

## Chapter 15

# Migrant Youth Invading Digital Spaces: Intersectional Performativity of Self in Socio-Technological Networks

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“Electronic mediation and mass migration mark the world of the present not as technically new forces but as ones that seem to impel (and sometimes compel) the work of the imagination.”

—Arjun Appadurai (1996, p. 4)

### Introduction

Mass migration and mass mediation are two developments that characterize the current post-colonial condition in overdeveloped parts of the world. Mass migration and information and communication technologies (ICTs) have had a joint effect on the ways in which they enable and restrict subject positions. Subjects and their Internetworked remediations circulate concurrently across the globe, creating irregularities and/or ruptures that are not bound within local, national, or regional spaces. Appadurai (1996) emphasizes the role of media production and consumption in the social imagination, locating transnational media practices as both catalysts and primary evidence of a changing world that is no longer confined to the centre-periphery model of mediation, as “there is growing evidence that the consumption of mass media throughout the world often provokes resistance, irony, selectivity, and, in general, agency” (p. 7).

Right-wing politicians and a sensational press speak of economic migrants as *alien others* who are flooding the gates. This is the case in not only the former imperial center of “Fortress Europe” from which I write this chapter, but also in other overdeveloped countries such as the United States, Canada, and Australia. European borders are increasingly policed against unwanted migrants, and only highly skilled migrants have a chance of obtaining citizenship. In the United States, fences are set up with the help of remote sensing and cameras, and border patrols seek to halt the flow of “il-

legal border crossings” from Mexico, while Canada and Australia have sought ways to block ships with migrants from Sri Lanka and Indonesia respectively.<sup>1</sup> Once inside, migrants often have to struggle to acquire a desired position in society and to work against being othered.

Puwar (2004) explains this dynamic by describing minoritarian subjects, including migrants, as “space invaders.” She looks at everyday and institutionalized spaces where certain bodies are considered to be “out of place” (p. 8). Since the recent revolutions across North Africa, the Middle East and especially the war in Libya, people seeking refuge in Fortress Europe are sometimes literally seen as space invaders. The depiction in the spring of 2011 by European right-wing politicians and mainstream news media of Lampedusa, the Italian island off the coast of Tunisia, as in need of being “rescued” from “invading migrants” fleeing Libyan turmoil is exemplary (Reyes, 2011).

Nonetheless, Puwar (2004) argues there has been a “metonymic shift in the increased presence of women and racialized minorities into spaces in the public realm which have predominantly been occupied by white men” (p. 7). For instance, women and racialized minorities can legally enter the British Parliament, but, she argues, they are “space invaders” who do not fit the “template,” that is, “white male bodies of a specific habitus continue to be the somatic norm” (p. 141). They sometimes remain out of place, being “symbolically homeless” in the white, masculine environment (Grosz, cited in Puwar, 2004, p. 147). As they increasingly present themselves in spaces they were previously excluded from, women and minorities may subvert the status quo but have to actively reposition themselves from within the spaces they invade.

The digital realm is one area of “space invasion” that is often overlooked. The question arises as to what happens when subordinated subjects go online. Going beyond early utopian and dystopian reflections on cyberspace, cyberfeminists have laid bare how digital embodiment is structured, but not fully determined by what I call material-embodied, semiotic-discursive, and socio-technological norms and practices. Their focus has principally been on the analytical category of gender. Also, although the field is rapidly diversifying, “*cyberfeminism* has tended to include mostly younger, technologically savvy women, and those from Western, white, middle-class backgrounds” (Consalvo, 2003, p. 108). However, as immigrant youth and youth born in the diaspora begin to use the Internet to manifest themselves online and connect with others—their peers, the wider diaspora, and youth

culture—there is an urgent need for cyberfeminists to broaden their foci to account for their specific concerns.

