Chapter 13

Social Media as Contact Zones

Young Londoners Remapping the Metropolis through Digital Media

Koen Leurs

ABSTRACT

Social media use among urban, young Londoners of diverse cultural backgrounds constitutes a contemporary, postcolonial contact zone in Europe. By taking digital practices as an entry point to consider intercultural encounters in the postcolonial metropolis, I bring new media studies into a much needed dialogue with postcolonial theory. Two main questions guide my argument: (a) How can researchers bring postcolonial commitments to bear on data-driven research practices? Reflecting on my use of creative, participatory, and digital techniques during fieldwork with young Londoners, I suggest one way of *doing* postcolonial digital humanities; (b) How can we mobilize the explanatory power of postcolonial theory to account for everyday, intercultural encounters? In particular, I repurpose Mary Louise Pratt's notion of the contact zone to give an account of how young, urban dwellers use social media as sites of intercultural encounter. The contact zone is used as a conceptual lens to acknowledge new conflicts and solidarities emerging from young Londoners' everyday usage of digital technologies. The chapter considers both the ways in which young Londoners engage in digital practices to construct transnational networks, which connect them with their families across European borders, as well as the ways in which they engage digitally with the local context of the city, illustrating how young urbanites learn to live with difference.

> The easy, informal and downbeat urban culture . . . still draws young people from right across Europe towards London. Its postcolonial character means that difference is routine. . . . There are still conflicts but there is also a savvy, agonistic humanism around. . . . It rarely

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emerges in full daylight. It has certainly not been planned or orches-
trated from above.

Paul Gilroy, "Joined Up Politics and Postcolonial Melancholia"
(2001, 163)

Social media use among urban, young Londoners constitutes a contemporary,
postcolonial contact zone in Europe as it provides a glimpse of everyday,
digital encounters with difference. By taking digital practices as an entry
point for considering intercultural engagement in the metropolis, this chapter
brings new media studies into dialogue with postcolonial theory. It is my aim
to make two interventions: a) Drawing from creative, participatory, and digi-
tal techniques, I advance a methodological toolkit much needed in the emerg-
ing field of postcolonial digital humanities; b) The concept of the "contact
zone" has originally been coined by Mary Louise Pratt ([1992] 2008, 2) in
her literary analysis of European, colonial travel narratives to refer to asym-
metrical "social spaces where disparate cultures meet, clash, and grapple with
each other." I repurpose the postcolonial notion of the contact zone to give
an account of social media as a site of intercultural encounter among urban
cohabitants of diverse backgrounds.

A focus on digital encounters in the city is important because European
societies have recently become increasingly diverse in terms of ethnicity,
religion, and class, resulting from the "toandfro" (Clifford 1997, 247) that
emerge from new transport, communication, and migration technologies.
This particularly holds for postcolonial cities. For example, ethnic minori-
ties are now in the majority in "super-diverse" London (Vertovec 2007) and
migrants are an integral but ambivalent part of the city's identity (Georgiou
2013). In response, dominant right-wing imaginings of Europe often exclude
postcolonial, refugee, and labor migrants, as well as their descendants, as
"others."

The xenophobic reclaiming of Europe as a homogeneous container of
secularity, whiteness, and Western-ness can be seen as an act of postcolonial
melancholia. It reveals "fantasies of return to an imaginary homogeneity of
past whiteness," where "black bodies" are considered to belong elsewhere
(Gilroy 1999). European culture is essentialized as a bounded ideal of whole-
ness, safeguarding and containing normative Europeanness. For example,
besides the typical othering of migrants along intersectional lines of gender,
class, race, and religion, the ways in which migrants "do family" through
digital practices across national borders is considered as "non-normative"
(Reynolds and Zontini 2013), that is, non-European. Through such political
moves, various forms of difference are made to appear as a fragmenting threat
to the purity, continuity, and coherence of the city and the wider European
community.

With the aim to ground understandings of contemporary postcolonial transitions in Europe, a focus on digital practices of migrant youth in the city is warranted, not only because younger generations are some of the earliest adopters of these new technologies, but also because collective expectations, hopes, and fears about the city, or the community, or new technologies are often projected onto future generations. The context of London is a particularly poignant setting for conducting research on digital experiences of difference in the shared social space of the city. In the words of John McLeod (2004, 18), postcolonial London is a "profoundly disruptive location" that emerges from the complex interplay between tangible material realities and imaginaries of heterogeneity and exclusion, diversity and division. London is one of the most diverse metropoles in the world, where convivial interactions between people of diverse backgrounds happen, as the 2012 Olympic Games festivities have showcased. However, it is also a city that has recently demonstrated a very intense escalation of tension and conflict around cultural difference: the "7/7" London suicide bombings killing 52 in public transport in 2005; the 2011 Tottenham riots following the police shooting of a black youth; and the 2013 murder of British Army officer Lee Rigby by radical Muslims. As a global city, London reflects the world with its diverse populations and brings people, capital, technologies, and communication together in a dynamic constellation that reveals "intense juxtapositions of difference" (Georgiou 2013, 10).

