DIGITALLY MEDIATED DIASPORIC FORMATIONS

EVERYDAY MOTHERING PRACTICES OF ROMANIAN, TURKISH AND SOMALI WOMEN LIVING IN THE NETHERLANDS

LAURA CANDIDATU

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DIGITAAL GEMEDIEERDE DIASPORA FORMATIES

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English summary

This research investigates digitally mediated diasporic formations. It focuses on the role of mothering experiences in diaspora-making by looking at three migrant communities in the Netherlands—Romanian, Somali, and Turkish—and their uses of digital media. The aim of the dissertation is to show how mainly Amsterdam-based mothers from the three communities choose and use certain digital and social media platforms in order to strengthen their diasporic connections, both locally and transnationally. Drawing from feminist and migration studies, I propose the concept of diasporic mothering to emphasize how migrant mothers build communities through work of cultural reproduction, collective identity construction, and stable homemaking practices. With this, I draw attention to the relationship between "being a mother" and "being a migrant," while recognizing the different forms mothering experiences can take across historical times, geographical spaces, and cultural milieus. This investigation emphasizes thus the urgent need to investigate how mothering, media, and migration shape digital diasporas.

For the study of mothering in digital diasporas, I argue for an interdisciplinary reconceptualization of digital diaspora formation by building on postcolonial and feminist theory, as well as media anthropology theorizations of digital mediation.

First, by highlighting diaspora's processual and heterogenous character, I argue for the understanding of diasporas in the context of changing political, historical, and social contexts. This approach I believe, can best address how various hierarchies of difference are at play in diasporic formation.

Second, by privileging an ethnographic perspective and taking a non-media-centric approach, I show how not only digital media, but also the material dimensions of everyday practices shape how migrants connect, both transnationally and with each other within the diaspora community. This step has important methodological implications: If research on digital diaspora formations often emphasizes the new and unique ways in which digital media communication contributes to how people experience migration, this thesis foregrounds the social situatedness of digital spaces. In line with this, I make use of a mixed methods approach, combining ethnographic methods with digital methods for the exploration of diasporas on the online-offline continuum. Following these theoretical and methodological considerations, I then define digital diasporas as heterogeneous and dynamic communities, marked by the intersection of gender, class, race, and ethnic differentiation, and embedded in everyday social interactions, in material and digital spaces.

The empirical part of the dissertation is based on one year of fieldwork with the three diasporic communities, in which the relation between digital diaspora formation and diasporic mothering

practices was further explored. In all communities, the focus on mothering practices revealed particular gendered diaspora spaces that are scarcely addressed by scholarship on digital diaspora.

In the case of the Romanian community, I show how highly skilled migrant mothers mainly engage in diaspora formation via efforts toward aimed at the maintenance of family ties and heritage language transmission. I particularly emphasize how class and homeland politics are of high relevance for how these processes happen, both online and offline. In the Turkish case, I discuss the interplay between class and religion in how mothers participate differently in diaspora formation. I argue that homeland politics represent the terrain on which these divisions mainly play out, with privacy concerns structuring the digital mediation of diaspora groups. Finally, in the Somali analysis, I show how, despite classed differentiation, Somali mothers from different groups come together in diasporic formations. These encounters are shaped by the community's diasporic memory of its tense relationship with Dutch child protection authorities. In addition, I argue that digital media has a secondary role in this process due to the Dutch migration policy context, which favors certain migrants' physical, local, and neighborhood-based encounters.

I show how migrant women manage both their own diasporic subjectivities, and the lives of their children, together with the well-being of their families, and the maintenance of their communities. The analyses also show the prevalence of classed dynamics within diaspora groups, with new forms of elite and expatriate migration challenging earlier studies of the diaspora groups discussed in this dissertation: e.g., Romanian migration as mainly lower skilled, Turkish migration understood primarily in relation to the guest work agreements, and Somali migration as first and foremost forced migration. Finally, the strong role of national politics in diaspora formations is also evident in all three cases. This aspect opens avenues for inquiries about how nation states continue to have a strong material hold on migrant people's everyday lives.

In this dissertation, I thus highlight the different ways in which diasporas are digitally mediated. It offers a situated perspective on (migrant) people's digitally mediated sociality. In particular, a claim is made for the centrality of women's and mothers' reproductive work for community-building practices, with the concept of diasporic mothering seen as significant for the understanding of diasporic mobilizations. This gendered focus together with its non-media-centric approach aligns this dissertation with a larger humanities-based, feminist, and interdisciplinary tradition that critically unpacks the social values and power dynamics behind different technological advancements.

Nederlandse samenvatting

In dit onderzoek staan digitaal gemedieerde diaspora formaties centraal. Het onderzoek richt zich op de rol die ervaringen van moeders en moederschap spelen in het tot stand brengen van diaspora. Dit onderzoek focust op drie migrantengemeenschappen binnen Nederland—de Roemeense, Somalische en Turkse—en analyseert hoe in deze gemeenschappen digitale media door migranten moeders worden gebruikt. Het doel van het proefschrift is om te laten zien hoe de moeders uit deze drie gemeenschappen, met name zij die gevestigd zijn in Amsterdam, bepaalde digitale en sociale mediaplatforms kiezen en gebruiken om de banden met hun diaspora zowel op lokaal als transnationaal niveau te versterken. Op basis van feministische en migratiestudies stel ik het concept diasporisch moederschap voor om te benadrukken hoe migrantenmoeders gemeenschappen opbouwen door middel van culturele reproductie, collectieve identiteitsconstructie en het creëren van een stabiel thuis. Hiermee vestig ik de aandacht op de relatie tussen het "moeder zijn" en het "migrant zijn," terwijl ik de verschillende vormen erken die moederschaps ervaringen kunnen aannemen binnen verschillende historische periodes, geografische ruimtes en culturele milieus. Dit onderzoek benadrukt dus de urgentie om de complexe relatie tussen moederschap, media en migratie onder de loep te nemen zodat digitaal gemedieerde en gegenderde diaspora's in hun samenhang kunnen worden begrepen.

Door voort te bouwen op zowel postkoloniale en feministische theorie als op media antropologie en theorievorming op het gebied van digitale media, ontwikkel ik een interdisciplinaire herconceptualisering van digitale diaspora formaties om vervolgens moederschap binnen digitale diaspora's te kunnen onderzoeken.

Ten eerste benadruk ik het procesmatige en heterogene karakter van diaspora's, waardoor het noodzakelijk blijkt om diaspora's altijd te beschouwen binnen de context van veranderende politieke, historische en sociale configuraties. Een dergelijke gecontextualiseerde benadering is het beste in staat om te analyseren hoe diverse hiërarchieën van verschil een rol spelen binnen diaspora formaties.

Ten tweede laat ik zien hoe, door de voorkeur te geven aan een etnografisch perspectief en te kiezen voor een benadering die niet mediacentrisch is, niet alleen digitale media, maar ook en juist de materiële dimensies van alledaagse praktijken bepalen hoe migranten zich transnationaal en binnen de diasporagemeenschap met elkaar verbinden. Deze stap brengt belangrijke methodologische implicaties met zich mee: waar onderzoek naar digitale diaspora formaties vaak de nieuwe en unieke manieren benadrukt waarop digitale mediacommunicatie bijdraagt aan hoe mensen migratie ervaren, stelt dit proefschrift de sociale situering van digitale ruimtes voorop. In lijn hiermee maak ik gebruik van een "mixed methods" aanpak, waarbij ik etnografische methodes combineer met digitale analyse

om zo diaspora's te kunnen bestuderen binnen het online–offline continuüm. In navolging van deze theoretische en methodologische overwegingen, definieer ik digitale diaspora's als heterogene en dynamische gemeenschappen die worden gevormd door de intersectie van gender, klasse, ras en etnische differentiatie en die zijn ingebed in alledaagse sociale interacties, binnen door machtsverhoudingen gekleurde materiële als medium-specifieke digitale ruimtes.

Het empirische deel van het proefschrift is gebaseerd op een jaarlang veldwerk in de drie diasporagemeenschappen, waarin de relatie tussen digitale diaspora formatie en diasporische moederschapspraktijken verder werd onderzocht. In alle drie de gemeenschappen bracht de focus op moederschapspraktijken specifieke, gegenderde diasporische ruimtes aan het licht die niet of nauwelijks aan de orde zijn gekomen binnen eerder onderzoek naar digitale diaspora's.

In het geval van de Roemeense gemeenschap laat ik zien hoe kennismigranten die ook moeder zijn zich vooral bezighouden met diaspora formatie door zich in te spannen voor het onderhoud van familiebanden en de overdracht van de moedertaal. Ik benadruk in het bijzonder hoe sociale klasse en thuislandpolitiek van groot belang zijn voor hoe deze formatieprocessen zowel online als offline verlopen. In mijn onderzoek naar Turkse migrantenmoeders bespreek ik de wisselwerking tussen sociale klasse en religie in de verschillende wijzen waarop moeders deelnemen aan diaspora formatie. Ik betoog dat deze verdeeldheid zich vooral afspeelt op het terrein van de thuislandpolitiek, waarbinnen kwesties rondom privacy structuur geven aan hoe diasporagemeenschappen digitaal gemedieerd zijn. Tenslotte laat ik zien hoe Somalische moeders uit verschillende gemeenschappen samenkomen in diaspora formaties ondanks verschillen in klasse. Deze ontmoetingen worden sterk gekleurd doordat de gemeenschap een diasporische herinnering heeft aan de gespannen relatie met de Nederlandse kinderbescherming. Daarnaast stel ik dat binnen de Somalische context digitale media een onderschikte rol spelen in dit proces doordat het Nederlandse migratiebeleid bij bepaalde groepen migranten de voorkeur geeft aan fysieke, lokale en buurtgebonden ontmoetingen.

Ik toon aan hoe migrantenvrouwen, door online en offline ruimten te navigeren, zowel hun eigen diasporische subjectiviteit en het leven van hun kinderen vormgeven, alsook het welzijn van hun gezinnen en het onderhoud van hun gemeenschappen. De analyses geven ook aan hoe sociale klasse-dynamieken voorkomen binnen diasporagemeenschappen, waarbij nieuwe vormen van elitemigratie en de migratie van expats eerder onderzoek naar de gemeenschappen die worden besproken binnen dit proefschrift uitdagen. Dit onderzoek problematiseert bijvoorbeeld dominante aannames, zoals dat de Roemeense migratie grotendeels laaggeschoold is, dat de Turkse migratie met name moet worden begrepen in relatie tot gastarbeidersovereenkomsten en dat Somalische migratie op de eerste plaats gedwongen migratie is. Ten slotte is ook de significante rol die de desbetreffende nationale politiek speelt in diaspora formaties duidelijk in alle drie de gevallen. Dit aspect opent

deuren voor onderzoek naar de manier waarop natiestaten een sterke materiële greep blijven houden op het dagelijks leven van migranten.

In dit proefschrift belicht ik dus de verschillende wijzen waarop diaspora's digitaal worden gemedieerd. Het biedt een gesitueerd perspectief op de digitaal gemedieerde socialiteit van (migranten)mensen. Het claimt in het bijzonder dat het reproductieve werk van vrouwen en moeders centraal staat binnen het opbouwen van gemeenschappen, waarbij het concept diasporisch moederschap als zeer belangrijk wordt gezien om diaspora formaties te kunnen begrijpen.

Door deze gegenderde focus, gecombineerd met een benadering die niet mediacentrisch is, past dit proefschrift binnen een grotere, op de geesteswetenschappen gebaseerde, feministische en interdisciplinaire traditie die de sociale waarden en machtsdynamieken achter verschillende technologische vooruitgangen op een kritische wijze uiteenzet.

Introduction

> Motherhood occurs in specific historical situations
> framed by interlocking structures of race, class, and gender
> —Patricia Hill Collins

> [My daughter] was born and when my [daughter] was born that was the moment when…I went with her, I remember she was a baby, and I went with her to the park and I realized that I was not comforting her in Romanian. I was ashamed to talk in Romanian. And one day, I remember, I was breastfeeding in the park and I was talking to her, caressing her, and I thought: what is happening to me? Where is my self-esteem if I cannot stand up and talk in my own language with my child? And then something changed, and I thought, OK, now everything will change. So, in that moment something changed in me. Then I had my second child, afterwards that thing with "the borders are opening" started— "Romanians are coming, tsunami!"—[Geert] Wilders appeared. I didn't like the tone, I didn't like the fear and one evening, I got angry. (…). I got angry and one evening I drank a glass of wine and I made this website.

Elena was one of the first respondents I approached during the pilot study preceding my fieldwork. At that time, in my try to locate (and define) the Romanian diaspora, I was exploring different digital spaces, websites, Facebook and Instagram accounts curated by Romanian women living in the Netherlands. I got in touch with her after seeing the Facebook page dedicated to her website about Romania on my Facebook wall. As already hinted at in the vignette above, with the website, she wanted to counter-act the stereotypes and negative perceptions gaining ground in the Netherlands in various populist, right-wing political and media discourses. On the website, she shares with a Dutch audience images and stories about Romania and Romanian people that can complexify and improve the views Dutch people hold about them. Her narration about the making of the website in reaction to the more general unwelcoming atmosphere toward Romanians did not surprise me since, as a Romanian myself, I was already aware of it. What serendipitously did get my attention was how she connected her revolt against it, and the subsequent making of the website, with her everyday mothering negotiations. She brought together her worries about mothering in a foreign country and the role of digital mediation in migrant people's lives and put it in the context of a political discourse adverse to those sharing her ethnic background. I often went back to Elena's words in the process of

writing this dissertation. In moments when the different nodal points of the research got farther apart, the ties connecting the nodes became visible again through her story. This specific course of events described by Elena illustrates how motherhood practices are highly relevant to processes of diasporic cultural transmission and community maintenance (Gedalof 2009; Tsolidis 2001) by means of using digital media (Veazey 2016; Madianou and Miller 2013). It furthermore highlights not only the historical situatedness and intersectional nature of motherhood (Collins 2007, 311), but also the materiality of the digital context—"if you want to get to the Internet, don't start from there" (Miller and Slater 2000, 5)—both of which, I argue in this dissertation, play an important role in the dynamic formation of digital diasporas.

This research investigates the formation of digital diasporas. It focuses specifically on the role of mothering experiences in diaspora making by looking at three diasporic communities in the Netherlands—Romanian, Somali, and Turkish—and their uses of digital media, both within their respective diasporic communities and in the country of residence.[1]

The dissertation aims, firstly, to offer critical definitional parameters for the understanding of digital diaspora by highlighting its processual character, heterogenous nature (diaspora as gendered, classed, racialized, etc.), and embedment in everyday social interactions, in material and digital spaces. Secondly, it aims to center the experiences of mothering in the exploration of how diasporas are digitally mediated through three case studies. This investigation emphasizes thus the urgent need to look at how mothering, media, and migration are interconnected in how diasporas are digitally mediated. This not only has implications for research on how diasporas are gendered, but also for the understanding of how migrant women in particular, and migrant people in general, are connected through digital media.

The concept of diaspora has been long used for the understanding of transnational connectedness, cultural syncretism, and hybrid identities. Khachig Tölölyan (Tölölyan 1996, 5) calls diasporas "the exemplary communities of the transnational moment," and Zygmunt Bauman has remarked how, nowadays, "every society is just a collection of diasporas" as "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."[2] This statement echoes Stuart Hall's famous words in *The Stuart Hall Project*: "When I ask

[1] This study has been carried out in the period 2016–2020, in the context of the CONNECTINGEUROPE "Digital Crossings in Europe: Gender, Diaspora and Belonging" project, which aimed to investigate the relation between migration and digital technologies. The project is funded by ERC (European Research Council) consolidator grant, 647737. The three communities were chosen in the framework of the larger project that this dissertation is part of. The argument is that by looking at female migrants with Somali, Turkish and Romanian backgrounds, living in Europe's main metropolitan centres (London, Amsterdam, Rome), it is possible to address different patterns of migration and integration in Europe (colonial, labour, postsocialist) that account for Europe's imperial past, as well as post-war patterns of migration and processes of European integration, often played out around urban centres. See http://connectingeuropeproject.eu/

[2] https://elpais.com/elpais/2016/01/19/inenglish/1453208692_424660.html Accessed March 1, 2021.

people where they're from, I expect to be told an extremely long story" (Akomfrah 2013). Indeed, we live in a world strongly shaped by past and present, forced or voluntary transnational mobility, in which ethnically and racially heterogeneous communities are oftentimes formed in discordance with nationalistic and/or Eurocentric visions that question migrant people's multiple belonging.

