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Digital Diasporas: Beyond the Buzzword

Toward a Relational Understanding of Mobility and Connectivity

Laura Candidatu, Koen Leurs, and Sandra Ponzanesi

Introduction

> *Today, every society is just a collection of diasporas. People join the societies to which they are loyal and pay their taxes, but at the same time, they do not want to give up their identity. The connection between where you live and identity has been broken*
>
> —Zygmunt Bauman (2016)

This chapter proposes a critical intervention in digital diaspora studies by foregrounding a relational approach that is inspired by feminist and postcolonial theory. This relational approach takes inspiration from Edouard Glissant's *Poetics of Relations* in which the Caribbean theorist offers sites of connectivity, instead of fixed places of origin and of roots, as a way to conceive multiple coexisting histories. He argues that the dynamic process of creolization, offers a poetics defined by its openness to transformation. Instead of imagining a world of nations, he offers the alternative of the archipelago, an image of the world in which we are all connected while remaining distinct (Glissant, 1997). This relational understanding of digital diaspora takes its cue from different genealogies by rethinking current patterns of diasporas' digital mediation, and the way they are related as constellations within the digital firmament traditions, disciplinary engagements, and methodological

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approaches. It is therefore not a catch-all term but a relational one that operates around the unfolding of new identity forms, informed by principles of errantry and hybridity. In these instances, the Other is considered as one part of a multiplicity of difference that recognizes our "unity-diversity" (Glissant, 1997, p. 79). To put it simply, "Relation is the moment when we realize that there is a definite quality of all the differences in the world" (Glissant, 1997, quoted in Diawara, 2011).[1] This vision acquires particular poignancy in the ways of keeping in touch in a world were relations are severed due to forced migrations and uneven patterns of mobility.

Although migrants maintain a "connected presence" across distance using digital technologies (Diminescu, 2008), we highlight how contemporary human mobility remains shaped by and constitutive of an unevenly interconnected world. For example, at the height of the so-called "European refugee crisis" (fall–winter 2015–2016), news headlines and social media tropes questioned asylum seekers who crossed European borders with their smartphones. The question "Why do those refugees take selfies all the time?" adorned the front-page of the Dutch daily *Algemeen Dagblad* (Rosman & van Mersbergen, 2015) while the *UK Metro* printed a photo of young male refugees taking a selfie after arriving on the shore of the Greek island Lesbos, and explained to its readership how this photo was different from normal/regular selfie practice: "Looks like a lads' holiday pic—but these are refugees celebrating the start of a new life" (McAteer, 2015).

These discourses demonstrate that in the Western imaginary refugees are not the intended users of smartphones, selfies, and social media. Indeed, this process of *othering* is exemplary of "high-tech Orientalism" (Chun, 2006, p. 73). However, migrants may actually better be seen as ahead of the curve, as they are often early-adopters of technologies and "on the cutting edge of technology adoptions" (Brinkerhoff, 2009, p. 12). Dominantly framed as a danger to European family life, the male Syrian asylum seeker who arrives at the borders of Europe carrying little more than a smartphone is therefore a key figuration to unpack how mobility and settlement, here and there, online and offline, borders and flows are not opposites but mutually constitutive elements of a hierarchical networked world. It shows how contemporary reality is one of accelerating multiplicity: the only universality today is one of relations based upon diversity rather than homogeneity or unity.

Technology uptake often reflects desires to remain in touch with loved ones and friends but also to negotiate information scarcity, ontological insecurity, and emotional duress and other circumstances of insurmountable hardship. For example, in the case of Syrians fleeing from war, smartphones are essential to survival, allowing the circulation of information, discounting rumors around asylum procedures and the navigation of migration routes while keeping loved ones informed (Wall et al. 2017). This is visible, for example, in the ways in which Syrians refugees pool information and resources on Facebook pages and groups.[2] Exemplifying digital diaspora formations, these community initiatives provide a sort of "Tripadvisor for refugees," and these "feedback networks" (Dekker, Engbersen, &

Faber, 2016) center around informal language learning, information sharing, expressing gratitude and interacting with members of the hostland.

