation or engaging in transnational activism, they can also impose culturally-specific understandings of sexuality and gender, which regulate intimacy. The second case study is concerned with a podcast series on a digital platform. While the series provided an opportunity for celebration and reflected upon the legacy of older generations of queer migrants and queer public figures, the process of its production also revealed fragmentation among the queer diaspora and highlighted the challenges of fostering intergenerational dialogue within it. Taken together, both cases demonstrate the manifold possibilities digital media can open up for queer migrants, while recognizing associated restrictions. Furthermore, they each showcase different ways of doing queer digital migration research.

Before I shed light on theoretical debates within the existing body of literature on queer digital migration, I would like to briefly discuss my understanding of *queerness* within queer migration. While some scholars use queer as an umbrella term for LGBTIQ+ identities, I feel more intellectual kinship with scholars such as Manalansan (2018), who use the term as

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1   Earlier versions of some of the arguments made in this chapter appeared in *Sexuality & Culture* (Bayramoğlu, 2022) and *Global Media Journal* (Bayramoğlu & Lünenborg, 2018).

an adjective that destabilizes concepts, presumptions and normativities while questioning the very notion of identity. For my purposes here, the coupling *queer migration* productively intervenes into the scholarship and politics of migration by critically questioning the racialized hetero- and cisnormativities that shape current migration discourses, representations, policies and more. It also distances itself from homonationalist perspectives on migration that oversimplistically construct the movement of LGBTIQ+ individuals from the Global South to the North as a teleological progression from repression to liberation. While some earlier studies of queer migration identified sexuality as the primary motivation for migration for persons hoping to reinvent themselves as non-heterosexuals (e.g., Gorman-Murray, 2009, p. 443), I explore queer migration within its wider context including aspects beyond sexuality and gender identity. As the recent armed conflicts in Syria and Ukraine have shown, LGBTIQ+ individuals flee not only from homophobia and transphobia, but also from war. Furthermore, critical scholarly engagement with digital media allows for an exploration of the wide range of coping strategies, transnational connectivity and new forms of affectivity such media make accessible to queers, while remaining alert to potential negative aspects such as datafication of queer migrant lives, increased fragmentation among queer communities and the reproduction of inequalities. Taking the above considerations into account, this chapter seeks to examine everyday digital media practices that can shed light on the ambivalences of digital media for queer lifeworlds (Ponzanesi & Leurs, 2022, p. 116). For queer migrants entangled in postcolonial continuities, racialized border regimes and digitalized borders (Chouliaraki & Georgiou, 2022), the ambivalent character of digital media becomes all the more apparent as they utilize digital technology in their quest for self-empowerment, connection and becoming.

9.2 Queer Digital Migration: Theoretical Debates

The theoretical debates within queer digital migration scholarship address several key concepts and frameworks such as identity, social and global inequalities, spaces, emotions and affect. Like other identity constructions and performances in times of "deep mediatization" (Couldry & Hepp, 2017, p. 145), queer migrants' sense of self and identity is deeply entangled with digital media technologies. As one aspect of this, some scholars have explored how forced and voluntary migration are digitally mediated and impact upon coming out processes among queer migrants (Patterson & Leurs, 2019). While

coming out might be a useful concept in understanding digitally mediated and constructed identities, there has been growing critique from queer of colour scholarship of the Euro-American-centric emphasis on coming out as key to understanding queer lifeworlds (Gopinath, 2005; Manalansan, 2003; Savcı, 2021)—a criticism that digital migration scholarship has yet to respond to. As the queer of colour critique pointed out, not everyone needs to come out in order to develop a happy, healthy sense of identity. Looking at the everyday digital media practices of queer migrants can also reveal multiple facets of identity that are far more complex than singular categorizations can account for. Multiple experiences and intersectional inequalities often lead to the fragmentation of identity. Alexander Dhoest's research, for instance, explores how some queer migrants hide their queerness on Facebook, which they use to stay in touch with straight friends and family, while choosing PlanetRomeo, a gay dating platform, to seek connections with other queers (Dhoest, 2019, p. 395). This differential usage of digital platforms splits certain aspects of identities across digital presences. By borrowing José Esteban Muñoz' concept of "disidentification" (Muñoz, 1999), Szulc explores how Polish non-binary and trans migrants cope with the binary gender constructions of digital media platforms (Szulc, 2020). Szulc's work also demonstrates how queer migrants' selves become fragmented as they move not only between languages but also from one digital platform to another. Moreover, digital media simultaneously open up possibilities to experiment with gender and sexuality while universalizing Euro-American categorizations of sexual and gender diversity (Atay, 2021; Bayramoğlu & Lünenborg 2018).

Importantly, current theoretical debates address the reproduction of *inequalities* in digital spaces. Digital media platforms can become harmful places that reproduce not only heteronormativity but also racism (Daroya, 2018; Robinson, 2015). Andrew Shield's research, for instance, explores how the gay dating platforms Grindr and PlanetRomeo reproduce patterns of racism, and shows how everyday racism, including insults directed at immigrants, racial/sexual exclusion and racial fetishization, have become part of everyday digital communication (Shield, 2018). Queer digital migration brings forth a critical engagement with global inequalities as well, tracing how current racialized border regimes immobilize and inflict suffering (Shakhsari, 2014). In this context, queer migrants can develop strategies of "digital resilience" (Udwan et al., 2020) by using digital media to get in touch with transnational solidarity and support networks that might be able to assist their migration to safer countries. This, in turn, is intertwined with another form of global inequality, in which media represent the Global North

as a safe haven, rendering the inequalities that persist there invisible. Such media representations feed homonational perceptions of Muslim countries in particular as places where queer lives cannot survive (Lee & Brotman, 2011; Puar, 2007). In addition, further intersectional inequalities relating to class, age and ability may lead to unequal access to queer digital platforms. This need not necessarily be due to a lack of resources but can be an effect of simply not feeling part of a digitalized world (Bayramoğlu, 2022, p. 12) or refusing to use certain digital platforms in order to distance oneself from "surveillance capitalism" (Zuboff, 2019).

Existing research has demonstrated how digital media change the perception of *space*: seemingly reducing the relevance of physical distance and thus compressing the world (van Dijk, 2020, p. 112). Exploring this idea, scholars have studied how digital media help migrants to stay connected with their countries of origin (Diminescu, 2008) and to continue to engage with the discourses and policies of places that they have left behind (Alonso & Oiarzabal, 2010, p. 11). For queer migrants, the compression of the world may open opportunities for transnational activism and connectivity (Bayramoğlu & Lünenborg, 2018). And yet, some queer migrants might prefer to be disconnected from certain ethno-cultural spaces, or from family members and relatives in their countries of origin, to protect themselves from potential harm (Dhoest, 2019). Maintaining weak ties with the country of origin via digital media can help processes of placemaking in the country of settlement (Yu & Blain, 2019). Furthermore, digital technologies utilized in surveillance reinforce the racialized and heteronormative structures of borderscapes. For example, Christine Quinan and Mina Hunt have observed how advanced biometric technologies deployed in airports are dependent on a stable, binary conception of gender. Devices such as body scanners register nonconformant bodies as errors, therefore forcing trans and non-binary individuals to bend to these heteronormative technological systems (Quinan & Hunt, 2022).

By making it possible for migrants to build and sustain emotional and affective ties with people in geographically distant spaces, digital media create new forms of *affects and emotions* (Alinejad & Ponzanesi, 2020; Andreassen, 2017). Digital social networking is not only dependent on the body's capacity to be affected by what is shown on a smartphone, but also by its capacity to affect other bodies with which it is "in contact" via the smartphone. Users interact with each other via digital devices and through digitalized affects. Furthermore, in the case of virtual intimacy or online dating platforms, affects often come into play before any online communication has taken place. Hopes and fears shape the decisions made when setting up

a profile. McGlotten's ethnographic research (2013) illustrates, for instance, the impact of anxiety on Black gay men's online self-representations. Sexual encounters may help migrants to feel connected, but can also exacerbate feelings of "otherness," as Atay (2021) observes. While most scholarship on migrants' experience with gay dating platforms has focused on men, Haili Li's recent study explores the significance of the Chinese social app Rela for Chinese queer women living in Australia. Li shows how Rela is used to create transnational romantic relationships between diaspora and China, thus achieving an imagined physical intimacy (Li, 2020, p. 700).

9.3   Queering Methods in Digital Migration Research

The case studies that I discuss in this chapter were inspired by queer interventions in research methods. Particularly in the social sciences, attempting to queer methods can often bring challenges, not least because a substantial part of empirical data analysis in social scientific research is based on identifying and "coding" patterns within data in order to formulate generalizations and categorizations. Rejecting this, scholars who experiment with queer methods, such as Manalansan (2018), argue that research needs to embrace the messiness of everyday experiences. This proposal lends itself well to the exploration of everyday media practices, suggesting that research should not try to order data into "neat" categories but should try to grasp the fleeting moments of queerness embedded within everyday interactions with digital media. Another reason why queer methodologies may be met with suspicion is their critical stance towards single-method approaches, which again implicitly questions methodological orthodoxies. For scholars such as Ken Plummer, deploying queer methods involves refusing to be loyal to any single conventional method (Plummer, 2005, p. 366). Using a combination of different methods and data types and rejecting disciplinary orthodoxies, what Jack Halberstam refers to as a "scavenger methodology," offers ways to approach aspects of queerness that conventional methods would risk erasing or making invisible, since they are inevitably difficult to identify, define and categorize (Halberstam, 1998, p. 13).

I implemented a combination of different innovative methods to address the queer migrant media practices studied. The non-digital-media-centric approach within *digital ethnography* (Pink et al., 2016, p. 10) guided me to not only observe activity on digital platforms such as the dating apps, but also to examine how digital media are entangled with everyday practices of belonging, transnational communication and community building. My

first case study focuses on digital ethnographic observation of dating apps, Facebook groups, and inquiries about what smartphones mean to queer refugees in Berlin (Germany) and Istanbul (Turkey); the second is based on participant observation of the production of a queer migrant festival that had to migrate to a digital platform when the Covid-19 pandemic prevented live events from being held. My fieldwork for the first study took place between June 2016 and June 2017; for the second between July 2020 and April 2021. Intimate insider research as a queer methodology was a useful starting point when I conducted interviews for the second study. Building on feminist ethnographic research that rejects positivistic researcher/researched or subject/object binaries (Abu-Lughod, 1990, pp. 13-14), *intimate insider research* (Taylor, 2011) embraces the possibility of conducting research through friendships. Some of the interviewees, for instance, were my own friends or became my friends over time. Crucially, I shared my own queer migration experience with the interviewees that I had not known before the research. This allowed the interview situation to become a dialogue about common or divergent experiences; a situation in which researcher and interviewee both get to know about each other's lives. Such queer methodologies understand research participants as co-creators of knowledge. In my second case study, I was inspired by *ethno-mimesis* (O'Neil, 2009), a methodology that allows ethnographic data to be visualized together with the research participants. The interviews I conducted became a podcast series that was uploaded to the website created for the festival.[2]

9.4 Queer Cases

First Case: Regulatory Digital Spaces

Although Turkey is considered a safe country for queer refugees by the UN, hate crimes against trans women in particular, intensified repression of human rights since the Gezi Protests and pervasive state homophobia and transphobia impact not just Turkey's citizens but also queer refugees in Turkey hoping to be resettled somewhere in the Global North. Nonetheless, queers who manage to make that journey do not necessarily experience migration as the one-way-street from repression to liberation that it is often portrayed to be. In my research, I was interested in studying how queer migration is shaped by messy experiences whereby digital media help migrants maintain

2   http://madiancestors.com/#/podkest.

a sense of attachment to places they have left behind, or make it difficult to feel at home once they arrive at their destination. Embracing the messiness allowed me to trace the complexities and contradictions of queer migrants' interactions with dating apps and digital practices of belonging. I found that dating applications not only help people find love, but also function as regulatory forces that integrate queer migrants into a European matrix of sexualized and racialized difference. Furthermore, queer migrants appropriate dating apps for uses beyond those intended by their creators, such as for finding accommodation, getting information about migration or conducting activism. Existing research shows that migrants and refugees use digital media *before* they leave their countries of origin to help them navigate across national borders, inform themselves about their destination and even build networks in places where they hope to arrive (Emmer et al., 2016). During my fieldwork in Istanbul and Berlin, people I spoke to described similar strategies. My interviewees cited gay dating platforms such as GayRomeo, which was very popular at the time, and Facebook groups for queer refugees as useful platforms for the exchange of information on where to go and stay before they reached arriving their country/city of destination.

Sayid, one of my interlocutors, who had migrated from Syria to Istanbul and then to Berlin, used GayRomeo to find accommodation. When we first met, he was living in a refugee shelter in Lichtenberg, in the outskirts of Berlin, and was trying to get a room in a queer refugee shelter in Berlin operated by Schwulenberatung, a German NGO. Through the contacts he established via GayRomeo he managed to get a room in the queer refugee shelter. Then he used the same app again to seek an apartment or a room in a shared apartment.

In some cases, dating apps can become tools of transnational activism. Yahia's story provides a good example of how dating platforms and online queer migrant activism can intertwine. Yahia migrated from Egypt to Germany to escape persecution in Egypt. After reaching Germany, instead of seeing his country of origin as a closed chapter of his life, he used digital media to get involved in queer activism in Egypt. One of his online activism activities led him to Grindr. Instead of banning dating applications, the Egyptian government was using them to track down queers: Egyptian police created fake profiles to gain information, making the platforms non-safe spaces. Egyptian queer activists, including Yahia, informed dating application platforms about the persecutions, which led Grindr to issue a warning to its users that online dating in Egypt is dangerous.

A number of people whom I spoke to during my fieldwork described a complex form of racism, whereby being Arabic or coming from the Middle

East was constructed as desirable—such racism was intertwined with fetishization. This was fostered by the definition of users' ethnicity/"race" which is built into the interface of such applications, as well as by other information featured that can lead to online interpersonal communication in which migrants feel racially objectified and fetishized. One such feature is the language section. Yahia, for example, told me that once he realized some *white* users searched for "Arabic" in the language section in order to find people like him, he removed that entry, so that such people would not find his profile. He did not want to be the object of someone's "orientalist desire," as he termed it.

A further finding of my fieldwork was that digital dating platforms function as regulatory forces that reproduce homonormativity. This is reflected in the following excerpt from Yahia's interview:

> Since moving to Germany I have become more normal. I was more radical in Egypt. When I moved to Germany and when I started using the apps I realized that I wanted to have a typical relationship. That was never the case in Egypt. I was more like a political activist there. I don't know, maybe I am just getting old (Yahia, 17 October 2016).

Describing his sexuality and activist engagement with sexual rights in Egypt as relatively "radical," Yahia felt that his sexuality had become more "normal" since he came to Germany because he had discovered a desire to build a faithful, monogamous relationship. This seems to have been triggered by his experiences with dating applications. He also adds that it might be simply because he is getting older, relating his experience with dating apps to chronopolitics (the politics of time). As theories of lifecourse and temporalities demonstrate (Castro Varela & Bayramoğlu, 2021; Halberstam, 2005), the fulfilment of certain social, personal and cultural expectations associated with different phases of life is seen as a prerequisite for a "successful" lifecourse. While LGBTIQ+ subjects' lives are shaped by delays, diversions and discriminations that mess up "the usual flow" of life phases that integrate cis-heterosexual subjects into the economic and biologically reproductive circle of life, comments like Yahia's show that queers are not exempt from normative chronopolitics, especially when they engage with digital media.

Not just time but also space (Berlant, 1998) regulates values, expectations and normativities around intimacy. This also applies to virtual spaces: media-based intimacies create spaces in which specific kinds of intimacies are promoted, while other forms appear less intelligible or less representable.

Sayid, for instance, said that he had not had any fixed ideas about what constituted a romantic relationship between men before he migrated to Germany. It was only through online dating apps that he had discovered that a romantic relationship between two men could be possible. One of the men he met online fell in love with him. Sayid struggled initially, unsure how to respond:

> There was no understanding of a relationship between men, no definition for me when I was in Syria and Turkey. We were free, we were having fun without expectations (Sayid, 27 September 2016).

It is important to emphasize that while they make interpersonal connections possible, digital media also impose meanings on those connections by circulating specific ideas about what constitutes queer romantic relationships. Following Berlant (1998), virtual space functions here as a regulator that normalizes and stabilizes intimacy. In relation to queer migration, we can argue that such digital media platforms force migrants to reconfigure their ideas about queer intimacy to correspond with European ones. Often, such a transformation of concepts of sexuality as a result of migration is portrayed as emancipative and progressive. Sayid turns this narrative upside down when he describes having had no expectations or definitions concerning intimacy as a sense of real freedom. Sayid's and other interlocutors' experiences thus shed light on practices of belonging after arriving in Europe as well as between physical and virtual spaces. Next, I would like to shift the focus away from space to time; to generations and memory.

Second Case: Intergenerational (Dis)connectivity

With most scholarship on queer digital migration focusing on concepts such as identity, spaces, inequalities and affection, questions of time, generations and history have so far been rather neglected. My second case analysis focuses on how digital media can foster, and also complicate, intergenerational interaction within queer migrant communities. I conducted participant observation within a project called Madi Ancestors (hereafter referred to as MA), which was initially planned as a physical festival to remember Turkey's queer idols (Zeki Müren, Bülent Ersoy, Huysuz Virjin) and acknowledge their significance for queer migrants and diaspora in Berlin, but was obliged to migrate to a digital platform when Covid-19 broke out. Those who participated in the project all emphasized that the idols had been important not just for Turkey, but also for Berlin's queer diaspora, as

Figure 9.1. A screenshot of the main stage of Madi Ancestors.

key figures for a community that is not built around ethnic affiliations, biological kinship or similarly structured ideologies. Explaining the impetus behind the festival, Gizem, a musician who produced music for the digital platform based on songs by the queer idols, commented that many in the queer diaspora experience a disturbing sense of lacking knowledge about their own heritage:

> There has been migration [from Turkey to Germany] since the 1960s, and music migrated with the people as well ... I am a musician who's been living in Berlin for the past seven years, but I have come to realize that I don't know on whose heritage I am creating new work in Berlin (Gizem, 1 February 2021).

Some diaspora studies of how a sense of belonging can be evoked through music have focused on music that laments lost homelands or expresses nostalgia for places left behind. Gizem, however, sees music as a way of writing a new historical continuity between different queer diasporic generations, a continuity that does not (yet) exist in public consciousness, and, one might argue, has been kept invisible—but can be discovered. Gayatri Gopinath has observed two ways that diaspora communities can be sustained through music: either by building on intergenerational interconnectivity between heteronormative immigrant men or through revolutionary politics (Gopinath, 2005, p. 58). Queer diasporic kinship through music, however, appears far more "ephemeral," to use a term chosen by José Esteban

Muñoz in his writings about how diasporic music and performance often remain hidden in undocumented, un-archived fleeting moments. Heard briefly, unrecorded sound waves leave no trace in (national) audio histories. Queer diasporic connection through music is "lost in space or lost in relation to the space of heteronormativity" (Muñoz, 2009, p. 72).

While the podcasts of the project aimed to create of an archive of queer diasporic memories of music, the entire digital platform became a way of creating transnational connectivity between Berlin and Turkey. This was not always a harmonious process, however—indeed, the translocal connection opened up new contestations around concepts of belonging. The project exemplified queer diasporic interconnectivity between Turkey and Germany not just by virtue of its participants' transnational biographies, but also because stimulating such interconnectivity was the essential aim that structured the whole enterprise. The Berlin-based organizers collaborated with graphic designers, activists and writers living in Istanbul. This was seen as a way to demonstrate that border regimes can be transcended, while making a genuine economic contribution that could help those suffering from the impact of the pandemic as well under the increasing authoritarianism in Turkey. All around the world, queer spaces such as nightclubs were struggling economically from the long lockdowns, but Turkey's queer spaces were also impacted by measures to repress queer public presence imposed by the increasingly authoritarian regime in Turkey (Özbay & Öktem, 2021; Yalçınoğlu, 2020).

Nonetheless, migrating the offline festival to a digital platform brought some substantial challenges. One of the initial motives for the live festival had been to open up a space for intergenerational dialogue within the queer diaspora. Guests of different ages with different migration trajectories were invited to take part in panel discussions. The transformation to a digital format prevented such face-to-face "intergenerational dialogue" from taking place. The alternative that was developed, the podcast series, proved alienating for the oldest participant, who said he felt uncomfortable with the "nature" of being on a digital platform. Unlike most conclusions that are drawn by scholars who address digital divides within diaspora, this participant was not hindered by economics, nor did he lack the knowledge required to use digital technology. During a phone call, the participant said that he simply did not feel he was part of the "digital age." While he had been keen to join a public discussion on stage and to talk spontaneously about the history of Berlin's queer diaspora, the idea of being interviewed as part of a podcast series, which would be recorded, edited and therefore "less spontaneous" (or "less ephemeral") made him feel nervous and uncomfortable. In the end, he decided to completely withdraw from the project.

Figure 9.2. Leman posting a sticker on a wall in Neukölln, Berlin, 2021. Photo by Yener Bayramoğlu.

Figure 9.3. A defaced sticker on a lamppost in Kreuzberg, Berlin, 2021. Photo by Yener Bayramoğlu.

Furthermore, while the activists and artists involved in the project liked the idea that a digital platform would allow them to be truly "transnational" and reach people in Turkey as well as those in Berlin, the adaptations required to move from offline to online caused fragmentation and even exclusions within the local diasporic space. In targeting a transnational and global audience, the project's organizers feared neglecting "the local," because the online circulation of information promoting the existence of the digital platform would only reach those already networked digitally. To counter this, as well as placing announcements on various digital platforms, the artists and activists posted promotional stickers on lampposts and the walls of buildings of certain neighbourhoods in Berlin and Istanbul. This shows how multiple strategies are required in order for migrant digital media to build bridges between the local and translocal without risking causing fragmentation of the diaspora within the local context. During the podcast discussions, Gülây, another activist who took part in the project, expressed her concern that digital spaces are not easily accessible for all,

pointing out that "not everyone has a smartphone or laptop," and even those who do might not be well informed about how and where queer diaspora and migrants come together digitally. The stickers were a very "old school" response to the challenge of how to invite local people to join a digital space. Moreover, the stickers also served to queer heteronormative public space. Evoking Muñoz' (2009) poetic writings, the stickers were fragile and ephemeral, often only visible for a couple of hours or days before someone tore at them or covered them with new pastings. Briefly glimpsed, they may or may not have passed on their message to a glad viewer before being defaced, displaced or erased.

9.5   Further Directions

There are several possible directions that queer digital migration research can now take. The crucial critique expressed by trans scholars and activists that queer scholarship often produces knowledge that renders trans lives invisible, is pertinent for anyone conducting queer digital migration research. To date, queer digital migration research has tended to focus on gay men, so future exploration of how digital media technologies, communication and culture entangle with gender identities and cisnormativity should be prioritized. We need more research on how trans, non-binary and intersex migrants interact with digital media as well as how digital media and intersectional inequalities can be thought together with a focus on these groups (e.g., Camminga, 2020). Furthermore, many existing studies of queer digital migration have engaged with migrants in just one national context, failing to reflect the interconnectivity between different national contexts in an increasingly digitalized world. Myria Georgiou (2012)—without a focus on queer sexualities and/or gender identities—has proposed employing a triangular spatial matrix spanning the local/urban, national and the transnational, as a strategy for researching the transnationalization of everyday life with and through media. Such an undertaking requires multi-sited research with attention to different spatial realms. Multi-sited and multi-spatial research can enable scholars of queer digital migration to develop better understandings of how digital media entangle with migration trajectories at different stages in different localities, as well as of how digital communication interweaves different migrant and diasporic spaces with one another. Such a comparative approach spanning local and national contexts can overcome "methodological nationalism" (Wimmer & Schiller, 2002). To this end, queer comparative research (Binnie & Klesse, 2018), inspired by

relational comparison in human geography, might offer an inspiring new methodological direction.

For example, by focusing on queer film festivals in different local and national contexts, Jon Binnie and Christian Klesse have explored how queer comparative research can generate understandings of how activist strategies in one local context productively inform and influence activists, communities and localities across national borders. Scholars of digital media and migration would do well to harness such innovative comparative methodologies to explore and compare how digital media practices of queer migrant activism, community building and solidarity in different localities shape the creation of transnational connectivity. Furthermore, we need to shift away from Euro-American-centric approaches, stories and representations. Much research to date has focused on migration trajectories from the Global South to the North, from East to West. It is high time for other migration routes to be studied: routes within the Global South. Countries such as Turkey or the Gulf states, despite being known for state homophobia and transphobia, are increasingly being chosen as destinations by migrants. How queer migrants use digital media practices to help them cope with intersectional inequalities and the repression of human rights in such places is a highly significant field that is just waiting to be explored.

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Section IV

Visuality and Digital Media

Introduction to Section IV: Visuality and Digital Media

Giorgia Aiello

Not surprisingly, visual images have become central to the ways in which migrants view and represent themselves in a variety of digital arenas, including but not limited to social media. When thinking of the role of visual images in migrants' everyday lives and their relationship to digital media, the notion of visuality becomes particularly apt, as it implies the existence of mundane, repetitive acts of visual production (whether as an image-maker or as a viewer) together with an engagement with the politics of representation in its own right (Mirzoeff, 2006). Rather than simply aiding us to reflect on how migrants may be represented or may self-represent in digital media, speaking of visuality helps us think through some of the ways in which their visibility is imbricated with issues of agency and power. This is exactly the type of intellectual work that Chapter 10 by Daniela Jaramillo-Dent, Amanda Alencar and Yan Asadchy, Chapter 12 by Estrella Sendra and Chapter 13 by Moé Suzuki in the section on *Visuality and Digital Media* do, as they move beyond conceptions of the visual as a way to promote or altogether "other" particular identities to engage in more depth with the problems and potentials of digital media imagery in the pursuit of a sense of shared identity and belonging among migrants.

But what are some of the problems and potentials in how migrants engage with digital imagery in everyday life? First and foremost, the chapters consider the ways in which migrants' digitally mediated socialities are both enabled and constrained by the algorithmic logics of particular platforms together with the aesthetic demands of specific media—from the visual formats that are typical of social media platforms like TikTok and Facebook to the immersive and experiential qualities of virtual reality. In our work on visual self-representation in social media, and specifically on how trans people represent themselves on Instagram, Katy Parry and I have introduced the idea of "constrained empowerment" to engage with the tension

between the ways in which individuals from marginalized communities are increasingly able to perform their identities and solidarities publicly online and the affordances and discourses that limit their ability to do so in a truly diverse or emancipatory manner (Aiello & Parry, 2020, p. 50). In other words, digital visibility is very often a double-sided coin. On the one hand, and as the next three chapters show, digitally mediated practices of (self-)representation are now crucial to the development of support and community among migrants, while also working to foster the development of more inclusive "ways of seeing" across a variety of publics (Duguay, 2016). On the other hand, however, the very ways in which migrants can be seen and see themselves depend largely on the socio-technical constraints and semiotic conventions of the media and communication tools they use, however purposefully (Hand, 2022). Overall, across a variety of digital media, visuality is central to how migrants address and are addressed by "affective publics," that is, others who may share affinities with them and may therefore both limit and reward the ways in which they express themselves online (Papacharissi, 2014).

And it is precisely the affective and overall more visceral aspects of visuality that are foregrounded in the chapters included in this section. Hence, a second key critical thread running across these chapters pertains to the emotional, material and sensorial inclinations that are generated in migrants through their engagement with imagery and/in digital media (Hansen, 2004). Together with Chapters 7, 8 and 9 in Section III on affect and belonging, this is an especially up-to-date contribution this anthology makes to academic debates on migrants' digital practices. In Section IV, more specifically, visual imagery is not seen merely as a representation of migrant identities and experiences (although representation does matter) but also and perhaps more importantly as a means for an embodied understanding of such identities and experiences—from feelings of pride and cohesion between the roots and the diaspora to the development of relations and bonds between refugees and viewers. Across the chapters, we also find a keen emphasis on how these affective and overall embodied practices can and do lead to political engagement if not activist action.

In a related manner, the third and final thread that runs across these chapters is methodological in nature. Research on migrants' (visual) digital practices cannot be reduced to observations about the technological structures and discursive instruments that contribute to their disempowerment. For this reason, the authors of these chapters all made a clear effort to design and carry out research that excavates deeper into migrants' participation in digital communication to understand the ways in which agency,

performativity and embodiment play out, whether in unison or individually, in their lives (Marston, 2020). Ultimately, the visuality of digital media is a fraught terrain that however also potentially offers uplifting and even liberatory means to take part in networks of solidarity and affirm one's identity in the face of erasure and discrimination.

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10. Migrant Agency and Platformed Belongings: The Case of TikTok

Daniela Jaramillo-Dent, Amanda Alencar and Yan Asadchy

Abstract

This chapter derives from a project exploring TikTok content by 53 Latin American migrant creators residing in the US and Spain. The goal was to identify their creative practices and affordance uses through a series of multimodal content analyses. Based on our analytical approach we propose four distinct forms of narrative agency and belonging experienced by these creators: 1) (self)representative, 2) utilitarian, 3) prescriptive and 4) activist agentic styles. The proposed typology expands the notion of *platformed belongings* understood as creative, narrative and agentic practices deployed by migrants—and other marginalized groups—that instrumentalize platform vernaculars and affordances to construct their identity by connecting, countering or establishing a dialogue with existing narratives.

Keywords: social media; narrative agency; belonging; ethnography; multimodal content analysis.

10.1 Introduction

This chapter is part of a larger doctoral research project entitled *Platformed Migrant Narratives: Mediated (Self)Representations of Migration on Social Media*, a project that delves into the platformed, (self)representative and activist narratives by 53 Latin American migrant TikTokers living in the US and Spain. Even though the multimodal elements analysed in this chapter refer to a specific profile of migrant in terms of origin and place of residence, it is not possible to determine if the content refers to a specific type of migrant. Due to this limitation, we opted for the blanket terms "migrant"

and "immigrant," which are used interchangeably in the chapter to refer to the vast diversity among people who migrate, including undocumented and forced migrants.