The socio-technological network has its particular history and norms, and the question is raised concerning how young migrants negotiate its templates along or against “symbolical grammars of difference” (Wekker, 2009, p. 153) such as gender, race, diaspora, generation, religion, and youth culture. Thus, in this chapter I want to connect feminist technoscience to post-colonial intersectional thinking in order to argue for intersectional cyberfeminism. Reading prior scholarship on migrant youth digital performativity of self through an intersectional lens, I highlight how intersectional cyberfeminism offers a means for a grounded and richer understanding of the technological affordances/restrictions and agency of the user in the contemporary multicultural online/offline context.

Puwar (2004) argues that space is formed through “the historically embedded relationship between ‘reserved positions and certain social types,’” adding that available “positions have a gendered and racialized symbolism to them” (p. 33). In the section below, I first set out how norms and digital templates in digital spaces also reserve certain gendered, racialized, and perspectival positions and semiotic-discursive types, and I subsequently argue how the intersectional performativity of self and technologies are mutually shaping each other. In the second section, three digital communicative spaces “invaded” by migrant youth are discussed, spaces where these subjects are not necessarily the normative figures. These three different spaces highlight three distinct approaches taken to appropriate communicative space, illustrating also how migrant youth are actively maneuvering across digital spaces. In each space discussed, works on the Internetworking of migrant youth in the context of the United States are brought into dialogue with studies of various disciplinary backgrounds on migrant youth in the European context.

### Digital Templates

Lykke and Braidotti (1996) made a plea to:

try to rethink the world as interaction between material-embodied and semiotic (that is sign-producing and communicating) actors and subjects, who cannot be divided along the traditional lines of human versus non-human, conscious mind versus stupid matter. (p. 27)

In early work, inspired by postmodernist thinking, cyberfeminists celebrated the liberating potential of ICTs. Reid (1993) wrote that Internet Relay Chat

users self-select their gender, allowing for experimentation with social roles and deconstruction of the “sacred” institution of gender. She asserted that “this fixity, and the common equation of gender with sex, becomes problematic when gender reassignment can be effected by a few touches at a keyboard” (p. 63). Turkle (1995) described opportunities for “gender bending” and identity experiments. The Internet would offer “new models of mind and a new medium on which to project our ideas and fantasies” (p. 267). Sundén (2003) conceptualized online textual embodiment; “having to type oneself into being” (p. 3), arguing that digital embodiment is mostly mediated through typed, textual cultures. As people can choose themselves which information they want to put forward, the potential for fissures and experimentation arises.

The somewhat utopian view on cyberspace has been nuanced; scholars highlight the normative ways of being—masculine, white, and Western—that are standardized in the digital realm. Rephrasing Puwar (2004), the Internet has certain “natural occupants” and “reserved positions” (p. 33). Illustratively, Herring (2003) argues that power relations in computer-mediated communication (CMC) are gendered. Linguistic features of agonism such as assertiveness, use of profanity, and rudeness correlate more with males, and features of social harmony such as verbosity, politeness, use of smileys more with female CMC users. Herring sums up: “women’s concern with politeness tends to be perceived as a ‘waste of bandwidth’ by men” (p. 209). In popular renderings of our globalized techno-cultural world, persons of color as active agents are still mostly absent, strengthening the myth of the technological lag of minorities (Everett, 2002). Gómez-Peña (2000) exposes how Chicanos living in the Mexican-U.S. borderlands are often perceived as somehow “culturally handicapped” and culturally unfit to handle technologies and contribute to cyberculture (p. 249), while in Europe “migrants have been mostly represented as emblematic figures of technological backwardness” (Kambouri & Parsanoglou, 2010, p. 11). Nakamura (2010) asserts that the content and interface decisions on the Internet reflect and produce racial hierarchical categorizations. Digital profiles and avatars can often be constructed only on the basis of a restricted “range of faces, bodies, and features. This creates a normative virtual body, one that is generally white, conventionally physically attractive, as well as traditionally gendered” (Nakamura, 2010, p. 338).