Questioning refugee-taking-selfie in Europe can be understood in a longer history of anxiety surrounding transnational nonnormative family practices. Previously, fears were projected on the satellite dish—the very fact that migrants could watch TV from their homelands became framed as a symbol of "enclavization" and the failure of multiculturalism (Sjöberg & Rydin, 2011, p. 238). Technology use among non-elite migrants is considered with such suspicion; hypermobile expatriate groups are commonly celebrated. Academia is partly responsible for this division, research on digitally connected migrants revolves around either "encapsulation" or "cosmopolitanism" (Christensen & Jansson, 2014). Scholars commonly single out one or another of these processes. Homophily, the assumption that birds of a feather flock together, is often used in the study on forced, postcolonial, and labor migrants to argue that their transnational communication hinders integration and possibly leads to segregation and radicalization (Conversi, 2012; Scheffer, 2007). In works on elite migrants, the focus is on how they develop bridging, cosmopolitan capital by networking with global society (Jansson, 2011). Tech-savvy expatriate youth are, for example, celebrated as "third-culture kids" for their "expanded worldview" and their development of "cross-cultural" skills (Pollock & van Reken, 2009, pp. 107–118) while refugees are considered as "traditional," their fixed "non-Western" background is an obstacle to technology use and their successful integration. Cultural activities and dynamism among refugees are commonly ignored (Wilding, 2012). In response, we advance critical digital diaspora studies to acknowledge migrant connectedness (among transnational, forced, elite, refugee, internally displaced migrants) as simultaneously encapsulating and cosmopolitanizing, shaped by online and offline power relations.

In our critical intervention on digital diaspora studies, we are confronted with two main obstacles:

1. The term digital diaspora lacks a clear definition. Although arguably valuable for its interpretative flexibility, because the concept is used to grasp a variety of practices, groups, and ambitions its strength as a theoretical tool to uncover and combat social injustices is undermined. For example, little attention is paid to how political bodies draw on digital practices as a new form of governmentality.
2. The field of digital diasporas studies has insufficiently accounted for diverging geopolitical motivations to form communities, the multispatial specificities of living and communicating within and across the Global North and the Global South as well as the diversity which is reflected, reinforced, and possibly contested within and across digital diasporas.

In response, we propose a relational approach to critically study digital diasporas, as this innovative framework allows us to grasp contemporary human mobility as shaped by and constitutive of an unevenly interconnected world. In

championing the agency of digital diasporas the emerging field risks adopting a media-centric reasoning. This in turn risks glossing over the ways in which everyday offline and online contexts are steeped in intersecting gendered, racial, classed, generational, and geopolitical power relations. While the world might appear as interconnected because costs of travel, technologies, and transnational connectivity have dwindled, the capacity to migrate and choose one's place of residence remains unevenly distributed.

This chapter is structured as follows. We first offer a genealogy of digital diaspora scholarship, which reflects subsequent paradigm shifts in internet studies. These developments explain a lack of critical attention for power differences and material, social, and emotional contexts. Generally, internet studies initially developed a media-centric focus on cyberspace communities (1990s), shifted to a non-media-centric focus on mediation and online–offline relationships (2000s), and oriented toward a media-centric focus on participatory culture, Web 2.0 and Big Data (2010–now). In our intervention, we recover from these three paradigms theories and methodologies that are generative for a power-sensitive, contextually grounded, and critical digital diaspora scholarship. In our advancement of critical digital diaspora studies, we find inspiration in notions of diaspora, identity, and belonging as developed by postcolonial and feminist theorists. Understandings of diasporas have changed over time, from classical essentialist, comparative to post-structuralist to circulating and multispatially situated. The relational perspective acknowledges digital diasporas as mutually constituted here and there, through bodies and data, across borders and networks, online and offline, by users and platforms, through material, symbolic, and emotional practices that are all reflective of intersecting power relations. This circuitousness is intended to build a body of scholarship that provides definitions of digital diasporas that are theoretical and empirically grounded, without fixing it to the totality of a single definition or singular pattern. It is through the meeting and clashing of different takes, genealogies, and methodologies that a relational notion of digital diaspora emerges and, as Glissant said: "evolving cultures infer Relation—the overstepping that grounds their unity-diversity" (1997, p. 1). Therefore, we plea for an understanding of digital diaspora which brings into dialogue different disciplinary traditions and methodological takes, in order to offer a relational understanding of diaspora that avoids either encapsulation or cosmopolitanism (Christensen & Jansson, 2014) but foregrounds multiplicities and singularities.