The rise of digital communication technologies occupies a central role in both facilitating people's transnational lives and enhancing the visibility of transnationalism in people's everyday lives. Digital technologies contribute highly to processes of mobility in general and migration in particular, leading many to argue for distinct ways in which people live their migratory experiences in a digitalized world. In the age of high digital connectivity, social media platforms, and smartphone culture, transnational migrants seem to rely especially on digital media. Not only to keep in touch with family and friends from abroad but also, for example, to make informed decisions and solidarize when it comes to choosing and managing their migration paths: the smartphone is now the twenty-first century "migrant's essential" together with food and shelter,[3] announces the *New York Times*, while the *Economist* notes the indispensability of the smartphone for people seeking refuge in Europe.[4]

The computational turn (D. Berry 2011) has thus triggered much scholarly interest in how migrants have adopted, used, and domesticated these media tools and how diasporic formations are digitally mediated. The important role of the internet and communication technologies in migration processes and in shaping diasporic identities has been pointed out by various authors (Appadurai 1996; Brinkerhoff 2009; Alonso and Oiarzabal 2010), with Jennifer Brinkerhoff (2009, 12) noticing, for example, how diasporas have always been "on the cutting edge of technology adoptions." The use of the internet would then help migrants connect with family and friends, and with each other within the diaspora community or across different diasporas. Besides this connection potential, online spaces are now also seen as part of the social *loci* where migrant people define, negotiate, and perform their identities in reaction to an everyday life marked by pressures of assimilation, invisibility, and oftentimes discrimination (Nakamura and Chow-White 2011; Nakamura 2002; Everett 2009; Noble and Brendesha 2016). Even more so, migrant people's increased use of social media and other communication platforms led some scholars from media and communication studies to call for an epistemological shift in the study of migration: migrant people's supposed position of displacement has now become one of permanent connectedness. The figure of the twenty-first-century migrant is

[3] https://www.nytimes.com/2015/08/26/world/europe/a-21st-century-migrants-checklist-water-shelter-smartphone.html Accessed March 1, 2021.
[4] https://www.economist.com/international/2017/02/11/phones-are-now-indispensable-for-refugees Accessed March 1, 2021.

that of the "connected migrant," as argued by Dana Diminescu in her epistemological manifesto from 2008. If previous scholarship on migration privileged movement and, implicitly, the ruptures it triggered, Diminescu (2008, 567) argues for a new culture of bonds, mobility, and surveillance that favors continuities to ruptures since the former uprooted migrant is, by now, in a state of constant connectedness. As such, Diminescu calls for innovative methodological approaches and tools of investigation that can capture the specificity of digitally mediated connectivity. Scholars coming from anthropology or privileging an ethnographic perspective, while recognizing the unique ways in which the digital shapes social lives, are wary of the exceptional character of digital mediation and emphasize how media technologies—such as the telephone, the satellite dish, audio cassettes, and, more recently, the smartphone—have always facilitated and shaped migrants' communication with their homelands, families, and friends. While it is understandable to assert that the computational turn impacts many aspects of people's lives, these perspectives highlight the importance of resisting tendencies of technological determinism and a simplified vision of a stable historical past (Wimmer and Glick Schiller 2003, 596) in which, presumably, issues of dynamism, connectedness, and change did not (strongly) manifest. As such, authors from the field of digital anthropology emphasize the importance of exploring the diverse and oftentimes contradictory ways in which social lives are digitally mediated rather than the "newness" itself and the presumed radical transformation of societies by the digital (Miller and Horst 2012; Miller 2018). In such an approach, the salience of the cultural context and the everyday practices and experiences underlines the relevance of ethnographic research. Both directions—the rather computational one and the rather anthropological one—have been explored in studies of the relation between media and migration in the last years, which has provided many valuable theoretical and methodological insights. This dissertation draws from both perspectives as it methodologically explores the specificities of the digital at the same time that it acknowledges sociality's inherent material embedding. By choosing to engage with the digital in a non-media-centric (Morley 2009) and non-digital-centric way (Pink et al. 2016), this investigation of digitally mediated diaspora formations thus foregrounds the social situatedness of digital spaces and their mutual co-constitution.

In addition, by building on work from feminist and postcolonial studies, this research emphasizes the multiple locations from which migrant identities are constructed. Migrants are not one singular category and diasporas are heterogenous communities structured around multiple axes of difference such as race, class, and gender, among others. As such, how people create bonds—be it via letters, cassettes, telephone, or digital media—in conditions of mobility—forced or voluntary—and what meaning they ascribe to those bonds depends on factors such as those mentioned above.

Focusing on homogenizing categories,[5] such as migrants, refugees, and diasporas, can indeed neglect groups' "super-diversity" (Vertovec 2007) and gendered patterns of structuration. Feminist interventions in diaspora studies and feminist scholarship on migration have, however, long shown the particular ways in which women enter and live experiences of migration. Diaspora scholars, on the one hand, such as Floya Anthias and Nira Yuval-Davis (1989), Anne McClintock (1997), Avtar Brah (1996), and Fatima El-Tayeb (2011), show the various ways in which women shape diasporic processes, and account for diasporic communities' syncretism and inner power dynamics. Some readings of women's roles in diaspora making tend to put emphasis on their participation in the reproduction of the nation and the development of nationalist ideals, with the risk of glossing over women's agency and the dynamism of creating structures of belonging. For this reason, understanding migrant women's roles in the reproduction of their families and their communities can also highlight their agential efforts in making home through everyday negotiations. Migration studies scholars, on the other hand, have explored how the phenomenon of migration has been shaped by the increased number of women entering transnational mobility processes. This "feminization of migration" (Yinger 2006; Lutz 1997) refers, however, not only to the pure quantitative dimension of women's presence in migratory processes but also to the ways in which gendered power dynamics (alongside class, race, and ethnic differences) are reinforced in migration processes (Hondagneu-Sotelo 1999). This leads thus to *sui generis* social phenomena such as the "international division of reproductive labor" (Parreñas 2000, 2009, 2012), "global care chains" (Hochschild 2000), "mothering from distance," or "transnational motherhood" and "transnational families" (Parreñas 2001, 2005; Hondagneu-Sotelo and Avila 1997; Madianou and Miller 2013). This scholarship identifies and describes migrant women's specific roles in covering care deficits from western neoliberal economies while shedding light on the distinct transnational family connections that are oftentimes maintained through social media. Some of this research focuses especially on experiences of motherhood in processes of transnational mediated connectivity. Nevertheless, mothering in the diaspora remains understudied (Gedalof 2009) and, even more so, analyses of digitally mediated diasporic formations hardly include gendered perspectives, particularly those of mothers. For this research, however, diasporic mothering practices in their everyday manifestations across the online–offline continuum are seen as a paradigmatic social phenomenon in migration processes.

[5] Heaven Crawley and Dimitris Skleparis (2018), for instance, drawing on Raia Apostolova's (2015) discussion of "categorical fetishism," show how categories emerging from the migration crisis that distinguish between migrants and refugees run the risk of oversimplifying the experiences of the people they aim to signify (51). By pointing out the political dimensions of categorizing, the authors call for more attention to be given to the ways in which categories are constructed precisely, the purpose they serve, and their consequences (60–61).

Another important aspect of the research aims refers to the intersectional character of the analysis. Intersectionality, as coined by Kimberlee Crenshaw (1989, 1991), refers to the necessary understanding and analysis of experiences of oppression by considering the interlocking of power structures—racism, sexism, classism, etc.—rather than analyzing them in isolation. Intersectionality has been addressed and used by feminist scholars from a variety of disciplines and occupies an important role in feminist scholarship in general. For this reason, intersectionality has come to be understood and used in different ways: as a theoretical framework, a methodological approach, an analytic tool, a heuristic device, a reading strategy (see Davis 2008). In this research, I choose to engage with intersectionality as an "analytic disposition" that involves "critical attention toward the workings of power" and "a focus on the co-construction and mutual imbrication of different forms of power relations" (Smiet 2021, 8). In this sense, intersectionality guides this research to both recognize the differentiated material embedding of the social and the prevalent condition of one's susceptibility to power dynamics. In the context of this thesis, it means that particular attention will be given to the ways in which different markers of difference work together to make and unmake diasporas in a digital context.

Finally, this thesis considers how migrant mothering implies not only reproductive and care work, but also work of diasporic community building via everyday practices of cultural reproduction (Gedalof 2009), and how digital media and mothering practices are intimately interlocked (Arnold and Martin 2016). Building on this, I argue that mothering represents an important gendered site for investigating how digital diasporas form. In this dissertation I thus center experiences of diasporic mothering and propose diasporic mothering as a site where difference and belonging are negotiated through the labor of cultural reproduction, collective identity construction, and stable homemaking, ultimately leading to particular gendered diasporic formations. To this end, I take an interdisciplinary and intersectional approach in understanding how diasporic formations come into (digitally) mediated being by emphasizing the centrality of the reproductive sphere and reproductive labor for the maintenance and reproduction of generations and communities, as well as the multi-faceted ways in which people are connected through digital media.

The leading research questions of this thesis are the following: How do first-generation migrant mothers of Somali, Romanian, and Turkish descent living in the Netherlands use digital media to both keep in touch with family and friends from abroad and form local diasporic groups? What media platforms are chosen and what kind of digital spaces are created for diaspora formation? Moreover, what are the needs and contexts that trigger diasporic coming together? And, in which ways do various categories of differences—for example, race, ethnicity, gender, class—shape these practices?

These questions will be unpacked in the next chapters of this dissertation as follows: Chapters 1 and 2 address the theoretical and methodological frameworks of the thesis, and the following three chapters represent the three case studies through which, in a heuristic way, I look at processes of digitally mediated diaspora formation.

In Chapter 1, “Mothering in the Digital Diaspora: Feminist Interdisciplinary Theorizing on Digitally Mediated Diasporic Formations,” I introduce the main bodies of literature upon which the theoretical framework of this thesis is built. Here, I make two important claims. First, I argue for the need today to investigate digitally mediated diasporic formations starting from the experiences of mothering. This can offer new insights on how everyday practices of belonging are gendered. Secondly, I advocate for a non-media-centric research of digital diasporas that is grounded in everyday social processes in the online–offline continuum. In making these claims, I center postcolonial and feminist theorizations that emphasize diasporas’ heterogeneity and gendered embedding. Lastly, I discuss the interdisciplinary character of this research in relation to its embedding in the field of gender studies.

Chapter 2, “Epistemological Groundings, Methodological Choices, and Reflections,” addresses the methodological approach of the dissertation. Here, I first discuss the relevance of feminist standpoint theories in relation to more recent data-driven approaches to the study of the digital. This discussion sets the epistemological basis of the research. Next, I provide an account of how I approached and conducted the fieldwork. Here, I emphasize the importance of studying digital media in everyday contexts. By making use of digital anthropology and digital ethnography principles, I argue for the use of a mixed methods approach that combines ethnographic methods with digital ones in the study of digital diasporas. Ethical concerns and a description of the research design and methods can also be found in this chapter.

Chapter 3, “Diasporic Mothering as Cultural Reproductive Work: Gendered and Classed Dynamics,” addresses processes of diaspora formation and digital mediation in the Romanian community in the Netherlands. Here, I focus particularly on mothers belonging to the highly skilled Romanian community and argue that, from the vantage point of diasporic mothering, digital diaspora formation is strongly shaped by gendered cultural reproductive efforts toward the maintenance of family ties and heritage language transmission. I additionally show how both gendered and classed intercommunity dynamics contribute to this process, and explore how this dynamic takes place both in offline and online spaces. Lastly, by using digital methods alongside ethnographic methods, I illustrate how Facebook affords a “connectivity potential”—a “social (media) capital”—that can bridge (offline) classed divisions in the Romanian diaspora.

Chapter 4, “Beyond the Guest Worker. Class, Ethnicity, and Mothering in the Turkish Diaspora,” is about the Turkish community in the Netherlands. Here, I investigate two groups of Turkish women and their mothering experiences in the larger context of digital diaspora formation. The first group belongs to the Turkish community in the Netherlands that was born following the recruitment of Turkish guest workers in the 1960s. The second group of women belongs to a more recent community of highly skilled Turkish migrants. In this chapter, I first show the different identity positions from which the two groups form their digitally mediated diasporic spaces. Moreover, I argue that these diaspora formations are gendered and classed as well, and I show how the divisions between the two groups are enacted in relation to homeland politics. Lastly, I discuss the different diasporic social media uses of Turkish mothers through the lens of privacy.

Chapter 5, “Diasporic Memory and the Formation of Local Support Groups for Somali Mothers,” addresses the formation of the Somali digital diaspora in Amsterdam and its surroundings. In this last case study, I focus on the activities of an organization led by Somali women that aims to support newcomers in adapting to their new lives in the Netherlands. Here, I also address the relation between two groups of Somali women who came to the Netherlands at different moments in time and aim to show how their mothering experiences contributed to their diasporic coming together. I argue that collective memories of past experiences of the tense relations between the Somali community and the Dutch child protection services have directed Somali diaspora formations around the topic of parenthood and motherhood. In addition, I look at how digital media are used to both keep in touch with family and loved ones from Somalia and elsewhere, and to create and maintain diasporic ties in the Netherlands. Lastly, I argue that, due to the specific Dutch context and its institutional setting, digital media has a less significant role in diaspora formation. As such, diasporic formations in the Somali community, from the vantage point of mothers, are more likely to take place at a local and neighborhood level via different organizations and institutions, such as community centers and NGOs.

Finally, in the conclusions, I address the main findings of this dissertation. I highlight the theoretical, methodological, and epistemological implications of this research on the study of digital media, diaspora formation, and mothering by drawing on the three case studies.

Chapter 1

Mothering in the digital diaspora: Feminist interdisciplinary theorizing on diaspora formation

> Theory—the seeing of patterns, showing the forest as well as the trees—theory can be a dew that rises from the earth and collects in the rain cloud and returns to earth over and over. But if it doesn't smell of the earth, it isn't good for the earth.
>
> —Adrienne Rich

1.1 Introduction

This thesis investigates how diasporas are digitally mediated from the vantage point of migrant mothers. It focuses on women belonging to three diasporic communities—Romanian, Somali, and Turkish—in their everyday mothering practices and diasporic uses of digital media. In this dissertation, I specifically look at how first-generation migrant mothers living in the Netherlands maintain connections with family members and loved ones from abroad while, at the same time, creating diasporic spaces of belonging in the Netherlands. The aim of the dissertation is to reveal how mothers from the three diasporic communities strategically choose and use certain digital and social media platforms in order to strengthen their diasporic connections both locally and transnationally. Of particular relevance here is how the role and practices of mothering shape these decisions.