The decision to explore immigrant creators in the United States and Spain is motivated by their status as the two top destinations for the Latin American migrant community outside Latin America (Lorenzi & Batalova, 2022). However, research suggests that there are significant challenges for Latinx—a non-gendered term that comprises various ethnicities and cultures across national origins (Bodinger-deUriarte & Valgeirsson, 2019)—in both countries related to the difficulties to access the qualified job market (Yemane & Fernández-Reino, 2019). Both countries have seen a rise in far-right ideologies and related discrimination. In the case of the US these have resulted in instances of rejection of Spanish speakers (Martinez et al., 2019) while in Spain there has been a general hardening of opinions about immigration in the past few years (González-Enríquez & Rinken, 2021). The current political and economic situation results in significant precarity due to the scarce cultural, social and/or economic capital Latin American immigrants can access as well as an irregular migration status, which makes them increasingly vulnerable (Nedelcu & Soysüren, 2020, p. 2). The unique situations faced by immigrants in both countries may affect their identity construction processes. For example, they call for increased adaptations to their surrounding context, due to political environments that have become more polarized with the emergence of the far-right, in the case of Spain with Vox and in the US with MAGA. The case of immigrant TikTokers provides unique and multidimensional insights into identity construction and belongings that are reflected by their agency in creating content. Such content points to online and offline personas that reflect the creators' individual and collective selves as they navigate unfamiliar spaces and societies. Moreover, the visual and multimodal nature of these narratives illuminates the ways in which new interactive and digital sociality is shaped. The platformed aspects of migrant narratives and related identities on TikTok are shaped by the connective, imitational and interactive possibilities of the social media platform's memetic structure and affordances (Zulli & Zulli, 2020). Throughout this chapter we use the term *platformed* to refer to the ways in which digital spaces—structurally and through their policies/politics—enable, promote and constraint certain types of content and interactions.

Methodologically, we use a digital ethnography approach to identify immigrant creators and assess their content to select only those who (self) identify as immigrants living in the US or Spain. Qualitative, inductive

and multimodal content analyses enable us to empirically explore the agentic character of these narratives, considering the sociotechnical nature of *platformed belongings* as conceptualized by Jaramillo-Dent et al. (2022).

Below, we first define the key concepts that serve as the basis of our conceptualization including agency, belonging and identity. We then present the relationships between these and social media affordances, which enable the deployment of new digital and platformed forms of belonging, with TikTok as an example. The methodological considerations are then outlined, followed by an explanation and exemplification of four modes of agency identified in content by immigrant TikTokers and their implications for *platformed belongings*.

10.2   Agency, Belonging and Identity

Migrants have often been considered as passive, vulnerable victims. Their agency has largely been excluded from theoretical and analytical approaches in migration research (de Haas, 2021). It is urgently needed in digital migration studies to explore the extent to which migrants can counter governmental, legal, social and cultural limitations they face through their own forms of agency. Migratory agency is defined by de Haas as:

> the limited—but real—ability of human beings (or social groups) to make independent choices and to impose these on the world and, hence, to alter the structures that shape and constrain people's opportunities or freedoms (2021, p.14).

We will focus on various forms of narrative agency, which in the context of social media and hashtagged content has been defined as "the capacity to create stories on social media by using hashtags in a way that is collective and recognized by the public" (Yang, 2016, p. 14). In our case we consider the ability of such content to counter existing beliefs and stereotypes about who migrants are, through the lens of their own life experience and expertise gained through their own migration. We go beyond hashtags to consider other connective possibilities afforded by TikTok such as audio tracks, effects and memetic affordances such as the *duet*. Moreover, although we consider actual public recognition as relevant in the study of platformed migratory stories, we consider that the mere willingness of migrants to create content and deploy visibility strategies on a platform such as TikTok—which in many

cases can put them at risk for harassment and discrimination—constitutes a form of narrative agency worth exploring due to the possibilities it entails.

Thus, we explore the relationship between these forms of agency in the formation of migrant identities and belongings through content creation, with TikTok as a case study. For this purpose, we consider identity as socially constructed and shaped by the contexts occupied and negotiated by the individual (Hall, 2019). In online spaces, identity is defined and built through users' actions and behaviours (Senft, 2013). It is then through identity construction that "individuals come to situate themselves, for instance, as belonging to a distinct 'race', place, ethnicity, nationality, gender, or culture" (Nsamenang, 2008, p. 6).

Belonging has been described by feminist sociologist Nira Yuval-Davis (2011, p. 10) as the "emotional (or even ontological) attachment … [that] becomes articulated, formally structured and politicized only when it is threatened in some way." Yuval-Davis goes on to describe the dynamic nature of belonging processes, that are construed as "fixed" or scripted to the benefit of certain hierarchical power structures, as well as multi-layered including various forms such as practical, emotional and ideological belongings.

In migration studies, Jay Marlowe (2019) argues that social media provide unique opportunities for refugees to enact and expand their political capital and belonging to local and distant communities while negotiating different forms of identity expression. Thus, the narrative enactment of belonging can be understood as a form of articulation that has been denied to (im)migrants through various symbolic and material bordering strategies (Chouliaraki & Georgiou, 2019). In this sense, sociolinguist Theresa Heyd's (2016) *narratives of belonging* are instrumental, as they describe the shifting nature of digital diasporic stories that provide insights about emerging linguistic practices of identity and affiliation. Moreover, Marlowe et al.'s (2017, p. 17) notion of *digital belongings* describes the digitally enabled forms of social participation and cohesion among friends or family members. These authors incorporate various perspectives on identity, and belonging, analysed through the narrative functions of digital media to understand the identity-building practices of migrants.

For example, at the intersection of agency, identity and belonging, researchers that have explored migrant integration in Ecuador suggest that Colombian immigrants engage in an agentic *invisibility bargain* to negotiate the aspects of their identity they choose to present and make visible depending on how acceptable they are in their receiving society (Pugh, 2018). Moreover, sociolinguist Dominika Baran (2018) suggests that refugees' personal stories on Facebook illustrate different levels of agency

in relation to their perceived ethnic and national belonging. These previous studies provide the grounds for our theorization of different levels of agency modelled by migratory platformed narrative forms on TikTok.

Thus, when belongings, identities and agentic styles are established in the digital realm, they expand beyond traditional—non-digital—understandings to incorporate digital modes shaped by the creators' personal creative styles and their allegiance to certain digital groupings and trends. In this sense, we argue that TikTokers enact their various belongings and related identities using platformed strategies that are shaped by their agentic style and their perception, appropriation and vernacular knowledge of the platform. In the next section we introduce the platformed dimensions of our framework.

10.3   A Framework for Platformed Belongings

Our proposed framework to study platformed belongings is informed by various concepts derived from Internet research. On the one hand, the concept of *vernacular affordances* (McVeigh-Schultz & Baym, 2015) refers to the process by which users make sense and negotiate their digital behaviours with a platform's material structures, by navigating the actions that are enabled and constrained within. On the other hand, Gibbs et al.'s (2015) *platform vernaculars* describe the unique combination of styles, grammars and logics that constitute the popular genres generated within a particular social media platform and are shaped and developed by users' behaviours. These are key concepts to locate belonging strategies in the negotiation between migrant creators and the platform, through their use and appropriation of existing affordances and vernaculars.

This constant bargaining process between the content creator and the platform is delimited by its moderation policies and its politics (Gillespie, 2018), as well as the unique algorithmic *for you* page—in the case of TikTok. Creators belonging to marginalized groups have been able to impact platform policies in the past, an example was the case of Black creator Ziggy Tyler, who created videos bringing attention to biased moderation practices by TikTok when using the word "Black" in any phrase and getting flagged as inappropriate and comparing it to the use of the word "white," TikTok responded claiming that it was a glitch in the algorithm that was immediately fixed (Murray, 2021).

The politics of belonging as described by Yuval-Davis (2011) are, in some ways, perpetuated within digital platforms, where power configurations

and their agents are actively enacting digital (Chouliaraki & Georgiou, 2019), coded (Benjamin, 2019) and algorithmic (Noble, 2018) forms of bordering. Concurrently, we suggest that migrant content creators are actively responding to these exclusionary sociotechnical structures by harnessing their own lived experiences and their platformed know-how to legitimize their status and their rights through multimodal (self)representations.

In this chapter, we understand *platformed belongings* as creative, narrative, and agentic practices deployed by migrants—and other marginalized groups—that instrumentalize platform vernaculars and affordances to construct their identity by connecting, countering or establishing a dialogue with existing narratives in digital spaces that enable and constraint these contents.

10.4   Methodological Considerations

The first step was to identify content and profiles of interest through hashtag and keyword searches on the platform. We then assessed profiles to ascertain creators' self-identification as immigrants living in the US and Spain. Our non-participant ethnographic study included four separate actions: (1) periodic observation of migrant content creators' videos for one hour a day every weekday, (2) consumption of general content on the platform to assess the latest and most relevant trends two times a week and (3) monthly walkthroughs as consumers of content and as content creators to identify changes in the affordances and configurations of the platform. These observations were recorded using field notes and screenshots of phenomena of interest considering these three separate tasks. Task (4) involved the selection and scraping of specific datasets to further delve into phenomena of interest.

One of the main challenges of conducting research on social media is its ever-changing nature. In terms of the platform, this means guidelines and moderation policies that are constantly shifting or whose interpretation changes (Gillespie, 2018). To minimize these challenges, we employed different forms of the walkthrough method (Light et al., 2018) to keep our analyses current and relevant in relation to the platform and design changes. We conducted walkthroughs with two main goals: to understand the user experience while navigating and consuming content on the "for you" page and as a content creator, attempting to create videos and assessing the changes in platform affordances and configurations as they would be experienced by creators.

As part of the project, different analyses of the sample were performed, including three separate qualitative, inductive, multimodal content and discourse analyses comprising a total of more than 600 TikTok videos analysed. Each of these analyses served to inform the next, as phenomena of interest were identified, and new video samples were analysed to delve into specific phenomena. This chapter derives from observations made in the process of gathering and analysing the data in these three different studies to refine the concept of *platformed belongings* in migration research.

The main reason for taking a non-participant approach was the difficulty to contact content creators due to structural limitations of the platform, which make it very hard to contact other users, similar to the issues faced by He et al. (2022) in their study of Douyin. For the purposes of our study, data were identified in a process of observation for an extended period as explained before. For two of the data analyses the videos were labelled before being scraped as examples of phenomena of interest and for the third, four profiles of immigrant creators were identified and a sample of each of their profiles was scraped. In this case, the digital ethnography fieldwork of these communities of creators informed the scraping process, through a series of iterative observations of the data and fieldnotes that detailed the phenomena of interest.

When researching migration in these digital spaces, there are added difficulties due to the controversial topics migrant creators discuss, and the harassment they often receive due to their migratory status. Researchers in the field of media and migration need to keep in mind that the content that is available online is a tiny sliver of the migratory experience and provides a limited glance into migrants' lives due to the risks many other prospective and former migrant content creators have undergone. It is worth noting that TikTok offers a relevant space for the analysis of migratory narratives, due to its status as the most-downloaded app in 2021 (Cyca, 2022) and one that has also become a recognized space for political expression and influence (Lorenz, 2022). The TikTok Cultures Research Network (https://tiktokcultures.com/), led by digital anthropologist Crystal Abidin, provides a space of collaboration among scholars interested on TikTok and its communities of creators.

In terms of data collection and analysis, data analysed in depth were scraped using the Python TikTok API Wrapper (Avilash, 2021). To locate the data to be scraped, we first carried out a search using hashtags and keywords of interest in Spanish and English (e.g., #migrante #inmigrante and their English counterparts). Once we located the contents connected by these hashtags, we located hashtags and text referring to the place of residence

of the creators such as #colombianaenusa or #venezolanosenespaña or combinations of hashtags and emoji that signalled Latin American migration to these two countries.

Since various ethical challenges arise from analysing social media data without consent (boyd & Crawford, 2012) information was anonymized to protect creators and their identities. A critical and reflexive process was followed to ensure that the perspectives and realities of migrant content creators were included, by understanding specific contexts, as well as considering ethical concerns over privacy and data ownership in digital research (Metcalf & Crawford, 2016).

Below we include content examples that illustrate each mode of migrant agency and their associated belonging enacted on the platform, including their multimodal aspects and the ways in which these creators harness TikTok's affordances and creative functionalities to convey different agentic styles for belonging and identity. It is important to note that quotes have been translated from Spanish.

10.5   Four Modes of Migrant Agency for Enacting Belonging

In this section we propose a typology of agentic styles that define the platformed belongings and identities deployed by migrant TikTokers. These agentic styles are all adapted to the platform through practices that position them in relation to others, through original creations, affinity or by countering existing content. We came up with this typology while analysing TikTok content created by migrant creators, as we observed that these contents reflected their agency through narrative genres that were unexpected and that in some cases promoted different forms of agency in the immigrant community.

In terms of platformed practices, belongings and their respective identities are established through an array of affordances and formats, such as the inclusion of niche hashtags that connect migrant creators with their perceived communities. These may refer to specific national (#mexican) or ethnic groupings (#Latinos) there are also words that are known by those familiar with the specific culture itself such as (#catrachos).[1] There are also platform-specific hashtags (#foryou or #parati) that connect content with specific communities of creators and reflect their vernacular knowledge of the platform. The use of affordances within the platform that enables

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1   Catracho/a is a word that (self)identifies Honduran nationals.

SELF-REPRESENTATIVE AGENCY	UTILITARIAN AGENCY	PRESCRIPTIVE AGENCY	ACTIVIST AGENCY
BELONGING THROUGH STORYTELLING	**PRACTICAL BELONGING**	**INSTRUCTIONAL BELONGING**	**BELONGING THROUGH RIGHTS PERFORMANCE**
THEMES Cultural/National pride Clarify misconceptions	**THEMES** Practical tips / advice housing / job market / school/	**THEMES** Patriotism; gratefulness; lattitudinal integration	**THEMES** Actions you can take to change situations of oppression/injustice
ASSUMPTIONS Differences are good Multicultural integration Diverse stories as models.	**ASSUMPTIONS** Migratory status is not important to belong.	**ASSUMPTIONS** There are correct and incorrect ways to belong	**ASSUMPTIONS** Human rights / equality constitutional rights / right to migrate
TONE Passive; humorous; sarcastic; non-aggressive	**TONE** Instructional non-judgemental	**TONE** Authoritative judgemental	**TONE** Activist / modeling actions / interactions / empowerment /calls for action
PLATFORM Popular audio embedded text Duet/Stitch Hashtags: for you ; audience; topic; genre Choreograph; lip-sync; pointing and dancing	**PLATFORM** Original audio response to comment hashtags: niche; audience; topic Monologue	**PLATFORM** Original audio response to comment hashtags: niche; audience; topic Stitch; duet; green screen	**PLATFORM** Original audio response to comment hashtags: niche; audience; topic ; call to action ; emotional Monologue; stitch; duet
EXAMPLES (1) the migrant worker; (2) personal experience stories (3) content representing the daily life of immigrants	**EXAMPLES** (1) legal advice (2) how to find a home, job, school. (3) how to enter the country	**EXAMPLES** (1) how to behave (2) acceptable ways to migrate (3) correct/incorrect ways to be an immigrant	**EXAMPLES** (1) activism (2) anti ICE vigilantism (3) content modeling how to enforce human rights (4) calls to action

Figure 10.1. Proposed forms of agency and belonging, characteristics and examples.

the reuse of content—such as *duet*,[2] *use this audio*[3] and *green screen*[4]— are deployed to connect with and counter existing narratives. Multiple identities are reflected through these belongings and agentic styles. Figure 10.1 reflects the four modes of agency and corresponding forms of belonging reflected by immigrant TikTokers' content.

(Self)representative agency: belonging through storytelling

The first agentic style and its corresponding mode of belonging can be described as migrant (self)representation. Such self-representations may range from seemingly passive to subversive. This style can be illustrated

2   The *duet* affordance enables the creation of a new video that will appear side-by-side an existing video.
3   The *use this audio* affordance allows the content creator to use an existing audio track in a new video.
4   The *green screen* effect on TikTok enables the inclusion of existing videos or images in a new video as background or as a small, overlaid square.

by migrant creators who present a specific rendition of the migrant experience that offers opportunities for interpretation, and which may challenge existing beliefs. Self-representations present a story that is often personal and may include persuasive elements. In the strongest cases, it may include an identifiable call to action or a clear message about what is expected from the viewer.

Examples of (self)representative agency include content featuring migrant workers. Migrant worker (self)representations in previous research revolve around narratives where the immigrant strives for deservingness to belong (Georgiou, 2018; Nikunen, 2019) and that strategically emphasize identity features perceived as more desirable to be accepted into receiving societies (Pugh, 2018). This content ranges from passive representations of a working migrant to a more empowered rhetoric that includes mentions of the stereotypical beliefs within the receiving country versus the reality shown in the narrative.

An example of a seemingly passive (self)representation includes a video that visually depicts a man and his colleagues picking up vegetables in the field on a sunny day with overlaid text that reads "Working in Spain, the life of an immigrant 💪 (Ecuadorian and Spanish flag emojis)." The audio is a popular Ecuadorian song used around 4,000 times on the platform with the lyrics (translated from Spanish): "I am also a migrant, a Latino migrant. I did not have enough to live in a dignified way. Going through risks in the journey, I have come to strive." The caption promotes action from the viewer: "… 💪💪💪 (Ecuadorian and Spanish flag emojis) like this video for the workers." In this example, agency is twofold, first through the presentation of immigrants in a positive light, which, beyond the establishment of deservingness, these content creators can respond to widespread beliefs through first-person accounts of their life, second by promoting support from the viewer.

As shown in Figure 10.1, the assumptions of this mode of agency and belonging include the value of testimonial, first-person accounts. The tone of the message will often match TikTok's platform vernacular (Gibbs et al., 2015; Zulli & Zulli, 2020) such as the use of emoji and overlaid text, as well as audio that has been used in several videos before. The vernaculars in this type of video may also appear as humorous or choreographed messages that may include narrative configurations such as one-person role plays, point-dancing or lip-syncing to illustrate the desired message.

In the (self)representative agentic example, belonging can also be established through narratives that can go from (self)representation to

affinity and the shared migrant identity constructed collectively through the deployment of the duet format. Other TikTok formats for reuse such as *green screen* or *stitch*—which enables the use of an existing TikTok video that can be cut to create a new video and "stitch" them together—can also be used as part of the (self)representative agentic style.

Utilitarian Agency: Practical Belonging

The second agentic style involves practical tips and advice to make belonging easier for prospective and current migrants. There is an emphasis on functional aspects of belonging through the provision of a set of guidelines to facilitate basic needs and resource acquisition for migrants. We posit that the focus on accessing resources constitutes an empowered form of belonging (Yuval-Davis, 2011). Content reflecting this style thematically ranges from financial matters related to migration, to finding a home, getting a job or accessing school. It also includes strategies for bureaucratic processes to gain lawful status. In some instances, it may involve answering questions about specific actions that are (un)safe for migrants including specific tips to navigate life in the new country while undocumented.

Overall, utilitarian agency refers to a perspective which assumes that migratory status is not paramount to entering a country with the intention to stay, integrate into the job market, get housing or access school. The tone is instructional, non-judgmental and based on a combination of personal experience, anecdotal information and different levels of knowledge of the legal, cultural and social systems in the receiving country. The format is mostly original video and audio which sometimes may include the *response to comment* affordance—which allows for a creator to visually embed a comment from a previous video in a new one and respond to the comment in question.

For example, a female creator speaking to the camera and responding to a comment that reads "can I travel to Colombia for a month as soon as I get my Residence card?" by using original audio:

> You can travel to Colombia for a month when you get your residence card ... the first card expires after one year and you need to contribute to your Social Security for a minimum of six months by the time of renewal.

The quote illustrates an immigrant creator who is knowledgeable—from her own experience—sharing information about the strategies needed to

navigate migratory processes in the receiving nation. In the case of this creator—whose content ranges from Colombian recipes to housing advice and cultural content—the advice is prompted by a person using the *response to comment* affordance. The recommendations feature a knowledge of the procedural requirements to maintain residency status and ensure its renewal. The creator's position of power among her followers as a leader for Colombian immigrants is evident. This agentic mode also highlights the role of digitally-enabled community support networks (Udwan et al., 2020) who build forms of collective agentic knowledge among immigrants establishing different forms of utilitarian and practical belonging in their new context.

Utilitarian agency also resembles Marlowe's (2019) description of a sort of awareness-raising political engagement through social media, which enables the commenter to take control of her newly acquired status and ensure a form of legal-status-based belonging. The hashtags included in the caption for the example above are "#parati #foryou #inmigrantes #colombianosenelexterior #viajaracolombia" and reflect the intended audience, and TikTok-specific hashtags relating to the algorithmic *for you* page, suggesting the goal of gaining visibility within the platform and the specific community of Colombian immigrants. Thus, the utilitarian agentic style enables belonging by promoting compliance with legal requirements of residency in Spain, which are delineated by this creator.

Prescriptive Agency: How to Belong Correctly

Prescriptive agency intends to promote certain "correct" ways to belong to the new country. In this case, the assumptions include the belief that there are correct and incorrect ways to belong, in terms of what is expected from the migrants in their host society. It reflects an authoritative tone, often with a sense of superiority from the perspective of a more experienced immigrant who instructs others who just arrived or are making the decision to travel. The platformed configuration of this content may include a monologue by the creator looking at the camera or a duet/green screen to include examples of the wrong ways to be. Thus, the narrative format of this agentic form often includes examples of "wrong" forms to be an immigrant and the corresponding "corrective" modes according to the creator. These may involve linguistic, cultural or attitudinal instructions that in many cases resemble top-down integration policies to achieve mainstream forms of belonging, such as adapting to the host country's labour market, regulations and its ways of working.

An example is depicted by an immigrant creator promoting gratefulness. This goes beyond the *grateful migrant* or the *migrant worker* representations illustrated in the first case and in previous literature as forms to establish deservingness to belong (Georgiou, 2018; Nikunen, 2019). In this case the creator provides stern instructions about the best way to migrate in which seemingly contradictory claims about the home country's identity appear side by side: using a commanding tone within an original oral audio,

> I want to invite Latinos and Colombians to be grateful with what Spain gives us … look, come to Spain to contribute, and do not try to trick the system, leave that "indigenous malice" that they mention in Colombia behind.

The video is an example of her personal definition of a "good migrant" which refers to different forms of acceptable and civic behaviours that enable certain immigrants to belong (Chauvin & Garcés-Mascareñas, 2014). This is faced with what she sees as incorrect behaviour described as "indigenous malice," which she portrays as an intrinsic form of corruption that is native to Colombia that circulates within the community. In this case, belonging is established within these behavioural lines the creator provides, as well as leaving behind what is seen as a negative trait among Colombians to become a "better immigrant."

The creator employs an authoritative tone to convey information about how immigrants should behave. Considering that the lack of recognition and loss of social identity are important post-migration challenges affecting the belonging prospects of migrants in their host societies (Mulvey, 2013), these narratives can be interpreted as forms of resistance towards exclusionary integration policies that undermine migrants' agency and aspirational life trajectories (de Haas, 2021). This mode of agency/belonging also reflects the ways in which top-down normative belongings set by governments permeate horizontal forms of belonging established between members of the immigrant community in these receiving nations (Chin, 2019). The lack of empathy for the possible variations in the migratory experience is striking in this example in which the hard truth as seen by some members of the migrant community is salient.

Activist Agency: Belonging Through the Performance of Rights

Activist platformed belongings are reflected by themes related to specific actions and behaviours that can be enacted to change the outcome of real-life

experiences for vulnerable populations such as the case of some of the most precarious immigrants—those with an irregular migration status (Nedelcu & Soysüren, 2020). These videos also follow what Cogo (2019) has defined as migrant activism through narratives that emphasize experiences of oppression and racism and claims for rights and citizenship. In this case the creator emphasizes aspects of life that are subject to inequality, systemic oppression and injustice. The assumptions in this case include the belief that all people have rights regardless of their documentation. Rights, in this case, include human or constitutional rights as well as driving principles such as equality and justice for all people.

The tone of content illustrating this form of agency and belonging is empowered, active, instructional and performative. It includes specific actions viewers can take in such situations in a way that is fearless and unconcerned with the possibility of retaliation by haters or opponents. In this regard, it is important to highlight that an explicit awareness of the dangers of surveillance by the government (Witteborn, 2021) and/or explicit mentions of fear related to these dangers are also absent from content reflecting this agentic style.

An example involves an immigrant who provides information about entering the country as a tourist to stay and reside in Spain in response to a follower's question "What type of questions does the immigration officer ask?" The TikToker responds facing the camera and, describing the exchange with the immigration officer, provides specific questions and requirements a person needs to enter the country as a tourist and stay:

> They asked whether I had family here, I said I didn't. They asked about the length of my stay, I said 15 days. They asked about the hotel … the amount of money I had … it is important to answer calmly … you need to bring 90 euro per day.

The quote is an example that borders the utilitarian agentic style described in an earlier section, but in contrast to the utilitarian agentic style, this example highlights the importance of making use of digital spaces to enact narrative agency in the context of existing political structures. This is a subversive form of agency that intends for the immigrant to claim mobility rights from below, on their own terms. It is considered activist agency because it subversively and strategically models this form of entrance to a country. Belonging is established through assumptions that legitimize this migration strategy and enable a form of casual, political counter-narrative (Marlowe, 2019) while facing material and legal borders established by Europe with regard to

many Latin American countries for prospective immigrants. Activist agency connects to a form of belonging based upon migrant activism (Cogo, 2019).

10.6   Conclusions

The present chapter considered a perspective on narrative agency to analyse how different forms of belonging are enacted on TikTok contents created by Latin American migrants in the US and Spain. It found that traditional forms of belonging, agency and identity in migration research can be enriched by new dimensions enabled by platformed spaces and creative possibilities.

First, the relationship between narrative agency, belonging and identity was outlined and the relevance of understanding these together was established. An explanation of the platformed content creation possibilities adds an analytical dimension to our conceptualization of agency and platformed belongings. Furthermore, we presented each of the four agentic forms and their corresponding belongings, illustrated with examples of TikTok content and the use of different affordances that enable these agentic forms to emerge. Finally, it was argued that content creation on TikTok can be seen as an opportunity for different levels of migrant agency and rights claims, as well as the construction of collective knowledge in the process of establishing their belongings in their receiving country. There are nuanced differences between these agentic forms in the two receiving countries analysed. For instance, prescriptive agency always intends for the migrant community to follow certain guidelines, but the guidelines themselves change depending on the individual content creator and in some cases reflect normative integration notions of the receiving nation—linguistic integration in the US that is not necessary in Spain, for instance.

The relevance of developing approaches that include migrant agency in the analysis of belonging and identity processes is becoming increasingly pressing in the face of diverse bordering strategies that may be physical, symbolic and digital (Chouliaraki & Georgiou, 2019). It is noteworthy to highlight the methodological possibilities of scrutinizing social media content which provides an overview of the diverse voices within immigrant communities and their content creation strategies of identity, agency and belonging. Social media analyses of content created by immigrants, such as the one presented here, can provide interesting perspectives about the nuanced and unexpected ways in which horizontal forms of agency, belonging and identity are policed and negotiated within the migrant community and facilitated by the configurations of platforms.

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11. Affective Performances of Rooted Cosmopolitanism Through Facebook During the Festival International de Folklore et de Percussion in Louga, Senegal

Estrella Sendra

Abstract

This chapter addresses Facebook as a virtual festival space where affective performances take place. It focuses on performances of the identity as rooted cosmopolitanism, a term coined by Kwame Appiah to refer to people who identify as citizens of the world while feeling strongly grounded in a particular place. This is illustrated through the case study of FESFOP, the Festival international de folklore et de percussion based in Louga (Senegal). During the festival, there is both physical engagement, of artists from Louga based abroad, and digital engagement, through Facebook. The chapter identifies different affective performances of rooted cosmopolitanism: celebrating belonging to the region, expressing nostalgia and enhancing the festival participants' international recognition and professionalisation through their connections to the roots.

Keywords: migration; social media; affect; festival; rooted cosmopolitanism; Senegal.

11.1 Introduction

During the Covid-19 global pandemic, festivals across the world had to reimagine their formats. Following the cancellations during the first wave, creativity became a key component not just of the curatorial dimension, but also of management. Aware of the important cultural, social and economic role of

festivals, organizers offered online and hybrid formats, engaging with existing audiences, even if differently, and building new audiences as a result of the digitalization. This phenomenon has fostered a particularly reflexive environment among practitioners and researchers, for instance, among the Film Festival Research Network, with a double special dossier on reviews of film festivals during the first and second waves of Covid-19 in the NECSUS journal, coedited by Marijke de Valck and Antoine Damiens (2020; 2021), followed by the volume *Rethinking Film Festivals in the Pandemic Era*, co-edited also by de Valck and Damiens, with contributions from a range of film festival researchers (2023).[1]

During the pandemic, social media became at times the main or sole festival space, hosting performances "live" for digital audiences. This contrasted significantly with previous uses of social media at festivals, mostly conceived as a communication platform. However, as practitioners and scholars rethink the role of digital media in festival organization, it is worth looking at affective forms of participation in festivals through social media, and more specifically, Facebook, even before the pandemic. This chapter focuses specifically on the affective dimension of Facebook among the migrant community during the celebration of a festival, namely, the Festival international de folklore et percussion, also known as FESFOP, in Louga, a rural region in the north of Senegal. Its main research question is: How does Facebook operate as a bridge between the hometown, Louga, and the diaspora, during the Festival international de folklore et percussion? It thus engages in a key question raised in scholarship, which refers to "how emotion, affect and feeling find expression in the digital" (Sampson et al., 2018, p.7) and specifically in this chapter, to how affect and feeling find expression in virtual festival spaces among the migrant community.