A Genealogy of Digital Diaspora Studies

Attempting to understand the complexities of digital migrant connectivity, concepts including "the connected migrant" (Diminescu, 2008), "mediatized migrants" (Hepp, Bozdag, & Suna, 2012) "digital diasporas" (Everett, 2009), "diaspora online"

(Trandafoiu, 2013), "e-diasporas" (Diminescu, 2008), "ye-diasporas" (Donà, 2014), "transnational habitus" (Nedelcu, 2012), "polymedia" (Madianou, 2014) have been coined in disciplines like sociology, science and technology studies, media, communication, and migration studies. We now historicize these broadly defined buzzwords and bring them into dialogue with recent paradigm shifts in the field of internet studies. First we want to emphasize that the notion of diaspora itself is contested and variously deployed.

Diaspora is a "travelling term" (Clifford, 1994, p. 302) that originally referred to the collective trauma caused by the banishment and exile of Jewish communities. In a second stage the word also came to signify the dispersal and genocide of Armenians and Irish people, and the coercive uprooting of African people for slavery. Later, the term has marked the condition of indentured labor in the nineteenth century (e.g. Indians in British colonies). There are also other forms of diaspora such as the imperial diasporas, trade diasporas (Chinese and Lebanese), and cultural diasporas, as in the case of the Caribbean. Understandings of diaspora have developed from a classical essentialist view, to a comparative and social constructivist tint at the end of the twentieth century (Cohen, 2008), toward a more recent focus on strategies of circulation and multispatiality (Georgiou, 2011; Knott, 2010). Diaspora evokes globalized, localized, and transnational forces of world economy, international migrations, global cities, cosmopolitism and localism, and distributed social identities. It is therefore a term that can account for "multiple subject positions" (Bhabha, 1994, pp. 245).

Different diaspora studies paradigms are reflected in the variegated digital diaspora approaches (or online diaspora, e-diaspora, virtual diasporas). Indeed many oppressed, minority, or endangered groups, often organized in diasporas, use the internet to keep up with their homeland and strengthen their ethnic ties. Certain diasporas are meant to represent suppressed or marginalized groups, preserving their threatened ethnicity. Such examples are Eritreans living in exile and active online (Bernal, 2014); Slavs who formed the first online nation, Cyber Yugoslavia (Antonijevic, 2004); and resistance networks (Chiapas, Tamil, Tibetan, Uyghur, and Burmese) that use the internet primarily for expressing political goals.

Over time, understandings of digital diasporas have taken different forms depending on the scholarly positions informing them, the methodologies and tools they are investigated with, and their main research focus. Variations in digital diaspora research reflect different internet studies paradigms (see Table 3.1). Internet studies came of age with the media-centric focus on cyberspace communities in the 1990s. As discussed in the Introduction to this chapter, from the 2000s onwards this was complimented by, first, a non-media-centric focus on online–offline relationships and, then in the 2010s, by a media-centric focus on participatory culture, Web 2.0, and Big Data (see Wellman, 2004; see also Madianou, 2002, pp. 19–50 for a review of media-centric and non-media-centric approaches in the study of the media and identity). These paradigms might indicate a linear model of progression, but digital diaspora scholarship shows reality is nonlinear as perspectives from across paradigms are currently in use.