In this chapter, I first contextualize and reflect upon my fieldwork with young Londoners to argue how we can bring postcolonial commitments to bear on data-driven, digital humanities research practices. Second, the understanding of digital contact zones is elaborated upon by combining approaches from new media and postcolonial studies. In particular, I theorize the digital contact zone as it operates at the intersections of encapsulating orientations with co-ethnics on the one hand, and cosmopolitanizing orientations toward others on the other hand. The empirical part of the chapter consists of a discussion of young Londoners' both encapsulating and cosmopolitanizing digital practices.

DOING POSTCOLONIAL DIGITAL HUMANITIES: METHODOLOGICAL CONSIDERATIONS

Postcolonial digital humanities is "an emergent field of study invested in decolonizing the digital, foregrounding anti-colonial thought, and disrupting salutatory narratives of globalization and technological progress" (Risam and Koh 2013). In this section, I illustrate how we can develop fieldwork techniques to gather and analyze digital data with a postcolonial commitment

to social justice. As everyday life is increasingly digitally mediated, our behavior leaves behind more and more data traces that can be innovatively captured with scrapers, processed and analyzed with tools and algorithms. In an attempt to legitimize itself as a relevant field, the digital humanities has initially uncritically celebrated the seemingly endless opportunities offered by innovative digital technologies to access and study large-scale databases of user activity on Twitter, Facebook, or Wikipedia, archives of scanned text corpora, and other searchable digital sources. Buzzwords such as "cultural analytics" (Manovich 2011), "web science" (Rieder and Röhle 2012), and "digital methods" (Rogers 2013) have established a "forward-looking sentiment," and new analytical opportunities have been hailed as able to save the humanities from obsolescence (Svensson 2012). However, now that the dust of early excitement is beginning to settle, the question arises how the humanities—a field traditionally organized around theory-driven research—may reinvent and sustain itself by engaging with the digital (Ponzanesi and Leurs 2014, 15–18).

In an effort to create greater awareness of the challenges that cultural differences pose to digital humanities, the subfield of postcolonial digital humanities has emerged with the aim to stay true to critical complexity, situatedness, poly-vocality, historicity, and medium-specificity. As Roopika Risam and Adeline Koh (2013) posit, "Postcolonial digital humanities brings critiques of colonialism, imperialism, and globalization and their relationship to race, class, gender, sexuality and disability to bear on the digital humanities." This is a particularly relevant development, given the fact that research in digital humanities, so far, has predominantly deployed a Western, white, male gaze, leaving unaddressed issues of colonialism, race, class, and gender (McPherson 2012). These studies reaffirm exclusionary, anthropocentric "mainstream ideas about 'Man' and his Humanities" and emphasize that advocacy for the "new" and "posthuman humanities" is much needed (Braidotti 2014, 244). Postcolonial digital humanities, in particular, are important in order to reconsider digital data as never neutral, for intersecting axes of power and difference, such as "gender, geography, race, income," affect the production, circulation, and storage of bytes (Graham 2012). Thus, questions arise. How *does* one do postcolonial digital humanities? And, more broadly, how can researchers bring postcolonial commitments to bear on data-driven research practices?

This chapter draws from in-depth interviews with eighty-four young Londoners (aged between twelve and twenty-one) living in Haringey, Hammersmith-Fulham, and Chelsea-Kensington, which reflect three different urban class environments—working class, middle class, and upper (middle) class. The interviews have taken place in libraries, youth centers, churches, and in the informants' or their families' homes. The group consisted of

forty-one young men and forty-three young women. A central London district, Kensington-Chelsea is known for its exclusive residential areas and it is home to many tourist destinations. Hammersmith-Fulham, west of the center, is a small, residential borough characterized by Victorian terraced houses. Haringey, a north London borough, and more precisely Tottenham, is the location where the 2011 "Black Berry Messenger" (BBM) London riots started, following the escalation of a peaceful protest in response to the police shooting of Mark Duggan, a local black youth. As news headlines such as "Is Technology to Blame for the London Riots?" (*BBC News*, August 8, 2011) and "These Riots Were About Race. Why Ignore the Fact?" (*The Telegraph*, August 7, 2011) indicate, both issues of race and migration have been singled out as key drivers of the riots, while smart phones and social media are seen as instrumental in the spread of disorder across London and the country. Triggered by a postcolonial commitment to scrutinize, contextualize, and situate singular, detrimental claims about race and multiculturalism in post-riot London, I have sought to listen to how young Londoners experience negotiating race relations in the city by taking their use of digital technologies and social media as entry points.

As postcolonial commentators have convincingly argued (Sinha and Back 2014; Back 2007), taking a dialogic, reflexive stance is crucial to problematize asymmetrical power relations between researchers and informants. There are several research practices that one can deploy so as to promote a sharing of the power of definition, data gathering, and interpretation with the research subjects in order to avoid ventriloquizing the informants' speech. In particular, I employ a mixed-methods approach, drawing from recent developments in "creative" (Gauntlett and Holzwarth 2006), "participatory" (Gubrium and Harper 2013), and "digital" (Rogers 2013) methods. By doing so, my aim is to join differently situated, but complementary, partial views on cultural difference and the politics of digitalized urban encounters.