This study seeks, first, to contribute to the scarce literature looking at the role of emotions and affect in digital media practices by transnational communities (Wilding et al., 2020; Alinejad & Ponzanesi, 2020). As Donya Alinejad and Sandra Ponzanesi note "the study of emotion can help us think more comprehensively about the digital mediation of migrants' social lives in the current media age" (2020, p. 621), despite its historic marginalization in migration studies (Alinejad & Ponzanesi, 2020, p.621). Second, it aims to bring Kwame Appiah's term of "rooted cosmopolitanism" (2005), already applied to festival research (Sendra, 2021), to the space of social media, offering a horizontal theoretical framework to approach the study of digital migration. "Rooted cosmopolitanism," as understood by Appiah, is an affect-based identity among citizens of the world who feel rooted in a particular place

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1   This includes the chapter "Towards Decolonised Film Festival Worlds," co-authored by Lindiwe Dovey and me.

through birth, ancestors, love and other symbolic experiences (2005, p. 214). Such feeling prompts a call to action, to give back to the roots (Appiah, 2005, p. 241). The concept can offer a horizontal framework to migration studies in that it is "polycentric" (Shohat & Stam, 1994), rather than assuming North-South directions, often associated with Eurocentric migration studies, which are, like any other form of Eurocentric thinking, "fundamentally unrepresentative of a world which has long been multicultural" (Shohat & Stam, 1994, p. 4). Finally, its choice of a festival as a case study can encourage interdisciplinary approaches to migration studies, specifically, within the field of festival studies. This seems as timely as ever, in a post-pandemic period of increasing reflection on digital mediation in festivals.

In addressing the main research question, I will start by situating my case study, FESFOP, within the broader festival landscape in Senegal, home of the Premier Festival Mondial des Arts Nègres [First World Festival of Black Arts]. This allows understanding of the context in which FESFOP emerges, as a local *and* international festival to celebrate the cultural intangible heritage of Louga, as a source of pride, and thus largely defined through affect. I then look at the link between rooted cosmopolitanism, migration and festivals. In this section, I draw on the cultural origins of Louga and the international mobility of its artists and population more broadly in order to understand how migration is involved in the contemporary festival. Once the theoretical framework and context have been outlined, I specify the methodological considerations for this specific study, which is followed by the main analysis. In this, I first examine the way in which Facebook can be considered a virtual festival space in FESFOP (and not just a fact-based communication tool). I then identify different forms of performing rooted cosmopolitanism, emphasizing several practices and feelings. I suggest that Facebook is a particularly affective space of performances of rooted cosmopolitanism in circulation, for that affect is an immediate and instantaneous force and feeling (Alinejad & Ponzanesi, 2020, p. 624). This conceptualization of affect resonates with the operating mode of social media, also a space of circulation, largely shaped by immediacy and liveness.

11.2   Situating FESFOP Within the Festivalization of Senegal

The Festival international de Folklore et de Percussion in Louga was founded in 2000,[2] a year in which Senegal experienced increasing festivalization.

2   There was a "zero edition" in 1999, a pre-festival pilot event to test the formula for the first edition in the following year.

Before then, a number of festivals had been created, but these were mainly located in urban areas which had played a crucial role in the period under French colonialism, Dakar and Saint-Louis. Festivals before the year 2000 often resulted from state initiatives, as platforms to express and perform ideas about nationalism and panafricanism in light of the postcolonial period. The first and most emblematic event self-defined as "festival" was the Premier Festival Mondial des Arts Nègres, hosted from 1 to 24 April 1966, just six years after independence, under the patronage of Léopold Sédar Senghor, the first president of independent Senegal, and philosopher of the Négritude movement. This was conceived as a project and weapon for intellectual decolonization through placing Black arts at the very centre. The 1966 festival became a key historic moment of performance of Négritude (Murphy, 2016), at the crossroads of culture and politics in a unique context shaped by the euphoria of the immediate post-independence period.

Despite the legacy of this festival, and of Senghor's cultural political vision, expressed and embodied during the 1966 festival, the state's involvement in festivals changed significantly shortly afterwards. This shift was due to the various challenges faced in the decade of the 1970s, with an economic crisis, severe drought and the obvious obstacles of a society that had been under European colonialism since 1444. Following the appearance and disappearance of various cultural festivals under uncertain circumstances, from the year 2000, a large number of initiatives spread from across the country, both in urban and rural areas. These were no longer state initiatives or national projects. Instead, they are being led by artists or socially committed individuals who want to place their home regions on the international cultural map. This is how "two-tier festivals" emerge, both with a local and international dimension (Sendra, 2018). The notion of "two-tier festival" was inspired by Saliou Ndour's concept of "two-tier music" ("musique à deux vitesses"), in relation to the music industry in Senegal (2008, p. 3-4), referring to the different ways in which artists perform depending on whether their target audience is international or local. In the case of festivals, this dual dimension, local and international, constitutes a sustainable management formula, in order to ensure their annual celebration, boosting their local economies, re-profiling and remarketing them as potential tourist destinations (Dovey, 2015, p. 158), and celebrating their local cultural heritages in an international framework.

This is precisely how FESFOP appears, as a "project of territory," as defined by its founding co-director and president up to today, Babacar Sarr, remarketing Louga as the "cultural capital of Senegal." This was acknowledged by a former minister of culture, Mame Birame Diouf, when he attended the

festival in 2008. FESFOP is one of the first two-tier festivals that has secured an annual celebration ever since its inception, with the exception of the 2020 edition, due to the global pandemic of Covid-19.

FESFOP is a music and dance festival focusing on percussion and "folk-lore," a term understood as intangible cultural heritage and "tradition," in the words of the artistic director, Ibrahima Ndoye (interview on film, 21 December 2015). It offers a non-competitive programme of percussion bands from different regions in Senegal, as well as African and non-African countries, where the Troupe Communale Régional de Louga, that is, the local percussion band, is attributed a particular place in the programme. Its curation at the end of the opening evening on the stage, and centrality in the range of afternoon performances across the various neighbourhoods of Louga, contribute to building the expectations and suspense about the greatness of artists from the region. The festival becomes a platform for the performance, celebration and preservation of cultural heritage, as well as a source of pride, whose impact extends beyond the festival dates. It is held from 28 December to 2 January[3] and is complemented by a series of events surrounding those dates, as well as a continuous programme aimed at the local transformation of the region, led by the FESFOP association. This two-tier dimension, local *and* international, is key to understanding the way in which Facebook operates as a virtual festival space where rooted cosmopolitanism is performed.

11.3   Rooted Cosmopolitanism, Migration and Festivalization

One of the key features that explains the endorsement by the local popula-tion of FESFOP is precisely its management and direction by a "rooted cosmopolitan" (Appiah, 2005), Babacar Sarr, co-founder, director and "the soul" of the festival (Sendra, 2018, p. 248). As stated above, this is the term coined by Kwame Anthony Appiah to refer to people who identify as citizens of the world yet feel strongly rooted in a particular place. This rootedness motivates cosmopolitans to contribute to such places of connection, through initiatives that will help transform those places and the lives of their people (Appiah, 2005, p. 214).

Since the year 2000, one of the ways in which festivals achieve a certain degree of sustainability is through the engaged and transformational leader-ship of rooted cosmopolitans. This helps to secure a frequent periodicity

3   The dates may vary slightly per year.

(annually or every other year), in a context of uncertainty and fragility. Rooted cosmopolitans are often people with an international trajectory of social engagement, and frequently also, with an artistic background. Aware of the limited infrastructures or cultural policies, especially beyond Dakar and Saint-Louis, rooted cosmopolitans found festivals. These are seen as "gateways to cultural legitimisation" (de Valck 2007, p. 38), able to encourage the implementation of existing and new cultural policies, funds and infrastructure (Sendra, 2021, p. 262).

However, for festivals to achieve this transformation from event to structure (Harbord, 2016, p. 70) and have an impact for its local inhabitants, management, leadership and involvement by rooted cosmopolitans tend to be key. Otherwise, local communities can fail to identify with the project (Davies, 2011), particularly with misfit festival formats "imported" by non-locals (Dovey, 2015, p. 151-153). FESFOP was conceived from its origins as a "project of territory" (Babacar Sarr, pers. comm. 2015) *by* and *for* the population of Louga. The co-founders were both from Louga: Babacar Sarr, with a long history of social engagement and activity in the educational sector, and Yossou Mbargane Mbaye, artist and *griot*, the term to refer to storyteller and preserver of local tradition, through the oral medium, namely music and the spoken word. They had both created the artistic band *Ngalam* in 1978, with the acclaimed percussionist El Hadji Mbol Seck (1932–1985). The band would soon adopt a leading role in the national cultural scene, winning the gold medal of the Première Quinzaine de la Jeunesse de la Culture in 1995 and 1997. Having travelled extensively, and observed what was being done elsewhere, Babacar Sarr perceived "they did not have the right to do nothing for Louga" (interview on film, 26 December 2015). In line with their previous commitment to the region, acknowledged by the population, Babacar Sarr and Youssou Mbargane Mbaye's major contribution to Louga would be through a festival, FESFOP. The festival aimed to celebrate the emblematic role of the region in the cultural history of Senegal, and the legacy of important figures and music and theatre groups from the past in contemporary artists.

Louga is an artistic region, home of renowned musicians of international fame. In the words of Babacar Sarr, "Louga has contributed to forging Senegalese culture, promoting it, enhancing it and exporting it at an international level" (interview on film, 22 December 2015). It has been described as "the major centre of cultural production in the country" (Bao, 2017, p. 3). In 1961, just a year after independence, one of the dance groups created by the state as a way of revaluing national cultural values was the Ensemble National de Ballet la Linguère, from Louga (Djigo, 2015, p. 244).

This was composed of 35 dancers and performed internationally, with state funding. The involvement of artists from Louga was not coincidental. Before independence, the region had four main groups, L'Effort, Le Foyer, L'Espoir and, the most influential one, Cercle de la Jeunesse, formed in 1951, which "got inspiration from the local heritage to create theatre plays, dance, chants, etc." (Youssou Mbargane Mbaye, pers. comm. 2015). The band was created by Mademba Diop (1928–2007), a rooted cosmopolitan artist who also worked as a youth ministry officer, offering advice to the ministry on music to include in political events. The Cercle de la Jeunesse won multiple national awards for around two decades, and toured internationally from 1962 to 1981 (Neveu Kringelbach, 2013, p. 47), featuring Fatou Kassé's voice. This group is considered "the mother of the Troupe Communal de Louga" (Youssou Mbargane Mbaye, interview on film, 26 December 2015). A large number of local musicians have performed with the internationally acclaimed Senegalese musician Youssou N'Dour, such as Eric M'backe Ndoye, Magatte Dieng and Cheikh Faye. Throughout the years, the region has seen the appearance of several bands and musicians.

However, a large number of these musicians, artists and their children, who learned music in the family home, have emigrated, either to the capital, Dakar, or abroad. This emigration started mainly in the 1990s, due to the lack of infrastructure and supportive measures to work professionally as an artist in rural regions (Sendra, 2018). For example, the Orchestra Saourouba, then renamed Louga Lô, formed in 1967, saw several artists travel to France, leading to more transformations. In 1992, after performing in Tunisia, some of the musicians still based in the country decided to form the Ndiambour Salsa, which is still playing in the country.

The mobility of musicians is illustrative of the crucial role that migration plays in the region of Louga (Maggi & Sarr, 2008; Sall et al., 2011). This movement of the population is strongly linked to the geographic location of Louga, at the crossroads of different communities, between the Senegal and Saloum rivers, corresponding with the former province of Njaambur, which belonged to the kingdom of Cayor (1565–1888). A key marketplace, increasingly important since the construction of the railway in 1907, Louga soon experienced a continuous flux of the population. Today, it is considered one of the most important migrant sending areas in Senegal, due to the "overestimation of the potential for success in Europe" (Sall et al., 2011, p. 23). In Wolof, the most widely spoken lingua franca in Louga and Senegal, there is a phrase that reflects such idea, "the four T's: *tukki, tekki, ted ak terale,*" which means "travelling, making it, achieving social success and helping family and friends" (Sall et al. 2011, p. 24). There is a certain criticism of the

attitudes of *Modu-Modus*,[4] since these contribute to spreading the association of Europe with El Dorado by showing off successful lives through fashion and cars during their visits back home (Keyti & Xuman, 2013).

This historical mobility of the population in Louga raises the question how the migrant community is involved in its most important local festival, FESFOP. There are various ways in which people from Louga who have experience of international mobility may participate in FESFOP. These include sharing income with local artists performing at the festival, for example to buy clothes; travelling back to attend the festival; organizing a cultural trip to the festival, with tourists from those places where the artists from Louga are based; travelling back to perform with dancers trained abroad, etc. However, in this chapter, the focus is on *affective* participation through Facebook, a tool widely used among the migrant community, and whose use is particularly significant during the festival. Facebook publications "are positioned as both mediators and repositories of affect which leave consequential traces beyond the point of initial circulation" (Powell, 2018, p. 13). They are not just ephemeral forms of engagement with the festival, but rather, spaces where people are prompted to express a feeling towards their hometown. This embodied and mediated expression operates as a performance of the rooted cosmopolitan identity, one that stays over time, in the long term.

11.4   Positionality and Methodological Considerations: Mediating Migration Through Film and Research

This study relies on ethnographic methods, including participant observation during a fieldwork period from October 2015 to February 2016, and attendance at the Festival in 2014, 2015, 2017 and 2021, as well as digital ethnography from 2014 to the present. It was conducted as part of a broader research project, as a doctoral student from SOAS, University of London, examining local and international festivals in contemporary Senegal (Sendra, 2018). However, the focus on digital migration, and more specifically on the use of Facebook by rooted cosmopolitanism, became particularly symbolic of my first encounter with both Senegal and the region of Louga in particular.

While I was still an undergraduate student at Universidad de Sevilla, in my hometown, in 2011, I was very frustrated with the representation of Africa

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4   This is the term to those who migrate and go back and pretend they are economically and socially successful, through their clothing style or consumerism of goods such as cars.

in the Spanish media. Having completed an initial research project on the subject, I decided to take action, and make a documentary film on a topic that was accessible both to me and my region, migration. The documentary was entitled *Témoignages de l'autre côté*, and it featured the testimonials of various African people in my city Seville and Madrid. National winner of the European Charlemagne Youth Prize for Spain in 2012, the documentary film travelled to various screens internationally, including in Senegal, in the summer of 2012. The screening at Aula Cervantes in Dakar was as welcome as the private and first screening in the Casa de Acogida in Seville with the migrant community.

On both occasions, the debate was longer than the film itself.[5] In Dakar, where migration is an everyday reality experienced in different ways by the whole population, there was a demand for a second part, filmed from Senegal. For its production, I was joined by Mariama Badji, Senegalese journalist and protagonist of the first documentary film. At the time of the screening of my first documentary, I was also an intern in the cultural section of Senegalese newspaper *Le Soleil*, which made me realize that migration was by no means a taboo topic. This motivated Mariama Badji and me to choose to focus on the relationship between arts and migration. One of the artistic performances featuring in the second documentary, entitled *Témoignages… waa suñu gaal / Testimonials From the People in Senegal* (2016), was the theatre play *Au-delà des frontières / Beyond Borders,* directed by Lébou Ndoye, *metteur-en-scène*, and artistic director of FESFOP, in Louga. I had first met him in 2013, as a journalist, when I went to Louga to interview him about the festival, for an article in *Le Soleil*. This previous experience, multi-positionality, as a filmmaker, journalist (and festival worker), as well as my continuous engagement with Senegal, shaped my access to festival participants, and contributed to the relationships of trust. This is particularly significant in the context of non-African researchers conducting research in Africa, since the local perception is often "distrustful of the ethics of research in Africa by outsiders" (Neveu Kringelbach, 2013, p. 24), who have historically extracted knowledge to then "go back [to Europe] to be called an 'expert'" (Neveu Kringelbach, 2013, p. 24).

I have reflected extensively about these methodological and ethical considerations in a chapter (Sendra, forthcoming), where I share my engagement in "reciprocity practices" (Peirano, 2020, p. 24), trying "to give something back" (Neveu Kringelbach, 2013, p. 24). However, it is worth mentioning

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5   The film is 33'14" long. It is available online on my personal website: https://www.estrellasendra.com/film-production/.

here in order to understand how I approached digital ethnography, that is, the observation of the Facebook posts related to FESFOP, for the purpose of this specific study. The materials were collected in a broader context of trust, as part of my fieldwork research and continuous contact with both FESFOP and the community in Louga. Due to the under-researched status of festivals in Senegal, my PhD thesis required the production of primary data (Sendra, 2018). Through ethnography, collaboration and immersive methodologies—adopting and embracing my multiple positionalities (as a filmmaker, journalist, festival organiser and researcher) and immersing myself in various circles of cultural production and reflection on festivals—as well as archival research, with oral, written and digital accounts of festivals, I was able to trace, for the first time, the history of festivalization in Senegal. This was mainly done over the course of nine months in 2015, when festivals had not yet explored online or hybrid formats, in contrast to the period of Covid-19. Ethnographic fieldwork in Louga had become imperative in a context where archives of the festival were almost inexistent, a shared challenge in festival research (Damiens, 2020; Loist, 2016; Lee, 2016). Facebook was a key source of information, operating as a "crowd-sourced grassroots collaborative archive" (Sendra, forthcoming). I had initially somehow disregarded it as a major source of information due to the lack of updates on its page, just like on the festival website. Most communication about the festival was done live, in person, or through audiovisual promotional materials, such as radio podcasts, word of mouth, pre-festival performances and posters.

Consulting Facebook, either through festival participants that had already "friended" me because of my involvement in Louga and FESFOP, or the FEFOP page itself, I was also able to further understand the range of festival experiences. What I found was not an informational use of this social media platform, but rather, a predominantly affective use. This is a form of communication not based on factual information, but rather, on emotions shaped by the experience of migration.

However, observing Facebook practices made me realize that, when treating the festival as an archive, I had to consider both artistic and identity-based affective performances. This has already been noted in the context of queer film festivals, "as an ideal site for conceptualizing queer people's relationship with cinema" (Damiens, 2020, p. 158). They "both reveal and visualize queerness: as crucial forums for self-representation and sites for queer sociality, they entail a visual experience that can at times be cathartic and quasi-erotic" (Damiens, 2020, p. 159). In the case of FESFOP, affective performances concerned the feelings of belonging to Louga, both for local

people who had been based abroad or who aspired to eventually travel. Situated within the context of migration, it was enlightening of the role of rooted cosmopolitanism in the festival.

Having identified this trend, I followed various rooted cosmopolitans over the course of several festival editions, in order to examine the range of feelings towards Louga, expressed through Facebook during the festival dates. I complemented these with interviews and discussions with the participants based in Louga, and with Facebook chats or WhatsApp messages, with those based abroad. However, I preferred to anonymize these sources of information, in order not to personalize the phenomenon, and to respect the privacy of artists and people whose experiences of international mobility are already complex enough. Attending the festival for several years, as well as keeping in continuous touch with people from Louga, has enabled understanding of this phenomenon, not as a sporadic, circumstantial use of social media, but rather as one that can be enlightening of the link between digital migration and affect.

11.5   Facebook as a Virtual Festival Space in FESFOP

The festivalization of Louga through FESFOP is mostly achieved through the strategy of decentralization, both of the festival temporalities and spaces. As mentioned before, whilst the festival is always hosted around the same dates, from approximately 28 December to 2 January, the festival activities expand beyond these dates, with diverse cultural and training activities near the festival dates and during the whole year. This makes the FESFOP association a visible structure in the region. The festival is the most evident window into the contribution of the FESFOP association to the local transformation of Louga, through the implication of the local population, as well as local, national and international sponsors and collaborators. These activities are not just hosted in the city of Louga, but in the whole region, involving local rural communities that are often disregarded by political strategies.

Even in the city of Louga itself, where the performance stage is located during the festival dates, the programme is spread across different neighbourhoods, at times offering simultaneous yet different performances there, through the so-called Animations de Quartier[6] in the afternoon.

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6   This means, literally, "neighbourhood festivities," and refers to daytime artistic performances in different neighbourhoods, not on a stage, but in a designated area.

In this section, I argue that Facebook is not just a social media platform that permits communication about the festival. Instead, Facebook is to be understood as a virtual festival space that is able to engage participants affectively beyond the physical geographic boundaries of Louga. During the festival, through Facebook, there is a formation of a "virtual geography, inhabited by people" (Bakker, 2015, p. 10–11). Facebook users are not there to read about the festival, or to see audiovisual accounts of the live physical festival. They are there to feel, to express belonging and to perform the identity of the rooted cosmopolitan. All musical performances take place live, across a wide range of venues in the whole region of Louga. However, having said this, over the past few years, there has been increasing digital visibility of the festival through social media. For example, in the last edition, in December 2021, a year after having been cancelled due to the pandemic, a new official Facebook page was created. Performances and speeches were recorded live via Facebook, both documenting the festival celebration, and engaging digital participants with it. This festival edition was significant in that it celebrated the twentieth anniversary of the festival after the first interruption in the whole history of the festival, due to the global pandemic of Covid-19. In a context where international mobility was still challenging, even more so in the African continent, where neo-colonialism has once more been evidenced through its uneven accessibility of vaccines, Facebook also became a platform of visibility and an archive of the celebration of the festival. This is illustrative of the way in which Facebook further contributes to the shared aspiration among festivals to become international. This scope is key to achieving financial sustainability, through both local and international sponsorship.

If the focus of the physical festival is on the artistic performances, on Facebook, there is instead an identity-based performance. People represent themselves as cosmopolitan citizens and, in most cases, as artists with roots in Louga. In this performative virtual space, Facebook becomes a bridge between the hometown and the diaspora. It is a two-tier space, involving both the local and international population, allowing rooted cosmopolitans and the diaspora of Louga to connect and interact with their place of origin. Facebook creates a "deterritorialized social space that facilitates communication among geographically dispersed people in migrant networks" (Dekker & Engbersen, 2013, p. 403). The idea of "territory" then becomes more complex, since this refers both to the local *and* the virtual space. So do festival audiences, who can feel part of the festival through the Facebook posts of their friends, family and neighbours.

11.6   Performing Rooted Cosmopolitanism Through Facebook: Practices and Feelings

The main practices involved in the performance of rooted cosmopolitanism through Facebook are the publication of supportive messages endorsing the festival; posting selfies, identifying oneself as a festival participant; photo-sharing, amplifying the festival network of FESFOP friends, or rather, making the "FESFOP family"[7] grow; multi-tagging, identifying fellow participants in the festival; and sharing posters about cultural expeditions to Louga during the festival. In contrast with the quiet Facebook activity referring to FESFOP close to the festival dates, there are continuous publications during the festival. Photographs of events, with a strong focus on the performances by the Troupe Communale Régionale de Louga, start to spread across Facebook. These are often shared by fellow Facebook friends, and at times, directly involve them through multi-tagging, that is, through tagging several people at the same time in that photograph, which increases the number of views of the post and thus of the potential for engagement.

By uploading these photographs, people identify themselves as part of the FESFOP project, but also, of the rich intangible heritage of Louga and its artistic community. Through sharing posts, of photographs and festival materials, such as posters, flyers and catalogues, Facebook users become ambassadors of the festival, spreading the word and broadening its visibility. A clear example of this is the publication of the poster by the artistic director of the festival, Lébou Ndoye,[8] based in Louga, but who has several experiences of international mobility as a theatre director. Having trained a large number of young people in Louga in theatre and worked with a large section of the population through FESFOP, Lébou Ndoye is one of the most recognizable faces of the festival and association. Even if the FESFOP Facebook page was not updated, a Facebook post by Lébou Ndoye guaranteed the communication of the festival. This communication did not include the daily programme, but rather, focused on the fact that the festival was, once more, committing to its annual meeting with the community of Louga. In other words, what was prioritized in this communication was not the accuracy of the information on the schedule, but the festive excitement

7   The members of the FESFOP association refer to themselves as being part of the FESFOP family, emphasizing the important social impact of the festival on the local people involved in its organization.
8   This has not been anonymized as the subject has given explicit consent, as a result of a long collaboration and relationship of trust.

this annual event offers to the community of Louga, as a source of pride and celebration of culture. Ndoye's post was seen and shared by a large number of people, who may not necessarily be Facebook followers of the FESFOP page or like its posts, since this is outdated and in fact, has been inaccessible to festival organizers for the past few years. As the latest official Facebook page (FESFOP Louga Officiel, launched on 6 February 2019) and Fesfop Louga user profile (the one which posted the live videos in the 2021 edition, active since 21 December 2021), build their audiences, individual posting by FESFOP members is important in building festive excitement.

Similarly, by multi-tagging different people, festival participants grow in this virtual space, beyond the physicality of Louga. This is of particular significance in a context of migration, since the international visibility may contribute to the legitimization of the festival, as well as of the artists performing and participating in it. These practices demonstrate the importance of "social capital" (Bourdieu, 1986/2010, p. 86) in this project of territory, a shared feature in community festivals. They implement a "horizontal communication [model], which includes more active roles by recipients, transforming identity processes into something more complex and diverse" (Alonso & Oiarzabal, 2010, p. 8). Festival participants engage in "material and symbolic exchanges" (Bourdieu 1986/2010, p. 88–89) based on their physical, emotional or social "proximity" to other FESFOP members, thinking that these may benefit the collectivity of the people within the network. And, as Bourdieu notes, such social capital may transform into other kinds of capital, such as cultural and economic (Bourdieu 1986/2010, p. 88–89).

These rooted cosmopolitans resonate with Andoni Alonso and Pedro Oiarzabal's concept of "digital diasporas," understood as "distinct online networks that diasporic people use to re-create identities, share opportunities, spread their culture, influence homeland and host-land policy, or create debate about common-interest issues by means of electronic devices" (2010, p. 10). Their Facebook practices "facilitate[e] the circulation of affect" (Wilding et al., 2020, p. 640). They foster visibility of the pride in belonging to Louga internationally. This digital circulation of affect is particularly important in a context where human physical circulation is challenged. Beyond the endorsement of the festival that these practices entail, further feelings are expressed that are strongly linked to the identification as a rooted cosmopolitan. These audiovisual messages serve also as a tool to communicate a feeling of nostalgia, pride inlocal roots, and memory of the historic role of Louga in Senegalese culture. Facebook makes it possible for human beings to be "at home with technology" (Evans, 2015, p. 10).

Figure 11.1. Audiences gathering at the Place Civique during the 15th FESFOP. Rooted cosmopolitans stay by the back on the left, along with artists performing in the festival. Photo by Estrella Sendra, 30 December 2015.

At times, this can operate partly as marketing tool for local artists with or without experiences of international mobility. For local artists based abroad, that is, rooted cosmopolitan artists, participation in the festival stresses their professionalism and legitimizes their activities abroad, which include teaching dance and percussion courses, specifically of *sabar*. This is the most characteristic dance and percussion style of Louga, in dialogue with the *sabar* drums, typical of the Wolof people (Tang, 2007). It is not just performed at festivals, but in regular events and festivities, such as weddings and baptisms. However, making a living as a professional *sabar* dancer or percussionist is very challenging at a local level. In this context, migration becomes a common practice among artists. Yet the challenges to work professionally as an artist remain. This is why the publication of Facebook posts of the festival is used as a marketing tool, to promote the artistic work internationally.

Through images of the festival performances, rooted cosmopolitan artists share evidence of their status as musicians and dancers from a place of rich cultural heritage. They also affirm their identity as "African," "West African" or "Senegalese" artists, in a sector where African musicians are rarely curated beyond such labellization (Royal African Society, 2019). In so doing, they reinforce the way in which "tradition" can be evoked to claim a professional status (Neveu Kringelbach, 2013). There is thus an aim of transforming

cultural capital into economic capital, which is enhanced through the affective performance of rooted cosmopolitanism. For this transformation to occur there needs to be first a feeling of belonging to the homeland, and affection for those roots, despite the geographic (dis)location. Such a transformation happens, for instance, through entrepreneurial initiatives, based on the organization of percussion workshops and cultural expeditions. These are organized by rooted cosmopolitan artists under the banner of "cultural tourism" and often become a key funding source for the journey back to Louga. For example, during FESFOP 2015, a group of Spanish people was brought by a percussionist from Louga based in Spain, who was working there as a percussion teacher. The physical return to the homeland serves as an acknowledgment of the international mobility achieved thanks to FESFOP, operating as a way of giving back, and reinforcing the identification with the notion of rooted cosmopolitan.

Facebook is also used by local artists in Louga who have not yet had an experience of international mobility, but who aim to achieve it as part of their professional growth. That is, the use of social media by local people does not only favour the connection with relatives based abroad, called to participate in order to remember their roots. It also implies an aspiration of mobility, of migration, reflective of the desire to become professional artists and find financial stability and opportunities for the family at home. This "desire for and experience of the condition of mobility itself" has been identified in other migrant communities (Seto & Martin, 2018, p. 10). In the case of Louga, this is seldom realized for some. Throughout the research period in which this project has been conducted, from 2014 to 2022, the members of the Troupe Communale Régional de Louga have changed extensively, mainly due to international migration. This demonstrates how Facebook can become "an effective" – and I would add, *affective* – "infrastructure for exchanging social capital in migration networks" (Dekker & Engbersen, 2013, p. 405). There is an expectation that sharing images of participation in the festival will achieve a certain visibility among the existing international networks and broaden international networks with the people met during the festival.

The performance of rooted cosmopolitanism involves the expression of feelings of belonging to the homeland. For people based abroad, engagement in the festival through social media reflects a sense of pride in belonging to Louga. For those unable to be physically present, or even those present just temporarily around the festival dates, many of these practices reflect a further feeling of nostalgia about the hometown. This refers to the "sentiment of loss and displacement, but it is also a romance with one's own fantasy…" (Boym, cited in Mejía Estévez, 2009, p. 298). It is the norm during

the festival to post an image to express belonging to Louga from a distant geographical location. The idealism associated with the memory of it is emphasized through the festive environment triggered by the festival, and the remarketing of Louga as the cultural capital of Senegal.

Facebook is thus a technology allowing people to cope with distance and nostalgia, locating home "just a click away" (Mejía Estévez, 2009, p. 393). Because of the continuous exposure to home, there is a sense of "digital nostalgia" and a feeling that "home [is]... never fully left behind" (Mejía Estévez, 2009, p. 393). This digital nostalgia refers to the "quest for continuity of space and time through the simultaneity offered by digital media" (Mejía Estévez, 2009, p. 405). What results is some form of "co-presence across distance" (Wilding et al., 2020, p. 641 see also Chapter 4 by Stevens, Baldassar and Wilding), where Facebook constitutes the affective bridge between the hometown and the diaspora. In the case of artists, such continuity is enhanced through the professional development as an artist, for which social media results are crucial. Facebook "facilitate[s] a global-local orientation to the world that allows individuals to engage in virtual community-building and participate in communication to build global citizenship" (Sobré-Denton, 2016, p. 1715). These two simultaneous dimensions, local and international, engage in a necessary dialogue with each other through Facebook, a performative virtual space for rooted cosmopolitanism.