Table 3.1 Internet Studies Paradigms as Reflected in Digital Diaspora Scholarship

Paradigm	*Key authors*	*Theory*	*Methodology*	*Merits*	*Critiques*
I. Media-centric cyber culture studies approach: internet as distinct realm	Mitra (1997, 2001); Rheingold (1993); Gajjala (2004); Everett (2009); Bernal (2014)	• Cyberspace • Cyber communities • Postmodern literary theory	Discourse analysis	Pioneering, agenda-setting, development of virtual ethnography	Utopian
II. Non-media-centric ethnographic approach: internet as part of everyday life	Morley and Robbins (2002); Miller & Slater ([2000] 2001) Madianou (2014) Georgiou (2006) Hepp et al. (2012) Nedelcu (2012) Hegde (2016)	• Mediation & mediatization • Everyday practices • Offline embedded online	Social science methods preexisting the internet: e.g., ethnography, participant observation, interviewing	Context-sensitivity: material, social, economic and emotional	Descriptive, small scale, particularistic
III. Media-centric digital approach: data-driven network analysis	Diminescu (2008) Kok and Rogers (2016)	Actor-network theory, new materialism, posthumanism	Digital methods; "born digitally" data-driven approaches	Unlimited scale, sensitivity for distribution, medium-specificity, cross-platform	Flat ontology, lack of emancipatory ideals; ethical questions

I. The Cyber Approach

The first internet scholarship paradigm witnesses the birth of a new reality—cyberspace. Cyberspace's emergence is seen as a novel electronic frontier (Rheingold, 1993) where cyberspace represents individuals' entrance in a space of utopic progressive freedom, disembodiment, and escape from the everyday life, emphasizing the cyberspace/offline material life separation. The internet itself—the meta-network that was designed as a strategic military communication channel which would survive nuclear warfare—emerges from a cold-war and military-industrial context. This is still evident in the networked configuration which rests on "C3I" protocols (command, control, communication, and intelligence) which operate behind the screen (Ricker Schulte, 2015). Nonetheless, a Californian ideology emerges from the enthusiasm of cyber-hippies, entrepreneurs and academics alike who see cyberspace and virtuality as digitally enabled egalitarian spaces outside social life and where new forms of subjectivity and sociality could emerge. The *cyber* prefix enjoyed high popularity for most of the 1990s, surrounded (not without a dose of healthy skepticism) by a halo of positive expectations about the benefits it would bring for democracy, education, science, and intellectual life. This perspective is best illustrated by John Perry Barlow's 1996 *Declaration of the Independence of Cyberspace*: "We are creating a world that all may enter without privilege or prejudice accorded by race, economic power, military force, or station of birth" (1996, n.p.).

This paradigm's main assumption was that to understand what is happening in cyberspace, only what happened in it was of relevance. Translating postmodern/poststructuralist literary theories (e.g., Judith Butler on performativity) and social science perspectives on self-presentation (e.g., Erving Goffman on self-presentation) to the digital realm, utopic visions were most dominant in shaping the way the internet was imagined and studied. Cyberspace triggered much scholarly interest from various fields—science and technology, digital culture studies, cyberfeminism, literary studies, anthropology, philosophy, as books and anthologies like *Communities in Cyberspace* (Smith & Kollock, 1999) indicate. Of interest is the parallel pioneering research conducted on migrant online networking. For example, Ananda Mitra (2001) brings to the fore a new dominant/marginal cyber–relationality. He shows how through the use of internet marginal voices, including racialized minorities and migrants, can connect and produce alternative identities through cyberspace narratives (2001). Critiques of cyberspace have laid bare the perpetuation of inequalities; Pramod Nayar, for example, notes that the "hype around the freedoms of cyberspace—including identity changes, surfing, limitlessness—recalls the tropes of the colonial period when mobility was always associated with the white man" (2010, p. 161). This first paradigm is mobilized in a more nuanced way in recent publications such as Ann Everett's *Digital Diaspora: A Race for Cyberspace* (2009) and Victoria Bernal's *Nation as Network. Diaspora, Cyberspace & Citizenship* (2014). This pioneering paradigm remains of importance for its

agenda-setting role: by being attentive to digital cultural productions of nonmainstream, marginalized, and racialized minorities it innovatively foregrounds understudied populations from the perspective of self-representation. Additionally, it prompts reflections on digital identities, discussions on virtual ethnography, and good cyber-ethical-research practice (Gajjala, 2004).