In the following pages, I will outline the main theoretical interventions on which I built my own research. Three main concepts are central to the dissertation and structure this theoretical chapter: mothering, digital diaspora, and interdisciplinarity. In the first section of the chapter, I refer to research on the topic of motherhood and mothering. Here, I introduce the distinction between motherhood and mothering and argue for the use of the latter for the purposes of this dissertation. I then address how the topic of motherhood and mothering has been researched in feminist studies, migration studies, and media studies. An argument will be made for a timely investigation of the intricacies between mothering, media, and migration for the understanding of digitally mediated and gendered diaspora. In the next section, I proceed to address the concept of diaspora from a genealogical perspective. This step is especially relevant in order to argue for the grounding of digital diaspora in everyday social processes and for a non-media-centric investigation of its formation. More attention will be given to postcolonial and feminist theorizations that emphasize diaspora's

heterogeneity and gendered embedding. Additionally, I will refer to the new forms the concept has taken with the development of the internet in general and the appearance of new digital technologies in particular. Here, I will argue for a reconceptualization of digitally mediated diasporic formations that builds upon postcolonial and feminist scholarship on diaspora while recognizing the challenges and specificities of their digitally mediated manifestations. The theoretical and analytical framework thus draws from various disciplines: diaspora studies, postcolonial studies, media studies, and gender studies. For these reasons, I, in the last section of this chapter, will make the case for an explicit feminist interdisciplinary approach in researching a multilayered social phenomenon such as mothering in the digital diaspora.

1.2 Mothering and diasporic formations

The topic of motherhood and mothering became central to the thesis in a rather serendipitous way. In its initial stages, the focus of the research was defined in more general terms. As such, the research was to investigate migrant women belonging to the three migrant communities under study in this dissertation: Romanian, Turkish, and Somali. Early in the pilot stage, however, the theme of motherhood and the issue of mothering practices in the diaspora emerged regularly during the conversations I had with my respondents. This is when I decided to further pursue the topic of motherhood. The theoretical understanding of motherhood and mothering was therefore explored and integrated within the theoretical discussion of women's role in digitally mediated diasporic formations.

In the past decades, the topic of motherhood has been addressed by scholars from a diverse range of disciplines. Even more so, as Andrea O'Reilly (2007, 1) remarks in the "Introduction" to the edited book *Maternal Theory. Essential Readings*, motherhood-related research has developed into an established field of academic research. As such, a wide range of topics and social phenomena are explored under the umbrella of motherhood studies, with a similarly diverse range of theoretical approaches being deployed for their understanding. Research on motherhood has thus long surpassed its earlier essentialist and heteronormative understandings and has explored so far its connections with, *inter alia*, gender and sexuality (e.g., the study of lesbian mothering, queer parenting, trans mothers); with migration (e.g., the study of migrant mothering, aboriginal mothering); heteronormativity (e.g., the study of single mothers); and biology (e.g., surrogacy, adoptive mothers).[6] In O'Reilly's (2007) comprehensive volume, the fifty chapters included theorize

[6] See the past issues of the *Journal of the Motherhood Initiative for Research and Community Involvement* (JMI), which have addressed a wide array of issues around motherhood since 1999. https://jarm.journals.yorku.ca/index.php/jarm/issue/archive Accessed May 8, 2020.

motherhood from three different perspectives: motherhood as experience/role, motherhood as institution/ideology, and motherhood as identity/subjectivity. In this dissertation, I engage with the topic of motherhood as a lived experience. I therefore do not engage—at least not directly—with the discussions around its ideological and normative formations, nor with the complex debates around identity and subject formation. Nonetheless, it is important to mention that this research works with an encompassing understanding of the experience of mothering that acknowledges its diversity and questions universalizing perspectives. For this reason, I mostly choose to work with the term "mothering," thereby referring to its praxeological dimension.

The conceptual difference between "mothering" and "motherhood" stems from Adrienne Rich's ([1989] 1995) foundational work *Of Woman Born: Motherhood as Experience and Institution.* There, she makes the distinction between the two entangled meanings of motherhood: "the *potential relationship* of any woman to her powers of reproduction and to children; and the *institution*, which aims at ensuring that the potential—and all women—shall remain under male control" (13, emphasis in original). As such, whereas the concept of "motherhood" connotes a patriarchal institution inherently oppressive to women, "mothering" encompasses the variety of women's experiences related to motherhood, shaped by oppressive societal expectations and norms, while nevertheless holding an empowering potential (O'Reilly 2004, 2; F. J. Green 2010, 839). Indeed, the complex and transgressive potential of mothering experiences in the context of oppressive motherhood norms is by now a canonized approach to how the topic of motherhood is theorized and scholarly understood. Yet, while I take this to be implicit in how I relate to mothering experiences, I focus more particularly on experiences and practices of mothering in conditions of migrancy, the attention thus being on the particular relation between "being a mother" and "being a migrant." For this specific approach, an important dimension of motherhood research that needs to be highlighted refers to the essentialist pitfalls of studying motherhood and mothering. In order to counteract such tendencies, it is important to recognize and theorize the different forms both the institution of motherhood and mothering experiences take across historical times, geographical spaces, and cultural milieus in relation to various markers of difference such as, *inter alia*, class, race, and sexuality. African American feminist Patricia Hill Collins (2007) has theorized how racial domination and economic exploitation influence the mothering conditions of non-white American women. Hill Collins shows how "motherhood occurs in specific historical situations framed by interlocking structures of race, class, and gender" (2007, 311). She discusses, for instance, how the specific mothering experiences of African American women, and black women from the Caribbean or African countries in general, were centered not only around child-rearing aims but also the survival of the communities themselves. In the context of oppressive social hierarchies, particular social arrangements around mothering practices were set in

place by women. An example of such an arrangement refers to “othermothers”: women who care for children from the community who are not biologically their own, thus engaging in a practice of mothering for the community (Collins 2000, 178–83).

The gendered dimension of community maintenance and cultural reproduction has been similarly discussed both in diaspora studies and migration studies. Furthermore, the role of motherhood practices has proven to be central to processes of diasporic cultural transmission and community maintenance (Tsolidis 2001, 206–7). As such, mothering while migrant implies oftentimes not only raising children and doing care work but also doing work of heritage transmission, identity formation, and diasporic community building. In this sense, authors show how “cross-cultural” mothering involves complex processes of renegotiation and reevaluation of identities and practices in the context of cultural displacement (Yax-Fraser 2011; Holmes and Mangione 2011; Tummala-Narra 2004), with mothers often being the ones who make the choices and the efforts toward the diasporic transmission of their own cultures and mediate the acquisition of cultural elements of their host countries. In some cases, the lack of family support or lack of familiarity with the new countries of residence can have strong negative effects on migrant women’s lives. Those mothers, situated at the marginalized end of societies, might, for example, run a higher risk of experiencing depressive and other distressing emotional and mental conditions (Ornelas et al. 2009; Barclay and Kent 1998). In this context, differences within and between communities play an important role in how gendered processes of cultural transmission take place in the diaspora. For example, Namita N. Manohar (2013), in her study on Tamil upper caste Indian mothers living in the United States of America, shows how mothering practices are not only culturally determined but also shaped by the community’s social location. With the Indian community in the United States both being racialized and made into a “model minority” at the same time, women, in order to present their families as both ethnic and upwardly mobile, mother both “for ethnicity” and cultural reproduction and “for class.” The particular form this respective diasporic community takes is, of course, only one of the possible ways in which mothers in the diaspora shape the diasporic communities they are a part of.

One author who emphasizes the need to further research women’s and mothers’ role in diaspora-making processes is Irene Gedalof. In her article “Birth, Belonging and Migrant Mothers: Narratives of Reproduction in Feminist Migration Studies” (2009), Gedalof points out how, on the one hand, migration studies scholarship on the issue of motherhood—by privileging the transnational approach and thus addressing issues related to change, distance, and dynamism—ends up undertheorizing the “reproductive sphere.” Feminist writings on reproduction, on the other hand, focus more on subjectivity rather than collective social identity processes triggered by migration and

diaspora. Drawing from her work on Sierra Leonean mothers living in London, the author argues in favor of bringing together feminist scholarship on embodied reproductive labor and feminist migration studies in research on women's role in migration processes. By making use of the concept of the reproductive sphere, she looks at the experience of "mothering at close quarters," that is, in diasporas, as both an embodied labor—through childbirth and childcare—but also as the labor of passing on culturally specific histories and traditions (82–89). Gedalof therefore links gendered reproductive labor activities with the reproduction and maintenance of migrant communities and families for a better understanding of women's role in diaspora spaces.

In a similar yet different move, Eleonore Kofman and Parvati Raghuram (2015) point out how, for example, research on migrants and global care work has focused especially on the migrant as the provider of care for others, overlooking in this process the reproductive labor ensued in reproducing themselves and their own communities (56–57). Furthermore, the authors draw attention to how, even though both "reproductive labor" and "care" have been used in the literature rather interchangeably, care is just one of the many elements needed in the maintenance of individuals, families, and (migrant) communities.

These two arguments suggest new locations from which to engage with research on women's participation in migration processes and especially that on migrant mothers' reproductive labor—not only from the domestic space but also from the diasporic communities themselves. As such, focusing on mothering practices and experiences in the understanding of diaspora formations brings about the myriad ways in which gender is constitutive of migrant communities, and recenters motherhood practices and reproductive labor in today's digitally mediated migration context.

Literature addressing the role of digital media in the lives of migrant mothers and their building of diasporic spaces of belonging is, however, rather scarce. With a few notable exceptions (see Arnold and Martin 2016; and see Veazey 2016, 2018 in particular for the discussion on digital diaspora), scholarship addressing the intricacies between internet media (researched as ICT, new media, or digital media) and motherhood focuses mostly on non-migrant women who tend to be located in the Western part of the world. As such, some authors refer to the importance of new social media platforms, or digital media in general, in supporting mothers in their transition to motherhood (Madge and O'Connor 2006; Stamm, Yu, and Kennedy 2016) by means of online communities, websites, videos, message boards, etc. The study of Madge and O'Conner, however, show the double-edged consequences of the online socializing of mothers: online environments can both liberate and put constraints on mothers and power dynamics can still be reproduced in online spaces. However, regardless of the dynamicity of these spaces, women do increasingly turn to online communities for information seeking and support and to overcome social isolation in their transition to motherhood.

Other authors focus on the role of digital technologies in reproducing and intensifying ideological differences in parenting choices (Valtchanov, Parry, and Glover 2016) and, more specifically, the discussions on mommy wars and mommy blogging (Abetz and Moore 2018), on intensive mothering (Arnold 2016; Ennis 2014), or feminist mothering (Craig 2016; Loe, Cumpstone, and Miller 2016), among others.

An important contribution to the topic of migrant mothers and digital media has, however, been made by literature from media and migration studies. Building on feminist migration studies literature addressing the "feminization of migration"[7] (Yinger 2006; Lutz 1997), different scholars show how media and (transnational) mothering practices interlock. A rich literature on the case of migrant Filipino domestic workers and their transnational mothering practices has, for example, developed over the past decades (Madianou and Miller 2013; Parreñas 2000; 2001; McKay 2012a; Cabanes and Acedera 2012). The work of Mirca Madianou and Daniel Miller (2013) is of particular relevance for this research as it engages with the understanding of how mothering and (digital media) shape each other in the context of migration. In their work, transnational connectivity is seen as not only shaped by social media platforms and their affordances but also by how people react to and interact with them in practice. Drawing on her previous work with Daniel Miller (2013) on mediated transnational communication, namely the concept of "polymedia," Mirca Madianou (2016) uses the case of Filipino women living in the United Kingdom to show how, in their role as mothers, they use social media to stay connected with children and other members of the family. She develops the concept of "ambient co-presence" to describe "the peripheral, yet intense, awareness of distant others made possible through the ubiquity and affordances of polymedia environments" (2016, 198). This research thus shows how mothers domesticate and shape media use in their specific experiences of transnational mothering while digital media simultaneously play a role in the form mothering practices take in the context of migration and "mother-away" (Cabanes and Acedera 2012) conditions.

As diasporas are strongly shaped by gender dynamics—within families, politics, activism, and the communities themselves—locating and understanding women's participation in diasporic community making remains highly important. This dissertation thus contributes to the making of a more diverse and intersectional picture of contemporary digitally mediated diasporas by recognizing women's and mothers' reproductive work in both child-rearing practices and community-building

[7] Feminization of migration is understood in migration studies as both the numerical increase of women in migration processes and the gendered dynamics that followed and are ingrained in migration processes. The study of the feminization of migration led scholars to identify specific gendered social phenomena such as the "international division of reproductive labor" (Parreñas 2000; 2009; 2012), "global care chains" (Hochschild 2000), "mothering from distance," "transnational motherhood," and "transnational families" (Parreñas 2001; 2005; Hondagneu-Sotelo and Avila 1997; Madianou and Miller 2013).

ones. In the context of digital media and its ubiquitous role in migrant people's social lives, understanding the workings of digital diasporas from the specific location of mothering experiences will not only explain and reveal new aspects regarding migrant women's lives in general and migrant mothers' lives in particular; this research trajectory represents a step further in shaping and conceptualizing the complex matrix of a digitally mediated diasporic coming together.

1.3 Conceptualizing diaspora formations. Diaspora—a traveling term.

1.3.1 From ethnic essentialism to diasporic condition

Past and present forced and voluntary global mobility has led to a multiplicity of transnational connections and a diversity of migrant communities. Whether labor migrants, expats, refugees, higher or lower skilled, first or later generation, study or family migrants, they all try and have tried to build lives in host countries while maintaining ties with their families and friends from their so-called homelands. The increased political and media interests in social phenomena related to migrants' experiences in their "host" countries and their affiliations to the "sending" countries are also mirrored in a proliferation of academic research on migration in general and diasporas in particular. In her article "Global Journeys: From Transnationalism to Diaspora," Nadja C. Johnson (2012) noticed a renewed interest in diaspora studies, with the term not only being used in academia but also gaining more centrality in political, governmental, and economic debates. Nevertheless, Johnson also remarks how, in spite of this proliferation, the question regarding the actual definition of a diaspora has been left unanswered (2012, 42). A few years before her, Robert Cohen (2008, xv), in the preface of the second edition of *Global Diasporas*, remarked on the last decade's "astonishing" increase of the study of diasporas in the social sciences and the humanities as well. It is true that, while the recent surge in the study of diasporas concerns itself more with the relationship between diasporas and the use of digital technologies, the debate over what a diaspora is, its diversity, and its significance has been going on for the past few decades (Hall 1990; Gilroy 2008a; Appadurai 1996; Clifford 1994; Schnapper, Costa-Lascoux, and Hily 2001; Brubaker 2005; Safran 1991; Tölölyan 1996; Evans Braziel and Mannur 2008). Evans Braziel and Mannur (2008, 3) talk, for instance, about the explosion of the term in literature, sociology, anthropology, film studies, queer theory, area studies, and ethnic studies, though cautioning against an uncritical and unreflective use of it.

Diaspora is a "traveling" concept that has evolved through time, from the classical use of the term, referring mostly to exiled communities, to the social constructionist approach from the 1980s onwards, in which the use of the concept expanded to include different types of migratory groups—

expatriates, refugees, minorities, etc.—and the more recent interest in the ways in which it can still account for new transnational identity formations without losing its denotative core. The classical use of the term referred mainly to the prototypical case of the Jewish diaspora, to which Greek, Armenian, African, and Irish communities were added later. This way of looking at diasporas favored more strict definitional boundaries, supporting an etic perspective rather than an emic one. The particularity of these paradigmatic cases was given by two main characteristics: their traumatic dispersal from an initial homeland and the prominence of the homeland in their collective memory (Cohen 2008, 4), which saturated the definition of a diaspora with the image of the pain that comes with forced exile (Tölölyan 1996, 11–12). In this approach, diaspora was defined through different and fixed characteristics: a coerced dispersion outside the homeland, a fixed predispersion group identity, the active presence of a collective memory, boundary maintenance, the communication and connectedness between different dispersed diasporic groups, and a persistent contact with the homeland (Tölölyan 1996, 12–14).