11.7   Conclusion

As festivals move online and experiment hybrid formats, in light of the pandemic, rethinking audience development strategies, it is crucial to examine the role of social media in these festivals. Based on the Festival International de Folklore et de Percussion in Louga, a rural region in Senegal, this chapter has proved the transformation of Facebook into a virtual festival space, mediated by technology. Facebook participates in the generation of festive excitement expected from a festival. It enhances the territorialization of the project beyond the geographic boundaries of the festival location, thus expanding the decentralization upon which the festival is conceived, as a project of territory. The practices by Facebook users during the festival evoke emotions that are linked to the feeling of belonging to the region of Louga, where the festival is located. Facebook becomes not just a space for the communication of festival activities, but rather, an affective performative space, inhabited by rooted cosmopolitans. As such, it constitutes a bridge between the roots and the diaspora. This study thus seeks to encourage further scholarship on the

relationship between affect and digital migration, suggesting a framework, Kwame Appiah's notion of rooted cosmopolitanism (2005), where the local and the international meet, through emotions which encourage actions. Building on this contextual focus, a dance and music festival where intangible heritage is embodied by artists in order to celebrate the cultural identity of the region, this chapter invites further research examining affective practices and performances in digital media in arts and creative industries.

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12. Situating the Body in Digital Migration Research: Embodied Methodologies for Analysing Virtual Reality Films on Displacement

Moé Suzuki

Abstract

Sparked by my experience of nausea while watching virtual reality (VR) films on displacement, this chapter proposes a multi-level analysis of such films. The affective dimensions of VR films on displacement—which, according to advocates, make VR films superior to other forms of media in raising awareness and funds—can be best captured by pursuing explicitly embodied methodologies that conceptualize embodiment as "being a body" rather than "having a body." I argue that such methodologies make three main contributions: they expand the boundaries of what is considered "valid" knowledge and centre the geopolitics of knowledge production; foreground how researchers bring with them their relations, experiences, and histories into the virtual encounter; and can lead to thicker conceptual understanding.

Keywords: virtual reality; embodiment; refugees; displacement; methodology.

12.1 Introduction: Learning from Nausea

I put on my Oculus Quest 2 headset and start watching *Clouds Over Sidra* (2015). After a few minutes, mild nausea gradually starts to overtake my body. The headset weighs heavy on my head and neck. Sitting on the floor with the laptop in front of me, hurriedly typing up notes—what do I see and hear, where do I look, what am I feeling, what am I thinking—I

pause to quell the nausea. I take off the headset. The nausea lasts for a few hours, preventing me from doing any further analysis of the film for the day. Does this experience offer any insights about displacement portrayed in VR films?

Since the commercialization of virtual reality (VR) technology in the mid-2010s, an increasing number of VR films covering social and political issues has been released. *VR Nonfiction: A Mediography* database identifies 603 VR nonfiction titles released between 2012 and 2018, with a marked increase from 2015 onwards (Virtual Realities: Immersive Documentary Encounters, n.d.). Among this growing corpus, what Lisa Nakamura (2020) calls "virtuous VR" has emerged as a particular kind of VR experience. This refers to VR experiences created after Facebook's (now Meta) acquisition of Oculus VR in 2014 that market the technology as "a compassionate, connecting, and above all empathetic kind of machine" (Nakamura, 2020, p. 48). Nakamura highlights "the refugee VR documentary" as "one paradigmatic genre," where VR technology is said to bridge difference by putting the viewer into the shoes of refugees. Within this genre, Nonny de la Peña's framing of VR as "a visceral empathy generator" (Volpe, 2015) and Chris Milk's description of it as "the ultimate empathy machine" (Milk, 2015) have captured the popular imagination, particularly since the release of the United Nation's first-ever VR film about the displacement of Syrians, *Clouds Over Sidra* (2015). The claim is that, in going beyond mere representation, VR films are felt. They offer more than visuality—they purport to offer *experiences* of displacement, allowing viewers to "walk in another person's shoes" as the producer of *Clouds Over Sidra*, Gabo Arora, puts it (United Nations, 2016). In those ways, VR films attempt to forge affective bonds between refugees and the viewer. The virtual environment tugs at the viewer's senses, as well as their experiences and histories; it attempts to open the viewer's capacity to be moved by the encounter with refugees and the simulated experiences of displacement (Nash, 2018). Being moved—to tears, to empathize, to take action—by watching VR films hence comes to frame the technology itself as a pro-social, liberatory tool.

The relationship between embodiment, immersion and empathy has been explored in empirical literature on VR technology. For instance, in a highly cited paper, Kilteni, Groten and Slater (2012) propose the term "Sense of Embodiment" to describe embodiment in VR, defined as "the sense that emerges when [a body] B's properties are processed as if they were the properties of one's own biological body" (p. 375). Embodiment thus generates a sense of "personally having the VR experience" (Shin, 2018, p. 66), and VR

experiences are "often better understood not as a media experience, but as an actual experience" because they feel "real" (Bailenson, 2018, p. 46). Interestingly, Kilteni et al. (2012) mention in a footnote that they use the term "body" in this paper "as a container, which can be any object in the context of virtual reality," which is distinguished from "one's biological body" (p. 375). The "body as a container" suggests that it can be filled up and emptied at will. The authors similarly define "sense of embodiment" as "the ensemble of sensations that arise in conjunction with *being inside, having, and controlling a body*" (pp. 374–375, emphasis mine). The physical body and virtual body are thus understood as a container that holds something else: they are individualized and rendered as property, something you *have* rather than something you *are* (Minh-ha, 1989).

The conceptualization and operationalization of the body as a container underscores an interesting tension: although VR technology is an embodied form of technology as it relies on embodiment to achieve its technological affordances (Hayles, 1996), embodiment in the virtual environment is predominantly[1] achieved through supposed transcendence of the physical body. This idea that VR technology enables "bodily and subjective transcendence" (Green, 1999, p. 416) extends the discourses in the 1980s and 1990s when the technology was being developed. More specifically with regard to VR films on displacement, the viewer can supposedly stand in the shoes of refugees precisely because the body is seen as a container—refugees' bodies, through which they experience displacement, are rendered consumable and replaceable (Cañas, 2016). In the process of transposing experiences to the body-as-container in the virtual world, the experiences of displacement are divorced from refugees' lives: decontextualized, generalized, and depoliticized.

This, I argue, reflects an assumption about "humanity" and universal embodiment that undergird the popularity of VR films on displacement: that because we are all human with bodies, the virtual body-as-container serves as a vehicle through which to experience and understand other people's lives and experiences. The idea of body-as-container and an apolitical, pre-existing idea of "humanity" together produce a disembodied and apolitical epistemology of displacement that elides questions of power and

1   As pointed out by Wallis and Ross (2021, p. 317), Indigenous creators and scholars such as Métis Cree film director Loretta Todd and Kanien'kehá:ka (Mohawk) artist and theorist Jackson 2bears have challenged Eurocentric emphasis on disembodiment in VR. They have sought to use VR technology in ways that centre the body and differently embodied selves that people bring to the VR experience.

politics, as if we are all equally vulnerable to being displaced (Suzuki, 2022). Not all VR films about displacement reproduce such understandings of humanity and displacement; however, the popularity of using VR technology to highlight the issue of displacement reflects a particular way in which the concept of humanity is put to work, as well as how displacement is commonly conceptualized. I thus approach VR films about displacement through an explicitly political lens.

Contrary to such claims of seamless transition into another's shoes, my own experience of watching VR films on displacement such as the UN's *Clouds Over Sidra* (2015) and Amsterdam-based VR studio Scopic's *Refugees* (2015) generated not tears or compassion but nausea and dizziness. I was split from the scenes of Za'atari camp and migrants arriving on Lesbos, instead having to cope with the surging nausea while trying to maintain my presence as a researcher. This furthered my critical analysis of liberal humanist assumptions undergirding the VR films. Nausea prompted me to think about the immediate bodily affect and how it disrupted the purportedly "real" experience; the centrality of embodiment to the VR experience; and how VR films' disembodiment of the viewer and the experience of displacement itself is a depoliticizing move (Suzuki, 2022). One can claim to be able to simulate displacement in a virtual environment only if displacement is reducible to an instance, a scene—rather than a historical and political experience rooted in a racist and colonial ordering of mobility on a global scale.

As VR films are claimed to be superior to other kinds of media like text or 2D films[2] by supposedly offering "an actual experience," it is crucial for researchers to engage with methodologies that attend to the embodied dimensions of VR films. Still, what I am proposing relies on text—after all, writing being the dominant form of communication in academia, researchers are often required to translate thoughts, feelings and being into words—and might be considered to replicate the problematic I am critiquing. However, I am not attempting to overcome the dominance of text in this chapter. Instead, taking seriously Vacchelli's (2018) comment that migration studies have not embraced the "embodied turn" in social sciences, I draw on my own experience of analysing VR films on displacement to cultivate embodied methodologies that attune[3] (Kanngieser & Todd, 2020) to the body, and centre it as a source of knowledge.

2   However, 2D films can also be experiential and sensuous. For example, see Marks and Polan (2000) and Sobchack (2004).
3   Drawing on Indigenous scholars from the Pacific, Kanngieser in Kanngieser and Todd (2020) defines attunement as "to bring into tune, to find resonances or moments of intersection. ... a

In this chapter, I provide some avenues for cultivating embodied methodologies to analyse VR films. In the first section, I introduce the two films I analysed as part of my doctoral research that informed the analysis in this chapter. I then discuss research as an embodied process by drawing on existing literature. The final section proposes a multi-layered analysis of VR films, and three contributions that embodied methodologies can make when analysing VR films on displacement: they expand the boundaries of what is considered to be "valid" knowledge and centre the geopolitics of knowledge production; foreground how researchers bring with them their relations, experiences and histories into the virtual encounter with the figures of refugees; and can lead to thicker conceptual understanding.

12.2   VR Films on Displacement: *Clouds Over Sidra* (2015) and *Refugees* (2015)

My thoughts on embodied methodologies emerged through my doctoral research on VR films about displacement, where I analysed the ways in which the concept of "humanity" manifest in four VR films about displacement. This chapter draws on two of the four VR films on displacement that I studied as part of the project: *Clouds Over Sidra* (2015) and *Refugees* (2015).

Set in Za'atari refugee camp in Jordan, *Clouds Over Sidra* (Milk & Pousman, 2016) tells the story of a 12-year-old girl Sidra, a Syrian refugee, who narrates the film and guides the viewer through her daily life in the camp. I see her eating dinner with family; taking classes at school; girls playing football; men working out in the gym; and boys playing computer games. The film concludes with Sidra's hopeful message of returning to Syria: "I will not be twelve forever and I will not be in Za'atari forever. My teacher says the clouds moving over us also came here from Syria. Someday, the clouds and me are going to turn around and go back home" (Milk & Pousman, 2016). The film is a collaboration between the UN Sustainable Development Goals Action Campaign, VR company Vrse, UNICEF Jordan, and Samsung, and was released at the World Economic Forum in Davos in January 2015. It features prominently in narratives about VR's potential to change people's

laborious, humbling, and self-reflexive process" (p. 390). It involves recognizing one's presence and relationship to land, place and beings (non/human), as well as the limits to one's knowledge, and "reckoning with ... being a guest, a trespasser, and a colonizer" (ibid.).

attitude towards refugees,[4] and has been screened at multiple festivals and incorporated into fundraising campaigns.[5]

Refugees (Perez & Melissen, 2015), directed by Amsterdam-based VR studio Scopic's Chief Editor Eduardo Hernandez Perez and journalist Hans Jaap Melissen, was awarded Best Experimental Film at the Independent European Film Festival in 2016. The film is also one of the top search results for "refugee VR film" on YouTube. The film focuses on refugees fleeing to Europe to reflect the daily reality of "hundreds of Syrian, Afghani [sic], and Iraqi refugees" arriving on the shores of Greece (Scopic, 2016). The film begins with refugees arriving to the shore on dinghies, and their short journey to taking off again on a ferry headed to Athens. I see photographers taking pictures of exhausted refugees, makeshift camps, a beach covered with brightly coloured deflated life jackets, and people walking towards the dock. Some of these scenes are overladen with recordings of anti-refugee speeches by ex-US President Donald Trump and the right-wing Dutch politician Geert Wilders.

Both films can be viewed using a commercial VR headset, offering a 360° view in the virtual world. Scopic created *Refugees* "[i]n an attempt to restore the humane perspective of the refugee crisis and offer new insights to the public" (Virtual Reality Marketing, 2018), and the UN explains the purpose of creating *Clouds Over Sidra* as "using the medium [of VR] to generate greater empathy and new perspectives on people living in conditions of great vulnerability" (United Nations Virtual Reality, n.d.). Released in the aftermath of the so-called "European refugee crisis," those two films are therefore emblematic of virtuous VR that utilizes the technological affordances of VR to offer supposedly new ways of representing displacement and forging connections with refugees.

12.3   Embodiment and Research

In my own project, the research process entailed putting on the headset and incorporating elements of fieldnote-taking and auto-ethnography:

4   Director Chris Milk famously described VR as "the ultimate empathy machine" (2015) with reference to the film. The UN High Commissioner for Refugees has also included the film in an article titled "7 videos guaranteed to change the way you see refugees" (Parater, 2015).

5   It was shown at a humanitarian pledging conference in March 2015, where it exceeded expectations and raised $3.8 billion, and used in street fundraising campaigns in Canada (Anderson, 2015). It was also part of UNICEF's street fundraising efforts in 40 countries, with claims that VR is more effective in generating donations (Cravinho, 2016).

writing down what was going on in each scene as well as what I saw, heard, felt, my own movements and how I was expected to move, as well as how I related to others in the VR film. I watched the film as many times as required, sometimes going against expectations (e.g., not looking where I am expected to look) or trying to attend to the whole experience and its contextualization—or lack thereof—rather than just the immediate surroundings. The notes were then coded as I identified key themes. My thinking on embodied methodologies developed through this process of analysing VR films and by engaging with methods and methodologies that foreground embodiment. Such literature includes walking interviews as a biographical method (O'Neill & Roberts, 2020), listening to images (Campt, 2017), embodied analysis of film (Marks & Polan, 2000; Sobchack, 2004), creative and participatory methods such as collage-making and digital storytelling (Vacchelli, 2018), auto-ethnography (Strom, 2021), sensory ethnographic research (Pink, 2015), and how to practise embodiment in the research process (Ellingson, 2017).[6] Even when embodiment is not the object of study as in my case or when researchers are working with quantitative data, researchers use their senses; researchers affect and are affected by others and objects we encounter and the environments we navigate and in which we conduct research; and being both discursive and corporeal, bodies are one of the sites where power manifest (Ellingson, 2017). In this way, all research is embodied.

What is embodiment? I turn to Trinh T. Minh-ha's words on this question: "we do not have bodies, we are our bodies, and we are ourselves while being the world. … We write—think and feel—(with) our entire bodies rather than only (with) our minds or hearts." (Minh-ha, 1989, p. 36). In short, embodiment can be defined as the experience of being bodies. Scholars from a variety of backgrounds who foreground embodiment in their work also informed my thinking. For example, feminist standpoint theorists like Collins (1999), Harding (1992), and Haraway (1988) have developed theories of situated knowledges, connecting embodiment with the politics of knowledge production. Postcolonial feminist Mohanty (2003) has similarly argued for "a politics of location" that resists homogenization and depoliticization of experience under the banner of "women's experience," while decolonial scholars like

6   She presents a list of practices for embodying research and how to incorporate embodiment when taking fieldnotes. I found the latter particularly helpful when taking my own notes: engaging your whole body as you write since writing is a corporeal activity, not simply a cognitive one; understanding language as dynamic and open-ended; and using imaginative figurative language like similes, metaphors, hyperbole and poetic language to express sensory perceptions.

Mignolo (2002) and Lugones (2010) have discussed coloniality and geopolitics of knowledge production. Feminist posthuman scholars like Haraway (1991) and Hayles (2002) have challenged the nature/culture dichotomy and the liberal conception of autonomous individuals. Phenomenological approaches such as the work by Ahmed (2006; 2014), Fanon (1952/2008), and Salamon (2018) have contributed to a rich body of literature on embodiment, race, and gender. Furthermore, Indigenous scholars have long called attention to the connections between land, knowledge production, coloniality, colonialism and power relations (Aluli-Meyer, 2008; Moreton-Robinson, 2013; Todd, 2016; Tuhiwai Smith, 2021). However, it is important to note—for myself too—that engagement with Indigenous worldviews and epistemologies requires a careful, ethical, and self-reflexive approach so that Indigenous thinking is not simply "included" into Eurocentric thinking through a logic of extraction (Todd, 2016).

Embodiment as "being a body," then, and the relations that we build through our being, recognize the impossibility of separating the mind from the body. Being, thinking, knowing, feeling all happen through being bodies. What is important to note here is that knowledge derived through embodiment is not necessarily a "truer" form of knowledge. Accepting this would replicate the oft-implicit claim VR advocates make, that VR films are a *better* way of understanding displacement because it is an "actual experience." Yet, there is no seamless transition from experience to knowledge, as postcolonial and Black feminist scholars have shown (Collins, 1991; Combahee River Collective, 1986/2018; Mohanty, 2003).

12.4   A Multi-Level Analysis

As mentioned earlier, one of the prevailing discourses of virtuous VR is that it moves people; it is a technology designed to affect the viewer. While there are disagreements on what affect is, for the purpose of this chapter I understand it as "a force that creates a relationship (conscious or otherwise) between a body (individual or collective) and the world" (Cifor, 2016, p. 10). Despite the centrality of embodiment and affect in VR films on displacement, those dimensions are often not made explicit in both empirical and theoretical work. For example, empirical studies that seek to measure empathy before and after watching a VR film about refugees or comparing the results between 2D and VR formats can be thought of as an attempt to capture this affective dimension (Schutte & Stilinović, 2017; Shin, 2018; Alberghini, 2020). However, such studies reduce emotions to an

individualized, psychological realm by adopting self-reporting and measurement scales such as the Interpersonal Reactivity Index (IRI) (Davis, 1980).

Emotions are better conceptualized as social and cultural practices, and not something people possess: "[I]t is through emotions, or how we respond to objects and others, that surfaces or boundaries are made: the 'I' and 'we' are shaped by, and even take the shape of, contact with others" (Ahmed, 2014, p. 10). Ahmed's (2014) sociality of emotions model is therefore useful in situating the affective relations that emerge from VR films on displacement in wider social, cultural, and political contexts (Pedwell, 2014). Theoretically oriented works[7] with a focus on discursive and representational dimensions of VR films on displacement can also do more to methodologically engage with the embodied and affective dimensions. In such work, the experiential is often subsumed under the textual, and the researcher's embodiment is largely absent in the analysis. Rather than taking for granted one's perspective as a researcher and as a viewer, embodied methodologies encourage an understanding of VR technology as producing particular kinds of "viewers" and "refugees" and shaping affective relations between them.

An embodied methodology that I propose here considers the multiple levels at which researchers need to analyse VR films: embodied experience as a participant in the virtual environment and a consumer of the technology, embodied experience outside of the virtual environment, and embodied experience as a researcher. Those multiple levels at which research takes place overlap and interact, which inform the experience of watching VR films as well as the analysis itself. For example, when analysing *Clouds Over Sidra* and *Refugees*, as a participant in the virtual environment and consumer of the technology, I let myself experience the VR films as they came to me naturally. As a consumer of VR technology, I thought about the political economy of the VR industry as symbolized by Meta's Oculus Quest 2 headset, and the data being collected by Meta while conducting this research. With regard to the embodied experience outside of the virtual environment, I experienced physical sensations and reactions (e.g., nausea and weightiness of the headset), and was struck by the dissonance between where I actually am (my living room) and where I am virtually (Za'atari refugee camp and Lesbos). As a researcher, I tried to deconstruct and question what I experienced in the two films. It was also me as a researcher that took notes, paying attention to these different levels of embodiment, while being reflexive about what I was bringing to the analysis of two

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7   By this I mean research that does not involve participants or attempt to measure certain aspects of VR films as empirical work.

films—my theoretical background, personal histories, and my complicity and/or implication in the displacement of people portrayed in the films. Those different levels of analysis overlap and may contradict each other, and what emerges from conducting this multi-level analysis will differ depending on the researcher.

12.5   Generative Potential of Embodied Methodologies

What can embodied methodologies contribute to analyses of VR films on displacement? Below I offer three contributions: politics of knowledge production, attention to relationality, and thicker conceptual understanding.

Politics of Knowledge Production

Embodied methodologies expand the boundaries around what is considered "valid" knowledge, as many feminist, postcolonial, decolonial and Indigenous scholars have discussed. For example, attending to my nausea from watching *Clouds Over Sidra* and *Refugees* led me to deeper reflections on the experiential and political aspects of VR films. To ponder on what it is to know, and what is considered to be knowledge, is to take seriously the questions of "how I know what I know, where I know from, who I know from, and what I cannot possibly know" (McKittrick, 2021, p. 14). This involves not only grappling with one's positionalities and relations but also understanding the geopolitics of knowledge production (Lugones, 2010). Embodied methodologies thus ask the researcher to situate one's knowledge: In what ways are experiences of displacement rendered "knowable"? Am I positioned as able to access all knowledge? How is the viewer imagined—does the film follow a "body-as-container" model, therefore position the viewer as someone who can access anyone's experiences and histories?

Embodied methodologies take seriously the ways in which knowledge and narratives about VR and displacement are tied to the material (McKittrick, 2021). This can be expanded to thinking about the relationship between not only the material and the metaphorical but also the ontological and the epistemological. What allows me to conduct research—access to resources, mobility, infrastructures and networks that sustain my life, and so on—and how does that shape the kinds of knowledge I produce by watching the VR films? To use embodied methodologies is to bring my attention to the structures and relationships that allow me to think, feel, write as a researcher (and more generally to live), and for them to inform my analysis.

In contrast to VR advocates who suggest that VR films on displacement provide a new—and better—way of knowing displacement through "an actual experience," some filmmakers challenge assumptions of VR's ability to render others' experiences transparent and accessible. For instance, Wallis and Ross (2021) explore how Indigenous creatives use VR to centre Indigenous sovereignty, to tell Indigenous-centred stories and to resist colonial, Eurocentric modes of production and distribution. They actively incorporate power relations and the "opacity of being" (Glissant, 1997). Wallis and Ross (2021) discuss a VR film in which Mohawk speakers have more freedom to move, whereas non-Mohawk speakers have less as they have to be in a fixed position to read the subtitles: "the non-Mohawk speaker is not given the same access to this community and they have to work to establish their personal relationship with it" (p. 9). Knowledge about the Mohawk world is not rendered transparent to everyone. An embodied methodology of VR films on displacement similarly asks: What might a VR film with such orientation look like, one that refuses the voyeuristic gaze and the reduction of the complexities of experiences of displacement?[8]

Attention to Relationality

Embodied methodologies conceptualize VR technology not only as a technological object but also as a web of relationships (Green, 1999). For instance, the commercial VR headset Oculus Quest 2 used in my research is a headset and two controllers that arrived to me after passing through many hands, lives, and borders. To actively consider this is to incorporate into one's thinking and analyses the political economy of VR technology: who has access to this £400 piece of technology,[9] where the raw materials come from, who assembles them, and who profits.

In this way, embodied methodologies centre the webs of relationships in which researchers are implicated. It encourages researchers to pay attention to not only the immediacy of the VR experience but the wider context in which the experience takes place. Ahmed's (2000) inter-embodiment as a site of differentiation is a particularly useful framework to explore how an embodied analysis of VR films can turn researchers' attention to the relations and experiences that pre-exist the virtual encounter, which shape

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8   There is no space to expand on this important question in this chapter; I hope to write more about this elsewhere.

9   This was the price in October 2020. Funding from the University of East Anglia enabled me to purchase the headset.

the encounter itself. The encounter happens in the here and now but is part of a much longer history of living amongst others in the world. This means that who the viewer is and the histories and experiences they carry matter when trying to understand and analyse VR films, especially the affective bonds they attempt to forge. This point is also pertinent to VR films on displacement specifically, since particular experiences are being framed as representative of "the refugee experience"; particular figures of refugees are reproduced (Suzuki, 2022); and people who experience displacement may be treated as body-as-containers, simultaneously consumed and erased (Cañas, 2016). Attending to inter-embodiment also encourages reflexivity, and how the research/er may challenge or be implicated in "unjust power relations" (Leurs & Prabhakar, 2018, p. 249).

As VR films on displacement attempt to forge affective bonds between the viewer and the figure of the refugee, affect is another aspect to which researchers should pay attention. This would entail not only asking how I feel in the virtual environment and outside of the headset, but also to think about how I am expected to feel. The multi-level analysis is particularly pertinent for analysing affect: how am I affected as a participant in the virtual environment, as a researcher, and as a person embedded in the world? Apart from nausea that disrupted the seamless transition into the virtual world imagined by the creators, at several points during *Clouds Over Sidra* and *Refugees*, I felt discomfort at the certain level of intimacy offered by the virtual environment, such as standing next to Sidra's family having dinner or next to a person wrapped up in a blanket, who had just come off a dinghy and is clearly distressed. This contrasted with what I understood to be the intended affective relations of compassion and empathy towards refugees.

Thicker Conceptual Understanding

Finally, paying attention to the body can generate "thicker" conceptual understanding.[10] In my case, treating my nausea seriously and attending to my relationships to refugees both inside and outside the VR experience further developed my thoughts regarding the concept of "humanity" that undergirds some VR films on displacement. This, again, is connected to how one conceptualizes displacement. Attuning to the body highlights that ontology and epistemology are intertwined in complex ways within

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10   I take cue from anthropologist Geertz's (1973) "thick description." Geertz discussed the importance of interpretation when writing ethnography. Ethnography is not simply a compilation of facts but involves the researcher's attempts to make meaning in context-specific ways.

structures of power (Hemmings, 2012). Situating myself as a viewer in the virtual environment—as someone who benefits from a global system of im/mobility based on a colonial and racist logic—interrupted the seamless transition into the virtual body. It further cemented my understanding of displacement as a lived, embodied experience (Bhutto, 2018)[11] that cannot be captured in VR films that position the body as a container.

Analysing the orientation of my body and movement in the VR film at multiple levels also led to thicker conceptual understanding. This involved questions such as: Where is my body? Am I expected to be oriented towards a certain person/object? Can I move differently? From where am I looking? How do others/the environment move? In *Clouds Over Sidra* and *Refugees*, I noticed not only the absence of my body (Hamilton, 2017; Kool, 2016) but also the unusually high angle from which I was looking, reminding me of Haraway's expression "the god trick of seeing everything from nowhere" (1988, p. 581). This experience of technological embodiment, for instance, informed my arguments on technological disembodiment and depoliticization of displacement (Suzuki, 2022).

12.6   Conclusion

I began this chapter by asking: Can the experience of nausea offer me any insights about VR films on displacement? While VR advocates assume a seamless affective connection between refugees and the viewer, my experience of nausea disrupted this and led me to engage with embodied methodologies. The introduction presented the paradox of VR as both a disembodied and an embodied form of technology, followed by the second section providing a brief overview of the two VR films that informed this chapter. The third section highlighted the significance of embodiment in research by drawing on my own research and existing literature from various disciplines.

Using *Clouds Over Sidra* and *Refugees* as examples, the fourth and fifth sections proposed what an embodied methodology of VR films may look like. I presented a multi-level analysis of VR films: analysing

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11   In an essay, Bhutto recalls experiencing Alejandro G. Iñárritu's VR work *CARNE y ARENA* (2017) as a Pakistani person with personal histories of displacement. Towards the end, the virtual world and her own experiences of displacement in "real life" start to blur. Her reactions are visceral, bringing up corporeal memories of violence. She has to remind herself that she can leave any time.

the embodied experience as a participant in the virtual environment and a consumer of the technology, embodied experience outside of the virtual environment, and embodied experience as a researcher. Such explicitly embodied methodologies, I argue, make three contributions to the analyses of VR films on displacement. Firstly, they expand the boundaries around what is considered "valid" knowledge, encourage researchers to reflect on under what conditions knowledge is produced and by whom, and question some VR films' attempts to render experiences of displacement transparent. Secondly, by situating VR technology not only as a technological object but as a web of relationships, explicitly embodied methodologies encourage researchers to consider the lives and resources that comprise the physical object—such as the headset—that the researcher uses to conduct research. Moreover, particularly when analysing the affective relations that VR films seek to forge between the viewer and the figures of refugees, such methodologies foreground the wider context in which researchers are situated. Finally, explicitly embodied methodologies can generate thicker conceptual understanding. In my case, the multi-level analysis formed the basis for my arguments around the limits of "humanization" in *Clouds Over Sidra*, as well as the depoliticization of displacement through technological disembodiment (Suzuki, 2022). In those ways, embodied methodologies situate the body in digital migration research, highlighting that, indeed, researchers write, think, and feel with our entire bodies.

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Section V

Datafication, Infrastructuring and Securitization

Introduction to Section V: Datafication, Infrastructuring and Securitization

Saskia Witteborn

Media and communication studies have explored the production of the migrant through material and discursive processes and the politics of language. Research has argued that the labelling of migrants is a political project and that terms such as refugee serve bureaucratic management procedures and shift the discourse about rights to the discourse about belonging (Zetter, 2007). Moreover, studies continue to highlight the influence of mediated discourses on the construction of the migrant figure. In Europe, victimhood and threat are still some of the persisting tropes in narratives and practices of digital and symbolic bordering (e.g., Chouliaraki & Georgiou, 2022; Eberl et al., 2018).