II. The non-media-centric Ethnographic Approach

In contrast with studies that prioritize online, the second internet scholarship paradigm, the ethnographic approach, revolves around a non-media-centric approach toward online–offline experiences and conceptualizes the internet as a form of mediation and mediatization. The focus is on social interaction and in this process; for example, language can be seen as a fundamental form of mediation (Madianou, 2014). In this tradition, research is concerned with the global proliferation of internet users and uses through various sociologically informed methods. The focus is on how the internet mediates everyday life, intersecting experiences of domesticating technologies, identification, and home-making across distances (Morley & Robbins, 2002), opening space for new questions regarding the relation between digital media and migration. Myria Georgiou argues diaspora is an "exceptional case of intense mediation," as it depends on mediated mobility to link distant and proximate places (2011, p. 205). Daniel Miller and Don Slater problematize the virtual/real disjuncture ([2000] 2001). They go beyond an ethnography about the users, use of, and the effects of the internet, and look holistically at the simultaneous transformative process enacted through this new medium. They reject the division between online and offline, starting by setting the study of the internet in a particular place—Trinidad—and plea to:

> treat Internet media as continuous with and embedded in other social spaces, that they happen within mundane social structures and relations that they may transform but that they cannot escape into a self–enclosed cyberian apartness. (2001, p. 5)

Neil Blair Christensen poignantly describes Inuits in the digital diaspora, who embed their offline identities online in a relational process: "The use of new technology by Inuit is not a peculiarity, nor a sensation, nor a corruption of culture, but a rather common part of a continuous (re)shaping and integration of old and new elements" (2003, p. 21). By emphasizing thus, the irrelevance of the online–offline separation the multilocality of everyday practices is centralized, and digitally mediated spaces are a significant part of these practices. Seeing physical and mediated mobility as continuous also draws attention for its uneven distribution across geographies and digital space. From this paradigm, we learn that critical

digital diaspora scholars need to be aware that the internet can best be studied in its distinctly situated context: "if you want to get to the Internet, don't start from there" (Miller & Slater, [2000] 2001, p. 5).

III. The Media-Centric Digital Approach

The recent theoretical surge (2010s onwards) that seeks to decenter the human and address endless human–machine entanglements (object-oriented ontology, new materialism, posthumanism, actor-network theory) has fused with big data orientations. In internet studies, the focus on networked data flows has led to media-centric reconceptualizations of the web as a "cross-platform ecology" consisting of a multiplicity of competing social media platforms (Helmond, 2015, p. 12). On the level of methodology, this has led to a shift toward developing methodologies and tools that are native to the internet. An online–offline boundary is again reinstated, as the assumption is that comprehensive digital data sets can be studied to make general societal and political claims.

Mirroring the seductive scalability of big data, these flat ontologies risk implying a God-trick (view from nowhere) in their aim for comprehensiveness. In decentering the human, experience and meaning-making may be lost in infinite assemblages. Arjun Appadurai points to the epistemological orientalizing impact of Anglophone Big Data studies that fuse Euro-American High Theory with military-industrial algorithmic High Technology. As a form of knowledge-based imperialism—through universalizing automated aggregation of "machine-based sociality"—less-privileged digital "proxy social worlds" outside the West are marginalized and expected to "catch up" with properly screenified singular modernity (2016, pp. 6–7). Furthermore, the radical, unlimited scope and distributed sensitivity promised by flat ontologies is difficult to align with inductive, and empirically grounded activist, anti-oppressive and/or emancipatory research ideals of critical digital diasporas.

In recent years, several scholars have used data-driven methods that are native to the internet to study digital connectivity among migrants. These methods capture the specificity of emergent digital platforms like issue mapping, hyperlink, and network analysis.