Next to the white, masculine norms, the Internet is also shaped by Western standards. Palfreyman and Al Khalil (2003) analyzed the representation of Arabic using the Latin alphabet in instant messaging conversations in the

United Arab Emirates by female students. Their use of Latin characters is attributed to the influence of the American Standard Code for Information Interchange (ASCII) upon online communication. Palfreyman and Al Khalil (2003) recognize ASCII as “a kind of lingua franca of the internet.” Arabic script does not meet the technological default of the ASCII computer character set. The standard mainly covers Latin letters, most commonly used in European languages, and excludes Arabic script (among other non-Latin scripts).

Wajcman (2007) argues that cyberfeminists can bridge accounts of techno-phobia and techno-philia when focusing on the “mutual shaping of gender and technology, where neither gender nor technology is taken to be pre-existing, nor is the relationship between them immutable” (p. 287). Thus, a middle-ground perspective is needed to acknowledge the entanglement of digital materiality and embodiment: digital media practices concern more than wholly voluntaristic fabrications of the self, and that they can also move beyond pure reifications of pre-existing power relations such as gendered and racial orders and Western hegemony. Internet practices are always situated in “specific socio-cultural personal contexts,” allowing users to question dominant cyber spatial configurations of sociality by relocating and, to a certain extent, disrupting disciplinary assignments and regulatory practices of social identificatory mechanisms (Gajalla, Rybas, & Altman, 2008). Wajcman (2007) adds: “we require more nuanced research that captures the increasingly complex intertwining of gender and technoscience as an ongoing process of mutual shaping over time and across multiple sites” (p. 296). In my attempt to do so in this chapter, I connect below technoscience with feminist poststructuralist theory and intersectional thinking to theorize how categories of difference and technologies can be approached as processes of co-construction.

### **Mutual Shaping: Intersectional Performativity of Self and Technologies**

Haraway (1997) recognizes that the computer is “not a Thing Acting Alone” (p. 126), as connections between humans and computers remake worlds. The question remains, however: How do we disentangle the interactive encounters between human and nonhuman actors through different technologies, which materialize “worlds in some forms rather than others”? (p. 129). Technologies can be understood as vehicles that can enact (enable and disable) processes of allying human and nonhuman actors. In this section, I turn

to performativity and intersectionality to better grasp processes of mutual shaping in the lives of migrant youth engaging with socio-technological networks. Combining poststructuralist thinking and feminist technoscience is urgent; as Barad (2007) states, “there has been surprisingly little cross-pollination between feminist poststructuralist theory and science studies.... Even in the feminist science studies literature, one is hard pressed to find other direct engagements with Butler’s work on performativity” (p. 57). Similarly, Haraway (1997) argues that:

Either critical scholars in antiracist, feminist cultural studies of science and technology have not been clear enough about racial formation, gender-in-the-making, the forging of class, and the discursive production of sexuality through constitutive practices of technoscience production themselves, or the science studies scholars aren’t reading or listening—or both. (p. 35)

Butler famously deconstructed the category of gender by foregrounding that gender is to be understood as something *we do* rather than something *we are*. There is no preceding or following “I” that exists apart from gender performativity; rather, we come into existence through a matrix of gender relations. With her notion of performativity, Butler goes beyond distinctions between material-embodied and symbolic-discursive domains. Gender performativity is the constitutive stylized repetitious process through which one acquires a gendered subjectivity: “language sustains the body not by bringing it into being or feeding it in a literal way; rather, it is by being interpellated within the terms of language that a certain social existence of the body first becomes possible” (Butler, 1997a, p. 6). The body becomes fundamentally constituted through performative repetitions of sedimented gendered norms “through a series of acts which are renewed, revised, and consolidated through time” (1997b, p. 406). Extending this notion, other axes of differentiation migrant youth experience such as race, ethnicity, diaspora, and age also get constituted through performative acts. In the repetitive process, room is left for subversion; as Barad (2007) asserts, in the context of socio-technological networks, “gender performativity constitutes (but does not fully determine) the gendered subject” (p. 62). By contesting enacted identities in their embedded contexts of hegemonic power relations, people have the chance to re-signify themselves.