During the last decade, there has been a turn toward the material and a proliferation of research about the technological aspects of bordering, the datafication of the mobile body, surveillance of the Other, and migration infrastructures (e.g., Aradau & Blanke, 2022; Ruppert & Scheel, 2021; Xiang & Lindquist, 2014). Biopolitics remains a relevant research topic, as expressed through the concepts of voice and accent recognition in Leix-Palumbo's chapter (see chapter 13). This chapter speaks to the vital question of how oral expression is transformed from a profoundly interactive social performance into a probability measure of access to rights and territory. A focus on the intersection between voice as a collective accomplishment and the performance of language could be a point of departure to understand even better how groups from particular regions in the world are constituted as deserving protection while others are denied this protection.

There is an increasing body of productive research about technological infrastructures that govern trans-border mobilities and normalize the control of refugee populations through the logic of logistics, management,

and surveillance (e.g., Dijstelbloem, 2021; Pollozek & Passoth, 2019; Tazzioli, 2020). Ludek Stavinoha's insightful chapter (see Chapter 14) adds to this body of research through the angle of lean management and how efficiency and cost optimization are the drivers of technocratic change management and the privatization of human population control. He thereby ties his persuasive argument to the question of the actors involved in migration and mobility control as well as their aligning and conflicting interests. Future studies can continue investigating the debates and resistant discourses within and between state institutions, NGOs, and activist networks linked to the datafication of migrant bodies, data justice, and surveillance. In addition, researchers can explore the differences and similarities between migrant populations concerning types and consequences of datafication, including refugees, stateless people, labour migrants, and privileged knowledge migrants.

Much of the recent research has engaged with the data-driven anticipation of mobility scenarios, also based on the work by Louise Amoore (2013), and how migrants respond to those scenarios with equally anticipatory practices. In chapter 15, Kaarina Nikuunen and Sanna Valtonen build on this discussion from the perspective of state actors and explore the notion of *anticipation* as an operational border and migration management logic. They argue forcefully that migrant bureaucracies and practices are increasingly digitized and datafied, thereby amplifying a logic of prediction through profiling and modelling of migrant movement and behaviour.

In the future, research should continue to highlight the construction of the migrant and its material, discursive, and affective moorings, including biometric infrastructures of control, the shift from humanitarianism towards a management approach in the warehousing of mobile bodies, and datafied mobility modelling. One consequence of these processes is that vulnerable migrant groups are rendered hyper-visible in the name of security and collective identity curation by the state (e.g., Witteborn, 2022, 2023). Studies can address how this hyper-visibility is accomplished through various epistemologies and beyond disciplinary boundaries. Research can also continue to focus on migrant mobilities as a response to securitization and infrastructures of control. The latter activates modes of defiance that need ongoing academic attention to lobby for more humane migration policies through grassroots engagement and evidence-based scholarship. Studies can also engage with the conceptual anchor of the digitally connected migrant (Diminescu, 2008) to examine the networked basis of migrant mobilities as well as the networked nature of anti-immigrant populism and disinformation (e.g., Banaji & Bhat, 2021). These foci facilitate our understanding of the systemic, feedback-driven character of governing by datafication and

discursive reproduction. They also underscore the consequences of automated technologies and digital identity tools for algorithmic body politics.

In contexts of risk and ongoing crises, anticipation, prediction, and preemption are conceptual notions with political, economic, and ethical force. Therefore, future research might also expand its scope to accentuate the intersections between migration infrastructures, borders, and climate change. Climate-induced migration will only strengthen the datafication and automation of internal and trans-border mobilities and raise new questions about biometric surveillance and predictive modelling of human populations.

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13. The Weaponization of Datafied Sound: The Case of Voice Biometrics in German Asylum Procedures

Daniel Leix Palumbo

Abstract

Since 2017, German border authorities have used voice biometrics to analyse the accents of undocumented asylum seekers to pinpoint their country of origin and, consequently, determine their eligibility for asylum. This chapter analyses voice biometrics in the framework of sonic weaponization and in the sociotechnical imaginary that supports today's voice biometric industry, with the aim to direct new critical attention to the auditory realm of top-down governmentality digital practices in the field of digital migration studies. Finally, I argue how the very sonic nature of voice and its capacity to establish intimacy is datafied and weaponized to construct digital identities and control borders—alienating the value and meaning of voice as a site to affirm one's subjectivity and political agency.

Keywords: sound; voice; biometrics; asylum procedures; datafication.

13.1 Introduction

Sound is an essential element underpinning the relational nature of voice (Cavarero, 2005). It activates language into utterances, affording the capacity of voice to establish relations between subjects and objects (Bakhtin, 1979/1986). Sound also symbolically connects voice to identity. It affords the uniqueness of one's voice through a sonorous self-revelation that overcomes linguistic registers or signification, exemplified, for example, by announcing oneself on the phone through the pronouns "I" or "me" (Cavarero, 2005). At the same time, affective, social, ethical and political forces colour the sound

of voice, making it the channel for a person to express their subjectivity and form links and groupings (Kanngieser, 2012). Thus, the sound of voice accentuates "individual identity as a relational project" and allows individuals "to foster confrontations between one and another, and to infuse language with degrees of intimacy" (LaBelle, 2010, p. xxi).

As such, voice also plays a primary role in machine-mediated local and transnational communication—from the telephone to the oral/aural renaissance occurring in today's digitized media context (Gallego, 2021). The case of migrants is no exception, as online voice calls and messages on messaging platforms are present in everyday digital practices (Greene, 2020; Weitzel, 2018; Zijlstra & van Liempt, 2017). The sound of voice can thus be argued to be constitutive of migrants' bottom-up digital practices of everyday meaning-making, which the field of Digital Migration Studies recognizes as a form of "cosmopolitanism from below" (Leurs & Ponzanesi, 2018). Through digital technologies such as smartphones and social media, migrants take part in practices of boundary-making by maintaining bonds with diaspora communities—including family and friendships at a long distance—while simultaneously crossing boundaries through local, intercultural networking and integration with the host society. Such practices create diasporic spaces of belongingness while providing individual and collective intercultural, cosmopolitan experiences (Leurs & Ponzanesi, 2018), also imbued with the intimacy elicited by the sociopolitical and affective forces of the soundings of voice. But what if this moment of intimacy established by the sound of voice is weaponized in the name of policing the digital fortress of Europe?

This question brings us to the reception centres of Germany, where the German Bundesamt für Migration und Flüchtlinge (BAMF, or Federal Office for Migration and Refugees) started an ambitious project for the massive digitization of its whole administrative infrastructure and border policing system in 2016 (BAMF, 2018). This was initiated in response to the so-called "European refugee crisis" and premised on a technocratic imaginary, favouring the implementation of advanced technologies (such as blockchain and machine learning) to guarantee efficiency, transparency and control in migration management (Witteborn, 2022). If the introduction of blockchain technology aimed to facilitate data sharing and communication among the different units of BAMF in German's federal system (Witteborn, 2022), at the core of the digitization process was the implementation of IT tools for the assessment of asylum seekers' country of origin and identity. These tools were aimed at making up for the inability of Germany's administration to cope with the high number of asylum applications, operationalizing the call for more restrictive measures to decrease the inflow of asylum seekers and

also ease forced returns (BAMF, 2018; Kreienbrink, 2018). According to official information, most asylum seekers arrive in Germany without presenting a passport; therefore, the BAMF implemented an IT toolbox to handle asylum procedures to reinforce the deterrence policy toward migrants not covered by the Geneva Convention (Kreienbrink, 2018).

In the IT package embraced by BAMF, the controversial tool of voice biometrics stands out. It is built around automatic dialect recognition and named the Language and Dialect Identification Assistance System, or DIAS, by BAMF. This was presented as the flagship of the BAMF digital renewal, and has been in full use since the first testing in 2017, despite criticism of its lack of accuracy (Bellanova & Fuster, 2019; Biselli, 2018). Voice biometrics are deployed when decision-makers do not trust asylum seekers' claims about their origin, for instance, if the documentation is suspected to be counterfeit or is not provided (Tangermann, 2017). In these cases, the voice biometric software records the voice of the asylum applicant speaking in her native language, focusing on the acoustic qualities and inflexions to analyse their accent and determine the country of origin. As a result, the software releases a report that assesses the applicant's accent in probability percentages—which might confirm or contradict their claims—assisting the decision-maker in determining the eligibility for asylum.

The implementation of voice biometrics in Germany can be considered the meeting point between the logic of techno-solutionism (Madianou, 2019) and the increased market interest in voice biometric technology (Gallego, 2021; Kang, 2022; Turow, 2021). The former refers to the techno-solutionism and hype that leads governments to attempt to solve complex social issues through the latest technological innovations, without first meticulously understanding situations that may be not suited to digital disruption (Madianou, 2019). Consequently, asylum seekers are used as a testing ground for experimentation with data-driven practices such as biometrics which, against border authorities' claim of mechanical efficiency, cause the risk of failures that further endanger the most vulnerable groups (Madianou, 2019). The latter trend instead concerns the recent large investments made in speech recognition to make voice a central medium of interaction within networked technologies and online services, with companies interested in measuring and translating the information of the human voice into data for digital profiling and other purposes (Gallego, 2021; Kang, 2022; Turow, 2021).

The interest has also been shared by migration offices and state agencies in general. This is evidenced by the development of the Speaker Identification Integrated Project (SiiP), the first international and interoperable database of voice biometrics to support law enforcement investigations into

transnational threats, terrorism and organized crime (Jansen et al., 2021); the use of speaker recognition technology by the US National Security Agency (NSA) for counter-terrorism operations (Kang, 2022); the implementation of voice biometrics in the German border system; but also by the more recent programme started in Turkey in 2019, called Capacity Building for Effective Nationality Determination (Bellanova & Fuster, 2019). Due to a commitment to the EU, Turkey also enlisted automated language tests to detect a person's country of origin among its strategies aimed to slow down the inflow of migrants and refugees. However, at the end of the trial phase, the software for language recognition has not been implemented in Turkey due to unsatisfactory results (Ozkul, 2023).

In this respect, the collection and analysis of voice data have already raised many concerns about questions of surveillance. These accounts have mainly focused on the literal translation of spoken audio captured by AI voice technologies (Alepis & Patsakis, 2017; Woods, 2018). However, this scholarship has largely overlooked how the soundings of voice can also be used to manage digital identities. In this chapter, I direct critical attention to the information embedded in the sonic aspect of voice, indicating how its interpretation can be instrumental in constructing knowledge about subjects, creating power imbalances between the speakers, and the political actors behind the use of AI voice technologies. To do so, I look at the example of the German border system, where, through voice biometrics, sound becomes an emerging factor in the datafication of life, determining the identity and country of origin of asylum seekers.

While framing BAMF's accent recognition technology within the broader discussion on voice biometrics and data-driven security practices, I address this case from the specific perspective of sonic weaponization. With this term, I refer to the broad range of techniques that manipulate physical and affective properties of sound by converting it into a "weapon": intending to coerce, manage and control subjects (Goodman, 2012). Literature on the use of sound in contexts of aggression, torture and war shows how material and affective forces of sound can be harnessed by political actors—despite usual conceptions of acoustic pureness and abstraction. This scholarship also draws on the rise of affect studies, where affect is applied to sonic weaponization in its many different connotations. In particular, sound can be weaponized through its capacity to modulate moods and induce psychological effects, provide a sense of communion and belonging, reshape surroundings, and alter the sense of the immediate, elicit alert, or intimacy (Birdsall, 2012; Goodman, 2012; Thompson & Biddle, 2013). By incorporating these studies, I build a nuanced framework to make it possible to grasp the logic and operation

of voice biometrics in asylum procedures, while providing an integrated approach to address orality/aurality in contemporary modes of governance.

13.2   Methodology

Access to knowledge regarding developments in policing is notoriously difficult (Brayne & Christin, 2021), and much information is withheld from the public by the BAMF on the grounds of national security. For instance, it has not yet been declared what algorithms and data are used to train the voice biometric software, how many languages it can recognize, and what the error rate for the different languages it recognizes is. Therefore, in my argumentation I draw from various publicly available sources and secondary data. These include official documents released by the BAMF, such as the *Digitisation Agenda* and *The stages of the German asylum procedure*. Information drawn from this documentation does far more than provide an understanding of the steps and legal ground of asylum applications, or the framing of the use of voice biometrics and its rationale within the procedures. It also embodies aspirations, motives and broader cultural imaginations that foster the experimentation with new technologies for decision-making, which "successfully" allowed the agency to meet the challenges presented by the European refugee crisis and posit it as "a new leader in digitisation" and "a digital, breathing public authority" (BAMF, 2018, p. 4). Along this line, the documentation shows the agency's willingness to reaffirm the geopolitical role of Germany within the EU, and in the general digital society. It states that systematic examination with migration authorities from other countries is taking place to discuss "interesting opportunities for working together, especially in terms of dialect recognition" (BAMF, 2018, p. 35).

My argumentation also incorporates a discussion of a part of the databases on which BAMF's voice biometrics rely—the only ones that are publicly available by the immigration agency at the present moment. This information was provided with figures on the use and error margin of voice biometrics, together with other documents, following a parliamentary inquiry in the Bundestag, the German Federal Parliament, and various freedom of information requests lodged in the inquiry platform *FragDenStaat* by journalist and computer scientist Anna Biselli. The content analysis of the meta-information of this speech training data—sold to BAMF by the University of Pennsylvania's Linguistic Data Consortium (LDC)—allows for an understanding of the system's decision-making, and the role played by affective capacity of sound in it. The other documentation obtained by the

freedom of information requests includes information on official internal regulations regarding document verification, the establishment of identity, and training documents for BAMF employees. This information specifically grants insight into the key features of voice biometrics, and the compositional steps of their use by decision-makers in the context of the personal interview for asylum. Finally, the analysis includes information from the work of Anna Biselli and sound artist Pedro Oliveira, who have been on the frontline in reporting the forms of racial profiling and errors caused by voice biometrics.

13.3   Weaponizing Sound

It was not long ago that outrage was sparked online by the news of Greek police testing the use of long-range acoustic devices, or "sound cannons," to deter migrants from crossing into Europe. Tested during the quiet months of the corona pandemic in 2021 along the border with Turkey, these devices mounted on trucks can emit noise matching the loudness of a jet engine, causing permanent deafness and other health issues. The reporting of this news by journalists and human rights activists not only provoked indignation, but also implicitly shed a light on more general public discussion about the coercive qualities that acoustic power can have (Euro-Med Human Rights Monitor, 2021). While the public outcry is recent, there is a long tradition of scholarship we can draw from to explore how sound can be harnessed by political actors.

The study of music and sound in the context of sonic violence and torture presents us with an important area of inquiry. This scholarship allows for a discussion on sound and power, adding to how the politics of sound—besides generating subjectivities and collectivities—can also be repurposed to maintain grids of power along intersecting hierarchies of class, gender, sexuality, race, among others (Revill, 2000; Stoever, 2016). The analysis of sonic materiality is one of the main productive entry points, which serves to dismiss any idea of ineffability connected to sound. As will be discussed in the next section, operations of identification and authentication through voice biometrics reduce voice to a partial ontology—solely understood as a fixed sound material devoid of any socio-cultural dimension, and where the continuous becoming of a speaker's vocal identity is denied (Kang, 2022). As such, sound needs to be understood not as pure or neutral, but as a complex entity whose use is informed by political dispositions. The material and affective qualities of sound contributed—for example, through sound system cultures—to forms of identification in the networked, diasporic community of the Black Atlantic (Gilroy, 1993; Goodman, 2012; Henriques,

2011). At the same time, sonic materialities are also the basis of a multitude of coercive acoustic weapons (Daughtry, 2014; Goodman, 2012). This idea of the abstraction of sound is often harnessed by political actors to conflate violent and brutal uses of sound with notions of "no-touch" control and "non-lethal" weaponry (Cusick & Joseph, 2011). In response, these studies have denounced the problematic use of sonic material and affective capacities to perpetrate physical and psychological violence. I build on this framework to situate the turn to voice biometrics in asylum procedures, where the sonic nature of voice serves to propose the same ideas of sound pureness—where no coercion is involved, and to offload accountability from human actors.

In particular, musicologist Suzan Cusick has carried out pioneering work on the use of loud sound in the detention camps of the United States' "global war on terror." Relying on first-person witnesses of interrogators and former detainees from US detention camps in Afghanistan, Iraq and Cuba, Cusick (2008) describes how music and sound are an integrant part of various techniques of sensory manipulation to force detainee's tendencies towards compliance during interrogations. Cusick & Joseph (2011) argue that sound is weaponized within contemporary practices of torture because of its foundation on the so-called principles of "no-touch" control. This refers to principles to control bodies without leaving readily identifiable physical traces, and where the one-to-one relationship between torturers and the one tortured is truncated—with no person to be blamed. The ephemeral qualities of sound, therefore, are key to its understanding as seemingly innocuous and malleable.

Secondly, Steve Goodman (2012) draws from affect and social theory to discuss the material quality of sound, focusing on the role of "vibrational" force within sonic power relations. The understanding of sound as a vibrational force—the outcome of a combination of frequencies and loudness—is crucial for grasping the invisible materialities and physical capacities by which sonic power can be weaponized at a coercive and affective level (Goodman, 2012). Consider, for instance, the exploiting of sound vibrations occurring at frequencies that are beyond the human standard hearing range, but which are still perceivable by humans at a tactile level as a physical rumbling. Goodman (2012) calls such frequencies at the periphery of acoustic perspective "unsound." Along with sonic loudness exceeding the human threshold for pain, unsound is harnessed for developing brute, non-lethal acoustic weaponry in war scenarios and torture techniques in detention centres. Law enforcement agencies also weaponize low-frequency infrasonic tones[1] to arouse fear, anxiety and bad vibes to disperse demonstrations

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1   Frequencies which are below the lower limit of human audibility.

or riots (Goodman, 2012). Addressing these extremely brutal acoustic phenomena, Martin Daughtry (2014) coins the term "thanatosonics" to indicate that level of intensity where sound's "inherent polysemy is sacrificed to the unequivocal demands of acoustics" (p. 39). In the abovementioned cases of acoustic violence, the sheer sonic materiality reaches such a level of intensity that it stops behaving like sound. It cannot be even listened to or witnessed, but turns the passive bodies into pure victims of vibration, inflicting permanent and profound physiological damage (Daughtry, 2014).

Scrutinized by this critical framework, and supported by increased interest in voice within the tech sector and the trust placed in big data and the body as guarantors of identity, sound becomes, through voice biometrics, a newly available singularity for allowing the biometric assemblage (Madianou, 2019) and algorithmic augmentation of borders (Ajana, 2015). Voice biometrics, along with the sound cannons in Greece, thus represent a new potential sonic weapon within the digital fortress of Europe.

13.4   Biometric Technology and the Voice as Evidence

Resulting from growing anti-immigration rhetoric and political pressure to deter migration arisen with the refugee crisis, the "Fortress Europe" approach has enforced migrations policies within and beyond Europe, especially furthering the incremental adoption of data-driven technologies (Dijstelbloem et al., 2011). This development is premised on the assumption of a self-evident relationship between data and identities (van Dijk, 2014), where the aggregation and algorithmic processing of a large amount of information enables a surveillant knowledge infrastructure (Bollier & Firestone, 2010). Such an infrastructure operates by performing tasks of identification and identity authentication (Ajana, 2013), or constructing profiles according to the logic of risk, to speculate about future behaviours or threats and act pre-emptively (Amoore, 2011). In this respect, biometric data has been particularly instrumental in developing migration policies, thanks to authorities' confidence in the informatization and digitization of the body (Kloppenburg & van der Ploeg, 2020). In other words, biometrics are accredited by the belief in a specific equation between bodies and identities, and in registered and processed digital data for managing risk.

It is in this broader framework that the voice-body-identity equation needs to be examined, to understand the sociotechnical imaginary that informs the current global multibillion-dollar voice biometric industry. Edward Kang (2022) argues that this ferment in the voice biometric industry

is supported by normative ideologies and sociotechnical beliefs which frame voice, body and identity as fixed and correlative objects. As a consequence, voice is treated as a fixed, extractable and measurable "scientific" sound object (Schaeffer, 2017) to which identity can be attached through "scientific" methods employed to make socially constructed judgments about the speaker. Practices of identification through voice biometrics therefore treat voice as a site where individual identities can be measured in terms of race, gender, nationality, etc., and thereby as "a reliable and stable carrier of knowledge about the body" (Kang, 2022, p. 13). By equating identity with a collection of physically measured information, which is then rendered as processable digital data, the subject's own experience is ignored (Wevers, 2018) and voices are mistaken for fixed objects (Magnet, 2011). However, ways of speaking and soundings of voice should be understood in relation to the cultural, social and institutional contexts in which speakers are communicating (Hall, 1976). There is no universal form of speaking or a fixed one, but the soundings of a person's voice need to be considered as the result of her community and sociocultural context. Instead, the logic of voice biometrics assumes voice to be a permanent and coherent phenomenon that stays the same over time, without ageing, suffering changes or undertaking self-initiated alterations. Nevertheless, this logic can be invalidated, for example, by singers. They go through meticulous training regimes to shape and refine their vocal physiology, which indeed partly determines the sound of one's voice, but it "is not fixed, and like our cultural identities, is always in the process of becoming" (Kang, 2022, p. 12).

The reliance upon biological understandings of identity complicates the claims of biometric technology to mechanical objectivity and infallibility, instead causing the misrecognition or misidentification of individuals and having serious consequences on their mobility. According to this framework, voice biometrics errors reflect long-standing normative cultural assumptions and beliefs, which lead to the techno-solutionist and experimental use of speech recognition that further oppresses marginalized groups like asylum seekers.

13.5   Voice Biometrics and the Datafication of Sound

Language analysis to determine origin and identity is not a new phenomenon within asylum procedures. In many countries inside and outside the EU, under forensic linguistics programmes such as LADO, it has been the long-term, specialized domain of language experts hired to assess individual cases

(Patrick, 2012; Pfeifer, 2023). The case of Germany, however, indicates a major shift to outsourcing this task to speech recognition systems to generate faster, automated results. But this shift is not followed by improved thoroughness or accuracy in asylum procedures. Despite the claims of success made in the agency's Digitization Agenda, the BAMF revealed that voice biometrics have an error margin of 15%—which improves to 10% when it comes to recognizing Levantine Arabic (Deutscher Bundestag, 2018). This may result in many applicants having their right to asylum denied on the basis of distorted results (Biselli, 2018). Despite BAMF's promises to implement improvements, voice biometrics errors prompted criticisms similar to those levelled at LADO—namely, that using language as a marker of geographic origin is problematic, as it does not take into account the sociolinguistic biography of an individual, and the context-dependent nature of language (Rosenhouse, 2013). That means language analysis, whether automated or not, cannot be used as a reliable method to definitely indicate an individual's region of socialization or origin (Pfeifer, 2023). The BAMF claims that voice biometrics are only an assistant tool to provide an initial assessment, that it has no direct consequences on the final decision, and does not replace the evaluation by the decision-makers (2018). However, the research of Anna Biselli (2018) has reported cases where voice biometrics were used to make decisions, compromising asylum seekers' applications.

In the asylum application procedure, the personal interview arguably represents the most important step—where decision-makers require asylum applicants to describe their story and biography by providing evidence to support their claims (BAMF, 2019). However, if their story is not supported by valid documentation, voice biometrics are introduced. These perform the task of identity authentication, creating a biometric template from the asylum seekers' speech that is checked against different databases of stored biometric templates (BAMF, 2017). In other words, a person's speaking aspects are captured, processed and then confronted with those stored in the software's databases to verify the truthfulness of their claims, and scientifically pinpoint their identity and origin. The provenance of most databases, or speech corpora, has not been revealed by the BAMF. However, the Federal Interior Ministry has only indicated that those for Levantine Arabic, in its different variations, were purchased from the LCD of the University of Pennsylvania (Deutscher Bundestag, 2018). The voice biometric test for the asylum applicant who is being questioned is performed in a dedicated room. In this room (see Figure 13.1), the applicant picks up a phone handset, in which she is required to speak following a signal. She is asked to describe, in the fullest possible detail and without any interruption, an image

Figure 13.1. Illustration of the use of voice biometrics on asylum applicants.
Note. The slide is taken from the training documents for BAMF personnel. It provides an overview explaining in which cases voice biometrics are used and illustrates the procedure for the analysis of asylum applicants' speech (BAMF, 2017).

Figure 13.2. Sample of a voice biometrics result report.
Note. The slide shows what a result report produced by BAMF's voice biometrics looks like. The report consists of three different sections: the first lists the dialects/accents assessed for the asylum applicant in probability percentages, as well as the Log Likelihood Ratio (LLR); the second indicates the details of the recording, namely its duration (*Aufnahme-Dauer*) and the amount of spoken audio in the recording (*Netto Sprachdauer*)—both values should ideally diverge only a little according to the report; the third and final section concerns the technical details of the assessment, which are, however, dismissed as not relevant for the language assessment (BAMF, 2017).

for two minutes (BAMF, 2017). After just a few minutes, the system releases a result report, which assesses the speaker's dialects or languages of origin in probability percentages (see Figure 13.2). Depending on the conformity of the applicant's claims about her origin with the probability percentages produced by the accent recognition software, the fate of the asylum seeker is determined—allowing or denying access to a life in Germany.

The strategies adopted in conducting the accent recognition process are not left to chance. A phone handset used to capture the applicant's speech, or the specific choice of the image they are meant to describe, are instrumental within the evaluation process. As identified by Pedro Oliveira, BAMF tries to operationalize certain strategies by following sociolinguistic guidelines on how to elicit a speaker to speak naturally and in a more "sincere" manner when conducting an analysis of a dialect—albeit not considering the ethical problems imposed by the discipline (2019). The "success" of voice biometrics is dependent on strategies that would elicit the speaker to provide the most natural account of a person's speech in terms of prosody, pronunciation and vocabulary, in order to ensure that the speaker, consciously or not, adapts their speech. This strategy is operationalized by replacing the figure of the researcher (or a recognizable recording machine) with a telephone device, which usually suggests intimacy or familiarity (Oliveira, 2019). The adoption of this setting is also in line with findings in sociolinguistic research that the evocation of dialects is most successful with topics with which speakers are emotionally involved (Meyerhoff et al., 2012).

Indeed, the image that needs to be described via the phone recalls something familiar—for instance, in the depiction of a Muslim family eating together in a domestic setting (Oliveira, 2019). In the practices of BAMF, therefore, the phone device is instrumentalized as an object that evokes a connection to an elsewhere for the applicant: in this case, home, family and the intimate sphere. The pattern is also exemplified when looking at the name of the speech corpora on which the accent recognition software relies. These are named *CALL FRIEND* and *CALL HOME*, consisting of captured conversations occurring between Arab speakers in moments where intimate reconnections are established on the basis of voice (Oliveira, 2019). The LCD harvests these corpora by involving participants resident in North America to call friends and families overseas, so as to increase its repository created for language-related education, research and technology development. BAMF purchased the corpora, but no research or development project was initiated with the University of Pennsylvania (Bewarder, 2019). The use of this corpora by BAMF might be considered an example of function creep (Madianou, 2019), which refers to how data collected for one purpose is

used instead for a very different one—in this case, speaker authentication for border control.

The enactment of these strategies, from the phone handset to the choice of the speech corpora, indicates a further step within the broader tendency by authorities to exploit and control the domain of affectivity. Digital processes of top-down governmentality already exploit migrants' affective bondings by surveilling the data traces of their diasporic and cosmopolitan digital practices of everyday meaning-making (Leurs & Ponzanesi, 2018). In this specific case, sound as a vehicle of affectivity is instead harnessed to set up an imagined moment of transnational intimacy and is weaponized against the speaker, reminding "an asylum seeker that home is always elsewhere" (Oliveira, 2019, p. 6). In addition, what needs to be observed is that what the BAMF's system embodies is:

> a certain way of governing through data that does not even pretend to translate reality. It is unconcerned with what asylum seekers actually say, or, more exactly, it is grounded on the assumption that whatever they might say is not worth being taken into account before the trustworthiness of their belonging is ascertained (Bellanova & Fuster, 2019, p. 360).

Voice biometrics in this way alienate the political and symbolic nexus between voice and identity by turning it into a biological equation. Asylum seekers attempt to communicate their stories, but these are essentially ignored and made dependent upon the decision of voice biometrics—focused on translating sound into data to establish their identity and country of origin. The digital identity is, in other words, sought in how the asylum seekers' voice sounds, not in what they are saying. Voice loses its power as a means of self-affirmation, and is treated solely as fixed sound mate-rial—where the socio-cultural dimensions that colour its composition and determine its continuous becoming are ignored. This process implies the idea of an identity that is not attached to the individual, although it is paradoxically extracted from the sonic materiality of their speaking voice. The same sound of an accent which would normally be the reflection of one's life (but not one's country of birth) is weaponized for the assignment of a fixed identity—or at least, the fantasy of a clear-cut identity. Thus, voice biometrics in asylum procedures weaponize sound as a vehicle to exploit the domain of intimacy by treating it as a fixed, measurable acoustic material to impose their truth.

At the same time, the sonic nature of voice biometrics also works to pro-pose the technology in public discourse as a cutting-edge and mechanically

efficient tool for securing the German borders with no coercion involved. As opposed to fingerprinting, which is commonly associated with criminality and violent extrapolation (Aas, 2011; Ajana, 2013), the capture of voice can be presented as a quick and neutrally efficient check of one's identity—where there is no processing of bodily parts if not of an abstract vocal sonority. However, the datafication of one's voice, in reality, enables a new form through which sound can be used for the control of individuals, one which takes part in the making of the digital selves and the knowledge that composes them. Voice biometrics enable sound as a new factor through which people are categorized and assigned a status of identity affecting their life and im/mobility (Cheney-Lippold, 2017). In particular, the datafication of the acoustic features of a person's voice becomes another available weapon to exclusively criminalize, discriminate and marginalize targeted, unwanted migrant populations. In this way, borrowing from Michelle Weitzel (2018), the intrinsic political key value of the voice to determine yourself—to voice yourself according to your own individual subjectivity—is thus wrested from and turned against the speaker.