Including creative, participatory, and digital research techniques in the interview setup has pushed the informants to take part, to some extent, in the study of their digital experiences and to become active agents in their own representations. By "creative techniques" (Gauntlett and Holzwarth 2006, 82), I mean ways in which informants can more meaningfully convey their identities and experiences "through creatively making things themselves, and then reflecting upon what they have made." During the interviews, the informants were invited to draw a map on a piece of paper showing what their view of the Internet looked like. The social media applications included in their maps were used to structure their interview further.

By "participatory techniques," instead, I refer, following Gubrium and Harper (2013, 16), to "techniques that afford the 'subject,' 'community member,' and/or 'field site' greater narrative latitude when it comes to

ethnographic knowledge production." First of all, the informants were given the authority to decide upon their own pseudonyms. Second, inviting the interviewees to have a say over their representation, they were asked how they would introduce their cultural backgrounds. This is important, because in most news coverage and sociological research, young people are assigned general labels that assume racial purity and boundedness. For example, the BBM riots were used to define London again in terms of racial and cultural essentialisms, leading to the public disavowal of Tottenham youth, especially young, non-white Londoners. That explains why Sammi, a fourteen-year-old girl who was "born in the UK," her "dad's black" and her "mum's white," shared what follows: "I think that people think, like if I go for a job interview or something, and they heard I was from Tottenham they'll probably have a bad impression of me and think, like, I was not capable of learning stuff." Engaging with such exclusionary dynamics in contradictory ways, the informants shared complex narratives of self-positioning, in line with what Stuart Hall once observed: "When I ask people where they are from, I expect nowadays an extremely long story" (Hall quoted in Akomfrah, Gopaul, and Lawson 2013).

For example, fourteen-year-old Carmen proudly mentioned she was "born here but India is always my homeland," while eighteen-year-old Tyreese articulated a complex position of hybridity by stating: "I'm half, I'm mixed-other, but, I'm not really sure about my ethnicity, my mum's ancestry, she's fully Trinidadian, but she's very mixed race, and then she's also got Portuguese and parts of India in her. So I'm mixed from six–seven different countries." In contrast, sixteen-year-old Jackson performed Britishness offline and online through various tactics of mimicry. His self-positioning indicates his great desire to meet the norms and to pass as a white British boy: "Well I've got a little bit of Caribbean in me, but other than that I'm white British with a bit of Northern, but I consider myself to be British, white British yeah, not Northern, not Caribbean, just that." Thus, informants' presentations of themselves indicate that they mobilize various tactics to articulate their belonging in the urban context of London; these range from ethnic pride to hybridity and mimicry. The variety of tactics illustrates the importance of listening to the divergent experiences and positionalities of the informants and of having informants participate in their own representation.

Finally, part of this participatory approach to postcolonial, data-driven research has been the visualization of personal Facebook friendship networks, together with the informants themselves, in order to have them research their own digital practices and to prompt their reflections on their politics of encounter and cultural difference online. The commercial but freely accessible Facebook application TouchGraph was chosen to generate a visualization of the informants' Facebook networks, organizing them in friendship

clusters. This digital mapping exercise was not a quick "technological fix" (Sinha and Back 2014, 477), but it offered informants the possibility to decide upon the direction of the interview as they studied their own interactions with transnational and local contacts. For example, Bruno, a seventeen-year-old boy whose background "is, like, Portuguese," but he "was born here, brought up here" in London, recognized three different groups of friends among his Facebook friendship network: Portuguese contacts, friends from secondary school, and friends from college:

> OK, the Portuguese people, obviously they are Portuguese, they are all in the same boat as me, like, born here. Obviously their parents, well most of them, were born there and then they moved here. From my secondary school, I'd say there's people from all over the place, like, there's blacks, there's whites, there's Asians, there's Indians, they're all from all different countries. All the countries you could think of, they're there in my secondary school. In my secondary school, obviously, it's all the same religion as well. Because my school was a Catholic school so you had to be Catholic to go there. My college friends, that's another thing. They are from all over the place, all over the world, also, all over, different religions.

So far, I have sought to show how doing postcolonial digital humanities can benefit from drawing from creative, participatory, and digital techniques. The empirical data gathered through such techniques can be brought into dialogue with critical theories, and, in particular, I argue that the lens of the contact zone sheds new light on the everyday digital experiences of Bruno and other urban youth like him. If Bruno's narrative is indicative of a common interplay between transnational and local scales online, how can we make sense theoretically of these multi-spatial belongings? What new transnational and local conflicts and solidarities are emerging from such everyday usage of digital technologies? In the next section, I succinctly trace the genesis and genealogy of the concept of the contact zone and, through this concept, I further theorize the implications of the intersections between transnational migrant connectivity and local intercultural encounters in the context of urban, postcolonial Europe.