Feminist technoscience approaches human-computer interactions as heterogeneous, related assemblages where some subjects enjoy privilege while others are underprivileged.<sup>2</sup> The focus on performativity helps to focus on

how power is actively distributed. Humans engage in alliances with technologies resulting in certain world-building practices whereby specifically located subjectivities and modes of speaking are materialized and signified. These alliances can “be teased open to show the sticky economic, technical, political, organic, historical, mythic, and textual threads that make up its tissues” (Haraway, 1997, p. 68). Performative angles on human-technology relationships point to an underlying process of entanglement, making it possible to unravel the particularities of normalized and taken-for-granted circumstances.

The ways in which migrant youth’s digital performativities of self are distributed become especially apparent when considering the various categories of difference traversed in their social trajectories. Brah (2003) argues that migrant identities are constructed around multi-axial localities across various spaces “where multiple subject positions are juxtaposed, contested, proclaimed or disavowed; where the permitted and the prohibited perpetually interrogate” (p. 631). Wekker (2009) describes intersectional thinking as guided by “central insights that gender and ‘race’ or ethnicity (and other axes of signification such as class, sexuality, age, religion, and so forth) operate simultaneously as social and symbolical grammars of difference and coconstruct each other” (p. 153).<sup>3</sup> Symbolical grammars of difference can be limiting and oppressive, but also empowering. Illustratively, Durham (2004) posits that South Asian immigrant girls in the United States negotiate diaspora affiliations but also experience the turbulent waters of adolescence: “diaspora adolescents’ negotiations of nation and culture intersect with the struggles around gender and sexuality that are a hallmark of coming of age in America” (p. 241). Cyberfeminists have recognized how various categories co-construct one another in multiple ways. Sundén (2007) argues that “cyberfeminist theory and practice is required to be more explicitly aware of the multiplicity of differences that constitute techno-bodies” (p. 46). For Sundén, technologies are not only the interface in and through which socio-cultural categories are constituted; rather, “intersectional cyberfeminism would explore the ways in which differentiated bodies collide and intersect with digital technologies; how corporeal differences transgress the boundaries between natural and artificial, human and machine” (p. 37).

Below, three spaces in the digital realm are discussed where migrant youth have manifested themselves as “dissonant bodies” who do not necessarily meet the template/image of “who is seen to really belong” (Puwar, 2004, p. 34). These spaces exemplify the constitutive processes of technology

and migrant youth subjectivity. Each space raises theoretical questions on migrant youth engagement with digital media that would benefit from more cyberfeminist scrutiny with an attention to intersectional performativity of self and the co-construction of technology.

### **Space 1: Hypertextual Selves in Online Social Networking Sites**

The first space of invasion I want to describe is the online social networking site (SNS). Scholars working on the ways in which migrant youth perform their identities in online social networking sites showcase how their identities are dynamic and hybrid. Authors set out how migrant youth in their hypertextual performance of self perform hybrid identities that cut across various symbolic grammars of difference. Aoyama (2007) writes about Japanese Peruvians in Peru using the SNS Hi5.com. These youth label themselves as Nikkei, and Aoyama found that “a starburst shape of identity construction and negotiation” is observable (p. 119). Nikkei-ness gets performed by combining Japanese affiliations such as the *Hello Kitty* brand, *anime* videos, *Kanji* writing, *kimonos*, as well as “Latino” and “Chino” (Chinese) celebrities on profile pages. Users join and hyperlink to different “groups” on their profile page, and Aoyama writes that “these groups stretch across a large and varied scope of topics, including that of national, racial/ethnic, and cultural identities” (pp. 2, 104–110).

In his research on migrant youth in Oslo, Norway, Mainsah (2009) analyzed self-representational strategies by users of online social networking sites and found that profile pages allow youth to be active agents in their own representations. These representations often go beyond mere ethnic/diasporic affiliations. For instance, Mainsah describes how Yamane, an Eritrean Norwegian girl, expressed herself in a multi-layered way on her MySpace.com profile page. The groups she joined go beyond identification with her Eritrean ethnicity. The groups “‘Rafiki’s Children,’ and ‘Rock for Darfur’ represent an attachment with Africa. ‘Malcolm X Grassroots Movement’ represents solidarity with the African American Diaspora in the US.” Yamane said that “these groups I have joined represent bits of my personality, and they stand for values that I find elementary.” Mainsah concludes that his informants connected to groups “to establish new ties and to develop and cultivate a wide range of religious, cultural, political and social interests” (pp. 195–197).