1.3.2 Postcolonial approaches to diaspora

In a later phase, from 1980s onwards, the use of the concept expanded[8] and the study of diaspora shifted toward a more "metaphoric designation" that included various groups of migrants: "expatriates, expellees, political refugees, alien residents, immigrants, and ethnic and racial minorities *tout court*" (Safran 1991, 83). Postcolonial geopolitical transformations triggering mass migration movements and the postsocialist reconfiguration of nation-states from the Soviet bloc, made it necessary to consider new historical and cultural specificities in the study of diasporas. These changes mark the move toward "a nomadic turn in which the very parameters of specific historical moments are embodied and . . . are scattered and regrouped in new points of becoming" (Evans Braziel and Mannur 2008, 3). Tölölyan (1996, 16) argues that, in this more accommodating definition, the focus is on discursive and representational practices and the emic claims of the individuals or communities. From this period onward, diaspora became a fertile terrain for social constructionist approaches. Cultural studies and postcolonial scholars started to rethink identity formation processes and to open up new spaces of conceptualizing diasporic subjectivities. Evans Braziel and Mannur (2008), in the anthology *Theorizing Diasporas*, accurately describe the main intervention of this body of literature as an approach that seeks to do justice to "the lived experiences (in all their ambivalences,

[8] For Tölölyan (1996, 12–14), the year of 1968 already marked a symbolic separation between a "pre-1968," more strictly Jewish-centered academic approach to the definition of diaspora and the "post-1968" expansion triggered by various socio-economic global transformations that set in place new diasporic phenomena.

contradictions, migrations, and multiple traversals) of people whose lives have unfolded in myriad diasporic communities across the globe" (4–5) by using diaspora as a contesting tool for the disruption of binaries—hostland/homeland, colonizer/colonized, West/East, etc.

Two main interventions are notable for their contributions to the shift toward accommodating the complexity of the migration phenomenon from a postcolonial perspective: Paul Gilroy's ([1993] 2008a) "The Black Atlantic as a Counterculture of Modernity" and Stuart Hall's (1990) "Cultural Identity and Diaspora." Both authors bring into discussion a new way of looking at diasporic subjectivities through the lens of syncretism. Here, diasporic identities are tied together not only through the ethnic selfsameness but also through a shared experience of oppression and struggle, which, in turn, does not deny the existence of intragroup differences and power dynamics. This perspective overcomes the nation-state centrality mentioned earlier and is more attuned to lived social experiences marked by present and past forms of transnational mobility.

Paul Gilroy ([1993] 2008b) applies a cultural studies approach to the cultural construction of African intellectual history. He introduces the concept of the "Black Atlantic" as a way to reconfigure new diasporic communities, of which the people who suffered from the transatlantic slave trade are emblematic. He is skeptical toward the previous analysis of African diaspora, which was based on the idea of a common heritage and racial descent, and proposes an alternative model that privileges hybridity and is able to account for the tensions that arise when one occupies a position of "double consciousness."[9] He proposes a "difficult" choice to the idea of cultural nationalism, which represents ethnic differences as "an absolute break in the histories and experiences of 'black' and 'white' people": that is, to theorize "creolization, *métissage, mestisaje*, and hybridity" (51). His suggestion of the "Black Atlantic" as a hybrid analytical concept has the aim to produce, beyond the constraints of the nation-state or that of national particularity, "an explicitly transnational and intercultural perspective" (62). Moreover, the history of the Black Atlantic entangled with the embodied movements of black people—as commodities but also as caught up in struggles toward emancipation and liberation—represents a tradition supported by "counter-cultures of modernity" (63) marked not only by common "roots" but also common "routes."

In his article, Stuart Hall (1990) tackles the issue of (diasporic) cultural identity with reference to the emerging black diasporic subjectivities in Caribbean cinema. His argumentative ground is set in the abnegation of identity as an already accomplished fact by bringing in the postmodernist idea of identity as an incomplete production of representation processes. To begin with, he identifies two

[9] The term coined by W.E.B. Du Bois (*The Souls of Black Folk* [1961] 1996) depicts the conflict experienced by subaltern groups in societies with a specific reference to the African American community. Respectively, the concept describes the action of one seeing oneself via the dominant, racist white society while trying to reconcile one's African heritage with an upbringing in a European society.

ways of defining cultural identity. The first definition is an essentialist one, focused on commonalities—a shared culture, historical experiences, and cultural codes. In this perspective, it is sameness that matters for the construction of a coherent representation of dispersal and fragmentation: "this 'oneness' . . . is the truth, the essence, of 'Caribbeanness,' of the black experience. It is this identity which a Caribbean or black diaspora must discover, excavate, bring to light . . ." (223). However, the achievement of this fixed, imaginary unity—a monolithic Afro-Caribbean culture, for instance—would presuppose an imaginative re-telling of the past rather than the recognition of the "divisions and vicissitudes of . . . actual history" (224). The second definition recognizes, alongside the similarities, the differences between communities inside an imagined cultural group. The existence and the acknowledgment of discontinuities make cultural identity both "being" and "becoming," both in the past and in the future, unstable, and under constant transformation. Furthermore, it is this position that allows an adequate understanding of the traumatic experience of colonialism as it sheds light upon the ways in which the (colonial) past "continues to speak." Hall puts black Caribbean identities between two vectors: that of similarity and continuity and that of difference and rupture (225–26), showing how two groups—namely black people from Jamaica and black people from Martinique—can, on the one hand, be "the same" in relation to the developed West, and "different" in relation to the Western metropolises on the other (227–28). Diasporic identities—which are always changing—are thus grounded in historical, political, and social contingency, and are "subject to the continental play of history, culture and power" (225). In this context, for Hall, the diaspora (experience) is defined by heterogeneity and by a definition of identity "which lives with and through, not despite, difference; by *hybridity*" (235).

Both interventions thus manage to account for new forms of diasporic ways of being that are strongly shaped, if not in some cases generated, by colonial legacies and the postcolonial condition. In so doing, both Gilroy and Hall made a necessary step to unfix the definitional margins of diaspora conceptualization in order to account for hybrid and in-between possibilities of diasporic manifestations. At the same time, I believe, this scholarly moment of definitional expansion, strongly influenced by feminist, postcolonial, and critical theorists more generally, implies the continuous need to rethink and reconsider diaspora making in light of changing political, historical, and social contexts. As such, the next step of engaging with diaspora theory in this thesis is to settle on a genealogical tradition that can adequately, and temporarily, conceptualize the particularized (both in terms of historical context and the *sui generis* traits of each community) social phenomena that are under scrutiny in this research. In the next paragraphs, I will therefore engage more closely with feminist theorizations of diasporic identity formation and commit to a processual understanding of diaspora making.

1.3.3 Diaspora as a social process and feminist interventions in diaspora studies

Subsequent to the proliferation of diasporas in a postcolonial world and its reflection in academic scholarship, scholars from the social sciences reengaged with the concept of diaspora in an attempt to reconsolidate it: they aimed to address its definitional core while accommodating its inevitable theoretical expansion (Cohen 2008, 1–3). The expansion of the notion of diaspora toward a more "metaphoric designation," or what Brubaker (2005, 1) terms the proliferation the "'diaspora' diaspora—a dispersion of the meanings of the term in semantic, conceptual and disciplinary space," has ignited discussions about the need to respect and do justice to its definitional boundaries. Although they welcome the interdisciplinary surge of interest in the concept of diaspora, Evans Braziel and Mannur (2008) warn about diaspora becoming a "catch-all phrase" that now refers to "every movement . . . all dislocations, even symbolic ones," and worry about the neglecting of its historical roots (3). This warning echoes Tölölyan's (1996) worries about how globalized transnational mobility creates new communities that might, until a certain point, have become subsumed into the diasporic phenomenon (3), which puts diaspora "in danger of becoming a promiscuously capacious category" (8). On the other hand, scholarly advancements of cultural studies and postcolonial approaches remain acknowledged and diaspora studies scholars did try to find synthetic ways to think about its current possible understandings (Safran 1991; Clifford 1994; Brubaker 2005).

In his foundational article "Diasporas in Modern Societies: Myths of Homeland and Return," in the wider context of the "diaspora proliferation," Safran (Safran 1991) builds a definition based on the idea of trauma, exile, and nostalgia. He proposes a typology with a list of criteria and uses the Jewish diaspora as a non–normative starting point—a Weberian "ideal type"—as a way to engage in a comparative investigation meant to analyze and understand different diasporic phenomena. In this sense, a stable definition only has a referential role that supports the investigation of different forms the term might signify. James Clifford (1994) takes Safran's proposal further and admits to the ways in which decolonization, migration, global communication, and mobility can trigger *de novo* diasporic communities and encourage transnational multilocal attachments. Although still attached to the idea of a necessary foundational base, his decentered proposal allows for a bigger range in which disparate diasporic groups can be included, as "decentered lateral connections may be as important as those formed around teleology of origin/return" (306). These positions prepare the terrain toward a more inclusive narrative that not only acknowledges the need to reconsider the way in which diasporas are investigated but also takes into consideration their emic roots and, by extension, their social dynamicity. Brubaker (2005), for example, does away with the split between

the classical approach to diaspora—seen as assimilationist, (methodologically) nationalist, and teleological—and the more diverse perspective that recognizes the multitude of migration-related phenomena altogether (7–8). Without dismissing the social transformations that occurred in the last decades—especially the fast-moving transportation and communication technologies—he does acknowledge the importance of both perspectives in the understanding of social circumstances such as the "return of assimilation"[10] (Brubaker 2001). The author thus rearticulates the notion of diaspora beyond the two opposite stances and advocates for the investigation of diaspora "as an idiom, a stance, a claim," as a "category of practice" that would facilitate its empirical study and offer insights related to processual diasporic formation (12–13). This approach suggests an investigation of diasporic formations by looking closer at its sociality and thus recognizing its diversity in terms of power dynamics and the reproduction of inequalities. Admitting to its heterogeneity also means exposing it as a site for contestation in which experiences are built on the basis of various axes of differentiation: gender, race, class, ethnicity, sexuality, age, and others.

Claims such as those mentioned in the previous paragraph have indeed been made by feminist scholars especially. Such authors underline the need for diaspora theorization to account for structured inequalities of class, race, and gender (Anthias 1998; Brah 1996; Yuval-Davis and Anthias 1989; Al-Ali 2007) and try to show the productive dimension of such a concept to current migratory processes. Feminist interventions brought about important contributions concerning the concept of diaspora and, in many of these interventions, the processual dimension of diasporic formations is emphasized, with diasporic communities being defined beyond the bounded/unbounded binary, as hybrid, and as always in the making (Mavroudi 2007, 472).

One author who recognizes the processual dimension of diasporic formations while conceptualizing its structured inequalities in everyday social practices is Avtar Brah (1996). She sides with Clifford (1994) in asking for a historicized account of diasporic formations in opposition to the transhistorical signification of diasporic consciousness. For Brah, diaspora is a process rather than a fixed denotative signifier, a space marked by transcultural exchange and histories of migration in which "imagined communities" are forged along the lines of structural inequalities (193). She talks, for example, about a "homing desire" rather than the desire for a "homeland" and extends the physical borders of the nation-state to the boundary-making processes enacted by gender, race, class, ethnicity, sexuality, age, religion, and language differences (201). She proposes the conceptual lens of "diaspora

[10] Brubaker (2001) argues that the "differentialist" turn of the last part of the twentieth century has reached its peak, and that one can discern signs of a moderate "return of assimilation." Nonetheless, what has "returned" is not the old "assimilationist" understanding of assimilation but a more analytically complex and normatively defensible understanding. This process involves "a shift from an overwhelming focus on persisting difference . . . to a broader focus that encompasses emerging commonalities as well. Normatively, it has involved a shift from the automatic valorization of cultural differences to a renewed concern with civic integrations" (542).

space" as one that is able to account for particularisms, subjectivities, and power dynamics in a context of the transmigrancy[11] of people, capital, commodities, and culture (180, 204–5). For this lens to work, Brah advocates for the "creolisation of theory," where insights from feminist thought, border theory, postcolonial theory, diaspora theory, and class and gay and lesbian politics are to be taken into account (206–7). In her conceptualization of "diaspora space," Brah manages to offer an explicit feminist analytical framework for the investigation of diasporic social processes.

Furthermore, feminist theorists of diaspora such as Avtar Brah but also Floya Anthias (1998), Fatima el-Tayeb (2011), and Nadje Al-Ali (2007) make an explicit intervention by challenging traditional notions of diaspora, such as diaspora's linkage to nationalistic formations within the homeland or its ethnic boundedness. They do so by taking an intersectional stance that opens up a space of analysis that considers issues of race, class, and gender as well as trans-diasporic solidarities.

It is precisely the processual and syncretic understanding of diaspora formation that I find highly relevant for the current research. With regard to diaspora research, both postcolonial and feminist interventions offer the conceptual foundations to further delineate the definitional limits of digitally mediated diaspora formations. In this dissertation, digital diasporas are to be taken as inevitably processual, in the making, and forged within unequal power dynamics that manifest across gender, race, class, and many other differences.

In addition to her processual interpretation of diaspora spaces, Brah's approach to the study of diaspora is significant for this dissertation because of another aspect: its multidisciplinary intervention. Brah proposes a methodological and epistemological direction that implies engaging in the study of diasporic formations theoretically by transferring the conceptual analysis of the social phenomena to the process of knowledge production. I identify this step as a dimension of feminist interdisciplinarity practice specific to feminist research. As such, I argue that, in order to portray a complex representation of gendered diasporic processes, interdisciplinarity is of vital importance. This aspect of the research will, however, be discussed in a later section of this chapter, which will focus on how to study digitally mediated gendered diasporic formations. In the next section, I turn instead to the scholarship addressing diaspora formations in the digital context.

1.4 Diaspora and the digital. Studying digitally mediated diaspora formations

[11] At the time when the book was published (Brah 1996), the concept of transnationalism was taking center stage in the understanding and theorizing of migrants' identity formation. The "transnational turn" contributed to the recognition of transnationality in migrants' everyday lives: the multiplicity of their positions, loyalties, and ties manifested regardless of their residence or citizenship (see Schiller, Basch, and Blanc-Szanton 1992b; 1992a).

Scholarly investigation of migrants' "migration" in the online medium has varied through time depending on the theoretical lens and the academic ethos of the period as well as the different disciplinary fields that engaged with it. Scholars from different disciplines have studied the relation between migrant communities and digital technologies. Multiple denominations have been given to these online communities—ranging from cyber communities, virtual communities, digital diasporas, e–diaspora, or virtual diasporas—which generally describe migrant communities whose members interact through the use of the latest technologies of communication. Digital diasporas thus take different forms depending on the specific scholarly lenses that inform them, the methodologies and tools they are investigated with, or the research focus. As such, besides the relationship with everyday social processes, the definitional parameters of digital diaspora are related to the ways in which it is studied. That is, the digital diaspora takes various forms depending on the focus of the research: the digital itself or the social processes behind it. The approach in this dissertation foregrounds the relationship between the digital and the social, namely the various ways in which they shape each other, and the social phenomena that arise thereupon.

I address the issue of the different ways in which digital diasporas are studied in the chapter "Digital Diasporas: Beyond the Buzzword: Towards a Relational Understanding of Mobility and Connectivity" (Candidatu, Leurs, and Ponzanesi 2019), part of *The Handbook of Diasporas, Media and Culture* (Retis and Tsagarousianou 2019). Here, we propose a genealogy of digital diasporas research and place the respective scholarship alongside the shifting epistemological paradigms within internet studies. In doing so, we trace the various proposed conceptualizations that encompass the phenomenon of digitally mediated diasporic formations. The aim is to bring to the fore a critical intervention in digital diaspora studies by focusing on a relational approach that makes use of feminist and postcolonial theorizations of diaspora.

Drawing from Barry Wellman's (2004) categorization of three stages of the development of internet studies, three main paradigms are identified: I. starting with the 1990s, a media-centric approach on communities in cyberspace; II. beginning with the 2000s, a non-media-centric approach that addressed the online–offline dynamicity of migration-related phenomena; and III. a more recent approach that recenters the Web 2.0 and big data processes in the study of diasporic online sociality.