SOCIAL MEDIA AS CONTACT ZONES

There has been little attention so far devoted to the everyday, urban negotiations of cultural difference: there remains insufficient "capacity to represent unspectacular ways in which multiculture works as a daily routine of life in cities like London" (Back and Keith 2014, 22). This holds in particular for digital practices. In the early 1990s, postcolonial scholars, including Marie

Louise Pratt, Paul Gilroy, Robert Young, and Homi Bhabha, lamented the lack of theoretical models that acknowledged the dynamics of cultural mixing. They cautioned that focusing on cultural identifications of ethnic minorities might only further reproduce the essentialist, static categories they were trying to critique. For example, Robert Young (1995, 4) argued that "it is striking . . . given the long history of cultural interaction, how few models have been developed to analyse it." Paul Gilroy (1993, 19) criticized those "more interested in the relationship of identity to roots and rootedness than in seeing identity as a process of movement and mediation that is more appropriately approached via the homonym routes," and he argued that singling out "roots" often leads to an ahistorical, ethnic absolutism. Various theoretical projects were formulated in response to such tendencies and to assess, instead, the spaces of intercultural encounters; among them, the concept of "postcolonial contact zone" (Pratt [1992] 2008; Clifford 1997).

In her literary analysis, Pratt argues that written texts enable geographically dispersed subjects to meet in a discursive space and engage in contact with one another. The concept of "postcolonial contact zone" attempts to "invoke the spatial and temporal copresence of subjects previously separated by geographic and historical disjunctures, and whose trajectories now intersect" (Pratt [1992] 2008, 6–7). James Clifford (1997) develops the notion further in his analysis of museums as spaces of contentious, intercultural interactions. As museum visitors are confronted with various, evocative, ethnographic artifacts invoking various histories, hopes, and tragedies, for Clifford the museum space should be considered "a space in which people geographically and historically separated come into contact with each other and establish ongoing relations" (6).

The explanatory power of the notion of the contact zone for the present argument resides mostly in its capacity to account for what happens during an intercultural encounter. The "contact perspective" (Pratt [1992] 2008, 8) acknowledges how subjects negotiate living in the spatial co-presence of others.[1] Pratt bases her analysis on colonial travel texts written by white Europeans, such as German Alexander von Humboldt, as they explored colonial frontiers. Thus, I am repurposing a concept that emerged from an analysis of travel writing involving mostly male, white, European, colonial travelers who gazed upon others in non-European, colonized territories in order to account for twenty-first century, digital encounters taking place in the postcolonial metropolis.

Over the course of the last two decades, the concept of the "contact zone" has been canonized and applied across a wide variety of fields, ranging from literature through economics to biology. Recently, for example, it has been taken up to study the role of women in conflict zones (Ponzanesi 2014), communication and power relations at the World Social Forum (Conway 2011),

shared social spaces in high schools (Kelly 2012), the Westernization of Japanese cities (Lockemann 2014), teacher-student relations (Layne and Lipponen 2014), and food cultures in global cities like Singapore (Bishop 2011). These illustrative analyses share a sensitivity to how power relations and cultural difference affect encounters, and how contact can result in conflict but also offer means for resolution and learning.[2]

Within such a proliferation of uses of the concept, however, there has been only limited attention to the Internet, digital technologies, or social media as contact zones. This is partly due to the fact that discussions on migration, multiculturalism, and transnationalism have largely taken place separate from research on digital technologies (Ponzanesi and Leurs 2014, 6). Exceptions are works within the field of museum studies on cultural heritage and digital preservation (e.g., Hogsden and Poulter 2012) and works within the field of learning sciences on digital communication between teachers and students (e.g., Doherty and Mayer 2003). Nonetheless, the succinct genealogy of the concept offered thus far illustrates that the lens of the "contact zone" holds explanatory power to tease out digital encounters by focusing on a specific, geographical context and by paying attention to the intersectional power relations that affect contacts.

In Pratt's analysis of the contact zone, narratives authored by the white, European, "seeing man" brought forward "Europe's differentiated conceptions of itself in relation to something it became possible to call the rest of the world" (Pratt [1992] 2008, 5). Processes of representation have changed over the last couple of decades. The majority of Europeans do not necessarily passively depend on an elite minority to have their say. Considering social media as a contact zone is particularly urgent when taking into account that the growth of digital culture has altered opportunities and dynamics of representation. Although we must not forget power relations are also at play online, people can increasingly share their own stories through digital self-representation.

The recent explosion of social media use, especially among young people, and the constant stream of interpellations users receive from platforms to articulate their identities online (think of Facebook prompting users to post status updates—"What are you doing now?"), illustrate the recent turn toward people telling their own stories through "digital self-presentation" (Thumim 2012). Especially young people, the bulk of early adopters of social media sites, are prescribed to maintain and manage an online presence. They increasingly face "the expectation" of participating in "discourses of identity" and take responsibility for constructing their biographical "project of the self" (Livingstone 2002, 300–01). Through branding and niche-marketing, the new media conglomerates such as Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram commoditize uploaded, user-generated content such as photos, status updates, and videos.

However, youthful users, including migrants and ethnic minorities, are, how-ever, no passive dupes in this process, as they have been found to appropri-ate digital spaces on their own terms (Leurs 2015). Therefore, a question of particular pertinence arises when considering social media as contact zones: what types of micro-political repertoires does a digital "objectification of oneself" (Couldry 2012, 50) allow and forbid?