Leurs and Ponzanesi (2011a) note that Moroccan Dutch youth hyperlink to and participate in a wide range of communities within the Dutch social networking site Hyves.nl. When users join online groups on Hyves, a hyperlinked avatar appears on their profile pages. Moroccan Dutch youth were seen to affiliate with groups “ranging from feminist interests (*Women in charge*), Dutch nationalism (*I love Holland*), ethnic affiliations (*the Moroccan kitchen*) to clothing (*the brand H&M*), and global junk food (*McDonalds*).” The authors conclude that “These diverse affiliations—that are advertised online simultaneously—add nuance to the typical, one-dimensional stereotype about migrant youth, integration, and Islam in the context of Europe and Netherlands.” The strategic use of hyperlinking is the basis for a differential performativity of self. Haraway (1997) elaborates on the two-sidedness of hypertext: “Although the metaphor of hypertext insists on making connections as practice, the trope does not suggest which connections make sense for which purposes and which patches we might want to follow or avoid” (p. 127). Odin (1997) suggests that the web reflects a new mode of post-colonial embodiment, as hypertext “is composed of cracks, in-between spaces, or gaps that do not fracture reality into this or that, but instead provide multiple points of articulation with a potential for incorporating contradictions and ambiguities” (p. 598). As research on Japanese Peruvian, Eritrean Norwegian and Moroccan Dutch youth’s digital practices showcase, hypertext enables fragmentary, decentered subjectivity and identity formation, recurrent for post-colonial subjects. For instance, Trinh (1992) states that fragmentation denotes a way of living with differences at the margins, where “one finds oneself, in the context of cultural hybridity always pushing one’s questioning of oneself to the limit of what one is and what one is not” (pp. 156–157).

Highlighting various symbolical grammars of difference simultaneously, SNSs can be taken up to circulate a multiaxial self. Illustrating how identities are actively in the making as hypertextual webs, migrant youth carve out a space to assert, for instance, ethnic/gendered/religious identifications. However, performing hypertextual selves also allows migrant youth, as dissonant bodies in the space of online social networking sites, to emphasize that they do share belongings with the majority of the mainstream users, such as global and local clothing, food, music, lifestyle preferences, and attachments to political causes. The question arises as to what extent offline contexts allow for similar differential identity performances. Are these youth only able to assert various dimensions of their subjectivity online, and not offline, as a result of

narrow discursive labeling practices that emphasize alterity—as youth with a migration background, for instance, constantly remain interpellated as “migrant boys” or “Muslim girls” in offline settings?

Also, hypertextual performativity of self in the production of digital space in social networking sites is not always simply enabling. Not only are its users economically exploited, as online social networking sites collect personal data and sell it for niche-marketing purposes. Indicating the growing policing of the digital realm, certain minoritarian practices become restricted as well. For instance, when Facebook.com administrators were asked by Israeli Public Diplomacy and Diaspora Affairs Minister Yuli Edelstein to take down an Arabic-language page calling for a third Intifada against Israel to “liberate” the Palestinian territory, they first prided themselves on the Facebook “Terms of Service” for promoting freedom of expression and deliberation: “While some kinds of comments and content may be upsetting for someone—criticism of a certain culture, country, religion, lifestyle, or political ideology, for example—that alone is not a reason to remove the discussion. We strongly believe that Facebook users have the ability to express their opinions.” However, under increased Israeli government pressure, the page was deleted soon after by Facebook administrators (Protalinski, 2011). Similarly, Kambouri and Parsanoglou note that “Migrant digital networks are increasingly conceptualized as an Internet security threat, in particular after September 11th and the rise of Islamophobia” (2010, p. 30). They stress that digital Muslim/migrant networks are treated as risks to society, illustrating how new ICT’s also “generate new means of intensified monitoring and surveillance of migrant bodies” (p. 10).