The first paradigm is concerned with the epistemological shift generated by the "computational turn" (D. Berry 2011), where cyberspace becomes a novel electronic frontier (Rheingold 1993) characterized by utopic freedom, disembodiment, and escape from the everyday life. In this view, one of the main assumptions is that cyberspace and its social interactions are to, and can be, understood and analyzed without the need to consider its material embedding (Wellman 2004, 124). Utopic dimensions of the freedoms cyberspace would bring—"the speed, mobility,

connectivity, unboundedness, information, access, escape from everyday life, from the body and from identity, decontextualization and deterritorialization" (Bernal 2010, 167)—occupy most of the main imaginary in this paradigm. Power relations from both material and virtual spaces are oftentimes discarded (Wellman 2004, 124–25) and cyberspace's egalitarian and universalistic dimensions are strongly emphasized (see Barlow's 1996 "Declaration of the Independence of Cyberspace"[12]). Migration scholars whose work fits in this paradigm focus on the empowering possibilities of building such a space where burdens of difference can be discarded. Ananda Mitra's (2001) and his and Eric Watts's (Mitra and Watts 2002) research on voice in cyberspace is an example of such a view on migrants within that space. The authors propose the metaphor of "voice" as a way of emphasizing the discursive ontology of cyberspace and cybercommunities. They bring to the fore a new dominant/marginal cyber-relationality and conceptualize cybercommunities beyond mere affinities (e.g., fan clubs) by looking at diasporic websites from Southeast Asia. For them, cyberspace is defined as a discursive space produced by individuals whose geographical locations are ambiguous and provisional, which can have liberating and empowering effects (Mitra and Watts 2002, 486). Mitra (2001, 44–45) further shows how, through the use of internet, many marginal voices can connect together, and how individuals' identities can be shaped by new emerging narratives in cyberspace as well. As such, through agential processes triggered by voicing, "new ways of describing themselves both within their 'ingroups' as well as to the 'outgroups' with which they are inevitably connected as a result of immigration" are being created (45). The author does not deny the power asymmetry between the dominant and marginal but nevertheless sees in the internet a higher dialogical and accountability potential than in real life or than has been made possible by old media tools. The approach to studying cyberspace through the metaphor of voice makes space for new humanistic theorizations of the role of the internet in the everyday life of migrant marginal communities as, up until that point, the internet had been considered "either by focusing on the technology or by focusing on the user, and not necessarily on the process that unfolds in the user meeting the technology" (Mitra and Watts 2002, 481). Moreover, the hinting at the "natural" affinity of migrants and technological affordances represents a valuable insight for the study of migration and media that allowed even more complex investigations on how migrants (and more generally minoritarians) use digital technologies. Recent scholarship from this approach focuses on the relationships between race and technology by deconstructing myths about the white techno-savvy man while revealing non-white diasporic social formations and subversive subaltern practices (see, for example, Anna Everett's 2009 *Digital Diaspora: A Race for Cyberspace*; Jennifer Brinkerhoff 's 2009 *Digital Diasporas: Identity and*

[12] https://www.eff.org/cyberspace-independence Accessed August 14, 2017.

Transnational Engagement; and Radhika Gajjala's 2004 *Cyber Selves: Feminist Ethnographies of South-Asian Women*).

The second proposed paradigm is centered around ethnographic practices. In the ethnographic approach, research focuses on the offline–online social dynamicity and emphasizes the internet as a form of mediation. It is a non-media-centric approach (Morley 2009) that looks at how the internet fits into everyday lives rather than perceiving it as a separate realm. This approach distinguishes itself from the former by rejecting "the virtual" and "the real" disjuncture. Scholarship belonging to the field of media and migration studies researching cases of diasporic formation through ethnographically derived methods fit within this second approach: Daniel Miller and Don Slater's (2000) *The Internet: An Ethnographic Research* (2001), Myria Georgiou's (2006) *Diaspora, Identity and the Media*, Mirca Madianou and Daniel Miller's (2013) *Migration and New Media. Transnational Families and Polymedia*, and Deirdre McKay's (2012b) *Global Filipinos: Migrants' Lives in the Virtual Village* are some of the important works that brought about ethnographic methods in research on migrants and digital media. This scholarship brings to the fore the ways in which people's everyday practices and the internet co-constitute each other. This research goes beyond an ethnography about the users, use of, and the effects of the internet, and looks more holistically at the simultaneous transformative process enacted by this new mediating medium. Social processes thus become the main center that can uncover the intricacies of digitally mediated migratory experiences. Daniel Miller and Don Slater's (2000) ethnographic study in Trinidad looks at internet use and notes a "natural affinity" that people from Trinidad seem to have with internet media, suggesting as such a closer embeddedness between the two. The thesis of a cyberspace completely disassociated from real life cannot account for the existence of these strong ties as it does not account for the intricacies between the two realms. Therefore, as a way to better understand these ties, the authors propose "to look at both the specific and the multiple traits of active agents in creating this overall relationship and at the technology itself as an active component in our account," that is, to consider both the subjects and the medium within their material conditions and their material practices (3). This further implies that one should start researching the internet from the everyday practices of the users and by considering its embeddedness in people's everyday practices (5). In this co-constitutive process, it thus becomes important to acknowledge that actors enter in "transcultural networks of the Internet *from somewhere*" (7, emphasis in original), which, in turn, calls for a contextualized non-media-centric research of web uses. Miller and Madianou (2013) also locate their research on internet media use in the everyday practice of individuals. As mentioned earlier in the chapter, in the discussion on mothering and media use, their ethnographic research sheds light on the various ways in which Filipino migrant mothers living in London navigate through different media according to their

affordances. They name this process, in which users choose between complementary communication channels and mediums, "polymedia." In the same vein, Georgiou's (2006) research shows the important role media plays in the construction of diasporic identity, a process that is maintained through everyday social interactions. In this approach, diaspora online shapes and is shaped through digital media in their everyday use. Only by looking at this particular use can one understand the specific role media has in diasporic formations.

The third paradigm draws from big data studies and actor–network theory and proposes research on online behavior through data-driven analysis. Consequently, new research methods are being developed—mapping, data scraping, data visualization, etc.—and used to understand the specificity of digitally born data such as the hyperlink, the URL, and digital devices, such as Google, Facebook, etc., and spaces (for instance, the blogosphere). By centering the need to better account for medium specificity, Dana Diminescu (2008; Diminescu and Loveluck 2014) and her team from the e–Diasporas Atlas project conduct research on diaspora by mapping and analyzing the occupation of the web by diasporas. As such, they develop methods such as web exploration and corpus building, data enrichment (location, languages, text-mining), network visualization-manipulation and graph interpretation, and collaborative sharing of (raw) data and findings.[13] Similarly, researchers affiliated to the Digital Methods Initiative[14] (see Rogers, Sánchez-Querubín, and Kil 2015; Kok and Rogers 2016) also support the idea to develop adequate research tools and methods that can account for digitally born data as well as for the specific ways in which the web evolved.[15] In their article "Rethinking Migration in the Digital Age: Transglocalization and the Somali Diaspora," Kok and Rogers (2016) use network and web content analysis solely in order to explore Somali diaspora's transnational engagement. Based on their online findings of local and integration-oriented practices, they propose the term "transglocalization" to describe the different forms of diasporic engagement of Somalis abroad, which take place on multiple levels: local, national, and transnational. However insightful, these more media-centric approaches fall short in accounting for the inner dynamics of the social groups and communities situated on the offline–online continuum. Although methodologically

[13] http://www.e-diasporas.fr/#workingpapers Accessed August 15, 2017.

[14] The Digital Methods Initiative is an internet studies research group comprised of new media researchers and PhD candidates. It designs methods and tools for repurposing online devices and platforms (such as Twitter, Facebook, and Google) for research into social and political issues. For more Information, see https://wiki.digitalmethods.net Accessed on September 8, 2016.

[15] Web 2.0 refers to a contemporary post-2000s form of the internet based mostly on user-generated content, usability, and interoperability for end users (see O'Reilly, Tim. 2005. "What Is Web 2.0." Available at http://www.oreilly.com/pub/a/web2/archive/what-is-web-20.html Accessed on September 9, 2016). Anne Helmond (2015) describes a new step in the shaping of the web by introducing the concept of "platformization of the Web," seen as "the rise of the platform as the dominant infrastructural and economic model of the social web and the consequences of the expansion of social media platforms into other spaces online" (5), which strongly influences the weaving of the web as being already platform ready.

valuable due to its account of medium specificity, these new approaches to studying diasporic instances online run thus the risk of reinstating an offline–online separation in a media-centric form and ignoring the myriad ways in which differences shape social interactions situated between "the digital" and "the real." Diaspora is not only a conceptual designator but also a material social process (Johnson 2012, 43) marked by social inequalities manifested through classed, racialized, ethnic, and gendered axes of differentiation (Brah 1996). A feminist and postcolonial perspective can deconstruct neutral, globalizing, and homogenizing concepts such as "diaspora" or "the migrant" but also look more closely at social digitally mediated processes beyond technological determinism. It is for this reason that insights from feminist theory and postcolonial studies on diaspora formations are of much value for an understanding of how diasporas take shape in a digitally mediated context.

In this dissertation, I therefore define digital diasporas as processual and heterogeneous, shaped by hierarchies of difference, and embedded in everyday practices within the online–offline continuum. This definition has theoretical, methodological, and epistemological implications for the study of digitally mediated diasporic formations. Theoretically, it asks for an explicit feminist and postcolonial reading of these processes (see Ponzanesi and Leurs 2014; Leurs and Ponzanesi 2018; Risam 2015; Ponzanesi 2020) that emphasizes not only the inequalities that shape offline interactions but also the ways in which they are reproduced in online spaces, in terms of digital divides (Tsatsou 2011; Halford and Savage 2010; Sims 2014), data discrimination (Gangadharan 2012; 2014; Leurs and Sheperd 2017), and racialization (Browne 2015; Nakamura 2002; Nakamura and Chow-White 2011; Everett 2009). Methodologically, this synthetic approach would then bridge research on diaspora studies from both the second and third paradigm we identified earlier: ethnographic research combined with medium-specific methods. This methodology has been developed and discussed in "Diaspora and Mapping Methodologies. Tracing Transnational Digital Connections with 'Mattering Maps'" (Alinejad et al. 2019), where we propose a model for investigating digitally mediated formations of diaspora by bringing together digital research methodologies in its ethical and theoretical considerations and argue for the production of "mattering" diasporic maps. This methodological approach will, however, be addressed in the methodological chapter of the dissertation. Epistemologically, I recognize the need to create a dialogue between the different scholarly fields that engaged with the issue of diaspora, media, and migration. I propose a feminist approach inspired by Brah's (1996) "diaspora space," which is based on interdisciplinary engagement. I advocate for an interdisciplinary investigation of mothering and digitally mediated diasporic formations in order to better understand the complex intricacies of various categories of difference—gender, race, ethnicity, class—between and within different ethnic groups that shape the ways in which migrant women who are mothers use digital media for diaspora making. It is for this

reason that the next part of this chapter engages with the topic of interdisciplinarity and sets the disciplinary grounds of the research.

1.5 Studying digital diasporas interdisciplinary

1.5.1 Interdisciplinarity as feminist research practice

Real-life social experiences and interactions do not come in a prepacked disciplinary embedding and the phenomena that are investigated in this dissertation are multilayered in their scholarly understanding. Studying migrant women's digitally mediated lived experiences touches upon various processes that can only be partially covered by singular bodies of literature. In doing this research, I thus engage mostly with media studies, diaspora studies, and migration studies while I anchor the research within gender studies. In other words, I engage with interdisciplinarity in a specific approach that has long been a part of feminist research practices: an approach that values the transgressive potential of working at the borders of various disciplines; recognizes social phenomena's complexity as having multiple causes and effects and being multi-directional and relational; acknowledges the researcher's situatedness and the partiality of the truths she sheds light upon; and, finally, is driven by feminist research aims in its social justice orientation.

In this sense, interdisciplinarity as practiced within radical progressive disciplines, such as gender studies, among others, is quite distinct from a more generalized approach oftentimes driven by a commoditized knowledge production process (Liinason 2011, 154–55). I thus anchor my dissertation within the field of gender studies as an overarching lens through which I conduct this investigation for political, epistemological, but also practical reasons. I will enumerate them as follows:

First, it has to do with the formulation of the research questions that generated this academic investigation. As I mentioned earlier, the phenomenon of gendered and digitally mediated diasporic formations is itself situated at the intersections of various disciplinary engagements. It is a complex empirical research subject that cannot be addressed in a simplistic, mono-disciplinary analysis.

Next, there is the conscious choice one has to make as a researcher when it comes to choosing an audience and field of intervention. Which academic debates are addressed and upon which onto-epistemological basis the research is built is a decision that informs the theoretical and methodological approaches that can best address the research questions.

Then there are reasons related to my position as a researcher. My dissertation is part of a larger, externally funded project with a preset theoretical and methodological basis built on a diverse

set of disciplines. Furthermore, in my own curricular path and academic training, I have navigated through a number of departmental, institutional, and disciplinary affiliations, in different social and political contexts: political sciences, gender studies, media studies, postcolonial studies, both in Romania and the Netherlands.

Lastly, my current position as a PhD candidate in a gender studies graduate school, as well as my intellectual and political commitment to feminism, contribute strongly to the research choices I make throughout this thesis. All these reasons combined thus inform my theoretical and methodological interdisciplinary approaches with the aim of building disciplinary bridges while nevertheless remaining anchored in gender studies.

In this context, in the remainder of this section dedicated to interdisciplinarity, I discuss the relation between interdisciplinarity and the formation of the field of gender studies. The main aim is to argue that feminist interdisciplinarity represents a critical tool *a priori* embedded in feminist research agendas. As such, the interdisciplinary approach in this dissertation both strengthens the feminist character of the research and ensures its overall feminist lens.

1.5.2 Interdisciplinarity and gender studies

Interdisciplinarity is not a completely novel research practice. On the contrary, interdisciplinarity has long been present in past holistic epistemological perspectives—Greek philosophers, Roman higher education proponents, and Renaissance humanists all aspired to a synthetic idea of science and universalistic grand theories (Weingart 2010, 3). By the nineteenth century,[16] however, these approaches have been subject to change due to the emergence of specialization and the ensuing disciplinary differentiations in the Western world. One of the main consequences of the inward process of modern discipline making and particularization of knowledge was a stronger division between academics/researchers and the general public through self-referential validation, specialized communication via specialized journals and scholarly associations, and a main orientation of continuous novel discoveries (5–7). All these changes strongly impacted the structure of higher education (Thompson Klein 1990, 21) with the universities replacing the academies and becoming the main research institutions for specialized knowledge production (Weingart 2010, 7). Translated into epistemological premises, this shift favored materialistic, empiricist, and value-neutral truth claims (Thompson Klein 1990, 21) that contributed even more to a "view from nowhere" type of

[16] Although there are different takes on this issue, there is a general consensus on academic disciplinarization beginning in mid-nineteenth century Europe (Osborne et al. 2015, 3–4).

scientific objectivity.[17] Despite this structuration of knowledge production, higher education, and academic research processes, nostalgia toward a lost unity has persisted in recurring manifestations for interdisciplinarity (Weingart 2010, 11).