In discussing the degree of agency involved in the use of digital tech-nologies and social media platforms, a parallel can be drawn with Bolette Blaagaard's historicization, in her contribution to this volume, of citizens' engagement with media. As she observes, the widespread use of social media has transformed the production and circulation of information and news. Instead of being interpellated as a singular, imagined, national community of fellow audience members, people produce unstable, alternative, affective publics as they circulate their own subjectively located concerns. In turn, in this chapter, I observe how users of social media platforms curate their objectified digital selves and, by doing so, alter not only processes of identity construction, but, in particular, experiences of, and encounters with, (cultural) difference.

Seeing social media as a digital contact zone can be operationalized by untangling the interplay between cocooning with those who share a similar background and activating an intercultural orientation toward others. Postco-lonial theorists have theorized this twofold interplay with two modes of cul-tural identification: being and becoming. Almost twenty-five years ago, in his writing about migrant identities, the late Stuart Hall (1990) emphasized these two modes of cultural identification: on the one hand, transnational orienta-tions ("being") and, on the other hand, engagements with local environments ("becoming"). The first mode covers cultural identification with a stable col-lective of people who share a certain cultural heritage, vital for feeling a sense of community belonging:

> Cultural identities reflect our common historical experiences and shared cultural codes which provide us, as "one people," with stable, unchanging and continu-ous frames of reference and meaning, beneath the shifting divisions and vicis-situdes of actual history. (223)

The second mode, instead, acknowledges changing processes of cultural identification as a result of being receptive to intercultural encounters:

> Identity, in this second sense, is a matter of "becoming" as well as of "being." It belongs to the future as much as the past. It is not something which already exists, transcending place, time, history and culture. Cultural identities come from somewhere, have histories. But, like everything which is historical, they undergo constant transformation. (225)

The dialectic between "being" and "becoming" theorized by Hall resonates strongly with the notions of "encapsulation" and "cosmopolitanization" that are currently deployed in analyses of migrants' digital practices (Christensen and Jansson 2014). Migration and media scholars alike tend to privilege one or another of these processes. The "homophily" argument, revolving around the assumption that "birds of a feather flock together" (boyd 2014, 155–56), is popular among those who argue that transnational communication hinders integration and leads to inward looking, cultivation of sameness, and possibly segregation and radicalization. Journalists, for example, draw on this assumption to explain recent instances of homegrown terrorism in Europe, as well as the radicalization and recruitment of migrant youth by terrorist organizations through social media applications such as Twitter. Others contend that migrants use applications such as Facebook and Skype to maintain a "connected presence," enabling them to meaningfully participate in their "home" and "host" countries (Diminescu 2008, 572). From this perspective, it is argued that migrants may connect with those living elsewhere in the diaspora to maintain a sense of cohesion, but also engage in intercultural exchange with fellow members of their host societies.

Social media use potentially fosters cosmopolitanization as it allows easy contact with unknown others living in close geographical proximity to take place. Such interactions may promote intercultural learning and understanding, illustrating the empirical reality of everyday, convivial multiculture. Bruno's description of his friendship network is illustrative of his encapsulating with fellow Portuguese contacts living overseas. However, simultaneously, he articulates a cosmopolitan orientation toward local friends from various cultural backgrounds.

It is important to tease out further this dialectic, for there is a lack of empirically grounded insights on migrant digital connectivity in the context of Europe as *both* encapsulating *and* cosmopolitanizing at the same time. Even though scholars have made a plea for the "establishment of a European Research Area on ICT and migrations" (Borkert, Cingolani, and Premazzi 2009, 25), there remains "a dearth of nuanced research on digital diasporas in Europe" (Ponzanesi and Leurs 2014, 11). What follows is thus an attempt to empirically situate and further theorize the implications of encapsulating with family members through transnational connectivity and fostering cosmopolitan, intercultural encounters with fellow local, young Londoners.

BEING TRANSNATIONAL: ENCAPSULATION

Irrespective of their white British, postcolonial, refugee, or otherwise migrant cultural backgrounds, the majority of informants keep in touch with family

members living overseas. Illustratively, fifteen-year-old Connor, who self-identified as having quite "a mixed background," said he has "family members living scattered around the globe." Facebook and other digital media are common channels for transnational communication. Bob, a seventeen-year-old who "came up to this country [meaning England] when [he] was five," shared that his relatives live "everywhere." Besides instant messaging apps such as WhatsApp on his smart phone, he said he uses Facebook to keep in touch: "I don't wanna be that person that can only fly out and see them for a couple of weeks and fly back. I like to be in contact with them constantly." Enabling family practices at a distance by "being" and "doing together," such transnational communication practices have become, as Mihaela Nedelcu (forthcoming 2016) puts it, "ordinary co-presence routines" common in the lives of young Londoners. They allow Bob to keep alive his belonging to a collective sense of Jamaicanness, together with his friends and families living in the United Kingdom, in Jamaica, and in the diaspora.