### **Space 2: Instant Messaging as a Private Space**

The second communicative space concerns migrant youth claiming instant messaging (IM) as a communicative space of their own. Comparing online social networking sites such as Facebook with instant messaging, which facilitates the exchange of synchronous messages, Quan-Haase and Young (2010) assert that with IM, “users can engage in more intimate conversations, allowing them to share their problems with communication partners more easily” (pp. 358–359). IM allows for more privacy. This is interesting, because Kelly and colleagues (2006) learned from their interviewees—adolescent girls in Canada—that activities such as instant messaging “allowed them to rehearse different ways of being before trying them out offline” (p. 3). This could be

particularly important for migrant youth who have to negotiate their presence across online/offline spaces. However, in their work on instant messaging, most scholars (such as Kelly et al.) have singled out the category of gender.

Scholars have, for instance, set out how in IM practice, gendered dimensions become apparent. Studying IM exchanges between college students, Fox and colleagues (2007) noticed that female students differed from male students in, for instance, use of emphasis, frequency of laughing, use of emoticons, and reference to emotions. They conclude that “women sent messages that were more expressive than those sent by men” (p. 389). Baron (2008) also compared IM conversations between female and male students and argues that women are more “talkative,” which may reflect a “female writing style” (p. 67). While males used more contractions, females were prime users of emoticons. She found that “female-female conversations were roughly a third longer (in both number of transmissions and time on the clock than male-male conversations” (pp. 65). Building on the vocabulary of Goffman’s performance of self, Jacobs (2003) asserts that among American adolescent girls, “the backstage conversations [one-on-one IM exchanges] are where alliances are formed, problems are discussed and solved, and plans are made beyond the hearing of others....The onstage places [display names and the buddy list] are where alliances are declared and social positions and presence are established” (p. 13). In these studies, IM use is scrutinized with a focus on the category of gender in isolation from other axes of differentiation.

In the context of the United States, studies by Lam (2009) and Yi (2009) are notable exceptions. Recognizing that there is a “paucity of research on immigrant adolescents’ practices with digital media,” Lam (2009, p. 175) examined instant messaging use among immigrant youth and paid attention to the particular characteristics of instant messaging. She argues that “to perform different voices and versions of one’s self dependent on the audience has come to characterize the aesthetics and epistemology of IM” (pp. 380–381). Working with Kaiyee, a Chinese American adolescent girl, Lam found that Kaiyee traverses local, translocal, and transnational affiliations through IM. Mobilizing diverse cultural resources and linguistic repertoires, she used IM to (re)design her social and symbolic affiliations with multiple communities. She connected locally with “urban-identified teenagers of diverse ethnicities,” but she also expressed belonging to her diaspora (pp. 387, 394). Similarly Yi (2009) argues that the crafting of display names of her informants, two Korean American adolescents, shows how solidarity with different social networks was established. The subjects foregrounded various

elements, mixing Korean and American pop culture and, “in doing so, they negotiated their way through multiple languages, identities, and worlds” (p. 122). Korean was used as a strategic resource. When his school friends saw it as “‘cool’ for him to read and write Korean,” one of her informants “seemed to (re)learn the value of his heritage language and to construct a positive-self-image” (p. 108).

In Europe, Leurs and Ponzanesi (2011b) explored how Moroccan Dutch adolescent girls made IM into a communicative space of their own. They recognize that these girls have to negotiate between motivations. Parents who migrated from Morocco can, for instance, be prohibitive about direct contact with the opposite sex. “For girls this often also meant to ‘shame’ themselves in their presence, i.e., to behave timidly and modestly and to refrain from any looseness in appearance or expression” (Pels & De Haan, 2003, p. 58). Durham (2004) adds that “at the same time that immigrant families exercise rigid restraint over adolescent girls’ sexuality, Western culture continues to hypersexualize girls and women of color” (p. 145). In one-on-one conversations, the “backstage” of IM, the informants in the study by Leurs and Ponzanesi (2011b) use IM as a “relatively safe practice-ground” to engage in relationships and schedule dates. In the more public “onstage” of display names, Moroccan Dutch adolescent girls “claim diverse group-memberships and belongings” by combining multiple linguistic, gender, diasporic, religious, and Internet culture affiliations (pp. 56–79).