13.6   Conclusions

Practices of decision-making through voice biometrics involve new implications in the discussion on the value and meaning of voice in digital Europe. In an investigation of institutional European initiatives that seek to digitally bring to the foreground migrants and refugees telling their stories, Myria Georgiou focuses on voice to discuss the complexities of representational politics in migration. Although providing an "alternative form of mediation against the voiceless and threatening *Other*" predominating European mainstream media (2018, p. 20), digital Europe normatizes migrants' voices according to the colonizing gaze of mainstream representation of migration. These voices are only framed in narratives of care, where their rights are limited only to humanitarian aid—but not to political and legal achievements. Thus, representations of migration in hyperspace perform bordering power by not acknowledging the political agency of migrants' voices—whereas Hannah Arendt (1958) describes voice as the privileged way for individuals to identify themselves to others and define themselves as political subjects. At the same time, as discussed in this chapter, top-down governmentality of digital practices through voice biometrics reaffirm bordering power by alienating the symbolic relationship between voice and identity, where voice should represent a channel of self-expression which illustrates a

person's identity based on their claims and experiences (Couldry, 2010). Voice biometrics colonize this space of self-expression, harnessing the sound of voice to turn it into a site of identity construction for purposes of border control.

The weaponization of sound in asylum procedures occurs on different levels: by exploiting its affective capacities to establish intimacy, setting up fictional moments of transnational belongingness to elicit applicants to speak naturally; by turning voice and its political value into a fixed, extractable sound material—denying one's subjectivity and the sociocultural dimensions that aesthetically define one's voice, describing a life; and finally, by denying its inherently political nature and proposing a pure and ineffable one, which facilitates technosolutionist experimentations on asylum seekers in line with the current hype for the voice biometric industry. My preliminary considerations, and the framework built above, can serve future research in the field of digital migration studies that seeks to address orality/aurality in contemporary modes of governance. The use of voice biometrics in German asylum procedures represents a novelty. However, efforts by BAMF to partner with other immigration agencies, along with the most recent news of Turkey implementing voice biometrics in the EU-funded project Capacity Building for Effective Nationality Determination, and the development of the SiiP project, lead me to believe that Germany is not going to be an isolated case. These recent developments suggest the emergence of a sonic surveillant knowledge infrastructure in Europe, which will require going beyond the paradigmatic logic of vision that has long served as a metaphorical lens to address power and authority (Carmi 2020; Hsieh 2021; Weitzel 2018). With this different form of datafied knowledge production serving as a new paradigm for making deductions and predictions on individuals and their behaviours, future research will need to go beyond the epistemic limitations of ocularcentrism, and start a deeper discussion of the politics of sound.

Such discussion in digital migration studies might draw from the opposite pole of the framework of sonic weaponization. If I have looked at the use of sound for purposes of control and subjugation, sonic material and affective dimensions can also be deployed as a form of resistance (Goodman 2012; Weitzel, 2018). New accounts on voice biometrics can originate from this different perspective, which I have only briefly mentioned in this chapter. The fieldwork conducted by Weitzel (2018) interviewing undocumented sub-Saharan African migrants in Morocco suggests a starting point to do this: they report how the interviewees, thanks to previous conversations with other migrants, were aware of the modes of interrogation and identification awaiting them at the border, and had already planned counterstrategies

which involved performing muteness or altering their utterances in front of officers, knowing that voice could be a dangerous indicator of identity. As sound, in this respect, represents for migrants a means to contrast processes of identification carried out by officers at the border, future research might look at how undocumented asylum seekers can find ways to "game", "cheat" and side-track voice biometric systems by adopting similar strategies. The manipulation of sound by asylum seekers to their own advantage would further indicate the limits of a technology which already struggles to identify the sonic complexity of voice, defined in a continuous becoming by sociocultural processes and context.

In addition, further contributions might also bridge interdisciplinary dialogue with needed accounts from legal and computational linguistics perspectives. Finally, a critical discussion on the politics of sound in asylum procedures can allow for a useful framework to make sense of recent developments occurring in the voice biometric industry, considering the increasing aspirations of conglomerates in the datafication of voice as a site of profit and control.

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14. McKinsey Consultants and Technocratic Fantasies: Crafting the Illusion of Orderly Migration Management in Greece

Luděk Stavinoha

Abstract

In the aftermath of the 2016 EU-Turkey deal, EU institutions turned to McKinsey, the US consultancy firm, to eliminate the backlog of asylum cases of thousands of illegalized migrants in refugee camps on Greek islands. From identifying "bottlenecks" in the asylum process to "performance targets" for caseworkers, McKinsey was tasked with transforming the entire reception regime. Based on internal documents obtained through freedom of information requests, this chapter asks: What technocratic imaginaries of control are encoded in McKinsey's vision of more efficient and orderly migration management? Through a granular account of McKinsey's intervention, it interrogates the data practices that transformed the refugee population into depersonalized objects of bureaucratic knowledge and sustain the violence of the EU hotspot regime.

Keywords: data practices; migration management; outsourcing; freedom of information.

14.1 Introduction

In October 2021, EU and Greek officials gathered to inaugurate the first Closed Controlled Access Centre (CCAC) on the island of Samos—the first of five new refugee camps that were set to replace the notorious "hotspots" where tens of thousands of people had been warehoused since 2016. The camps are the product of a European Commission (EC) Taskforce set up

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in the immediate aftermath of the massive fires that reduced the Moria hotspot on Lesbos to ashes a year before. With €276 million in EU funding, the CCACs are conceived as spaces where humanitarian care and biopolitical control blend seamlessly: basketball courts and playgrounds meet electronic access turnstiles, X-ray machines and military-grade barbed wire fencing; spaces for leisure activities meet CCTV cameras equipped with behavioural analytics software that live-stream footage onto wall-mounted screens in a dedicated control room on the Greek mainland (Emmanouilidou & Fallon, 2021). Humanitarian NGOs and solidarity activists, as well as the camp's new inmates, denounced the Samos facility as a "prison camp" (Papaioannou et al., 2021). Its architects, on the other hand, heralded the camps as a means to finally "end overcrowding," guarantee "adequate living conditions," and "ensure efficient migration management" through fast-tracked asylum procedures and prompt deportation of individuals whose claims to international protection are rejected (EC, 2021).

The centres embody a technocratic vision of migration management that lies at the heart of the EU "hotspot regime" installed on the Greek islands (Vradis et al., 2019). In the aftermath of the March 2016 EU-Turkey deal, which dramatically reduced the number of people arriving on Greek shores, the hotspots were meant to instil order at Europe's borders amidst the chaos and unruly human mobility of the preceding months. Yet, as Kalir and Rozakou (2016) wrote in their ethnographic dispatch from Lesbos a few months later: "What was planned as a new efficient form of registration and pre-removal camp has turned out to be an overpopulated and impaired formation." With thousands of illegalized and immobilized migrants in the hotspots, the EC turned to the management consultancy firm McKinsey & Company to help eliminate the "backlog" of asylum cases that had amassed since the EU-Turkey deal had transformed the Greek islands from places of passage to sites of containment. Presented by EU institutions as a purely technical intervention to improve the efficiency of the asylum procedure in Greece, McKinsey's overarching objective was, of course, deeply imbricated in the politics of EU migration control. Its task was nothing less than to devise a plan for the *operationalization* of the EU-Turkey deal—a critical juncture in the EU's externalized border control—by restructuring the everyday functioning of the entire reception regime on the islands.

This chapter draws on a unique archive of previously confidential documents obtained through freedom of information (FOI) requests, a legal mechanism to gain access to internal documents held by public bodies (Walby & Larsen, 2012). It explores what happens when corporate logics of "maximizing productivity" and managerial control are transposed into

the world of asylum management. What measures did McKinsey consultants propose for the "optimization" of asylum procedures on the Greek islands? What bureaucratic "imaginaries" (Seuferling & Leurs, 2021) of mobility control are encoded in McKinsey's vision of a more efficient and orderly asylum process? In approaching these questions, the chapter offers a granular account of McKinsey's blueprint for a "streamlined end-to-end asylum process." Through a close reading of internal reports that McKinsey circulated to senior EU and Greek officials, it decodes the technocratic fantasies that sustain the hotspot regime and normalize the violence it inflicts upon people on the move.

The chapter proceeds as follows. First, I situate the role of management consultancies in relation to literature on the political economy of outsourced migration control (Lemberg-Pedersen et al., 2020), before reviewing recent work on "data practices" (Scheel et al., 2019) —that is, the ways everyday migration management is enacted through processes of data extraction and circulation. I then interrogate the practices McKinsey consultants deployed to transform the refugee population on the islands into depersonalized objects of bureaucratic knowledge. The analysis reveals how the extraction of data from the hotspots was not only abstracted from the everyday violence of the camps but served to normalize the imposition of a range of punitive practices upon their populations. Finally, I reflect on how FOI requests offer digital migration researchers a critical tool for probing important sites of migration management that often remain hidden from public view and the bureaucratic irregularities at play in the outsourcing of migration control.

14.2 The Rise of Privatized Expertise

From visa processing, biometrics, data management, air carrier sanctions and deportation, to the deployment of surveillance technologies, management of detention centres and the provision of humanitarian care, vast areas of migration and border control have been delegated to private companies in recent decades. Through complex processes of privatization, marketization and outsourcing, a "privatised migration control infrastructure" has emerged at both national and transnational levels (Bloom, 2015). In the EU, neoliberal restructuring of the state along with prolific lobbying efforts by the border security industry (Lemberg-Pedersen, 2020; Akkerman, 2021) have generated a growing "market for services directed at controlling cross-border mobility" (Lopez-Sala & Godenau, 2020, p. 7). The increasingly lucrative market is not confined to the outsourcing of infrastructures of control—the provision of

transportation and detention services by security companies like G4S, for example—but extends to a "heavier reliance upon private sector expertise and advice" by public bodies involved in managing migration and borders (Bloom, 2015, p. 154).

Yet, the influence of international management consultancies (MC), whose role is precisely to furnish state bureaucracies with expertise and advice, is currently somewhat overlooked. For instance, amongst the diverse areas of the outsourced "migration control market" identified by Lopez-Sala and Godenau (2020)—from registration to detention to expulsion of illegalized migrants—insight into the role played by MCs in the *production of knowledge* is missing. This is especially surprising given the growing intrusion of MCs such as PricewaterhouseCoopers, Deloitte or Accenture into the realm of migration management in countries such as Australia, the United States, Sweden or Germany, and transnational levels of governance through contracts with the EC or Frontex, the EU's border and coastguard agency (Akkerman, 2021; Vianelli, 2022). Furthermore, there are clear cases of MC's impact on migration control policies. For example, Baird (2018, p. 127) traces the origin of the term "hotspot"—the infrastructural centrepiece of the EU's approach to managing illegalized migrants at its borders—to a study conducted for the EC by the consultancy firm UniSys.

The US-based firm McKinsey & Company—one of the world's "Big Three" consultancies in terms of revenue and prestige—offers a particularly illustrative case. At the peak of the long summer of migration in 2015, McKinsey deftly positioned itself as a company that could assist European governments in the bureaucratic challenge of processing large volumes of asylum applications. It was able to draw on its work for the Swedish Migration Agency, where it helped introduce corporate "lean management" techniques geared towards accelerating asylum procedures (Vianelli, 2022). In September 2015, the German Federal Office for Migrants and Refugees hired McKinsey consultants to assist with the implementation of fast-tracked asylum procedures in order to clear a backlog of 270,000 pending asylum cases and, subsequently, to develop plans for increasing the rate of deportations of rejected asylum-seekers (Becker & Wiedmann-Schmidt, 2016). A year later, as detailed below, the firm embarked on a similar project in Greece (Stavinoha & Fotiadis, 2020). Across the Atlantic, McKinsey consultants have devised "detention savings opportunities" for the US Immigration and Enforcement Control agency that had enforced the family separation policy at the border with Mexico (MacDougall, 2019). With proposed measures that included accelerated deportation processes, cuts in spending on food as well as on medical care for detained migrants, the company was lambasted

for becoming complicit in the Trump administration's punitive migration control agenda.

In sum, MCs like McKinsey play an important role in *scripting* policies, *disseminating* ideas within policy-making circles, and *transposing* distinctly corporate managerial techniques and datafied logics into public bureaucracies tasked with managing cross-border mobility. In turn, the resonance of McKinsey's approach in several EU member states reflects "the increasing centrality of organisational, efficiency and economic imperatives in the management of asylum processes" (Vianelli, 2022, p. 52). However, much of what is known about MCs in the field of migration management derives from journalistic accounts. At least in part this has to do with the fact that their work for the public sector is generally shrouded in secrecy. Consequently, there is "a paucity of empirical studies into their work ... and little evidence, beyond MC's own rhetoric, of their impact" (Ford & Harding, 2021, p. 223)—a gap this chapter seeks to fill through the case study of McKinsey's intervention in Greece.

14.3   Managing Migration Through Data Practices

It does so by adopting an analytical lens that is less concerned with the *political economy* of outsourced migration control as such than with the *production and circulation of knowledge* that undergirds and legitimates particular state bordering practices and regimes. In other words, the attention here is on the *data practices* that are "mobilized to constitute migrations as intelligible, actionable objects of policy-making" (Scheel et al., 2019, p. 579). Through the case of Frontex, for example, Cobarrubias (2019) shows how these knowledge practices entail the production of statistics, maps, visualizations and projections about cross-border movements which actively *construct* notions of migrant illegality. It is beyond the scope of this chapter to detail the growing body of scholarship dissecting varied modes of data production and circulation that suffuse the overlapping domains of migration management, border control and humanitarian care (see, for example, Leese et al., 2022; Madianou, 2019; Tazzioli, 2019; Witteborn, 2022), or to give due regard to the "structurally violent workings" of tech-driven interventions targeting refugee bodies (Leurs, 2020, p. 96). Rather, the key point here is, following Scheel and colleagues, that:

> what is known, negotiated and targeted as migration is mediated by a plethora of data practices, including registering, enumerating, counting

and estimating to storing, cleaning, imputing, extrapolating and anticipating. These data practices, while often framed as matters of technocratic expertise, are of course political, sustaining the knowledge regimes that inform and shape migration policies, border regimes and migration management (Scheel et al., 2019, p. 579).

As I document below, this is precisely what McKinsey consultants were tasked with in Greece: to "bring order to chaos," to borrow Kalir and Rozakou's (2016) phrase, by rendering the presence of thousands of asylum-seekers in the hotspots an "actionable reality" (Scheel et al., 2019, p. 582). In McKinsey's words, its consultants would provide EU and Greek policymakers with a blueprint, packaged in a Microsoft PowerPoint format, for a "streamlined end-to-end asylum process" that would see "all new arrivals processed within 15 days," from the moment of disembarkation on the shores to their eventual deportation.[1] McKinsey's work in Greece, though never publicly acknowledged, is emblematic of a broader vision of migration management put forward by the firm in response to the "unprecedented influx of asylum seekers" into Europe since 2015 (McKinsey Global Institute, 2018). "Collecting reliable, comprehensive data is critical for managing immigration more effectively," reads a McKinsey report, which boldly affirms that "taking a more data-driven approach is a no-regrets move" (McKinsey Global Institute, 2018). It thus comes as little surprise that McKinsey's approach found a receptive ear inside the European Commission's Directorate-General for Migration and Home Affairs (DG Home), given its predisposition to conceptualize illegalized human mobility through a technocratic lens (Boswell, 2009).

In the analysis below I am concerned with understanding how McKinsey's "data craving" (Lemberg-Pedersen & Haioty, 2020) practices are structured by the "desire for *order* over what many consider *disorderly* flows" that lies at the core of the technocratic paradigm of "migration management" (Ashutosh & Mountz, 2011, p. 28; original emphasis; see also Watkins, 2020). More specifically, I build on the work of Seuferling and Leurs (2021) in approaching the tranche of confidential McKinsey documents as a window into the *bureaucratic imaginaries* that underpin the EU hotspot regime. In their analysis of the intertwining of media and migration infrastructures, Seuferling & Leurs (2021, p. 674) reveal how particular imaginaries—of mobility control, of camps, of illegalized migrants—are *encoded* within the "forms of mediation, including tools, discourses, images, and protocols"

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1   All quotes, unless indicated otherwise, are from the tranche of McKinsey documents that were disclosed to the author under EU access to documents rules.

which facilitate the everyday management of refugee populations. Through a close reading of archival material, Seuferling and Leurs (2021, p. 670) reveal the historical lineages between Germany's post-war refugee camps and the "fantasies of efficient ordering, administrating and limiting of refugee bodies in space and time" that drive the contemporary deployment of border technologies and infrastructural experiments such as the hotspots in the Aegean.

For what else are EU hotspots but sites for registering, sorting, containing, channelling and (potentially) expelling illegalized migrants (Vradis et al., 2019)? Subjecting border-crossers to a complex set of bureaucratic procedures, material infrastructures and logistical operations, the facilities were, in the technocratic imaginary of their architects, meant to "ensure the streamlining, absolute knowledge and control of populations on-the-move" (Kalir & Rozakou, 2016; Vianelli, 2022). Of course, from the perspective of street-level bureaucrats tasked with managing the "crisis," the reception regime was anything but orderly, characterized instead by informality, improvisation and bureaucratic irregularity (Rozakou, 2017). For those warehoused inside the camps on Lesbos, Samos, Chios, Leros and Kos, they were sites of violent abandonment. And it is into these spaces that McKinsey consultants were dispatched to resuscitate the faltering EU-Turkey deal.

14.4 Methods

The empirical material for this chapter was obtained through several FOI requests filed with the European Asylum Support Office (EASO) and DG Home, the EC department responsible for overseeing the implementation of the EU-Turkey Agreement and the hotspot approach. I requested access to all communication exchanged between these EU bodies and McKinsey in order to shed light on its involvement in Greece between September 2016 and April 2017. The requests were submitted under Regulation (EC) 1049/2001 which governs the rights of citizens to request documents held by EU institutions.[2] The regulation stipulates institutions' obligations to facilitate transparency, the procedural rules that they must follow in handling requests, as well as a series of exceptions, such as the protection of public security or commercial interests of third parties, that can be invoked to withhold access to specific (parts of) documents. Following initial rejections,

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2   Regulation (EC) No 1049/2001 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 30 May 2001 regarding public access to European Parliament, Council and Commission documents.

subsequent appeals and two complaints filed to the European Ombudsman (2018; 2020), the entire process spanned a period of more than three years. It ultimately yielded partial access to two sets of hitherto classified documents: (1) contractual arrangements between McKinsey and EU bodies; (2) the *Report of the Study on Operationalizing the EU-Turkey Statement*—a document of more than 1,500 pages of which several sections were disclosed. The analysis below consists mainly of a close reading of the latter.

Marked "strictly internal" and "confidential," at its core are a series of weekly "progress reports" that McKinsey consultants authored as the project unfolded and that were shared with the project's Steering Committee composed of senior officials from all relevant migration actors in Greece: EASO, Frontex, DG Home, the Greek Asylum Service (GAS), the Reception and Identification Service (RIS) and the Hellenic Police. The compilation of progress reports contains the firm's comprehensive analysis of the reception regime on the islands and the measures it proposed to eliminate the backlog. As such, the documents offer a rare insight into the data practices of a management consultancy "famed for its secrecy" (O'Mahoney & Sturdy, 2016, p. 250). More importantly, as I argue below, they reveal the "desires of control and order" (Seuferling & Leurs, 2021, p.8) that animate the discursive worlds and "idealized imaginaries" (Watkins, 2020, p. 1120) of the hotspot regime's architects and guardians.

14.5   Decoding McKinsey's Imaginaries of Control

McKinsey's involvement in Greece can be divided into two phases. Under a *pro bono* arrangement with the Commission signed in September 2016, its first task was to "analyse the situation on the Greek islands and come up with an action plan that would result in an elimination of the backlog" of around 16,000 asylum cases that had built up since the EU-Turkey deal came into force. Over the next 12 weeks, McKinsey consultants were positioned at the heart of the EU migration decision-making apparatus as they briefed senior EU and Greek officials about procedural "bottlenecks" and began to outline a series of measures to reduce the backlog. At the first stakeholder meeting, for example, McKinsey informed participants that the "processing rates" of cases by EASO and GAS would need to significantly increase. By December 2016, McKinsey had produced a list of "targeted strategies and recommendations" for each of the actors involved in reception on the islands. In an unprecedented instance of the outsourcing of policy formulation, McKinsey effectively *scripted* the operational component of the *Joint Action*

CONTEXT

A joint target was set to process and transfer all migrants from the Greek islands until end of April 2017

Target: Elimination of backlog cases on the islands by April 2017
Number of migrants waiting on the islands

Definition of success for elimination of backlog:

- **Continuous increase in productivity** of case workers (interviewers) and decision makers
- **Full processing of all migrants until final decision and transfer from islands to:** 1) Turkey, 2) country of origin (on voluntary basis), 3) the Greek mainland

Current trajectory

Base case without improvements

Islands max capacity ≈7,450

Target state for backlog elimination¹ by end of April

32,000
28,000
24,000
20,000
16,000
12,000
8,000
4,000
0

Jan   Feb   Mar   Apr   May   June   July

1 Backlog is reduced entirely; new arrivals processed at constant rate within 15 days
SOURCE: SRSS Migration Crisis Information Sheet (officially reported numbers)   12

Figure 14.1. McKinsey & Company study on the operationalization of the EU-Turkey statement.

Plan on Implementing the EU-Turkey Statement endorsed by the EU Council (Stavinoha & Fotiadis, 2020).

The second phase of McKinsey's intervention ran from January until April 2017, when the backlog was to be eliminated (see Figure 14.1). Under a contract with EASO, the consultancy was tasked with *implementation* of the action plan it had devised. Consequently, it became intimately involved in monitoring the everyday management not only of asylum procedures but of the logistics of the entire "reception chain" (Vianelli, 2022): from shelter allocation in the camps to deliberations about the precise stage when rejected asylum-seekers should be placed in detention prior to their deportation. The scope of the exercise was ambitious: McKinsey dispatched teams of consultants—putatively "experienced in migration management"—to organize workshops and "problem solving sessions" with "island implementation teams," to schedule daily calls with hotspot coordinators, and to coordinate the "alignment" and "continuous buy-in" of all "stakeholders." By the end of the project, the firm tallied 40 field visits to the islands and more than 200 meetings and workshops.

The documents reveal how McKinsey's approach to restructuring the Greek asylum bureaucracy was guided entirely by the lean management doctrine, with its emphasis on breaking down the asylum process into a
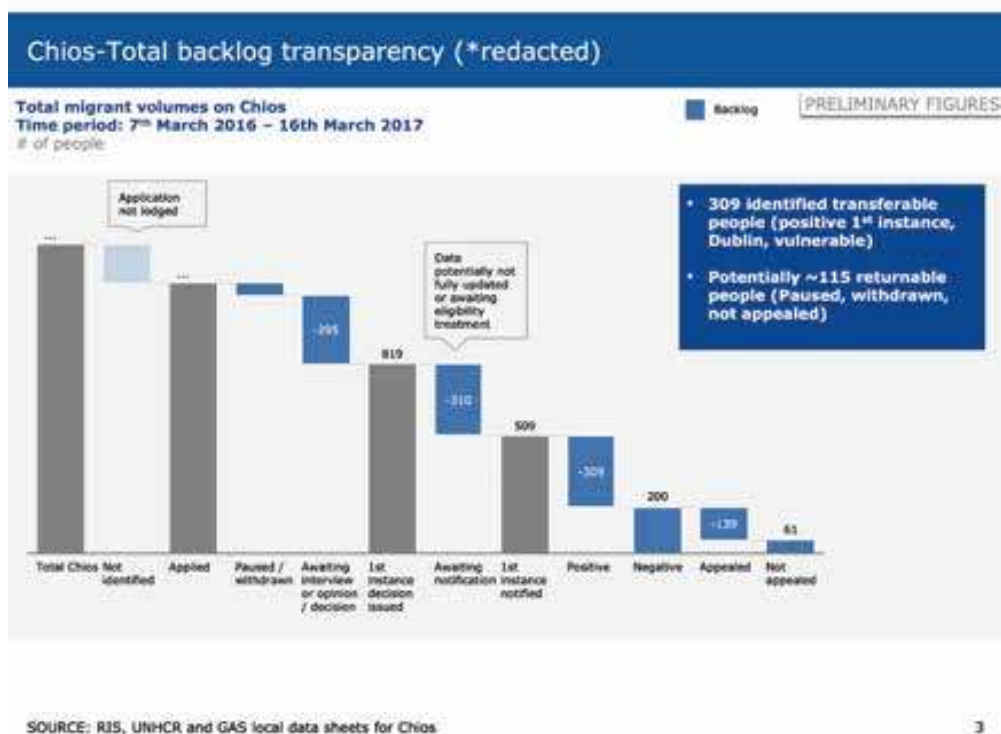
Figure 14.2. McKinsey's breakdown of migrant population on Chios, Greece, in March 2016.

collection of smaller parts and improving efficiency through incremental "adjustments" to each step of the process. Through constant optimization of resource allocation, the aim is to reduce interruptions, minimize "waste," and create a continuous workflow between the different actors involved in the process. As Vianelli (2022, p. 51) explains, an asylum case is, from this perspective, approached much like an automobile assembly line: "a process that needs to flow as smoothly as possible through the different stages from the asylum application to the final decision and the consequent transfer of the applicant" from the hotspot to either the Greek mainland or, as envisaged by the EU-Turkey deal, deportation back across the Aegean Sea.

McKinsey's intervention in Greece did not entail the extraction of data from migrants directly. Rather, its strategy of "making order out of disorder" (Ashutosh & Mountz, 2011, p. 28) consisted of the continual pooling, sorting and processing of diverse strands of information from the relevant actors operating in the hotspots. For example, amidst conflicting statistics on the number of people present in the camps, a key objective was to establish the refugee population for each island. This would then allow the consultants to establish "transparency on migrant volumes per process step," categorize the population "across islands and nationality clusters to identify potential bottlenecks," and visualize the evolving patterns via weekly "dashboards."

The same approach was applied to establish the "productivity rate" per process step per hotspot—that is, for instance, how many asylum interviews were conducted per GAS or EASO case worker each week. By analysing multiple strands of data almost in real time, McKinsey consultants would be in a position to monitor the "status" of implementation of each actor's ascribed targets and propose adjustments to eliminate inefficiencies deemed to be causing the backlog.

14.6 Disciplining the Hotspots

McKinsey's data practices performed two related but distinct roles. Distilled into PowerPoint-style slides, graphs, projections and measurable targets (see Figure 14.2), McKinsey transformed the "problem" of human mobility into an object of technocratic government for policymakers (see also Cobarrubias, 2019). Indeed, the language of "maximizing productivity," "key performance indicators," "process optimization" merges almost seamlessly with the European Commission's self-image "as a technocratic agency, keen to portray its actions as being based on rationalistic decision-making procedures and the use of expertise" (Boswell, 2009, p. 195). At the same time, these data practices were a necessary precondition for formulating appropriate disciplinary measures to increase "productivity," including meticulously planned "performance targets" for GAS caseworkers and the Appeals Committees. In a February 2017 progress report, for instance, McKinsey warned the steering committee that the "weekly total output of [circa] 50 cases across all committees is significantly below the weekly target of [circa] 300 cases." In response, McKinsey recommended that "performance dashboards" be installed inside offices to "motivate" individual employees to meet their required "output" of decisions. The imposition of discipline was not confined to street-level bureaucrats, however. It extended to the everyday management of the camps through a range of punitive measures directed at their populations. For example, the documents speak of stricter "consequence-enforcement," whereby the cases of individuals who failed to show up for their asylum interview would be automatically closed or archived. Elsewhere, McKinsey advised authorities to "detain migrants immediately after they are notified of returnable status" to speed up deportations.

This is not to say, however, that McKinsey's vision of an orderly asylum regime was solely guided by the logic of securitization. Rather, the imperative of maximizing efficiency carried ambivalent effects. For example, the firm

repeatedly advised Greek authorities *against* the use of limited detention capacity on the islands for individuals signed up to the International Organization for Migration (IOM)'s "Assisted Voluntary Return and Reintegration" (AVRR) scheme. It also urged Greek authorities to drop the contentious "Maghreb pilot" project on Lesbos and Kos, whereby asylum-seekers from North Africa and other nationalities with "low recognition" rates were being placed in "pre-removal detention centres" immediately upon arrival (Dickson & da Silva, 2017). Opposition to these detention practices was not guided by human rights considerations, however, but by the purely instrumental objective of freeing up "maximum [detention] capacity for forced returns" in order to speed up the rate of deportations to Turkey. Indeed, the imperative of maximizing efficiency was entirely divorced from any humanitarian concerns about migrants' welfare, for the "quality" of asylum procedures here is "calculated from the perspective of the institution, its decision-making and management processes" (Vianelli, 2021, p. 52). In fact, unlike the IOM, which couches its brand of orderly migration management in humanitarian terms (Ashutosh & Mountz, 2011, p. 28), any *pretence* of humanitarianism is entirely absent in McKinsey's discourse.

A final example illustrates this point. In a March 2017 progress report, McKinsey had identified "the lack of will for transfer to mainland camps" of some refugees who were granted permission to leave the hotspots. The reason, McKinsey acknowledged, was because they "do not consent to less 'attractive' shelter" and the prospect of being contained, indefinitely, in often remote camps with no social ties or networks of support. From McKinsey's perspective, however, they were needlessly occupying scarce shelter on the islands. They had, in other words, become a source of inefficiency. In response, the UN Refugee Agency (UNHCR) was tasked to "implement [a] sanction mechanism that makes stays in hotspots less attractive" by making "cash cards work[ing] on mainland only"—effectively compelling refugees to accept camp transfers by depriving them of access to the UNHCR-managed cash assistance scheme (Tazzioli, 2019).

14.7   Silences and Erasures

In January 2017, as McKinsey consultants descended upon the islands, three men died within a single week inside their snow-covered tents in Moria camp. Their deaths were attributed to carbon monoxide poisoning from makeshift heating devices (Papadopoulos, 2017). Yet, McKinsey's intervention was entirely abstracted from the lived realities of the hotspots, where the

provision of shelter itself had become a "politically crafted materiality of neglect" (Pallister-Wilkins, 2020, p. 78). One would search in vain in the McKinsey documents for any reference to the necropolitical brutalities that mark life, or death, inside the hotspots.