Feelings of digital togetherness sustained through frequent, transnational communication—what I have termed elsewhere "transnational affective capital" (Leurs 2014b)—may be seen as crucial emotional resources for these young people. Transnational digital connectivity allows users to keep in touch with a diasporic cultural heritage. Through maintaining such "continuous frames of reference" (Hall 1990, 223), cocooning with family members in the diaspora online might be seen as a new way to regain "ontological security" (Giddens 1991). With the concept of "ontological security," Giddens refers to the feeling of stability and confidence that emerges from routines and the reliability of one's networks. A person deprived of ontological security "lacks a feeling of biographical continuity" and is mostly "preoccupied with apprehension of possible risks to his or her existence" (53). The informants have noted that, in the comfort of likeminded members of their globally dispersed family network, they feel free to exert their voices and find ways to manage the hostility, racism, and abuse they experience in their everyday lives navigating London's streets. Transnational communication can strengthen social relations within the community.

Transnational communication also functions as a transnational contact zone. It is a meeting space between possibly different forms of modernity, technological development, and contradictory worldviews and expectations. In addition, several informants have reflected upon their experiences of meeting family members for the first time through their screens. For example, eighteen-year-old London-born Nicole, whose "mom is English" and whose "dad was born in the Caribbean, in Trinidad," shared that she has recently started using social media to get in touch with two stepbrothers who live in New York and Trinidad: "I never really, like, met them in person, so I only have things like WhatsApp or Facetime. . . . I think if we didn't have that, we

wouldn't, we still now wouldn't really know each other . . . it's opened up my world." Informants like Nicole shared feeling transformed by encountering online relatives living scattered across the world.

However, it is socially and politically salient to take into account not only how cohesion within groups is made and maintained, but also the ways in which connections across different groups are forged. Taking cues from Paul Gilroy's and Stuart Hall's twofold understanding of cultural identification, there is a political urgency to consider relationships *within* communities and *across* communities. When singling out the ways in which ethnic minorities tap into transnational communication to maintain bonds with their roots, we should be attentive to the risk of ethnic absolutism and the reinforcement of aversion toward difference. When considering that skeptics often single out migrants' orientations toward rootedness, we can understand why "London-born transnational communities" are "often regarded to be 'strangers' to London in equal measure to their migrant parents or grandparents" (McLeod 2004, 7). Those critical of multiculturalism commonly argue that ethnic minorities lead parallel lives as they encapsulate themselves with members of their own community. As naysayers generally do not consider local, intercultural engagements but focus exclusively on transnational connectivity, these mostly second-generation migrants are still viewed as strangers instead of as just Londoners. Basically, this means that second-generation migrants' exclusion can not only be apprehended as the product of white supremacy and a racialized conception of citizenship; it is also falsely attributed to the second-generation migrants' own practices of bonding with transnational communities.

In particular, the cross-border ways in which these migrant youth "do family" using digital technologies does not correspond with dominant European, normative expectations of family life. Their practices run against the dominant view of family life, "the implicit assumption that 'doing families' and intimate relationships is primarily practiced within a structure of co-presence and within the boundaries of the nation-state" (Reynolds and Zontini 2013, 228). Routinized, transnational connectedness with family members overseas replaces boundaries and frontiers and establishes a contact zone outside of the sphere of European normative governmentality. The informants' reaffirmation of continuity with their roots stretches and blurs boundaries of European normative views of what constitutes the "family" (Reynolds and Zontini 2013, 234). However, policy makers can find inspiration in such transnational forms of doing family through digital contact, especially as the financial crisis forces Europe to reinvent its role in the global economy. In order for Europe to thrive as a "network society" (Castells 2005), it can reimagine itself by accepting that "networks and flows of intimacy" (Gillies 2011) between family members living apart from one another inside and outside the borders of Europe are common and to be normalized.

Migrant youth themselves already provide a corrective to ethnic absolut-ism. Although engaging in digital communication with loved ones living overseas, they do not segregate themselves nor do they live in isolation from those who live in their local, physical environments. A postcolonial commitment to thinking differently and uncovering multiplicities proves its importance as the Facebook friendship data visualizations discussed by the informants reveal that the number of transnational contacts is typi-cally much smaller in comparison with local London friends from various backgrounds. For example, David, an eighteen-year-old, is a Jamaican-born young man who migrated to the United Kingdom at a young age: "I was born in Jamaica" but "home is London, here." Upon seeing the visualization of his Facebook friendship network, he described the locations of the different clusters of contacts. His network combined connections with Jamaican fam-ily members living in Jamaica, the United States, as well as London. How-ever, the majority of his contacts were friends living in close geographical proximity, in Tottenham as well as East London. His Tottenham Facebook friends included "loads from Jamaica," "from Africa," "Mauritian," as well as "mixed" people of various backgrounds. He showed appreciation for his heterogeneous friendship network: "It's linked, you know. It's actually a nice thing." David's friendship network description is illustrative of most young migrant Londoners who maintain contact with a small (but important) cluster of contacts living overseas in addition to a much larger cluster of friends who live locally, in close proximity.