The space of IM appears to be a space taken up by migrant youth where they feel comfortable to perform multiple versions of themselves, tapping into diverse linguistic repertoires. Lo Bianco (2000) discusses the urgency of a pluralistic response to everyday linguistic creativity in the context of globalization, such as “literacies which invoke ethnic, ideological, religious, script, technical and nation-identity statuses.” He emphasizes that “diversity in the plural literacy practices of minority children is often relegated to the margins of their lives. Yet they have within them the power to open up new intellectual worlds which are, at the moment, linguistically and intellectually closed to us” (p. 101). However, the appropriation of IM space also has its downside. Next to recognition of pedophiles turning to IM to contact young girls, Leurs and Ponzanesi (2011b) learned from their informants about a Moroccan Dutch friend who was severely beaten by her father and brother. She befriended a boy through IM. After he gained her trust, she digitally shared sexually explicit pictures. The boy subsequently circulated the pictures among his friends. When her family found out, they became furious with her.

### Space 3: Public Community and Voice on Discussion Boards

AsianAvenue.com, MiGente.com, and BlackPlanet.com are online discussion boards that represent Asian American, Mexican American, and African American digital public spheres. These sites are frequented by millions of users, including migrant youth, indicating that “the dissolution of racial identification” as often celebrated in early cyberfeminist accounts “is neither possible nor *desirable*” (Byrne, 2008, p. 15), as there is a great demand for such dedicated sites. Byrne compares these “dedicated sites” to “hush harbors,” a notion used to describe spaces in which slaves gathered away from supervision from their white masters. The hushedness of these sites is valuable for developing “group cohesion” and a shared sense of belonging “because they are relatively free of *mass* participation by ethnic outsiders” (p. 17).

Byrne states that online discussion boards highlight how “ethnic communities construct, stabilize, modify, and challenge individual and community senses of identity over a relatively long period of time.” These communities offer the space to strengthen a sense of collective identification and racial pride. In establishing digital communities, the sites are valuable for the production and circulation of “community-centered knowledge” (2008, p. 17). Consciousness of oneself in these sites gets associated with “racially, and often gender-, appropriate behaviors.” The boards can be seen as “informal learning spaces” where “ideologies are likely to be developed, promoted, contested and institutionalized” (2008, pp. 29–31). Digital communities offer youth the chance to circulate their own content and establish their own norms.

Studying a website for women of South Asia, Mitra (2004) has argued that “the Internet is providing a unique forum for the dispossessed to find a voice in the public sphere” (p. 492). The Internet as such might be taken up by minorities to assert their presence. In her study on the use of discussion boards by Moroccan Dutch girls, Brouwer (2006) extends Mitra’s notion and states that these boards are informal meeting places that give Moroccan Dutch girls a voice. Focusing on issues of religion, gender, ethnicity, and sexuality, she argues that Moroccan Dutch girls “are more restricted in their freedom than boys,” again illustrating how migrant girls are often seen as the upholders of traditional values. Moroccan Dutch forums are taken up by girls to voice the struggles they experience in their efforts “to negotiate strict Muslim demands placed on them with liberal youth culture.” In the relative

anonymity of the site, “girls raise all kinds of sensitive issues such as relationships, marriage, or religion which they would dare not discuss in public.” The discussion boards allow girls to escape the social control of their parents and negotiate their positionality in between in a complex field of power relations by discussing “their own ideas about the role of Dutch Moroccan women in society, stressing the importance of independence, education, and making individual choices within an Islamic context.”