Most well-known is the e-Diasporas Atlas project, a longitudinal data-driven study revolving 8,000 mapped, analyzed, and archived migrant websites (Diminescu, 2008). Reflecting on this project, Dana Diminescu and Benjamin Loveluck argue digital diasporic affiliations and communicative strategies among networked actors operate at the intersections of "graphic reason" and "digital reason." On the bases of the digital traces they could scrape, Saskia Kok and Richard Rogers (2016) claim notions of territoriality should be revisited on the basis of their findings on Somali transnational networking. In sharp contrast, van den Bosch and Nell (2006) computed large-scale hyperlink networks of Iranians and

Turkish-Kurdish migrants in the Netherlands and combined this with granular ethnographic data to disprove this common deterritorialization claim. They argue that transnational digital networks demonstrate how "geographical identity" is reinforced rather than dissolved (2006, p. 201). Thus, critical digital diaspora studies ground Bigger data-driven methods on various platforms with Small Data research across platforms, spaces, and places (Alinejad et al., 2019).

In the section "Critical Digital Diasporas", we recover from these three paradigms theories and methodologies that are generative of a sensitive, grounded, and critical digital diaspora scholarship.

Critical Digital Diasporas

There is a paradox in studying dynamic formations such as digital diasporas. In order to study and deconstruct diasporas, we need to define, structure, and fixate them—despite their heterogeneity—and resist generalization. In our critical advancement, we find inspiration in notions of diaspora, identity, and belonging as developed by postcolonial and feminist theorists, and the idea of relationality among disciplinary fields and methodological traditions that would commonly not speak to each other. Digital diasporas are relationally constituted here and there, across platforms, spaces, borders and networks, online and offline, by humans and data, users and platforms, through material, symbolic, and emotional practices that are all reflective of intersecting power relations. This approach entails an engagement not only with theorizations of digital diasporas in a non-medium-centric approach but also with earlier feminist and postcolonial perspectives on diaspora. This perspective allows complexity and can account for its multilayered manifestations beyond the digital loci. "Digitality" is not disconnected from "reality" and there is a continuity between online and offline worlds which pose different accents and problems to understanding their complementarity, and equally legitimate forms of our existence. This coexistence of digital and embodied selves creates new possibilities for reinterpreting migration not as a mere territorial dislocation but as being part of imaginaries on the move, as Appadurai wrote (1996). Cross-platformed practices, spanning various geographical contexts between here and there, coalesce with earlier postcolonial understandings that emphasize diaspora space and encompass senses of boundedness, stability, anchoring, and reterritorialization but also operate as site of contestation, encounter, exclusion, and solidarity. We believe therefore that a paradigm shift is needed in addressing questions of digital diasporas, with new conceptual and methodological understanding of the phenomenon in its online–offline intersectional co-constituency.

The impact of information technologies has in fact changed our perception of boundaries and identity, which are not linked anymore to geographical demarcations and physical markers. Nevertheless, notwithstanding its wide pedigree on

theorizing migration and diaspora, internet studies has avoided substantial dialogue with postcolonial, anti-racist and feminist scholarship (Fernández, 1999). This also holds for digital diaspora studies. What is of significance here is the erasure in the digital diaspora canon of critical voices coming from postcolonial studies, feminism, and cultural studies.[3]