In fact, the entire project could only proceed via a wholesale erasure of the refugee as a rights-bearing subject endowed with the capacity for public-political speech (Stavinoha, 2019). The pervasive use of dehumanizing language is instructive. No longer are we dealing with individual men, women, children but numbers of "transferable," "imminently addressable," or "returnable" migrants, whose sole recorded identity markers are their nationality and their exact location along the procedural chain. As Ioannidis et al. (2021) explain in their study of the Greek Asylum Service, "asylum seekers are treated as members of particular sub-populations defined by categorical indicators rather than as human subjects." These categories carry material consequences as they, for example, facilitate the "segmentation" of cases by nationality, a strategy that was at the core of McKinsey's action plan despite warnings from human rights NGOs that it was contributing to "inter-ethnic tensions and riots" inside the camps, "reflecting the frustration of certain nationalities waiting for months without being given access to the asylum procedure" (Papadopoulou, 2016).

Revealingly, no refugees were interviewed as part of the project; their lived experiences and views concerning the asylum regime were considered irrelevant in the knowledge production process. These, then, are data practices where migrants are targeted "without being directly addressed or interpellated as subjects, nor required to speak" (Tazzioli, 2019, p. 74). Within this "imaginary of abstract quantification" (Witteborn, 2022, p. 12), migrants are rendered speechless but they do not appear as victims or villains, figures deeply engrained in the humanitarian imaginary. Instead, they are reduced to dehistoricized and depersonalized categories of bureaucratic "processing."

There is, finally, no room for political agency or resistance in the sanitized discourse and aesthetics of the McKinsey reports. The everyday acts of contestation through which camp subjects rupture the illusory order of the hotspots (Stavinoha, 2019) appear as but another source of inefficiency that must be eliminated: "Increase security presence on islands to reduce downtime caused by riots and unrest" is the instruction given to the Hellenic Police. And other than references to vexatious "abscondences" that imperil efficient processes of data extraction, any traces of migrant agency are expunged from the record. The managerial imperative is clear: the hotspots shall remain thoroughly depoliticized.

14.8 Conclusion

When McKinsey delivered the final report to the steering committee in May 2017, it touted its success in "reducing total process duration" of the asylum procedure to a mere 11 days from an average of 170 days just three months earlier. Yet thousands of people have continued to be warehoused in the hotspots for months, sometimes years, ever since the consultants departed. That McKinsey's lean management techniques did not have their desired effect is, perhaps, hardly surprising. There is a paucity of compelling evidence that demonstrates any positive impact when corporate management mantra is transposed into the public sector (Ford & Harding, 2021). But the argument here is not one of instrumentality: determining to what extent McKinsey's proposals were *actually* implemented and whether McKinsey succeeded in fundamentally *transforming* the "managerial modalities of governmentality" of the Greek asylum regime (Ionnadis et al., 2021). That would be to ascribe too much credit to the intellectual creativity of corporate consultants, to deny the "partial, clumsy and non-working" (Tazzioli, 2019, p. 87) character of data-extraction practices at borders, and to obscure the messiness of migration management at the everyday level. Top-down impositions of the kinds of disciplinary measures depicted above inevitably clash with the "counter-conduct" of street-level bureaucrats—camp personnel, police officers, caseworkers—and their capacity to subvert managerial control (Ioannidis et al., 2021; Rozakou, 2017). Above all, and despite their meticulous analysis of every procedural component of the reception regime, McKinsey consultants failed to anticipate how their vision would be continually frustrated by people's unruly and unyielding desire for mobility.

What purpose *did* McKinsey's intervention then serve? To answer this question, it is important to bear in mind that these were not public-facing documents; their circulation was confined to senior policymakers in the EU capital of Brussels and the Greek capital of Athens. Within these corridors of political power, I argue, McKinsey's knowledge practices sustained the imaginary *illusion* of the *possibility* of orderly asylum management envisaged by the architects of the hotspot regime. While the hotspots plunged individuals into a grotesque vortex of indignities, McKinsey's consultants deployed mundane data practices to transform migrants immobilized on the islands into depersonalized objects of knowledge that could be acted upon, managed and controlled. In doing so, it sought to transform a fundamentally *political* question of Europe's response to unruly cross-border mobility into a purely *technical* one. Yet, the chapter

has shown that beneath McKinsey's sanitized lean management jargon lies not only the "irreducibly political character of data practices" (Scheel et al., 2019, p. 580) but the everyday brutalities of the hotspot regime and the punitive policies these knowledges set out to legitimate. Of course, none of this is entirely new. The desire for order and control encoded in McKinsey's blueprint and premised on the segmentation of refugee populations "into neat categories of desirable/undesirable subjects" has a long, and dark, history, as Seuferling and Leurs (2021, p. 671) remind us. Mckinsey's intervention in Greece is thus but one chapter in the growing proliferation of essentially violent logics of abstraction and quantification within the field of mobility control (Witteborn, 2022), while the highly securitized, high-tech detention centres that are set to replace the hotspot facilities on the Aegean islands are, in this regard, but the latest infrastructural manifestation of this deep-seated fantasy.

Finally, the data practices that feed these fantasies of control cannot be divorced from the contingent political and economic processes that produce them (Lemberg-Pedersen et al., 2020). The method of accessing the internal archive of documents through FOI requests has revealed an additional feature of the outsourcing of knowledge production to McKinsey. It had the effect of partially taking the contested implementation of the EU-Turkey deal out of the public realm and, thus, beyond public scrutiny, and to obscure the bureaucratic irregularities at play. Bureaucratic irregularity, in this sense, refers not to the often-haphazard management of migration within the hotspots (Rozakou, 2017) but extends to the corridors of power where EU and national migration policies are set (Pianezzi & Grossi, 2020). Indeed, the documents obtained helped to reveal that EASO had awarded the €992,000 contract to McKinsey under "irregular" terms, according to the EU Court of Auditors (Stavinoha & Fotiadis, 2020).

What follows from this is that FOI requests present a methodological tool for shifting the empirical focus away from the ethically problematic practice of extracting knowledge "from the already surveilled bodies of displaced people" (Lemberg-Pedersen & Haioty, 2020, p. 611). Instead, it directs the critical gaze firmly towards the interactions between public and private actors that take place within sites of power where the imagined worlds of orderly migration control are conjured. These interactions are only set to expand and deepen, as datafication and dataveillance technologies continue to proliferate, making state bureaucracies across the EU (and beyond) increasingly reliant on private actors in the outsourced management of complex interoperable migration databases and the deployment of big

data analytics to sift through the vast amounts of data stored within them (Kilpatrick & Jones, 2022). By granting researchers access to a range of otherwise unavailable "backstage texts" (Walby & Larsen, 2012, p. 37), FOI requests offer a productive means for studying the decisions, discourses and everyday practices of the policymakers, bureaucrats and experts in charge of data practices that are generally highly opaque (Fink, 2017).

This does not mean that FOI requests are a magic bullet that can easily penetrate the walls of migration and border bureaucracies. Aside from being a time-intensive, often intensely frustrating, Kafkaesque exercise that requires familiarization with the procedural rules and relevant case law, not every request yields the desired results (Walby & Larsen, 2012). Public bodies can refuse to disclose documents by invoking one of the exceptions contained in FOI laws or, in some cases, on grounds of political expediency. For example, the European Commission refused to disclose details of its arrangement with McKinsey. A subsequent investigation by the European Ombudsman (2020) found that the Commission had unjustifiably withheld these documents "solely for the purpose of protecting the contractor's commercial interests," thereby committing an act of "maladministration." Only in rare instances can FOI requests be a stand-alone data collection method. Yet, particularly when combined with elite interviewing and discourse analysis of publicly available documents, carefully targeted FOI requests can be productively used "to explore work that occupies the space between a given agency's official protocol and the informal operational code that governs day-to-day activities" (Walby & Larsen, 2012, p. 34). FOI requests thus constitute an important, and so far largely overlooked, tool for digital migration researchers who wish to pry open the black-box of datafied migration management, the technocratic fantasies of control that such data practices expose, and the political and economic interests they serve.

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15.   Undocumented and Datafied: Anticipation, Borders and Everyday Life

Kaarina Nikunen and Sanna Valtonen

Abstract

This chapter explores how datafication shapes the bordering practices and lives of undocumented migrants. Datafication involves a temporal shift towards *anticipation* that focuses on predicting, profiling and pre-empting different forms of migration. The empirical data consists of diaries and interviews, as well as documents and legal cases of undocumented migrants and asylum seekers in Finland. The case studies show that data used on borders is often produced from various sources with inconsistent practices and inherent biases. In addition, datafication has rendered borders ubiquitous: borders follow people in their digital everyday life, causing uncertainty, mistrust and embodied anticipation of surveillance. Overall, the chapter argues that in the anticipatory temporality of data-fied borders, humanity itself becomes evaluated and assorted through inconsistent and biased data practices.

Keywords: datafication; data bias; borders; undocumented migrants; anticipation; digital life.

15.1   Introduction: Datafication of Borders

In recent years, datafication has become an increasingly central concept in migration research (Aradau & Tazzioli, 2020; Broeders & Dijstelbom, 2016; Metcalfe & Dencik, 2019). Datafication refers to the continuous gathering of data from everyday life and selling it to third parties or using it for algorithmic profiling, predictive analysis and automated decision-making (Cukier & Mayer-Schoenberger, 2013; van Dijck, 2014). This entails, as José van Dijck (2014) argued, a widespread belief in digital technologies' objective

quantification and potential tracking of all kinds of human behaviour and sociality. Thanks to new digital infrastructure, government, military powers, the financial sector, advertisers, tech companies and humanitarian organizations can all conduct surveillance through data (Barassi, 2018; Eubanks, 2018). Data mining, Kennedy and Moss (2015) argued, has become a powerful method for politicians and policymakers to know and capture what the public says and does.

Datafication is often framed as a phenomenon that concerns everyone: in a highly networked digital world, datafication cannot be escaped. However, in recent years, researchers have studied inequalities (Eubanks, 2018; Kennedy et al., 2021), vulnerabilities (Gangadharan, 2012) and algorithms of oppression (Noble, 2018), demonstrating that datafication does not treat everyone in the same way. Automated social sorting, critical data studies have highlighted, is often based on categorizations and assumptions that echo existing social biases and power structures, as well as pervasive and accumulative surveillance of the already marginalized (Gangadharan & Niklas, 2019; Ajana, 2019; Colman, 2016).

In the migration context, datafied surveillance systems are employed to control migration not only on borders but also beyond them. Data-driven technologies have strengthened borders and rendered them ubiquitous: the outside border control has grown increasingly mobile, now able to travel in the migrated bodies as "technologically afforded aura" (Pötsch, 2015, p. 111). Datafication thus exemplifies the intimate power-knowledge and the Foucauldian biopolitics inherent in the mechanisms, technologies and rationalities employed to manage and govern the life of others from fingertips to pocket-archives (Ajana, 2019; Foucault, 1977; Leurs, 2017).

Over the past 15 years, the European Commission has invested more than three billion euros in the research and development of border security, particularly after the refugee crisis between 2015 and 2016, when more than one million people fled the wars in Syria, Iraq and Afghanistan to EU countries (Luyten et al., 2020). It is noteworthy that while in 2022 over six million people escaped the war in Ukraine, they have been treated very differently compared to the previous "refugee crisis" in Europe in 2015. For Ukrainian refugees, the EU has established measures to accelerate the process of temporary protection (European Commission, 2022). However, these measures only concern Ukrainian refugees. According to Martin-Mazé and Perret (2021), the EU is adopting "techno-solutionism" to side-line moral considerations when dealing with the complex issue of migration outside Europe. They distinguished three rationalities of power universes that shape the bordering practices at the EU's external border. The first pertains to the

universe of the military, drawing from the idea of territory surrounded by walls, even in the form of an electronic surveillance system (Eurosur). The second concerns the police and authorities who work to "manage flows of people and set up a series of filters to sort out licit life and things, from illicit ones" (Martin-Mazé & Perret 2021, p. 281). The third is about the rationality of power, where borders are no longer solid but transformed into data and are thus "gaseous." The three universes exist simultaneously, but they work in different ways.

In this chapter, we explore how datafication shapes the bordering practices and lives of undocumented migrants in Finland and in Europe in general. Datafication, we argue, changes the temporality of knowledge production to *anticipation.* This means that datafication enables prediction of migration routes and activities, and pre-emption of unwanted mobility. Moreover, rather than neutral and straightforward knowledge production, datafication involves complex and contradictory practices. Following Aradau and Tazzioli (2020), who argued that "biopolitics multiple" captures the different and uneven ways biopolitics affects people's lives, we argue that datafication as a concept needs to be closely examined to understand its uneven and processual nature. Datafication, then, is not an uncomplicated force of knowledge production but a complex process, constructed and compiled from various and often contradictory sources, intertwined in the everyday as a form of intimacy and responded to in multiple ways, from anticipation and anxiety to a sense of possibility. To understand the complex, affective and intimate workings of datafication, we explore border practices and the everyday experiences of those who often remain invisible in public but are subjected to and dependent on multiple data-driven services and practices (Hegde, 2019; Latonero & Kift, 2018; Ponzanesi, 2019).

We discuss datafication in two contexts. First, the datafication of borders has become an essential aspect of migration, with its multiple implications for how people become undocumented and how they come into being. The datafied logic of decision-making affect border practices and processes by diminishing the space for negotiation and meaning-making—described by Tazzioli (2018) as the accelerated temporality of identification proce-dures—that may generate fatal consequences. The second area of exploration concerns the experience of datafication in everyday life. After the borders are crossed, surveillance continues in different forms and leaves traces of mistrust and fear in the everyday lives of the repeatedly monitored. The datafication of the undocumented's everyday life reveals how borders travel and follow people, even in digital spaces (Broeders & Dijstelbloem, 2016; Witteborn, 2020). Through datafication, we argue, borders have become

more ubiquitous, multi-layered and mundane, operating not only in different spaces but also in time—through anticipation and prediction, through waiting and delay. Borders travel on mobile phones and in leaky combinations of different digital archives, operating as intimate infrastructure of life.

15.2 Research Context: Finland's Undocumented People?

The scale of irregular migration in Europe is based on a set of evaluations and national projects. That undocumented migrants try to avoid authorities means that they are difficult to count, and the counting differs according to country. Research by the Clandestino project (Duvell et al., 2008) estimated that the number of undocumented migrants in the 27 EU member states at the time was between 1.9 and 3.8 million. The so-called refugee crisis in 2015 brought more than one million new asylum seekers to Europe, with some of them ending up undocumented, either in the country where they submitted their applications or elsewhere in Europe. According to the Platform for International Cooperation on Undocumented Migrants (PICUM), the number of undocumented migrants in Europe, estimated to be between 4.1 and 5.3 million, peaked between 2017 and 2018 (PICUM, 2021).

Most undocumented migrants arrive from the Asia-Pacific region, the Middle East, sub-Saharan Africa, and European countries that are not part of the EU or EFTA. Most of them enter an EU country without authorization but legally as asylum seekers, overstay their visa, fail to leave after being ordered to do so, or have their deportation temporarily delayed. The undocumented population also includes those born in EU countries to undocumented parents—Finland, like most European countries, does not have birthright citizenship, the so-called *jus solis*. The European undocumented population also includes asylum seekers who are waiting for a decision, a group that, in 2021, still comprised nearly half a million people and is likely to be the largest such group with an uncertain legal status (Connor & Passel, 2019; PICUM, 2021).

Equally diverse groups of people live as undocumented in Finland. Since they do not appear in the population registers, it is impossible to know exactly how many people are undocumented. However, according to NGOs such as Refugee Advice Center and Amnesty International, the undocumented population has increased significantly since the end of 2016; presently, there are approximately 5,000 to 6,000 undocumented people in Finland, with many of them living in the capital area and also in other large cities (Jauhiainen & Tedeschi, 2021).

The undocumented's everyday life is marked by constant uncertainty about the future and different exclusionary experiences, some of which are intensified through digitalization and the ongoing Covid-19 pandemic. Since the undocumented cannot turn to authorities, they remain extremely vulnerable to exploitation and various forms of abuse, and since they are not part of society's basic services, they are completely dependent on their personal networks.

15.3   Methodological Considerations

Our study focuses on datafication and the experiences of the digital everyday life of currently or recently undocumented migrants in Finland. Since datafication is a complex phenomenon and fairly difficult to explore in the everyday, we contend, that it requires multiple methods and a combination of approaches. Our research includes empirical data collected from diaries and interviews, as well as documents and case observations concerning hearings and legal cases. The diaries and interviews provided the basis for the study and, through these, we expanded exploration to the case studies with documents, case observations and legal cases shared by the participants. We have an on-going connection with the participants of the study with the aim of understanding the complexity of their experiences; this requires time. We acknowledge that researching people in such a vulnerable situation requires a sense of commitment and capacity to make research participation meaningful for the participants (Pittaway et al., 2010; MacKenzie et al., 2007).

The participants were invited to take part in the study in July 2020 through networks and professionals working with undocumented migrants and asylum seekers—social workers, NGOs and volunteers—as well as through day centres for undocumented people. Eventually, 16 people joined the study; they kept diaries of their daily lives for seven to 10 days. The participants were instructed to tell something about their digital everyday life: a good experience, a barrier to participation, a perceived feeling about a platform, anything that the participant felt was significant. They could keep the diary in the language of their choice, either as an audio or written version. The concept of a diary was not familiar to everyone, so the diaries were very different from each other, and the vulnerable position of the participants was reflected in coping: keeping a diary seemed to require a lot of energy and determination. Along with the diary, participants photographed their digital everyday lives. Through the pictures, we were able

to discuss experiences that were difficult or impossible for participants to write about. After completing the diary, they were interviewed individually, sometimes with the help of a translator. The diaries were used in interviews as providing examples or queries to reflect upon. The diary and interview data were coded thematically (such as emotions, social relationships, self-presentation, surveillance, platforms, digital services) with Atlas.ti software.

Seven participants also joined a photography workshop that included the pictures they had taken documenting their everyday lives (Nikunen & Valtonen, 2022). Even though the study took place during the Covid-19 lockdown, the researchers met each participant personally. To build trust, face-to-face meetings are important, especially for a population living in constant uncertainty. Our research is committed to the ethical principles of confidentiality, openness and doing no harm (Black, 2003). Therefore we disclose only relevant information of the participants to protect their identity. Their citations have been translated and edited for fluency and to ensure they do not convey personal details. In line with the reciprocal research process, as the participants gave their time to our study, we did our best to help them with their situation and legal cases by offering them information, advice and help with official hearings if asked for. One researcher in our group chairs an association to support the undocumented and is thus well trusted to offer help with legal issues. This possibility may raise unreasonable expectations among the participants and therefore we made sure that the participants understood the options that are available in their cases. While for some the legal help was clearly relevant, there were others who were also eager to participate in order to be part of a research that could help the undocumented migrants' situation in general. Overall it appeared important in terms of trust to be able to give the participants something in return that they determine to be valuable themselves (Pittaway et al. 2010).

As Pittaway and colleagues (2010) argue, ethically unsound research practices can cause distrust and emotional and material harm for people in vulnerable situations. Since we were aware that, in such a research setting, there will be a power imbalance between the participants and the researchers, we paid particular attention to the ethical guidelines of research. These include making sure the participants receive enough information and feedback on the research and that researchers do not simply "fly in and out" of their lives (Pittaway et al., 2010). Our ultimate aim was to find ways to understand the structures and experiences of inequalities and to offer help to our participants through meaningful research.

15.4   Borders, Bones and Fingerprints

A substantial amount of research has focused on how borders have become datafied due to the latest technologies that seek to improve systems of identification and surveillance. Research has highlighted how several datasets in Europe—VIS (Visa Information System), SIS (Schengen Information System) and Eurodac (fingerprints of people over 14 years when they enter Europe)—are used to track people's movements. These border databases and technologies include identification documents, fingerprinting, facial recognition systems, retinal scans, speech detection systems, ground sensors, aerial video surveillance drones, and various automated decision-making processes (Aradau & Tazzioli, 2020; Broeders, 2007; Metcalfe & Dencik, 2019; Scheel et al., 2019). The logics of datafication, we argue, fortifies a temporal shift in migration governance towards pre-emption (Andrejevic, 2020).

Anticipation has become the dominating operational logic in governmental and supranational institutions, with the hope of being able to predict and prevent crises and conflicts. In the migration context, predictions are used to identify people's movements, and this information is used to determine where and when European borders need to be strengthened and, consequently, how to predict and categorize future asylum seekers. In this way, operational logic can strengthen the idea that particular groups are not worthy of asylum and work as racial profiling. Consequently, such groups are pushed back even before they can make an application for asylum. In other words, anticipatory logic influence where and when people can reach refugee status and where and when they are denied this status and become undocumented (Martin-Mazé & Perret, 2021).

As critical data studies scholars have highlighted, datasets are always historical, constructed and laden with political and ethical values (Metcalf & Crawford, 2016). There are several examples of facial recognition systems misrecognizing racialized minorities or the data produced being misinterpreted, thus illustrating the biases that are often overlooked due to the belief that technology is an infallible source of information (Boulamwini & Gerbu, 2018; Browne, 2015). Moreover, the technology of biometric systems cannot register bodies that are not complete; those with injured eyes or fingers, who have speaking impairments, or transgender bodies escape the normative systems of identification. Such a technology does not necessarily grant such bodies freedom from surveillance but instead submits them to further systems of surveillance (Constanza-Shock, 2020; Jacobsen & Rao, 2018).

The inconsistency of biometric data is illustrated by how authorities may interpret data differently according to the situation. A compelling example of

the inconsistent use of biometric data concerns age assessment (Tapaninen, 2018). A minor asylum seeker's age is verified using a bone density survey method. Age is tested with the consent of the minor and their representative or guardian, but if consent is refused, the person is treated as an adult before the law. Paediatricians, psychologists or social workers are not involved in the assessment. In this way, the body becomes the central object and stage of the exercise of power and the study results are reduced to "tooth age" and "wrist age." However, the comparative data of age assessment is based on data gathered in the 1930s from upper-middle-class children in Ohio (the so-called "Greulich-Pyle method"). In other words, the data used as a 'norm', is originally created for a completely different purpose in a different historical and geographical context. This bias in the database is, however, largely omitted and the age assessment of current asylum seekers in Europe to a great extent relies on this biased data. Moreover, the range of accuracy of the test is set as wide a two years, which offers a window for interpretation that can be used to meet other goals or policies.

A compelling example is an asylum seeker who came to Finland, a few years after his mother and siblings, at the age of 17 and three months. He had a tazkira (an Afghan birth certificate), written by the same imam who had also provided his mother's and siblings' certificates before. The mother's and siblings' documents and ages had been accepted as genuine by the Finnish authorities. However, the son was assigned to an age test, and based on that, his age was raised by 10 months. As a result, he was declared to be just over 18, which meant he could not obtain a residence permit based on family ties. He thus became an asylum seeker. His age could not be raised further, as then his age would have come too close to the age of his older sister (with less difference than nine months), but it was raised just enough to justify the (negative) decision and expulsion.

Sometimes biometric identifiers, such as fingerprints, cease to be part of the truth or sufficient to identify someone. Even in situations when biometric data is found, for example, in the form of a Eurodac hit, authorities may question its validity. When a Eurodac hit is found, an asylum seeker becomes a Dublin case, and their asylum investigation proceeds under the Dublin Regulation. Often, this means awaiting a decision in a normal reception centre—but not always. If the identification is not considered sufficiently valid and the person does not have a valid travel document, they may be detained for a longer period. This happened to an asylum seeker who arrived in Finland from Latvia in 2021. His expired passport was held by the Latvian police. Even if the Finnish authorities found multiple Eurodac hits, these were not enough to convince the authorities. So instead of a normal

reception centre, the asylum seeker had to wait for his Dublin process at the detention unit for three months. However, the same biometric data and identification were considered sufficient to deport him. Thus, there seems to be some flexibility in how authorities interpret biometric data—the same data can be used as much to verify as to undermine the "truth" of a perons's identity. Such cases reveal that border procedures based on biometric data and how they are negotiated, anticipate the policy goals and political aims to strengthen borders and reduce "pull factors." While bodies are considered to be the ultimate evidence, digital devices that store documents, images, interactions, relationships and other private information are also increasingly surveilled to verify the identity of those in need of protection.

The mobile phone of an individual who has applied for international protection in Finland is only examined in exceptional situations, but according to the experiences of migrants and asylum seekers, this is not the case everywhere in Europe. The European Commission published a *Return Handbook* that outlines the standards and procedures in EU member states for returning illegally staying third-country nationals (*The Return Handbook*, 2017), offering guidance for national authorities competent in conducting return-related tasks, including police, border guards, migration authorities, staff of detention facilities and monitoring bodies. Control over an individual's mobile phone has been left to the member countries to decide. Therefore, for instance, asylum seekers who do not have valid travel documents or other identity-proving documents can have their mobile phones checked for identification purposes. According to one of our study participants, their son's mobile phone was investigated in Croatia to verify their itinerary. Moreover, other asylum seekers have also reported, for example, that authorities have gone through the images stored on a mobile phone in other EU member states to investigate, among other things, terrorist risks (Beduschi, 2018; Thuer et al., 2018).

Although mobile phones or other devices are not examined in principle in Finland as part of the asylum procedure, social media accounts are still relevant in defining the need for international protection. Status updates and social media discussions are investigated when it is necessary to assess the extent to which a person is politically prominent and in need of international protection (see Andreassen 2020). Many of our research participants have also tried to verify their cases by presenting social media content as evidence. In most cases, they received threatening messages via social media, both before and after fleeing their countries of origin. However, these messages were not enough to convince the Immigration Service of their personal danger, as the authenticity of the messages, their sender(s), or the sender(s)'s motivation could not be ascertained.

Two participants provided their own social media accounts as evidence of political activity (and thus as a cause of personal persecution). In these cases, social media metrics, the number of followers, likes and comments were studied. According to the Finnish Immigration Service's interpretation of these cases, political content with few followers, likes or shares does not, in principle, endanger its publisher—the threat must be demonstrated in other ways as well. These estimates rarely consider the different ways in which social media is used in different cultures (see Andreassen 2020). Our research participants explained that, in their home countries, people mostly use social media to "stalk" others (participants 3 and 15) because expressing one's position by liking or commenting would be too dangerous, both in their country of origin and their country of exile. For example, one participant received a negative protection decision because his political activities were considered private and his social media interaction was low; thus, he was not considered dangerous. However, the politically assertive videos he has been uploading regularly have been viewed thousands of times, although the number of explicit likes is non-existent. Inevitably, these experiences have an impact on the subsequent use of social media and, more generally, on the structures of societal trust.

The examples demonstrate that there are multiple interpretations of data, and these interpretations are often linked to political goals and policies. For example, the introduction to the Finnish government's proposal to apply age assessment states that the intention is to "reduce certain pull factors." This is what Tapaninen and Helén (2019) described as ubiquitous suspicion that can "outweigh any form of evidence" (2019, p. 388). These examples illustrate how datafied control and surveillance can reduce judicial and moral questions to technical issues (Korp & Stretmo, 2020).

Increasingly, borders are aligned with various pre-emptive technologies to prevent the arrival of asylum seekers altogether. During the Covid-19 pandemic, for instance, motion-sensor-operated long-range sound cannons were tested at the Greece border, bringing a new dimension to the practice of the audialization of migrant bodies that Weitzell (2018) discussed (see also Chapter 13 by Leix Palumbo on the weaponization of sound). "Sound cannons that shoot out deafening noise are part of a vast array of physical and experimental new digital barriers being installed and tested during the quiet months of the coronavirus pandemic at the Greek-Turkey border to stop people entering the European Union" (Martin-Mazé & Perret, 2021, p. 279). Sound cannons are accompanied by long-range cameras, night vision, and multimodal sensors—all of them collect data to flag suspicious movement using artificial intelligence analysis to have a "pre-border" picture of what is happening (Kouniaki, 2021). The anticipatory automated surveillance

network being built on the Greek–Turkish border aims to detect migrants early and deter them from crossing. Surveillance and verification technology has been created and tested in Greece, Hungary, Latvia and elsewhere along the eastern EU perimeter.

Datafied pre-emptive technologies, according to scholars, have not only contributed to a sense of mistrust towards migrants but have also dehumanized them (Broeders, 2007; Tapaninen & Helén, 2020). A recent UN report stated that the development of digital border technologies has led to experimental, dangerous and even discriminatory practices (UN, 2020). Stateless persons and non-citizens now have fewer rights and legal protection and are thus increasingly subject to human rights violations. This is the result of increasingly strict border control and migration regulations, as well as using digital technologies in ways that are not open for public review and assessment. At the same time, migrants confronted with increased border securitization adopt anticipatory practices to bypass borders, create new forms of migrant-to-migrant protection and assistance and articulate their political voice (Godin & Dona, 2021; Metcalfe, 2021).

The fact that borders have become increasingly datafied instils in migrants' everyday lives a sense of being under constant surveillance. Having to anticipate and submit to various pervasive technologies, followed by uncertainty regarding how exactly their data is being interpreted, leaves them with feelings of mistrust and fear that follow them daily.

15.5   Digital Borders of Everyday Life

This chapter's second empirical section explores migrants' experiences of datafication after crossing borders based on their diaries and interviews. The diary notes and interview discussions conveyed routines of checking the news and practical information, as well as the joy of connecting with friends and family through digital devices. However, the anticipatory sense of being surveilled or being in danger when using digital devices and social media platforms emerged as a common theme in these experiences. Inevitably, experiencing different forms of border surveillance leaves traces of mistrust and fear in the participants' everyday lives.

Our participants' sense of insecurity and uncertainty is complexly intertwined with their digital lives and practices, involving the anticipation and pre-emption of surveillance. Their diary notes and interviews revealed simultaneous dependency and concern regarding the use of digital devices and social media. Digital devices with location tracking, as well as social media with

forced visibility, generate concern over their security and the possibility of being found through these devices, either by officials or other hostile participants on social media. One of the participants explained this as follows:

> As an immigrant background [person] I'm really afraid. I'm really afraid to share anything. Whatever. But I share on my Facebook page funny things. (That's fine). Comedy things. Something nonsense but I really cannot share something that really makes people think that okay this guy is doing something wrong or he's hiding something behind him. (Interviewee 10)

As the diary and interview data revealed, the participants consider digital media devices—a source of information and a tool to connect with family and friends—extremely important. They help them find not only practical information but also comfort during precarious situations (Gillespie et al., 2018; Latonero & Kift, 2018; Leurs, 2017; Twigt, 2018). This is in line with Twigt (2018), who argued that digital devices help migrants in vulnerable situations to orient themselves towards the future by offering them a space to imagine the future and help them connect with loved ones. In some cases social media may also provide a space for refugee activism and solidarity (Nikunen 2019a; 2019b).