Discussing portals and discussion boards developed in England by black British, Indian/South Asian, Chinese, and Muslim communities, Siapera (2006) argues that these sites bridge two dilemmas of multiculturalism, that of “particularism that leads to isolation and fragmentation” on one side of the spectrum and “universalism that ultimately negates all difference” on the other, far side of the spectrum. She notes that the sites allow a glance at quotidian multicultural politics. Users of the boards show “everyday or more prosaic multicultural conduct where one can observe the ongoing struggle between different understandings of our life together” (p. 21). As a contemporary counterpart to “hush harbors” where slaves gathered away from the gaze of white masters, migrant youth and other minoritarian subjects turn to discussion boards to carve out a space for public community formation and to assert their voice.

What is, however, lacking in these studies is an assessment of gender, class, and religious power relations that operate in forums. Nor do these studies report which practices are surveilled, included/excluded, and by whom. More research is needed to assess how these hush harbors relate to mainstream society and the dominant discourses that persist there. Judging by the popularity of these forums, hush harbors are apparently still necessary, indicating that migrant youth’s voices remain isolated from mainstream (offline) discourses. Do these hushed voices ever invade the mainstream online and/or offline, or are they a digital dead-end, as they remain ghettoized? And what happens when members of the majority engage with these boards? Are they excluded or welcomed? And what do they contribute? A closer look at how such practices in the digital realm relate to and cross over to the offline world would provide us with more insight into the roles of these harbors in the lives of minoritarian subjects.

### Conclusions

Turning to the interaction between mass migrations and digital mediation, this chapter has explored the intersectional performativity of self of migrant youth across centers and margins of the digital realm. Puwar (2004) recognizes that “different bodies belonging to ‘other’ places are in one sense out of place as they are ‘space’ invaders” (p. 33). Migrant youth do not fit some of the white, masculine, and Western normative templates of the Internet. By means of their digital practices, they become “space invaders” of material-embodied, semiotic-discursive, and socio-technological norms and practices. The three communicative spaces explored—online social networking sites, instant messaging, and online discussion boards—offer a view of the various ways youth manifest their multiply located selves. Lefebvre (2002) argues that “each living body is space and has its space: it produces itself in space and it also produces that space” (p. 170). Recognizing also the downside to these spaces, such as the commodification of digital behavior by profit-oriented corporations as well as increasing governmental surveillance in the case of SNS, dangers of pedophiles who pass as young people in the case of IM, and the apparent disconnect of migrant voices with the mainstream in discussion boards, the works discussed highlight how migrant youth are actively becoming producers of digital spaces. The three digital spaces have strong implications for thinking about what happens when “those whose bodies are not the norm in these places take up these very positions” (Puwar, 2004, p. 34).

The symbolical grammars of difference with which migrant youth cope are not only oppressive regimes but can also be empowering tools. From sometimes being “symbolically homeless” offline (Grosz; cited in Puwar, 2004, p. 147), they are able to assert and transform their own multi-axial and differential representations online. By doing so, they can work against narrow-fitting allocated positions and expose shallow stereotypes of migrant youth as absolute others. Intersectional cyberfeminists attuned to minoritarian subjects can uncover more such hidden experiences in order to assert how various intersecting axes of differentiation—such as gender, sexuality, religion, and diaspora—impact lives across online/offline divides.

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### Notes

- 1 See, for instance, Rajaram and Grundy-Warr (2007) and Tsianos and Karakayali (2010).
- 2 For an overview of feminist technoscience studies, see the special issue on feminist technoscience studies of the *European Journal of Women Studies* edited by Åsberg and Lykke (2010). They characterize cyberfeminism as a theoretical and methodological approach for doing feminist technoscience studies (2010, p. 300).
- 3 For a thorough discussion of intersectional thinking, see the special issue of the *European Journal of Women Studies* edited by Phoenix and Pattynama (2006). They argue that intersectionality “foregrounds a richer and more complex ontology than approaches that attempt to reduce people to one category at a time” (p. 187).

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