Research that debunked the utopian approach to the internet as the new egalitarian frontier can be identified either in the discussions around the digital divides, or in discussions about racialized and gendered dimensions of online interaction, and the postcolonial critique of the digital humanities field. On the one side, the digital divides approach coming from internet studies was a first step in acknowledging the technological gap informed by material economic and social factors. Sonia Livingstone (2005, pp. 6–9) gives a comprehensive overview of the ways in which discussions of digital divides have been taken up in the field of internet studies. Three linear approaches can be identified: the "digital divide" as difference of ownership and access focused on showing the importance of internet diffusion from the so-called developed countries to the less developed ones; then, after proofs of inequality proliferate despite policy efforts for equal access, researchers emphasized the difference of the quality of access and the need to go beyond the simple have/have nots dichotomy; and lastly, in the phase of "digital inclusion" research referred to debates on issues of social hierarchies, by recognizing the ways in which various material, economic, social, cultural, technical factors are linked to overall access and use. Following this last approach, recent developments criticize canonical ways of studying the digital divides due to their implicit split of the technological and social processes. Halford and Savage (2010) and Christo Sims (2014) indicate how offline practices and social contexts inform online participation and Internet use in general. On the other side scholars from postcolonial digital humanities (Risam, 2018) made an important intervention in current debates on Big Data and the computational turn by emphasizing how different computational power relations cut across various axes of differences. Additionally, scholars like Lisa Nakamura, Peter Chow-White (2012), and Anna Everett (2009) talk about racialized online interactions and offer a novel framework of analysis that brings race, gender and technology together.

These two largely different approaches continue to be developed in parallel and we remark once again on a lack of dialogue between internet studies derived approaches to issues of inequality, and the humanities and cultural studies analysis of how migrants and other vulnerable groups participate online. Bridging the two perspectives in the conceptualization of digital diaspora within the online–offline continuum needs to be done not only through a methodological step but also through an epistemological one. Connected migrants are connected in different ways, in physical and digital spaces and through various practices, and a postcolonial intersectional feminist lens allows us to deflatten digital diasporas into heterogeneous and multilayered dynamic imagined and material entities. We thus call for a reconceptualization of digital diaspora through a recovery of earlier postcolonial

and feminist theorizations of diaspora that brought to the fore the centrality of gender, hybrid identities, class, race,and ethnic differences.

Firstly, while it is important to acknowledge the significance of the ways in which digital practices enable migrant and marginalized subjects to feel at home in a non-hostile environment and secure among like-minded individuals in digital spaces, singling out only these continuous practices—as postcolonial theorists argued 20 years ago—risk glossing over dynamism and change. In this sense, Stuart Hall's (1990) and Paul Gilroy's (1993) work on diasporic identification open up new ways of thinking about diasporas in a syncretic dimension. They emphasize diaspora's twofold character: it involves both feeling attached to one's "roots" and a sense of a shared history and stable community but also future-orientation, transformations, and new intercultural "routes." Diaspora may be conceived as an "in-between" or "third" space, where differential individual and collective positionings can be articulated and contested (Bhabha, 1994; Brah, 1996). Therefore, digital diasporas—rather than constituted through a vertical unidirectional relationship to the homeland or a horizontal connection to a scattered transnational community—may be understood as reconfigured through medium-specific digital network configurations. In this way diasporas are not prefixed or determined in advance but can be acknowledged in their formation in flux, mutations, and renegotiations.

Secondly, feminist takes on diaspora emphasize the importance of including gender, queer (see Gopinath, 2005), race, and class analysis. Following the lines of a strong critique of migration research, scholars like Anthias (1998), Brah (1996), Yuval-Davis (with Anthias & Yuval-Davis, 1989), El-Tayeb (2011), and Al-Ali (2007) talk about the need to overcome nongendered conceptualizations of diaspora, and to study them in a feminist (intersectional) key that challenges conservative readings of diasporic formations: its role in the reproduction of the nation, or its ethnic homogeneity. Both Brah (1996) and Anthias (1998) point to the tendency to homogenize diasporic groups on an ethnic level, and bypass class, gender, and ethnic differences within, maintaining an androcentric (classed) gaze. In a broad and fixed approach to diaspora that neglects the intersectional dimension of diasporic formations, one cannot properly account for either transethnic connections that are based on gendered and classed power dynamics, and/or possible transethnic solidarities. Furthermore, Brah inflects the question of diaspora with a multiaxial slant. The concept of diaspora space is central to the framework of analysis she proposes since it marks the simultaneous articulation of migration, gender, race, ethnicity, and class. These perspectives allow for an exploration of how the power relations produced by these intersections are both inclusive and exclusory in contemporary conditions of transnationalism. For example, minorities are positioned in relation not only to majorities but also with respect to one another. Individual subjects may occupy minority and majority positions simultaneously, across contexts, with important implications for subjectivity formation and belonging.