While all the participants talked about the importance of being connected, they also talked about the fear and distress that being connected entailed. These concerns were particularly linked to being too visible to others through digital devices and social media presence:

> As a refugee I have to be careful always. When I'm going to post (on social media) and I have to double check what is it. It really affects people. It really affects if people think it is something dangerous, something wrong. Because since I'm living in a different community because, people are different always and you're different from my … so I have to think before I post anything. And even if I think that I can post something, if I post and I think that might affect or people think it is wrong I will delete it again. (Interviewee 1)

The participants responded to the coerced visibility of social media (Barassi, 2018) with various tactics that helped them hide themselves while being connected. Such anticipatory tactics of invisibility include using different social media profiles to hide their identities or activities that might cause harm to themselves or their far-away family members. A participant describes the sense of constant risk and danger when using social media and being connected to people as follows:

> I have friends that I have come to know during these four years in Finland who are also refugees or come from Afghanistan or Iraq or somewhere else. I have told them directly that if someone has asked a picture or sent a picture ... Since we hear every day about the mistakes that immigrants or refugees have made, it is made public easily. So if someone does ... so don't do it, because you are in a difficult situation here, you are not as free as they are. (Interviewee 9)

Besides using different profiles, the participants also used encrypted communication tools to send messages safely. Sometimes they deleted their mobile phone apps because of the distress they caused or the potential harm they might cause. They avoided enabling location services on their devices and created different ways of expressing themselves through images to avoid being recognized.

> No I don't share nothing. Nothing. Even if I put some pictures I don't put my localization or something like that that no one can know where I am, because many people, my friend in my country too, they ask me where are you because we don't see where you are. I say I'm in Finland but I don't explain my situation or anything like that. (Interviewee 3)

These experiences speak of the ambivalence of social media, the embodied sense of mistrust and the attempts to anticipate different forms of digital surveillance. During the Covid-19 pandemic, as societies were increasingly leaning on digital systems and services, these steps towards deeper digitalization also produced new forms of digital borders for the undocumented. Most digital services require an identity number and an existing online banking ID, which are not necessarily available for asylum seekers and the undocumented.

From the interviews, the lack of an identity number emerged as a central problem that exemplified the digital borders of the everyday. While some of the undocumented may receive artificial IDs, they cannot be used to obtain online banking IDs, which are crucial since, as explained by a participant, they are needed to access almost all public and most commercial services:

> Yeah. Like five years ago there were so-called virtual courses that I could have studied but because I didn't have the banking online numbers I could not participate and I could not study those virtual courses. Still a lot of people Iraqis and other nationalities who are asylum seekers they don't have those banking numbers. So they cannot log in to study for example

which is really a shame because, of course studying is really important. It's a very good thing in every aspect. People have to be educated. People have to study of course all the time and read and so on. But I hope maybe someday that they've figured out some way to so that everyone can study online using those banking online numbers. Even if it would be like temporary log in or something. Of course when it's related to work or even when I want to buy something online then I cannot do that. If I need to order something. (Interviewee 4)

Online banking IDs are needed to access various services, such as online shopping, benefits or membership schemes, or to obtain a Covid pass. During the Covid-19 pandemic, without a Covid pass, access to both public and private spaces was radically restricted. During a complete lockdown, even using supermarket toilets became impossible without showing some kind of membership card. When Europe restricted movement with Covid passes, it was the undocumented who, once again, found themselves on the other side of the digital border. These are processes that are fundamentally tied to an understanding of humanity: who is granted access to human rights, basic needs and protection.

15.6   Conclusion

In this chapter, we explored how datafication and border practices shape the everyday lives of the undocumented. Datafied borders and migration management, we have argued, highlight a larger shift in the temporal landscape towards anticipation that focuses on predicting, profiling and pre-empting different forms of migration. These systems shape mobility and define how people become asylum seekers or undocumented. Datafication accentuates anticipatory knowledge production; however, anticipation concerns not only the authorities and institutions that seek to manage migration—migrants and asylum seekers participate in various anticipatory practices to avoid, manage and live with systems that monitor, define and regulate their lives.

The undocumented migrants' constant sense of being surveilled also shapes the use of digital media, which they consider, on the one hand, potentially dangerous but, on the other, a necessary source of information, assistance and connection during precarious situations. While datafied systems are often considered cost-efficient and neutral, our case studies show that data is often produced from various different sources using inconsistent

practices and biases. The data extracted can also be evaluated in light of new policies and political goals. Datafication thus needs to be understood as complex, interpretational and prone to errors.

Moreover, we considered the simultaneous anticipation and delay in bordering practices and experiences as an example of "power chronography," the multiplicity of temporalities and their connection to power (Sharma, 2015). Power chronography refers to the ways in which power operates as a "biopolitical economy of time" as various institutions, such as border regimes, control and shape people's experiences of time (Sharma, 2015, p.19). In the digitalized world, borders extend in time, in prolonged waiting, and in anticipation of what is to come. In the temporal landscape of migration, time clearly appears to be more precious for some than for others (Christine et al., 2021). Though several systems are used to quickly predict mobility, extract data and verify identities, acquiring residence permits may still take six years of waiting in uncertainty. The unpredictability of borders and the new digital borders that have emerged during the Covid-19 pandemic create unfairly exclusionary experiences and prolonged waiting—a "delayed pushback" that renders everyday life difficult, even unbearable.

In the anticipatory temporality of datafied borders, humanity itself becomes evaluated and assorted. The way human classifications, categorizations and judgements are produced through data characterizes the drive to know and manage complex realities. Identities are produced through biopolitics, through processes by which "people become migrants, welfare recipients, prisoners, targets, or victims" (Maguire & Rao, 2018, p. 11). As argued by Tapaninen and Helén (2019), increasing the use of technologies in migration management furthers the atmosphere of suspicion and dehumanizes those who are on the move, seeking protection. This is a system of knowledge production that also creates bodies that do not matter (Agamben, 1998)—bodies that are left in waiting.

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Section VI

Conclusions

Conclusions: On Doing Digital Migration Studies

Koen Leurs and Sandra Ponzanesi

Taking Perspective

This volume addressed how migrants navigate their being in the world, crossing national borders, shaping new forms of diasporic affiliations and transnational belongings, while facing new forms of surveillance, control and datafication. We took as a starting point the main premise that the relationships between digital media technologies and migration / mobilities cannot be captured within the limited confines of single disciplines. Aiming to animate an interdisciplinary exchange, we therefore purposefully invited contributors from various fields and areas of expertise, including media, communication, geography, anthropology and sociology, to share their perspectives on (studying) migration in relation to digital media technologies. The chapters included were all previously presented during the April 2021 online conference *Migrant Belongings. Digital Practices and the Everyday.* Clear shared foci could be observed in the 200-plus papers submitted to the conference. The chapters included here were selected to develop new insights in five thematic strands that we discerned at the conference and that are significant for the development of the field of digital migration studies:

1) Creative practices: researching media and migration by exploring the various creative practices and modalities through which figures, tropes, frames and imaginaries of the "migrant", the "refugee", the "border crosser" and the "mobile individual" may be constructed, negotiated, questioned and destabilized;
2) Digital diaspora and placemaking: nuanced claims about the possibilities afforded by digital technologies to transcend place and time by reconsidering the emotions, materialities and symbolic processes of translocal connectivity, socio-cultural integration and placemaking across situated contexts;

3) Affect and belonging: addressing the politics of emotion in the context of accelerating but uneven forms and experiences of mobility and mediation. Specific attention is paid to the intersections of sex and gender, as structuring forces and intense emotional registers;

4) Visuality and digital media: addressing how visual politics and sense making, within the context of the increasing platformization of migration and mobility, shape and give meaning to forms of belonging;

5) Datafication, infrastructuring and securitization: accounting for the shifting nexus between humanitarianism and securitization by addressing how digitalizing and datafying migration infrastructures are made and negotiated from below in everyday life settings.

Besides aiming to open up new ways of thinking around these themes, we purposefully brought together scholars at various stages in their academic careers, both younger and more senior scholars, who work with diverse groups of migrant and mobile people, in different geographical settings and in relation to a broad range of digital technologies. Taken together, the fifteen chapters and five thematic sections plus introductions included in *Doing Digital Migration* present a comprehensive entry point to the variety of theoretical debates, methodological interventions, political discussions and ethical debates around migrant forms of belonging as articulated through digital practices. Furthermore, because publications commonly offer little information on why and how particular decisions are made during the operationalization of a study, the contributors were invited to reflect on the rationales behind their choice of particular frameworks, including spelling out their methodological considerations and attempting to situate their case studies in comparative contexts.

Pluralizing "the Migrant" and "the Digital"

One key recurring theme connecting the chapters is that they offer fundamental insight into how migration and digital media technologies are increasingly inseparable. Digital technologies impact upon everyday migrant life, while vice versa migrants play a key role in technological developments—be it when negotiating the communicative affordances of platforms and devices, as consumers of particular commercial services such as sending remittances, as platform gig workers (Van Doorn & Vijay, 2021) or as target groups and test cases for new advanced surveillance technologies (Molnar, 2020). Therefore, it is not productive to approach migration processes and

digital technologies separately as stable, stand-alone units that exist in isolation from one another. Rather, their entanglement should be taken as an ontological, epistemological, methodological and ethical starting point of critical inquiry (Leurs, 2023).

In practice, by considering the various perspectives advocated by the contributors to this volume, we can achieve a more comprehensive understanding of the entanglements between migration and digital technologies. Taken together, the chapters present us researchers with an important invitation, namely to pluralize our understanding of "the migrant" and "the digital." Inspired by feminist, critical race and postcolonial theory, pluralizing as a research principle does not seek to advance one singular, all-encompassing explanation or homogenizing understanding of the world; rather, it is committed to diversifying discourse. This aim to think differently about migration and digitality seeks to acknowledge a variety of interconnected worlds, knowledges, stories, experiences and feelings, from the centre but also, and more importantly, from the margins. "Embracing pluralism" here does not suggest that anything goes, all is relative, or all knowledge claims should have equal weight (D'Ignazio & Klein, 2020, p. 136). Rather, it seeks to acknowledge the standpoints from where people, communities, researchers, governments or corporations make truth claims about migration and technologies, and that claims made from particular positions are always "partial" rather than all-encompassing (Haraway, 1988). From which situated location in the world are these claims made, by whom, for whom and with what aims? Knowledge production thus does not end with pluralization; it is the basis for showing how unjust power hierarchies are shaped. This can be done by diagnosing how agency and domination emerge from intersectional assemblages of race, gender, sexuality, ability, nationality, religion, age, generation and location, among others (Crenshaw, 2022; Puar, 2018; Tsatsou, 2022). These insights in turn offer a basis on which to work towards social justice and transformation.

On the basis of the multiplicity of insights presented in *Doing Digital Migration Studies*, we advocate pluralizing the figure of "the migrant" in their interrelation with the "digital." Consider for example the variety of migrant communities and technologies discussed in this book: Senegalese living in Louga in the north of Senegal and Senegalese living in the diaspora who gather together on the Festival International de Folklore et Percussion Facebook platform (Sendra, see Chapter 11); Latin Americans living in Spain and the United States who create content for TikTok (Jaramillo-Dent, Alencar & Asadchy, see Chapter 10); queer refugees from the Middle East living in Berlin, Germany who use dating apps like Grindr (Bayramoğlu, see

Chapter 9); Chinese transnational grandparents in Australia using WeChat for digital kinning and homing (Stevens, Baldassar & Wilding, see Chapter 4); and "highly skilled," "international professional" migrants using platforms like Zoom for placemaking in the university town of Groningen in the rural northern Netherlands (Costa, see Chapter 7). Pluralizing our understanding of "the migrant" and "the digital" opens up new vistas to acknowledge the multiplicity, contradictions and messiness of how the digital co-constitutes migration and how migration co-constitutes the digital. Key in approaching migration and digital technologies here is acknowledging how both the digital and migration mediate differences that are often overlooked in their daily, mundane, banal everyday occurrences.

Categories and labels such as highly skilled migrants, expats, refugees, asylum seekers, *sans-papiers*, non-people and economic migrants are not ahistorical, neutral, naturally occurring differentiations of human beings. Rather, migration categories are contingent, socio-cultural and legal fabrications which have strong material and symbolic consequences. They reflect power-knowledge governance frameworks that differentiate people on the basis of a "good-versus-bad mobilities dichotomy" (Bruns, 2023), which "constructs immigrant identities along intersecting axes of inequality" (Cleton & Meier, 2023, p. 1). The differentiation between those who are eligible to move and those who are not is haunted by the historical projects of colonialism, modernity, capitalism and nationalism, as these legacies determine which bodies are allowed frictionless mobility and which bodies are immobilized (Andrews, 2021; Pallister-Wilkins, 2022). In parallel, the digital is built on difference, which is reflected in how digital inequalities are constructed and perpetuated across the levels of owner-ship, access, literacies, participation, datafication, machine learning and artificial intelligence. Here, we take cues from the digital anthropologists Daniel Miller and Heather Horst, who "define the digital as everything that has been developed by, or can be reduced to, the binary—that is bits consisting of 0s and 1s" (2012, p. 5)—the digital encoding of human life on the basis of this binary reduces and abstracts human complexity, thereby producing "a further proliferation of particularity and difference" (Miller & Horst, 2012, p. 3). While dominant rationalities of migration produce difference by simplifying the complexity of the world to form hierarchical categories that determine restricted possibilities for legal movement, the digital simplifies the complexity of the world by turning it into zeroes and ones, thereby also (re)producing differences.

Taken together, migration and the digital mutually reinforce a systematic and violent differentiation of people. From above, this oppressive system

undergirds and shapes the uneven landscape of everyday migrant life and digital practice (Gallis, Bak Jørgensen & Sandberg, 2022). However, this is not the only story to be told about migration and technologies. In the words of Foucault, "where there is power, there is resistance and yet, or rather consequently, this resistance is never in a position of exteriority in relation to power" (1978, p. 95). In the context of digital migration, surrounding the apparatuses of "security," there is "resistance" at the level of lived experience (Triandafyllidou, 2022) and it is up to researchers to locate, theorize and amplify such agential acts. For example, David Nemer in his recent work draws on decolonial and intersectional theory to address how favela residents in Brazil engage with and appropriate technologies mundanely, to navigate and fight oppression in their lives through digital and non-digital practices of spirit, love, community and resistance (Nemer, 2022). Similarly, Tanja Ahlin takes a relational perspective to analyse how families of migrating nurses from Kerala, India, establish and ambivalently experience "transnational care collectives" through tinkering with smartphones and social media (Ahlin, 2023).

To avoid reaffirming essentializing and homogenizing dominant rationalities of migration and technology, scholars in this anthology for example embrace an "autonomy of migration" framework to question state-centric analyses and attend to the subjective, lived and affective force of mobile people and communities (e.g., see Denić in Chapter 1 and Shah in Chapter 8). Similarly, considering how digital practices sustain translocal forms of belonging and place-making invites researchers to move beyond the dominant state-centric focus inherent in the study of transnationalism (Mevsimler, 2021, see Godin & Ghislain in Chapter 6 and Bayramoğlu in Chapter 9). Regarding methodology and ethics, researchers pluralize knowledge production by decentring technology. For example, in Chapter 2 Irene Gutiérrez Torres operationalizes a non-digital media-centric paradigm by co-producing knowledge with communities through forms of archival participatory filmmaking. Yener Bayramoğlu further problematizes previous one-sided perspectives by centring the perspective and multiplicity of experiences of queer migrant communities. These interventions do not ignore systematic conditions; rather, as part of a pluralizing commitment they invite researchers and the world to witness and acknowledge how migrant communities may claim agency through transnational and cosmopolitan practices from below.

Digital Cosmopolitanisms

The anthology has been divided into different sections that reflect emerging key topics and debates in digital migration studies, from creative practices to

diasporic formations, from visual representations to affective connections, all in negotiation with top-down and bottom-up responses to increased digitalization, datafication, monitoring and surveillance. As mentioned in our Introduction, these thematic sections are criss-crossed by critical concepts that are steeped in the entanglement of migration and digital media technologies, such as the notion of the everyday as being important for understanding new cosmopolitan formations from below. The notion of cosmopolitanism is deeply entrenched in issues of mobility, citizenship and human rights. Therefore, when permeated with questions of technology, border control and surveillance, it needs to be resignified from those positions at the margins, as experienced by refugees, migrants and the exiled as an important nexus of the local/global, which is always marked by unequal redistribution of power, access and agency.

Digital connectedness, for example, allows physical distance to be bridged by digital proximity, creating new paradigms for understanding the experience of mobility in general and migration in particular (Diminescu, 2008; Nedelcu, 2012; Marchetti-Mercer et al., 2023), but also of transnational intimacy and global networks, as they are part of the affective turn online (Ahlin, 2023; Alinejad & Ponzanesi, 2020; Garde-Hansen & Gorton, 2013). This new idea of connectivity also significantly reshapes notions of cosmopolitanism based on the trespassing and transgressing of borders, not only through displacement but also, as theorized by Arjun Appadurai (1996), through shared imaginaries on the move. These issues have been further elaborated upon in the rising field of digital diaspora studies and transnationalism, which criss-crosses and overlaps with that of digital cosmopolitanism (Alonso & Oiarzabal, 2010; Candidatu, Leurs & Ponzanesi, 2019; Gajjala, 2019; Gilroy, 1993; Franklin, 2013; Zuckerman, 2013; Ponzanesi, 2020).

In the discussions on cosmopolitanism, we can discern different perspectives that foreground either a normative approach, which embraces equality and solidarity among fellow human beings regardless of their background and ethnicities, or a more pragmatic and experiential approach that foregrounds different forms of coexistence and hospitality, often generated by forced migration and violent displacements. This latter approach seeks to acknowledge what is often called a "cosmopolitanism from below" where instantiations of "common humanity" are not dictated by the moral high ground of a shared experience as citizens of the world (cosmo-politans) but realized through the lived everyday practices of conviviality and ethnic coexistence that enables migrants on the move to create togetherness, despite the unequal access to mobility, integration and citizenship.

Indeed, when all legal and political structures fall short, cosmopolitan everyday practices have shown how aspirations to citizenship may be realized through acts of citizenship by people who may not be full citizens by law (Stavinoha, 2019). Such a conceptualization of citizenship is interested in how people "constitute themselves" as citizens through acts (Isin, 2012, p. 110). These acts of citizenship are meant to "disrupt habitus, create new possibilities, claim rights and impose obligations in emotionally charged tones ... and shift established practices, status and order" (Isin & Nielsen, 2008, p. 10). Acts of citizenship in these terms enable social change and promote a pluralization of flexible notions of citizenship (Ong, 1999). Therefore, cosmopolitanism can also be considered as something that comes into being through cosmopolitan acts. By addressing these acts, we researchers can increase awareness of shaping and participating in new transnational formations that cut across borders and boundaries, while establishing new forms of connectedness and belonging, away from institutional restrictions or banishments.

It is in that sense that digital technologies are regarded by some as the final turn of "ideal cosmopolitanism," in which equal access is granted to all and virtual mobility is available for everybody, as is the opportunity to play with identities in ways that enable escape from racial, religious or gender discrimination. The term *digital cosmopolitanism* (Zuckerman, 2013; Hall, 2018; Ponzanesi, 2020) draws attention to how digital technologies have enabled and contributed to the acceleration of cosmopolitanism ideals (Ponzanesi, forthcoming 2024). However, digital cosmopolitanism is not only useful to address the potential of digital technologies to enable connections; simultaneously it invites us to question the top-down power of technology to create bias, othering and harmful classifications.

As one among the many forms of contemporary cosmopolitanism, digital cosmopolitanism is about exploring the power of the internet and other digital tools and platforms to distribute worlding experiences created by digital publics and counter-publics, and the way this re-centres discursive power by challenging the idea of fixed flows of communication (fixed in the direction from the West to the rest of the world). Kurasawa, for example, uses the concept of cosmopolitanism from below to demonstrate that cosmopolitanism is a transnational practice which is not about cultural assimilation, but about acknowledging global diversity and the way it can be advanced in a decentralized and dynamic fashion through "crisscrossing webs of affinity between multiple groups from around the world" (Kurosawa, 2004, p. 236).

Mixing, therefore, does not imply the loss of individual and collective cultural distinctiveness. This insight is corroborated by the chapters in this anthology directly addressing issues of cosmopolitanism. For example, in her exploration of African digital cosmopolitanism, Fungai Machirori (see Chapter 5) argues that normative articulations of cosmopolitanism have recently come under criticism for their omission of non-Western cosmopolitanisms. As a result, a research agenda centring cosmopolitanism from below has emerged, bringing with it a sharp focus on alternative forms of cosmopolitanisms that interrogate the nexus between the local and the global from different locations. Machirori shows in her chapter how connection patterns remain diverse, incomplete and non-universal, with engagements enriched by embracing the dynamics of local and cultural specificities, rather than avoiding them. This is in line with Achille Mbembe, who suggests that for alternative thinking about borderless words we should turn away from Western concepts, and reconsider how everyday life under modernity in Africa has always revolved around pursuing mobility, circulation and networking across borders, to escape the entrapment of confinements, displacement and forced labour (2018).

Similarly in her chapter on "Affective Performances of Rooted Cosmopolitanism Through Facebook", Estrella Sendra (see Chapter 11) analyses how the performance of rooted cosmopolitanism involves the expression of feelings of belonging to the homeland. By studying the case of the Festival International de Folklore et de Percussion in Louga, Senegal, Sendra shows how the use of Facebook in practice promotes a sense of rooted cosmopolitanism. For people based abroad, the engagement in the festival through social media reflects a sense of pride in belonging to Louga. This practice resonates with the notion of cosmopolitanism as conviviality (Gilroy, 2005), which is an agential modality of choice for togetherness, shared values and bridging in practice. When people are unable to be physically present, or are only present temporarily around the festival dates, many of these practices reflect a further feeling of nostalgia about their hometown. The practices enhance the territorialization of the project beyond the geographic boundaries of the festival location, thus expanding the decentralization upon which the festival is conceived, as a project of territory. Here the notion of rooted cosmopolitanism, as theorized by Anthony Kwame Appiah (2005), can be considered to refer to how the local and the international meet, through emotions and a sense of transnational belonging.

Cosmopolitanism is also indirectly addressed in the chapter by Moé Suzuki on the analysis of virtual reality to situate humanitarian discourses that foreground notions of common humanity (see Chapter 12). Suzuki argues

that there is an assumption of universalism that is embedded in the notion of "humanity." Therefore, VR films dealing with displacement are often based on the idea of the virtual body-as-container that serves as a vehicle through which to experience and understand other people's lives and experiences, irrespective of their background, situation and condition. This is of course based on an apolitical and pre-existing idea of "humanity" that produces a disembodied epistemology of displacement that avoids questions of power and politics, as if we are all equally vulnerable to being displaced.

Here the notion of cosmopolitanism is brought to more inevitable global structures of the "everyday" as imposed by "banal ways" of cosmopolitan coexistence (Beck, 2010; Calhoun, 2003). Yet "cosmopolitanisms" in the plural (Robbins & Horta, 2017) accounts for how different articulations of belonging in the world can still be marked by localized and rooted forms of connection. The connections between digital cosmopolitanism and migration show how to learn to recognize alternative forms of cosmopolitanism that are not per se linked to Western normative definitions of cosmopolitanism, and open up a way towards differentiated patterns of connections which remain diverse, incomplete and non-universal. Cultural specificities are embraced here rather than avoided, providing a profound engagement enriched with the dynamics of the local as an expression of the transnational.

Future Directions

This volume is an invitation to fellow researchers to pluralize understandings of digital migration and produce new accounts of the situated, localized and context-specific digital practices of migrants and their lived experience of digital borders, datafication and migration technologies. Alongside the communities, technologies and processes covered here, there are also inevitably limitations to the volume. To close the volume, we would like to signal several new developments in the domain of migration and technology that may warrant further scrutiny.

The contributions by Rosa Wevers with Ahnjili Zhuparris (see Chapter 3), Daniel Leix Palumbo (see Chapter 13), Stavinoha (see Chapter 14) and Kaarina Nikunen and Sanna Valtonen (see Chapter 15) offer fundamental insights into digital and data-driven securitization. However, with the roll-out of artificial intelligence, the securitization of migration may be "spiralling" further (Léonard & Bello, 2023). For example, according to EuroMedRights—a network of human rights organizations in the Euro-Mediterranean region—there are strong consequences to the European Union's border externalization strategy: countries in the Middle East and North Africa are are made into

a breeding ground for "invasive surveillance" where AI is expected to play a growing role in tracking, controlling and monitoring migrants. This fear is growing with the AI act, which risks effectively creating a "two-tiered AI regulation, with migrants receiving lesser protections than the rest of society" (Napolitano, 2023, p. 5, 15). Additional research is needed on how people experience securitization, alongside digital and data-driven forms of humanitarianism, across the Global South and the Global North. There has been a growing interest in the use of digital platforms, metrics and digital tools for humanitarian purposes in the context of migration, raising new urgent questions about the implications of data sharing with authoritarian regimes, data security, data breaches and function creep as well as data preservation (Cheesman, 2022; Marino, 2021).

In the volume we touch on questions regarding the political economy of migration and digital technologies. Daniela Jaramillo-Dent, Amanda Alencar and Yan Asadchy address platformed belongings among content creators on TikTok (see Chapter 10); while Marie Godin and Bahati Ghislain analyse practices and experiences of refugee influencers on YouTube (see Chapter 6). Questions about money are a key concern, perhaps especially in the lives of mobile people, and this thematic has been firmly placed on the research agenda of media and migration researchers. For example scholars have addressed the "multi-directional" circulation of remittances, feelings and experiences within transnational families (Singh, 2016); how telecommunication companies target migrants and become part of the migration industry (Gordano Peile, 2014); the corporate and governmental brokering of ideal migrant workers on the basis of a "migrant platformed subjectivity" (Cabalquinto & Wood-Bradley, 2020); as well as how gig work has become racialized as migrant work (Van Doorn & Vijay, 2021). As public-private partnerships proliferate, particularly in outsourcing decision-making to AI, future researchers can explore further how migrants experience the "politics of privatisation" (Molnar, 2022) and how digital payments, mobile money and blockchain-supported pre-paid debit cards impact upon and constitute migrants (Cheesman, 2022; Tazzioli, 2019).

According to the United Nations Department of Social and Economic Affairs' report *World Social Report 2020: Inequality in a Rapidly Changing World*, global inequality is impacted by four mega-trends: international migration, technological innovation, climate change and urbanization (UNDESA, 2020). Future researchers can address the interrelationships between the latter two processes. There is established literature on post-disaster communication and recovery (Madianou, Longboan & Ong, 2015; Ong, 2017). However, as Saskia Witteborn also underlines in

her introduction to Section V, the digital migration infrastructures and digitally mediated experiences of environmentally-related migration and climate refugees demand more attention (see Boas, 2020; Boas, Dahm & Wrathall, 2020).

As scholars increasingly turn to digital data traces of mobility, questions of data privacy, security and ethical considerations become even more crucial (Witteborn, 2022). For this purpose, scholars have found inspiration in ethics of care paradigms to reconsider the ethical implications of privacy, informed consent and data protection (Sandberg et al., 2022); as well participatory-action-research and design-justice frameworks to ensure knowledge production cycles align with the interests of the communities involved (Costanza-Chock, 2020). Researchers are expected to take care to reflect upon and avoid perpetuating harm or furthering discrimination against migrants. More specifically for digital migration studies researchers, it is imperative to avoid technological fetishism in pursuit of studying the latest technological innovation. Additionally, "categorical fetishism" (Crawley & Skleparis, 2018, p. 48) which isolates and homogenizes particular types of mobile subjects should be avoided, for example by going beyond ethnic-centric and nation-state-centric approaches, and by studying migrants and non-migrants together (Dahinden, 2016). For this purpose we should ask ourselves to whom and to what our digital migration research is a contribution (Sandoval-García, 2013). By taking up such questions, scholars are reminded to see if they can collaborate and open their institutions up to people with migration, refugee, asylum or mobility backgrounds (see Chapter 6 by Godin and Ghislain) as well as to artists, activists and designers (see Chapter 3 by Wevers with Zhuparris). Pursuing such difficult questions allows us researchers to become accountable for our knowledge production, reflect on our standpoint and positionality and take a firm normative stance when needed, which may include deciding to do harm to oppressive migration governance structures (Stierl, 2022).

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Doing Digital Migration Studies present a comprehensive entry point to theoretical, methodological, political and ethical debates around migrant forms of belonging as articulated through digital practices.

Digital technologies impact upon everyday migrant practices, while vice versa migrants play a key role in technological developments. With its international scope, this anthology invites scholars to pluralize understandings of 'the migrant' and 'the digital'.

The anthology is organized in five sections, each introduced by international experts: Creative Practices; Digital Diasporas and Placemaking; Affect and Belonging; Visuality and Digital media and Datafication, Infrastructuring, and Securitization.

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"It is impossible to study – hence intervene – against the injustices, inequalities, and cruelties experienced by international migrants today without negotiating a central paradox: digital technologies both empower (connectedness) and disempower (datafication), often simultaneously, international migrants in search of a liveable life. This superb book takes the centre stage in showing how activists – migrants, scholars, and citizens – are negotiating this paradox by investigating everyday practices with meticulous detail and theoretical astuteness."
– Engin Isin, Queen Mary University of London

"*Doing Digital Migration Studies* is an important and insightful contribution that sheds a much-needed light on the complex and ever-evolving relationship between migration and digital media."
– Sara Marino, London College of Communication

"Incisive and exhaustive, this collection carves out new paths of inquiry in media and migration studies while retelling the field's rich and long histories. Scholars and practitioners working around the edges of critical data studies, the anthropology of aid, and the sociology of migration are particularly in for a special treat."
– Jonathan Corpus Ong, University of Massachusetts at Amherst

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