Indeed, in 1990, Julie Thompson Klein (1990, 11) remarked a revival of the desire for synthesis in knowledge production, manifested in the spreading of a wide range of practices that can be subsumed under the umbrella term of interdisciplinarity. While gaining more and more popularity among researchers, the practice of interdisciplinarity seems, however, to also generate a high level of confusion to what it actually is and how should it be carried out. Much of the concept's current understanding derives from the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development's (OECD) interest in it during the late 1960s and 1970s. Indeed, as Thompson Klein (1990) remarks, the "identification of interdisciplinarity with reforms of the sixties and seventies is so strong that many people are inclined to associate the very concept of interdisciplinarity with that remarkable era" (35–36). This belief is of particular relevance for this chapter considering the specific roots of gender/women's studies departments in feminist movements from the late 1960s and 1970s (Lykke 2011, 137), which focused, among others, on academic truth-claiming processes related to topics affecting or deriving from women's lives. In this sense, feminists have been preoccupied precisely with what many consider to be the main triggers for interdisciplinary work: the emergence of scientific expertise, the gap between academic research and everyday life, and, generally, the underlining power imbalances in knowledge production (Gregg 1987, 8). In other words, gender studies' scholarly practices were oriented toward interdisciplinary research aims since the beginning. This is due both to the disciplinary marginality of feminist issues and to gender studies' critical stance against the fixity of disciplinary knowledge formation (Allen and Kitch 1998, 277, 282). Indeed, gender studies (in the past also referred to as women's studies) appears nowadays as an exemplary figuration of an interdiscipline (Salter and Hearn 1996, 41; 148) for which (together with, for example, queer studies, postcolonial studies, and others) interdisciplinarity has a foundational role in the pursuit of transformative social aims (Liinason 2011, 154). The relation between interdisciplinarity and the field of gender studies has thus been the subject of feminist debates, with the issue of gender studies' liminal position triggering lively discussions around feminism's unique relation to interdisciplinarity.

One example of such a debate is the discussion on the institutionalization of gender studies departments from the 1998 *Feminist Studies* summer issue, titled "Disciplining Feminism? The

[17] This value-free objectivity refers to an epistemological viewpoint that is universal and free of bias and emotions. Donna Haraway (1988) and feminist standpoint theorists criticize this approach and propose epistemologies based on partial and situated knowledges. This debate is discussed in more detail in the next chapter of the dissertation, "Epistemological Groundings, Methodological Choices, and Reflections."

Future of Women's Studies." The context of this special issue, as argued in the "Preface" (Hewitt and Lanser 1998), is represented by the growth of gender studies scholarship and the increasing educational interest toward feminism during the 1990s. These factors bring about discussions over the opportunities and dilemmas surrounding gender studies, namely the creation of gender studies as a discipline or its maintenance as a "border-type" interdiscipline. More particularly, arguments regarding the inherent interdisciplinary quality of gender studies seem to be at the core of this debate and two articles of the issue approach this aspect: "Disciplined by Disciplines? The Need for an Interdisciplinary Research Mission in Women's Studies" by Judith Allen and Sally Kitch (1998), and "(Inter)Disciplinarity and the Question of Women's Studies" by Susan Standford Friedman (1998). I will address the main points of both articles below.

In the first article, Allen and Kitch (1998) make a plea for feminist interdisciplinary PhD programs through both scholarly and institutional steps while nevertheless clearly maintaining interdisciplinary research missions (275). For them, interdisciplinarity is not only a means through which a specific complex problem is solved or analyzed, but it also represents "the integration of disciplines to create a new epistemology" (276). Moreover, interdisciplinarity as a practice is an inherent characteristic of gender studies for them as feminist scholarship has regularly challenged the limits of canonical disciplines so far. Because gender studies runs the risk of not being able to follow on its interdisciplinary missions due to submission to other disciplines—"our field is disciplined by the disciplines" (293)—the authors advocate for institutional alliances and organizational structures that can, in the end, support the interdisciplinary scholarly aims.

They recommend treating gender studies as an "interdiscipline" and taking interdisciplinarity as a key element of gender studies' identity (294). Friedman (1998) takes on the same question of the implementation of gender studies PhD programs. She offers two types of reasons that can support a position against such an institutionalization: first, she offers material-ethical and pragmatic reasons related to labor market education and training discrepancies as well as financial budgetary limitations from within academia (304–6); secondly, she refers to the intellectual viability of such a step. Drawing from Foucault (1995), she refers in particular to the role of gender studies in the semantic and theoretical interplay between disciplinarity and interdisciplinarity. Thus, while recognizing the benefits of interdisciplinary scholarship, she supports the need for disciplines and their subsequent boundary-making processes as these processes themselves are what permits transgressive acts (308–9). By the end of the article, however, the author shows "second doubts" and, by recognizing the historical instability of disciplines and their transition toward becoming disciplines *per se*, she admits that gender studies has the possibility to transition toward disciplinarity in the future—as, for example, sociology and political sciences did. Navigating between the two opposite positions, what

can clearly be drawn from her article is precisely the need for an interdisciplinary research practice in its dialectic relationship with disciplinarity. She states: “I prefer a symbiotic relationship between the two, each reigning on the limitations of the other. Moreover, the brilliant breakthroughs that interdisciplinarity potentially achieves often depend upon this symbiotic relationship” (312–13).

I do not aim to further develop the discussion on the institutionalization of women’s and gender studies departments here. My intention was merely to highlight, via the two pieces presented above, the strong bond between feminist research and the practice of interdisciplinarity. Despite having slightly different positions toward the main issue tackled by the journal—the institutionalization of gender studies departments and programs—both sides share the view that interdisciplinarity is a foundational trait of gender studies research. In the tension between the field’s strategic interests of disciplining and its pedagogical and research objectives toward social justice through interdisciplinary engagement, the different positions end up supporting interdisciplinary scholarly practices.

1.5.3 How to do feminist interdisciplinarity

While the benefits of feminist interdisciplinary research are now more clearly contoured, the question of how this engagement is to take place remains. How does one anchor themselves in the field of gender studies considering the plasticity of the field and its dependency on other already established disciplines, especially methodology-wise? While my own methodological directions and commitments will be presented in detail in Chapter 2 of the dissertation, in the following lines I briefly elaborate on the feminist blueprint that guided my research process in its theoretical explorations.

Marjorie Pryse (2000), for example, tries to offer an answer to the dilemma of feminist interdisciplinarity by starting from where Friedman (1998) left off in the article discussed above. Pryse (2000) begins her article “Trans/Feminist Methodology: Bridges to Interdisciplinary Thinking” by introducing Friedman’s main point of contention when it comes to gender studies’ relationship with interdisciplinarity: the lack of a stable methodology and its leaning on other existing fields’ methodologies (107). She then proceeds to address this shortcoming by drawing from Nira Yuval-Davis (1997) in her reading of Patricia Hill Collins’s (2000, 108–10) work on the concept of “transversal politics.” The concept is introduced as a way to envision feminist solidarities between different groups through the recognition of different perspectives and of a partial situated knowledge (see also Haraway 1988). The praxeological dimension of this epistemological premise is then translated into a practice of rooting (in one’s own identity elements) and shifting (toward a situation

of exchange with one's different identity) (Pryse 2000, 109). Going back to the issue of interdisciplinarity, Pryse (2000) then introduces the concept of "transversal interdisciplinarity" as a main feminist methodological practice that can solve Friedman's dilemma over the benefits and losses of interdisciplinarity in gender studies. What she proposes is an ongoing transversal openness toward methodological possibilities ("pivoting" and "shifting") while building upon feminist epistemological principles and aims ("rooting") (110–12). It is precisely gender studies' distinct orientation—both in regard to content and methodology—toward social justice aims that makes, through "rooting," "shifting," and "pivoting" between different disciplines and methodologies, a stable and strong interdisciplinary approach possible.

In my own practice, I explored the theoretical possibilities that other disciplines offer for a better understanding of women's everyday mothering practices and their digital media use in the context of diaspora making. While the theoretical analysis of this entanglement supposes an inevitable disciplinary boundedness (studying women and mothers, studying migrants and migrant women, studying the digital, studying diasporas), it is my feminist commitment that guides how the fragments are brought together, what narratives are centered, and why. Foregrounding women's experiences and mothering practices especially for the understanding of digital diaspora thus brings to the fore otherwise disregarded and marginalized perspectives, revealing yet another facet of how gender, media, and migration intersect.

1.6 Conclusions

In this chapter, I presented the main bodies of literature that inform the theoretical framework of this dissertation. For this purpose, I have engaged with a diverse range of scholarship that studies, albeit partially, the intricacies of motherhood, migration, and digital media. In doing so, I aimed to make the case for the timely research of the relation between diasporic mothering, diaspora formation, and digital media. Considering that the topics are generally separately investigated, the discussion of interdisciplinarity has taken an important role in this chapter. As such, the chapter situated feminist interdisciplinarity in particular as a guiding practice for the investigation of digital mediation and diaspora formation by foregrounding women's everyday mothering experiences in investigating the sociality of media practices.

First, I showed how diasporic mothering is understood within the boundaries of this research. In this dissertation, diasporic mothering refers to the site where difference and belonging are negotiated by the use of cultural reproduction, collective identity construction, and stable homemaking. These processes emphasize the particular gendered dimension of diasporic formations

even more. The intersectional and interdisciplinary approach that I propose for studying digital diasporas thus centers the reproductive sphere and the reproductive labor mothers enact for the maintenance and reproduction of generations and communities and highlights the various ways in which people are connected through digital media.

Next, I proceeded to discuss literature addressing the topic of motherhood, particularly in its conjuncture with migration on the one hand, and media and digital media on the other. The literature review from this section highlighted the scarcity of research on the relationship between mothering, diaspora and migration, and digital media, and the need today to understand the formation of digital diasporas from the experiences of migrant mothers.

I then addressed the concept of diaspora from within a genealogical perspective. I especially discussed the contributions of postcolonial and feminist perspectives for the understanding of diasporas as heterogenous, shaped by hierarchies of difference, and processual and in the making. I also referred to scholarly engagements with media and diaspora and argued for a non-media-centric understanding of digitally mediated diasporic processes. I ultimately argued for a reconceptualization of digitally mediated diasporic formations that builds upon postcolonial and feminist scholarship and, at the same time, recognizes the challenges and specificities of their digitally mediated manifestations.

Lastly, I made the case for a necessary interdisciplinary approach to digital diaspora that recognizes its online–offline embeddedness, as well as its structuration along categories of differences. I discussed the concept of interdisciplinarity and its historical connection with the field of gender studies and presented the main feminist discussions on interdisciplinarity. Here, I emphasized the necessary interdisciplinary character of feminist research. As such, I argued for a feminist interdisciplinary approach in understanding the complex phenomenon of digital diaspora formation, an approach rooted in feminist research practices and research values. The methodological and epistemological implications of this approach have also been brought up briefly. However, this aspect of the research design will be further elaborated on in the following chapter of the thesis, “Epistemological Groundings, Methodological Choices, and Reflections.”

Chapter 2

Epistemological groundings, methodological choices, and reflections

> It matters what matters we use to think other matters with; it matters what stories we tell to tell other stories with; it matters what knots knot knots, what thoughts think thoughts, what descriptions describe descriptions, what ties tie ties. It matters what stories make worlds, what worlds make stories.
>
> —Donna Haraway

2.1 Introduction

This chapter addresses the methodology of this research. As such, it provides a detailed account of how I approached my research and conducted the fieldwork, and the main research decisions that have been made throughout. In the following pages, I will first situate the epistemological grounds of the research within feminist standpoint theories. I will then outline the methodological approach of the thesis by drawing from digital anthropology and digital ethnography principles to study digital media in everyday contexts. Next, I will argue for the use of a mixed methods approach that combines ethnographic methods with digital methods. I will describe the specific research design and methods I have chosen to work with—both for data collection and analysis—in order to best answer the research questions that guide this dissertation. Ethical concerns will also be addressed by showing how, at various steps during the research, certain choices were made that ultimately shaped the final form of this thesis. Here, I will touch upon how I entered into the fieldwork, approached my respondents, and reflected upon and represent the dynamics I observed.

In the previous chapter, I made the claim that understanding and defining digital diasporas is strongly linked with the methodological approaches used to study them. This issue has also been discussed in the chapter "Digital Diasporas: Beyond the Buzzword: Toward a Relational Understanding of Mobility and Connectivity" (Candidatu, Leurs, and Ponzanesi 2019). Drawing on postcolonial and feminist approaches to diasporas, as well as ethnographic media and migration studies of diasporas, we there propose to look at digital diasporas as co-constructed in the online–offline continuum. That is, we believe that "digital diaspora cannot be understood outside of its offline environment and materiality, still marked by gendered, racial, classed, generational, and geopolitical power relations" (43). The relational approach we suggest is based on a non-media-centric approach (Morley 2009) that assesses the digital forms diaspora take through its material everyday embedding.

Building further on the ideas developed in the article "Diaspora and Mapping Methodologies: Tracing Transnational Digital Connections with 'Mattering Maps'" (Alinejad et al. 2019), written together with my colleagues from the Connected Europe project, the current research therefore follows a mixed methods approach. In the article, we indeed propose a model to investigate digitally mediated diasporic formations through the use of digital methods together with ethnographic methods in order to produce "mattering maps" (see Grossberg 2010). In other words, we posit the foci of understanding how diasporas come into mediated being both spatially and temporally, in *that what comes to matter* for diasporic subjects or communities. By drawing on ethnographic and feminist research principles, the "issue mapping" approach we propose can make visible, albeit partially and in a situated way, the social significance and meanings that trigger and support the formation of diasporas on the online–offline continuum.

The methodological approach selected for this research was thus designed to capture diasporic sociality both in the digital and non-digital realm by taking both spaces as mutually shaping and informing each other. For this reason, mixed methods are employed to investigate the materiality and everydayness of the digital and datafied social interactions. Through its centering of migrant women and their experiences of mothering, and by acknowledging the social construction of knowledge production, the methodological approach is additionally embedded in feminist epistemologies, particularly feminist standpoint theories. Furthermore, the methodological approach draws on digital anthropology and digital ethnography principles through its understanding of digitally mediated sociality mainly via ethnographic methods.

2.2 Epistemological groundings: The "big data trick" and feminist objectivity

With the rise of digital technologies and the "computational turn" (Berry 2011, 2012), scholars from various disciplines took the challenge to lay out the significant ways in which societies have undergone radical transformations. From the "networked society" (Castells 1996) to the "datafied society" (Van Es and Schäfer 2017b), several theses have been proposed pertaining to the radical transformations of the social due to the increased informatization and digitalization of everyday lives. Karen van Es and Mirko Schäfer (Van Es and Schäfer 2017a, 14) notice, for example, the rise of "the new empirical" in scholarly knowledge production and call for a humanities-based engagement that can investigate these epistemological processes. Referring to the large corpus of available data and tools to research the digital realm, they warn about the overestimation of the possibilities big data promises. As such, the authors argue, in the investigation of the "datafied society," that humanities scholars need to develop approaches and insights from their fields' traditions rather than reproduce

empiricist urges for validation and testing (15). How exactly should scholars from humanities disciplines engage with recent computational transformations? And, on the basis of which epistemological principles? These are questions that triggered interventions from fields such as, *inter alia*, media studies, anthropology, and cultural geography. What is more, the area of digital humanities has taken contour more and more in the last years, with some even questioning the necessity of such a move by predicting an inevitable pleonastic character of such a place holder (Van Es and Schäfer 2017a, 15).

Rob Kitchin (2014), in his article "Big Data, New Epistemologies and Paradigm Shifts," investigates the epistemological groundings of research engagements with new forms of empiricism and data-driven approaches that use big data analytics, both in hard sciences as well as in the humanities and social sciences. He examines big data as "disruptive innovations" that, to a certain extent, shape today's research and asks for a critical reflection on the epistemological ramifications these processes might have. First, he considers that big data epistemological principles have a strong influence within hard sciences through either the rise of a new empiricism or the rise of data-driven research. The new empiricism is led mainly by a "digital serendipity" (L. Clark quoted in Kitchin 2014, 4) vision that announces the end of theory since "patterns and relationships contained within big data inherently produce meaningful and insightful knowledge about complex phenomena" (5). Data-driven research, on the other hand, while still staying true to traditional research methods from hard sciences, makes use of big data analytics in a theoretically guided way with the purpose of generating hypotheses "born from the data" rather than "born from the theory" (6). Second, Kitchin remarks less homogeneity in the ways in which discussions and research on big data have been taken by scholars from social sciences or the humanities due to their diverse—and essentially different, I would add—philosophical and epistemological groundings (7). While there are scholars in social sciences who make use of more positivist approaches and who welcome big data analytics more easily, for scholars from the humanities, whom assume what he calls a post-positivist stance, big data offers opportunities that are most likely to be found in the emerging field of digital humanities. This new research, however, unlike hard sciences or even social sciences, is, according to Kitchin, less likely to undergo a major paradigm shift. In spite of the adoption of new methods and techniques, humanities' epistemological traditions will, in the end, favor contextualization, situatedness, and positionality in contrast to claimed abstract, objective, and neutral truths.