BECOMING LOCAL: COSMOPOLITANIZATION

Thus, besides engaging in digital practices to maintain connections with fam-ily and friends living overseas, the young informants' everyday lives travers-ing multiethnic London are also reflected in their culturally diverse Facebook friendship networks. As Patrick, an eighteen-year-old ("white, European, full-Britain") young man put it, "You experience loads of different cultures, which is nice when living in London, 'cause you are exposed to so many dif-ferent cultures from immigration." Patrick's choice of the word "exposure" indicates that he experiences social media as an intercultural contact zone. Carmen, a fourteen-year-old young woman, described her Facebook friends as consisting of people of an array of refugee, labor, and postcolonial migra-tion backgrounds: "All of my friends are from different parts of the world, some are from Brazil, some are from St. Lucia, some are from Spain, some are from France, some are from, like, Australia, New Zealand, yeah, Turkey, Mauritius, like, Canada, Cyprus, China, everywhere." What, however, are the micro-political implications of having diverse friendship networks?

Such diverse friendship networks imply that users are constantly confronted with various articulations of cultural difference. As fourteen-year-old boy Jonathan ("My mother comes from a North–African country and my father's from Belgium. So I'm quite a mix") explained, social media enables users to express their cultural identifications: "You can tell things, you can make posts, you can post loads of pictures, it's basically for the world to see. It's for you to have an identity in the world. A virtual identity in the world." And he added that it is not only common among his friends to post photos, videos, music, or status updates relating to their music preferences but also to post about their cultural and racial backgrounds or their religious affiliations. This way, he and his friends "can relate to where they're from through social media."

Seventeen-year-old David, who was "born here in the UK, [his] parents were born in Nigeria," spoke about his own Facebook posts on Nigerian culture: "I love my country, say when my mum is cooking like really nice food, from my country, I might take a picture of it and put it up, and then people will see, like, your national food and delicacies." David does so for two reasons: "To show, like, you are happy and proud of it, and, like, inform people, 'cause people might stereotype it." Informants have deemed it important to receive responses from peers on posts having to do with their migration background. For example, thirteen- year-old Tammy ("my parents were born in Nigeria") shared that positive feedback makes her feel happy "because it shows that someone is taking an interest in your culture, in your background." Besides peer verification, which is key to each and everyone's identity formation but is especially poignant in the life-phase of adolescence (boyd 2014), informants also mentioned that such Facebook posts enable intercultural learning and understanding. Social media platforms like Facebook become contact zones, as users encounter the digital co-presence of others who articulate diverse cultural identifications.

Seen this way, Facebook friendship networks reflect how young Londoners negotiate living in close proximity to cultural difference online. As Doreen Massey (2005, 11) states, large cities are particularly intensely marked by what she calls "throwntogetherness," resulting from the "contemporaneous existence of a plurality of trajectories." As people from various cultural backgrounds stake out their positionalities in the city, competing narratives are articulated that may come into contact with one another through a "simultaneity of stories-so-far" (11). Particularly revealing, in this respect, is the narrative reflection on London's cultural diversity and on her own, intercultural friendship network offered by seventeen-year-old Ruby ("I feel like England is where I live, but Portugal is my home"), because of the various trajectories that get into contact on Facebook and elsewhere:

> I love how everyone's got a different culture, everyone's got a different story, everyone was brought up in different ways. Like, I think it's good to see everyone enjoying, like, different groups of people who were brought up or whatever in completely different ways, they are from opposite sides of the world, are best friends, because, that's just really cool, it's just like if they stayed in their countries or whatever, they would have never met each other, and it's really cool.

Elsewhere, I have developed the notion of "digital throwntogetherness" (Leurs 2014a) to account for how the politics of cultural difference and encounter are played out across digital spaces. Illustrative of general online experiences in urban settings, Tammy's and Ruby's experiences showcase that young urban dwellers choose to use social media like Facebook as a contact zone to negotiate the local co-presence of cultural difference. Besides cementing social relationships within their own ethnic groups, informants like Ruby also develop meaningful new resources as they participate in cross-ethnic networks (Reynolds 2006). Such intercultural encounters may foster the trust and reciprocity across different groups and communities needed to sustain a meaningful cosmopolitan orientation and fuel new political subjectivities.

Rather than uncritically praising the positive aspects of the urban use of social media as digital contact zone, however, it is important to realize that various forms of racism, classism, and discrimination are experienced by many of the informants. A substantial number of them, mostly black youth of Indian, mixed-background, African, and Caribbean descent, share episodes of racist abuse that they have experienced in public transport, on the streets, as well as online, for example while playing video games. Jason, a sixteen-year-old London-born boy whose parents "are both Indian," shared his frustrations with racism and discrimination: "I experience that a lot, I get people to tell me 'get off the road,' or 'go do something,' or 'go back home,' like, I even sometimes get searched by the police for no reason." A greater number said they have stumbled upon abuse through social media posts not directly addressing them. Kevin, a twelve-year-old London-born girl "from Romania," shared that she was confronted with Facebook posts calling people of Romanian descent "gypsies" who "get clothes from the rubbish."[3] London-born, eighteen-year-old Jack "from Ghana" saw a right-wing extremist page and recalled a statement in which black people were said to be "all like gorillas." Nonetheless, for most of the informants, this does not overshadow the progressive potential of the intercultural encounters online.