Transposed to digital diasporas, these insights can indeed conceptually account for the multidimensional and non-fixed nature of the interwebs of

migration and media uses. Digital technologies do carry with them a racialized, gendered, normative baggage that is informed by and then reproduced through everyday practices within the offline–online continuum. Within this power dynamic, processes of mobility, migration, and connectivity create positionalities and hierarchies that change and are reshaped in various (digital) diasporic formations. Revealing these formations can in turn challenge simplistic, conservative, and binary interpretations of diasporas' potential, and can, for example, dismantle the "selfie-taking refugee" floating signifier stuck between victimhood and (technological) empowerment.

Conclusion

In this chapter, we proposed a critical intervention on digital diaspora studies by focusing on issues of relationality. Our scope was to clearly delineate the different theoretical discourses that surrounded diaspora studies with more recent digital diaspora scholarship by adding a postcolonial and feminist perspective, bringing different disciplinary traditions and methodological imperatives into dialogue. The result is not a new definition of diaspora as a self-explanatory term or container but the realization that diaspora exists in a continuum and is constituted here and there through diverging everyday practices that are all reflective of intersecting power relations. Most importantly, diaspora is determined by a position of agency, which determines not a top-down idea of diaspora but a bottom-up production of many possible intersections and connections. What Gilroy called roots and routes (1993) becomes in the realm of digital diaspora studies highly complexified by the role of technology and the advanced and accelerated possibilities of digital connectivity. Therefore it was important to trace the genealogy of digital diaspora studies with that of internet studies in order to follow the different phases and steps, from media-centric (the advent of cyberspace and the belief in a separate space between online and offline worlds), to ethnographic phase (linked to the embedding of technology in everydayness) and back to the media-centric approaches with digital methods and the rise of data studies that takes digital information as leading and self-explanatory. Our attempt was to show that through relationality there is not one exclusive take on digital diasporas but that they are all interconnected. We plea for a reassessment of digital diaspora studies as being co-constructed between different continuums of digital everydayness. This does not mean that anything goes in accounting for diaspora studies but that digital diaspora cannot be understood outside of its offline environment and materiality, still marked by gendered, racial, classed, generational, and geopolitical power relations. The itinerary of digital diasporas indicates a myriad cultural fissures and fusion that users render visible in data that must be constantly situated and embodied across borders and networks, online platforms, and offline geographies, bodies, and data.

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Notes

1 Unfortunately there is no room to explore this further here, but more attention is needed for de-Westernizing communication studies attempts that operationalize rationality from the perspective of Buddhist philosophy in accounting for how in our networked universe "nothing is independent" (Gunaratne, 2010, p. 484).
2 Examples include Facebook groups and pages of Syrians in the Netherlands: هنا هولندا, https://www.facebook.com/syrians.netherlands: 60.145 likes; Syrians in Turkey: تجمع السوريين في تركيا Suriyeliler Turkiyede https://www.facebook.com/groups/sy.in.tr: 28,775 members; and the German Syrian Haus https://www.facebook.com/groups/923029951085515: 19,191members (on October 11, 2016).
3 For example, Stuart Hall took part in the 1995 "40 acres and a microchip" conference that brought together scholars working on Black British Culture including Samuel Delany, bell hooks, Octavia Butler, DJ Spooky, Stuart Hall, Greg Tate, Tricia Rose, Keith Piper, and Paul Gilroy. This event hosted at the Institute of Contemporary Arts was organized by a network initiative called "Digital Diaspora," which also produced digital advocacy projects with young people (Nwachukwu & Robinson, 2011). It is seen as "Europe's first major conference on urban culture and new media" and the "first black cyberspace conference" "for digirati of African descent" (Evans, 2002, p. 223; Haber, 1995).

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