In this context, media studies scholars have also developed new and various approaches to understanding the role of the digital in societal processes. Among these, research based on big data mining and analysis and data-driven research grew, especially since the rise of social media. On the level of methodology, this has been reflected in the developing of methodologies based on data and

tools that are digitally born. However, the approach has so far been brought into question by authors wary of the uncritical enthusiasm around big data. danah boyd and Kate Crawford (2012), for instance, critically engage with what it means to do research in the "era of big data" in the article "Critical Questions for Big Data." For them, big data refers to a phenomenon constituted by the processes of search, aggregation, and cross-reference of large data sets. Big data is largely defined[18] as sizable and complex datasets that need specific tools and techniques for their algorithmic processing. Kitchin (2013, 1–2) mentions the following main characteristics of big data: "huge in volume," "high in velocity," "diverse in variety," "exhaustive in scope," "fine-grained in resolution and uniquely indexical in identification," "relational in nature," "flexible, holding the traits of extensionality (can add new fields easily) and scaleability (can expand in size)." According to anthropologist Tom Boellstorff (2013a, 2), although the term has been informally used since the 1990s, its first academic mentioning was in 2003 (Lohr quoted in Boellstorff 2013a, 2), and it began to gain more academic legitimacy around 2008. Many scholars, however, have noticed how the term took upon itself a "mythicized" dimension when it comes to its scientific potential. In this sense, going back to boyd and Crawford's article (2012), big data can be conceptualized as a cultural, technological, and scholarly phenomenon that rests on the interplay of technology (developing computational technology to gather and analyze large data sets), analysis (identifying patterns to make claims about society), and mythology (the belief that these large data sets offer new forms of knowledge that is more true, objective, and accurate) (63). As such, boyd and Crawford highlight six important aspects that need to be considered when researching big data: 1) how big data shapes the ways in which knowledge is produced; 2) how big data is not objective but rather subjected to interpretation; 3) how the quantity of data does not necessarily presume a better quality; 4) how meaning is context specific; 5) how big data raises significant ethical issues; and 6) how big data is differentially accessible in terms of research and skills. By addressing these issues, the underlining beliefs, values, and biases of big data research can therefore be made visible and critically studied (675).

This critical engagement with the digital realm, data-driven research, and big data analysis was also central to the development of the research design of this thesis. Concurring with boyd's and Crawfords remarks on the mythicization of such research, and Kitchin's underlining of humanities' critical role, this study of digital diaspora formation foregrounds contextualization and interpretation rather than value-free and supposedly neutral knowledge production. In researching how mothers engage in diasporic community making via digital communication technologies, the research

[18] See Ward and Barker (2013) for a synthesis of various definitions coming both from the industry and academia.

traditions of my anchor field, gender studies—as mentioned in the first chapter of the dissertation—proved most suitable to critically assess and address the social situatedness of knowledge production, its partiality, its ethics, and ingrained biases.

Indeed, the discussions about the dangers of value-free, objective, and neutral knowledge production in big data research are reminiscent of earlier feminist engagements with standpoint epistemology. Feminist standpoint theories took shape and developed mostly in the 1970s and 1980s and were thought not only as theoretical principles but also as a guiding methodology for feminist research (Harding 2004, 1). Susan Hekman (1997, 341) identifies the beginning of feminist standpoint theoretical interventions with Nancy Hartsock's attempt to locate and define a feminist epistemological and methodological grounding—standpoint theory—by basing the formation and justification of feminist truth claims in women's experiences (1983). In a commentary on Hekman's paper, however, Dorothy Smith highlights how Hekman mistakenly attributes Smith's own "standpoint of women" to a later stage, whereas her intervention was made already in the year 1979 (see Smith 1997), meaning it preceded Hartsock's.[19] Regardless of the precise genealogy, the concept has enjoyed much interest during the feminist academic debates of the 1980s. It was, for example, further developed in the field of philosophy via Sandra Harding and Merrill B. Hintikka's edited volume *Discovering Reality* (1983), discussed in relation with race differences by Patricia Hill Collins (1989), who developed the concept of the black feminist standpoint, or rethought in relation with its political and epistemological implications by Donna Haraway (1988). These theories have made an important contribution to feminist debates related to epistemology and methodology by addressing the interconnected relations between lived experiences, power, and knowledge production. Feminist standpoint interventions also appeared as a critique of positivism and hard sciences' pursuit of abstract, objective, and universal accounts of knowledge. The main claims standpoint theories bring to the fore thus refer to the intrinsic social situatedness of knowledge, the unique position of marginalized groups in grasping inequalities and power dynamics, and the multiple positions from which knowledge can be produced. Research endeavors are therefore recommended to start from the lived experiences of such marginalized groups.

Many of the authors critical of the presumed universal objectivity of knowledge production derived from big data mentioned here indeed refer to Donna Haraway's (1988) influential work on

[19] Susan Hekman's article "Truth and Method: Feminist Standpoint Theory Revisited" (1997) relaunched the discussion on standpoint theories through its interesting critical apprehension of the concept's decline. Hekman identifies the following factors for feminist standpoint's loss of theoretical popularity: first, the discreditation of Marxism, the theories' supposedly main theoretical inspiration; second, the issue of "difference" and charge of essentialism; and, third, its apparent opposition with feminist postmodernism and feminist poststructuralism through standpoint theories' Marxist material roots. Several commentaries from the main feminist standpoint theorists were also published in the same year (see Harding 1997; Hartsock 1997; Collins 1997; Smith 1997; see also Harding 2004).

the situatedness of scientific discourse and the concept of objectivity. As Haraway's work has managed to penetrate so many of the disciplines that address the role of (digital) technologies in societal dynamics, I believe that her work is highly relevant for the specific intervention of this thesis, and particularly for this chapter. Her work on feminist epistemology has been fundamental in deciding the methodological direction of this thesis. In her article "Situated Knowledges: The Science Question in Feminism and the Privilege of Partial Perspective" (1988), Haraway firstly remarks on the epistemological objectivity/relativism binary that has resonances in feminist knowledge production and objectivity pursuits as well. She addresses the issue of a "feminist objectivity" caught up between feminist empiricist tendencies and radical constructivist ones (580). In this sense, she argues on the one hand that value-free objectivity is characterized by a false, unmarked, universal "view from above, from nowhere" that she describes as "the god trick" (581). On the other hand, radical constructivist claims risk the danger of relativism and preclude as such the possibility of objectivity. In relation to both, the author proposes a doctrine of embodied objectivity as situated knowledges that carries with it not only epistemological but also ontological and political charges. To counter both the "unmarked positions of Man and White, one of the many nasty tones of the word 'objectivity' to feminist ears in scientific and technological, late-industrial, militarized, racist, and male-dominant societies" (ibid.) and relativism's "way of being nowhere while claiming to be everywhere equally" (584), Haraway proposes the alternative of embodied feminist objectivity as situated knowledges. It is through this epistemological lens that knowledge claims can be locatable and, therefore, called into account. Essentially, Haraway's project of feminist scientific objectivity carries with it political principles as much as epistemological ones by foregrounding "location, positioning, and situating, where partiality and not universality is the condition of being heard to make rational knowledge claims" (589).

Sandra Harding (1992), in her piece "Rethinking Standpoint Epistemology: What Is 'Strong Objectivity'?," engages further with the issue of feminist knowledge production. Here, she sharpens the contours of socially situated epistemologies with her focus on the operationalization of feminist objectivity, which she terms "strong objectivity." For Harding, beginning the research from the lives of those who are marginalized is only the first necessary step but it is not sufficient (445). A second important step in order to ensure less distorted accounts of social lives is to account for the ways in which subjects of knowledge are embedded in and shaped by social processes in a similar way to the objects of knowledge. "Strong objectivity" therefore implies and requires "strong reflexivity" in order to reveal specific choices and beliefs that shape the research process in its entirety, from the selection of research topics, to the research design, collection of data, and interpretation (458). With this take on standpoint theories, Harding takes the discussion of feminist epistemology to the terrain of

methodology by being the first to offer delineations of what a feminist methodological approach based on standpoint theory could look like, and she does so by centering the salience of self-reflexivity. Practices of such a feminist research, which the author proposes by drawing on Patricia Hill Collins's conceptualization of a "black feminist standpoint" (1990), are, for example, related to the researcher's keen attunement to how gender, race, class, and sexuality co-construct each other (456). This aspect becomes of vital importance in light of possible critiques to the essentialist danger that a "women's standpoint" can ensue. Intersectional research practices can in this sense diminish the risk of categorical essentialism by recognizing the simultaneity of various axes of oppression (see Combahee River Collective 1977; Crenshaw 1989; 1991). Furthermore, Harding considers the following possible practices that favor a conscious self-reflexive engagement of researchers: a desire for "learning to listen attentively to marginalized peoples," "educating oneself about their histories," and doing a "critical examination of the dominant institutional beliefs and practices that systematically disadvantage them," as well as a "critical self-examination" of one's position in the matrix of power (Harding 1992, 458). These practices were an integrative part of my own research process, through my commitment to feminist ethics and ideals, dedication to understanding visible and invisible power dynamics, and self-reflexivity. Yet, it is important to mention that Harding's proposition offers in the end a more general view of feminist research practices, leaving it to researchers own rigor and creativity to achieve such goals.

In the context of media studies, Koen Leurs (2017), for example, proposes a way to critically reflect on research that makes use of new possibilities put forward by big data-related research developments. In his article "Feminist Data Studies: Using Digital Methods for Ethical, Reflexive and Situated Socio-Cultural Research," he exemplifies a feminist and social justice oriented methodological approach by foregrounding engagements with feminist and postcolonial studies as well as ethics of care ideals that can ultimately counteract big data derived, omnipotent objectivity claims (131). Here, he keenly observes that, while growing critical perspectives on the big data emergence in research have made important contributions to the opening up of the "black-boxed processes of datafied research," intersectional power dynamics are scarcely addressed (134). In this sense, feminist and postcolonial studies offer theoretical and epistemological lenses that both show how knowledge production is culturally situated and constructed and guide scholars into reflexive research practices.

In a similar move, this research is also committed to researching the makings of digital media and diaspora in a critical and feminist manner. The ways in which I engage with the study of digital diasporas draws from both critical humanities engagements with big data research and feminist standpoint epistemologies. I believe that both traditions offer a strong foundation for understanding

and representing digitally mediated social processes in a rigorous and feminist form. The epistemological approach of this dissertation is as such a feminist one in that it draws from standpoint theories and critical media studies interventions through its questioning of empiricist tendencies in digital media research, its centering of women's and mothers' experiences in diaspora formation, and its foregrounding of the situatedness and partiality of knowledge production. The implications of taking such an epistemological stance are to engage in the study of the digital in a non-media-centric way; to ground the understanding of digital mediation and diasporic formation in the experiences of my respondents and the communities that are studied; and to include reflexivity as a research practice throughout the entire research process.

Such an epistemological framework informs a methodological approach that foregrounds people's experiences in the everyday—and, by extension, the *issues that matters for them*, and the *meaning they give* to digitally mediated diasporic interactions—and that renders visible the choices that were made throughout the process of research design and interpretive analysis for the making of this thesis. In the following section, I proceed to elaborate on the methodological approach that informs this research project. By drawing from digital anthropology scholarship, I argue for the relevance of ethnography in the analysis of the meanings people give to their digitally mediated social lives in their everyday practices. For this reason, special attention will be given to the specifics of doing digital ethnography.

2.3 Methodological approach: The digital and the everyday

Different methodological approaches have been developed and implemented in order to understand the ways in which digital media and social lives co-constitute each other. Media studies scholars—as mentioned in the first chapter of the dissertation addressing the theoretical framework—have opted mostly for qualitative analysis and often turn to ethnography in the study of digital diasporas. Indeed, Tom Boellstorff (2013a, 2), for instance, mentions how scholars from the humanities and social sciences frequently present ethnography as the "other to big data." In his article "Making Big Data, in Theory," in which he builds on canonical work from anthropology such as Clifford Geertz's "Thick Description: Toward an Interpretive Theory of Culture" (1973), Boellstorff suggests a rethinking of big data as "raw data," that is, data that is always already submitted to regimes of interpretations, as "big data is never ontologically prior to interpretation" (10). Such approaches to research on digital media have been developed mainly in the emerging field of digital anthropology. Anthropologists have, in the last years, indeed incorporated "the digital" in their research by foregrounding the fields' already established methodological approaches and set of research tools (Alinejad 2017, 20), and

showing the salience of the relationship between technologies and culture (Boellstorff 2013b). Daniel Miller and Heather A. Horst (2012), in the introduction to their edited volume *Digital Anthropology* (H. A. Horst and Miller 2012), develop six interconnected main principles that should guide anthropological research in "the digital age" by drawing on contributions from the book but also the editors' and contributors' earlier ethnographic work. First, they refer to the ways in which digital technologies intensify the dialectical nature of culture, permitting thus both general and particular social developments, with both negative and positive effects (11). Second, they are wary toward claims of radical societal transformation in light of the so-called "digital age," and thus place digital mediation on the same plane with previous forms of mediation as "humanity is not one iota more mediated by the rise of the digital" (3). Third, the authors refer to anthropology's commitment to holism, a view that relates to the understanding of the digital aspects of people's lives through their incorporations in their wider social context. Additionally, the commitment to holism is also linked to the multilayered aspect of societies and, implicitly, that of the research on sociality. The last aspect of the holism principle refers to the wider and more elusive networks of connections shaped by the digital (15–18). The importance of cultural relativism is the fourth proposed principle and affirms both the differentiated and global nature of engagement with the digital. More specifically, it refers to anthropology's engagement in studying marginalized communities and cultures[20] (18–21). The ambiguity of digital culture in relation to the levels of openness and closure represents the fifth principle, and it refers again to the contradictory nature of culture and, subsequently, that of digital culture (21–24). The last principle asserts the intrinsic materiality of digital cultures, suggesting the incorporation of the digital within the various aspects of human life. In this sense, the digital can provide anthropological research with new occasions to understand "what it means to be human" (4).

These six foundational principles shape a very specific approach to the study of digital sociality, which centers the understanding of the interplay between culture and digital technology within lived everyday practices and experiences of people. As such, rather than making universal claims about the useful or unhelpful effects of digital media and technologies, a digital anthropology approach commits to a holistic, and ultimately ethnographic, methodological approach. This can, in the end, accommodate opposite social phenomena developing in light of digitally mediated sociality. Such an approach suggests the treatment of digital technologies as situated in a larger meaning-making social context to "make larger normative and ethical arguments rather than merely observe and account for the consequences of technological change" (Miller 2018, 1).

[20] This aspect most probably refers to the modern, Boasian tradition of relativist thinking about culture that distanced itself from earlier ethnocentric, colonial, and imperialist inquiries (see Hatch 1997).

While I subscribe to the approaches taken in the field of digital anthropology, I am not trained as an anthropologist and the current dissertation is not an anthropological one. However, what I am interested in emphasizing, by drawing on research from digital anthropology, relates to how the study of the digital is linked to that of people's lives. This research has therefore been undertaken from the premise that the digital, in its digital media forms and digital technologies manifestations, is embedded in people's everyday lives. As such, in order to understand what the "digital does," it is as important to locate it in "the bigger picture" of mediation, materiality, and sociality. Consequentially, this approach informs the necessity of an ethnographic approach through which such relations of entanglement and mutual constitution of the digital and non-digital aspects of everyday life can be better highlighted and understood.