As Bruno reflected upon realizing that there are "so many different like, cultures, religions" among his contacts, he expressed the value of intercultural contact online and offline: "The fact that you're not just locked in what you were brought up in, you can see other things." Chenise, a twenty-one-year-old "mixed-race" woman, explained the potential for informal, networked learning when encountering cultural difference on Facebook: "If you're from

this country, and someone else is from that country . . . someone can put up something about another country and, it's just, what do we have today, we have a multicultural society, so sometimes Facebook can be good, 'cause you can learn each other's culture, other religions and stuff like that, from it." Tammy shared that she had previously thought, "All Nigerians are the same and all Asian people are the same," but after reading Facebook posts, her views changed: "I realized many sorts of difference [exist], and that kind of changed my mindset." She concluded, "It just makes you feel more aware of other people around you, and how they do this and how they live their lives."

Such unspectacular, everyday encounters empirically sustain theories of the "vernacular cosmopolitanism" of non-elites (Werbner 2006). As argued by Feyzi Baban in this volume, the notion of cosmopolitanism should be problematized as Eurocentric and elitist. Following Baban's plea to reclaim cosmopolitanism from the margins by using postcolonial interventions, this chapter illustrates that the radical promise of cosmopolitanism can be observable in the digital contact zones as shaped by young Londoners. Grounded in both transnational and local routines, the informants' narratives capture their everyday, reflexive imaginations of openness between the self, the other, and the world (Delanty, 2006). Cosmopolitan potentialities—defined here, again in line with Baban, as the possibility of contact with the other and of being changed in the process—are actualized as the informants recalled having had their mindsets changed as a result of being receptive to encountering cultural difference.

CONCLUSIONS

The scope of this chapter has been twofold: on the one hand, to further develop postcolonial digital humanities so as to account for new forms of the politics of difference and for possibilities of inclusive community formations emerging online; on the other hand, to provide a theoretically grounded and empirically sustained understanding of how Europe is constructed from below as a networked society, not only but also through the digital practices of young Londoners of migrant backgrounds. This requires, in the first place, an understanding of social media as a postcolonial contact zone. In particular, by acknowledging young Londoners as micro-political agents and drivers of social change, this chapter has charted how digital practices enable young people to articulate their presence in Europe on their own terms vis-à-vis dominant discourses about extremist radicalization, anti-immigration sentiments, and Islamophobia.

Twenty-five years ago, postcolonial scholars lamented the lack of available theoretical constructs to account for intercultural mixing. A variety

AQ: Please check the phrase 'not only but also through the digital practices of young Londoners of migrant backgrounds' for clarity.

of theories were developed in response to such lack. At present, there has been little consideration of the digitally mediated forms of contemporary intercultural mixing. In this chapter, I have transposed the concept of the "postcolonial contact zone" to the digital realm in order to account for the ways in which young Londoners negotiate living in close proximity and the co-presence of racial, ethnic, and religious others. Furthermore, the postcolonial commitment to acknowledge the twofold orientation of processes of cultural identification (both encapsulating and cosmopolitanizing) has been mobilized to capture how informants encapsulate themselves and develop bonding social relations online while simultaneously engaging in meaningful, cosmopolitan encounters with others from various backgrounds. These findings underline that scholars working on migrants and mediation in contemporary, postcolonial Europe should avoid singling out transnational communication or transnational identification practices online, disregarding migrant youth's digital engagement with their local context in all its diversity. The informants' reflections on their Facebook friendship networks indicate that they combine transnational communication with their globally dispersed family networks and a cosmopolitan engagement with fellow young Londoners ranging across various cultural backgrounds.

Postcolonial digital humanities proves particularly useful when it comes to be attentive to how Europe is constructed from below through negotiations of difference, and as a networked society with transnational connections crossing its geographical boundaries. Rather than considering social media usage as a purely apolitical practice of entertainment and leisure, as it is commonly understood, it can also be seen as a potential site of social change and political struggle. As postcolonial contact zones where meaningful, intercultural encounters take place, these interstitial spaces reveal not only the formation of new digital consumers, but also the emergence of new political subjectivities as young urbanites learn to live with difference.

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NOTES

1. I unpack the intricacies of digital intercultural contacts and encounters, rather than focusing on issues of transculturation and hybridization. Therefore, I do not further draw from, for example, Homi Bhabha's ([1994] 2004) influential work on the "third space of enunciation" that shapes intercultural exchanges in between cultures. Bhabha's account offers insights on the extended process of articulation following encounter and contact, as he explicates how, upon their interaction, diverse cultures subsequently hybridize and inscribe themselves upon each other.

2. The "contact zone" has also been criticized for being too expansive and abstract, but also, on the contrary, for being too reductive: as only distinctly applicable to certain temporalities and geographies (Lindsay 2011). The studies I have mentioned tackle such critiques by firmly situating and contextualizing their analyses in particular geographical areas and at distinct moments in time.

3. For different discussions of the ambiguities between being Romanian and being read as Roma in West Europe, see Anca Parvulescu's, Anikó Imre's, and Mireille Rosello's contributions in this volume.

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