Although digital anthropology scholars remain more attached to the established research methods, there have been various methodological developments in relation to the use of ethnography for understanding digital cultures and sociality outside anthropology over the past decade. From Christine Hine's (2000) "virtual ethnography" to Robert Kozinets's (2009) "netnography," scholars from different disciplines of the social sciences and humanities have taken the challenge to accommodate the "newness" of the digital sphere and their commitment to their epistemological traditions through methodological innovations. One approach that has inspired the development of the research design taken by the Connecting Europe project, including this particular research, is that of "digital ethnography." Sarah Pink, together with Heather Horst, John Postill, Larissa Hjorth, Tania Lews, and Jo Tacchi (2016), has developed an approach to using ethnography for research in a digitally mediated context in their book *Digital Ethnography. Principles and Practice*. While acknowledging ethnography's strong roots in the field of anthropology, the book proposes and supports a more interdisciplinary engagement with its methods. Indeed, as Donya Alinejad (2018) observes in the review of the book, if the purpose behind *Digital Anthropology* (H. A. Horst and Miller 2012) is more related to the incorporation of the digital into anthropological research, hence showing the discipline's intrinsic suitability to research human–technology relations, the authors of *Digital Ethnography. Principles and Practice* (Pink et al. 2016) are more concerned with the methodological aspects of the digital's impact, namely what different forms ethnographic research practice takes in the context of digital technologies, environments, and tools (Alinejad 2018, 429).

Digital ethnography is a proposal for a research practice that starts with thinking the digital as situated in the everyday lives of people. As such, it follows that studying the digital involves understanding not only how the digital and the social are intertwined but also how the digital itself shapes the practice of ethnography. Inasmuch as ethnography represents a type of research that

involves contact with human agents within the context of their daily lives (Pink et al, 2016, 2), digital ethnography necessarily implies looking at the digital as it unfolds in those everyday lives.

Pink et al. (2016) outline a set of five principles that can guide digital ethnographic research and these principles have also been important in conducting the research for this dissertation. To begin with, the authors propose "multiplicity" as a guiding principle. This refers to the multiple ways in which one can engage with the digital. While having clear characteristics, digital ethnography is also necessarily unique to the research questions it addresses and the challenges it encounters (8). "Non-digital-centric-ness" is the second principle, which involves researching not only the digital or digital media in people's lives but also its other aspects. This principle draws on non-media-centric research practices from media studies (Morley 2009). Additionally, it implies that digital methods are, for example, secondary to research on digital aspects of people's lives and, when used, they should be developed in specific relation with the research questions (2016, 9–10). The third principle refers to "openness." The openness of digital ethnography research refers to its processual dimension and its susceptibility to influences from other disciplines, practices, or potential collaborations (11). The fourth principle assesses the importance of "reflexivity" for ethnographic practice, a legacy of the "writing culture debate"[21] in anthropological research that strengthened the importance of reflexivity in ethnographic research. This dimension of digital ethnography therefore involves the engagement with "the subjectivity of the research encounter" (12). The fifth and last principle pertains to the "unorthodox" character of digital ethnography in its exploratory and collaborative nature, in contrast to more established research approaches (13).

All five principles proposed by Pink et al. (2016) have guided the design and unfolding of this research. In a way, the research has had a *sui generis* approach in using adequate methods, exploring unexpected avenues and topics, and failing at following all the intended aims of the research. As such, it represents one of the multiple ways in which digital ethnographic research can be done by centering the topic of motherhood and migration in its intertwinement with digital media across three migrant communities. The research has also assumed a non-media-centric and non-digital-centric approach in the sense that the main foci of research have been women's lives in various domains of activity where digital media are used, with a focus on the meaning-making practices that happen in these

[21] The "writing culture" debate in anthropology started with the publication of *Writing Culture: The Poetics and Politics of Ethnography* (1986), edited by James Clifford and George E. Marcus. The debate itself polarized the anthropological community at the time with its supposed postmodern critique of anthropology on issues such as writing, objectivity, and reflexivity (Zenker 2014). James, Hockey, and Dawson (1997, 2), in the "Introduction" to their edited volume *After Writing Culture: Epistemology and Praxis in Contemporary Anthropology*, state that, while, at the time, "the writing culture" discussions seem to have been mostly read as a debate between modernists and postmodernists, in current times it should be seen more as a moment that drew attention to "the inextricable relationship between epistemology, politics and practice."

processes. While digital methods have been considered and, in some occasions, experimented with or even integrated in the research analysis, they have not been at the center of the research process. Furthermore, this research has had an interdisciplinary accent from its onset, making it susceptible to both collaborations and different disciplinary influences. In its inductive framework, this research has also been guided by the principle of reflexivity. This manifested firstly in an awareness of the historical, socio-political, and disciplinary contingencies in which the research is being conducted and their subsequent political embedding. Secondly, it referred to the understanding of my own position within various power structures, and the conscious following and opening up of the research to (emic) themes and topics that were not envisioned initially. Unorthodoxy has manifested in this research by sometimes navigating unknown terrains and having to "adapt" to the serendipitous character of the fieldwork and theoretical navigations.

This methodological approach also has a strong feminist dimension for several other reasons besides it feminist epistemological grounding. Pink et al. (2016) argue, for instance, that ethnographic methodologies have undergone changes with the different theoretical "turns" happening in social sciences, with each turn being, at a later stage, consolidated and integrated into ethnographic practices. The gender "turn" is one instance of such a process (4). In the way I read digital ethnography as proposed by Pink et al. (2016), the gender turn is always already embedded in the ethnographic process. In addition, it is also important to mention how, in the past, a strong link has already been set between feminist research practices from social sciences and the humanities and qualitative analysis (see Lykke 2010, 159–60). Next, reflexivity, as has been shown previously in the discussion on feminist standpoint theories, is a central topic for feminist research practices. Lastly, one can also argue for the effective influence that critical feminist theory, critical race studies, and postcolonial studies, *inter alia*, have had in sociological and anthropological research principles with regard to knowledge production in general, and studying non-Western cultures or marginalized communities in particular, since the 19070s. I can attest to the influence and commitment to such values in, for example, respecting the privacy of my respondents even in moments when this privacy is not explicitly requested (the blurred boundaries between private and public in online spaces), and in actively listening to my respondents and letting their standpoints guide the directions of this research.

2.4 Data collection methods

The methodological route taken by this project is in line with the issue mapping proposal made in the article "Diaspora and Mapping Methodologies: Tracing Transnational Digital Connections with

‘Mattering Maps’” (Alinejad et al. 2019) that was written by our project’s team. In this article, as mentioned in the beginning of this chapter, we advocate for an issue mapping approach that sets out to understand the issues that are of significance in diaspora formations together with the mapping of their digital traces. As such, we propose a mixed methods approach consisting of ethnographic methods and digital methods. Furthermore, as mentioned in the previous section, I take a non-digital-centric and non-media-centric approach, drawing from Pink et al.’s (2016) digital ethnography principles. With this perspective, the aim is to ensure a back-and-forth research process in which the research begins with identifying and understanding the topics and issues that shape and trigger the coming together of migrant women, so that, during the next step, these are traced online with the use of digital methods. Subsequently, the digital findings can then be discussed and interpreted together with the people from the diasporic group that is researched. The innovative dimension of this approach is that, instead of starting from a top-down and online-based understanding of how digital diasporas manifest online, we begin from people’s everyday practices.

2.4.1 Ethnographic methods

Ethnography is the written product of a set of methods among which participant observation and interviews are the most common, with the former being considered as the core of the ethnographic approach (Boellstorff 2012, 54). If interviews are focused on respondents’ own accounts of the topics being discussed, participant observation can provide insights into practices and meanings in a processual way since what people say not always equally translates into what people actually do.

For the making of this thesis, I conducted a short-term ethnographic study of how mothers with Romanian, Turkish, and Somali backgrounds, who are also first-generation migrants, engage with and create digitally mediated diasporic spaces of interaction. Due to the specific take of the Connecting Europe project, the one year of fieldwork had to be divided in approximately three to four months of fieldwork within each community. For this reason, Sarah Pink’s “Short-Term Ethnography: Intense Routes to Knowing” (2013) proved to be useful for how the research unfolded. Pink defines short-term ethnography as a theoretically informed approach to doing research that involves “intensive excursions” into people’s lives, focused observation, and clear-cut selection of informants (352). While such an approach might be seen as a limitation compared to conducting a more traditional, long-term ethnographic engagement, the author proposes to see this approach as “part of wider project ecologies whereby ethnography takes on particular temporal and spatial characteristics as well as specific qualities,” such as the intensity of the research encounter and the ethnographic-theoretical dialogue, and the post-fieldwork engagement with the materials (359). Indeed, if a more traditional fieldwork engagement would have ensured a more in-depth engagement

with the communities, it would have been difficult if not impossible to conduct ethnographic fieldwork within three distinct migrant communities. As such, what might be perceived as a limitation has proven to enrich the research in terms of access and data collection for three different communities of migrant mothers who live in the Netherlands.

Throughout the course of a year, from September 2017 to July 2018, I conducted fieldwork with women from the three communities, starting with the Romanian community from September 2017 to December 2017, the Turkish community from January 2018 to April 2018, and, finally, the Somali community from May 2018 to July 2018. A more detailed account of the specific context of each fieldwork is provided in each respective chapter. In the following, I will give a brief account of how each part of the fieldwork unfolded. It is also worth mentioning that a pilot was conducted in April 2017 with the Romanian community. Out of this pilot, the theme of mothering emerged as a topic to be further investigated. This theme proved to be a fruitful and more organic focus that created meaningful connections with my respondents. As a migrant mother myself, I found that conversations on mothering experiences contributed to a more sincere and relatively accessible point of entry into dialogue with my respondents. Furthermore, no biologist nor heteronormative criteria about what it means to be a mother were set in the selection of the respondents. Being a mother was thus loosely defined as a self-identified woman who has or has had children under their care in the past.

Fieldnotes have been taken at various stages of the fieldwork. For the Romanian community, I also had the chance of participating in several diasporic events that my respondents either took part in or where they were part of the organizational team. I additionally attended meetings of parents whose children were participating in classes organized by a Romanian school from Amsterdam. For the Somali community, I participated in a parenting workshop organized by a Somali organization from Amsterdam. In the case of the Turkish community, I took part in an event organized in a neighborhood community center aimed at residents with migrant backgrounds. Of course, my access to community events was oftentimes restricted because of language barriers or simply due to objective conditions such as the time of the year—in the summer, for instance, the holidays reduced the pace of events and diasporic activities.

In total, I have conducted fifty semi-structured interviews, out of which eighteen interviews with women of Romanian background (ten during the pilot and eight during the fieldwork), seventeen interviews with women of Turkish background, and fifteen interviews with women of Somali background. For the pilot, preset thematic interview topics were prepared to be used by all members of the Connecting Europe project conducting fieldwork. However, as the research developed, each researcher took different directions in regard to their research and interview topics. The subjects

discussed during interviews were also adapted along the development of the fieldwork according to the emerging patterns and themes that I decided to pursue further.

The ages of the women I interviewed ranged from early 20s to early 50s; however, age did not represent a criterion for selection. In the case of Romanian and Turkish women, the sampling method was snowball sampling. For the work with Somali women, I benefited from the support of a Somali research assistant who, based on previous discussions about the research topic, selected women from the community who she came in contact with during her organization's activities. Indeed, out of the three communities, the Somali community was the most difficult to have access to, both due to language barriers (some of the women spoke only Somali) and a more general level of skepticism toward research conducted in and about the community. Some communities are certainly "over-researched," especially when it comes to former refugees or asylum seekers who have been experiencing research fatigue[22] due to intense and repetitive procedures of interviewing throughout their migration experiences (see for example Omata 2019). These aspects, I believe, influenced the general duration of the interviews. As such, discrepancies can be found in the duration of the discussions between the communities. The interviews lasted between fifty minutes and two hours for the Romanian women, around one hour for the Turkish women, and, for the Somali women, from as little as fifteen minutes to an hour. The interviews were conducted in Romanian, English, Dutch, Turkish, and Somali. For those interviews conducted in Somali and Turkish, I benefited from the support of a translator.

Most of the interviews were audio recorded and supplemented with a literal transcription. In the case of the Turkish community, seven of the women did not wish to be audio recorded. In these cases, notes were taken throughout the interviews. Five of these respondents opted for a group interview and did not wish to have a one-on-one interview. All respondents agreed to the use of the interviews for the purposes of this research by signing a consent form. However, respondents' names used in the dissertation are anonymized and pseudonyms are thus used throughout the thesis.

From what has been detailed so far in this section, the differentiated access to the three communities has perhaps become visible. As such, one might wonder after the reasons or factors that have shaped these different relationships. Indeed, I have thus far hinted at my own ethnic affiliation and how that might have had an impact on my "close" relationship with the Romanian community. However, I would like to further nuance this aspect of the fieldwork in light of issues around cultural essentialism and hybridity. Firstly, I recall Lila Abu-Lughod's (1991) insightful essay "Writing

[22] Research fatigue is related to contexts in which repeated research interactions are not perceived to lead to any change or come into conflict with the interests of the community that is researched (see T. Clark 2008; Sukarieh and Tannock 2013).

against Culture," which tackles the issues of "difference" between "the scholarly knower" and the people whose culture is researched. Here, she discusses how the self–other divide is not exclusively in reference to cultural difference but also captures other factors of differences, such as gender, sexual orientation, class, etc. At the same time, these differences can be at play within the same community, while, at other times, connections based on those factors can happen between communities of different cultures. Being critical of essentialist understandings of culture, Abu-Lughold argues for the variety of differences and the complex ways in which they can crosscut. Kirin Narayan (1993) problematizes, based on her own fieldwork in India and her own insider/outsider position, the fixity of the insider/outsider dichotomy as well. She argues against the fixity of a distinction between the "native" and "non-native" anthropologist and proposes the idea of shifting the identifications and multiplex identities of those who do fieldwork. In a similar way to Abu-Lughold, she exposes how factors such as "education, gender, sexual orientation, class, race, or sheer duration of contacts may at different times outweigh the cultural identity we associate with insider or outsider status" (672). As such, a closer ethnic/cultural identification of the researcher with the studied community may lead to certain distances due to the need to expose "taken for granted reality" aspects; correspondently, in the context of a "stranger's" position, sympathies and strong ties can minimize issues of difference on other planes (682). In my working with the Romanian community, for example, I regularly encountered inner-community differentiations based on class. As such, as a person who has experienced social mobility, has been trained in gender studies, and has a strong attachment to feminist ideals, classed and elitists points of view made me, at times, experience distance and detachment from the Romanian community. Of course, at other times, my own privileged class position made it easier to interact with women who identified themselves as expats than with women who are less privileged in this regard. At the same time, however, my own experience of "mothering while migrant" contributed to heartfelt and close encounters with women with a different ethnic background who were also mothers and migrants. I nevertheless acknowledge that my own positionality as a white researcher, with a European passport, educated in Western Europe, and with the economic and social capital to ensure a rather comfortable life, limited in visible and invisible ways the extent and nature of my fieldwork. However, the written result of this research, in its perspectival and situated way, is based on genuine and complex relationships built in spite of and across differences as "even as insiders or partial insiders, in some contexts we are drawn closer, in others we are thrust apart" (Narayan 1993, 676).

From the interviews and the interactions with the mothers from the three communities, I came to know and, in some situations, access the digital spaces where diaspora groups interact. This

represented the first step in exploring the possibility of medium-specific research, that is, with the use of digital methods.

2.4.2 Digital methods

Digital methods represent both a methodological approach and a set of methods. The term was first coined in 2007 by Richard Rogers (2009) in opposition to what he terms "virtual methods." If the latter consists of importing more traditional research methods into the online medium, the former approach consists of the use and repurposing of medium-specific methods, such as, *inter alia*, data scraping or web crawling, within the possibilities offered by the digital objects that are studied (tweets, hashtags, links, etc.) in a "follow the medium" heuristic process. This approach is based on an "online groundedness" perspective, that is, a perspective that grounds truth claims, by means of the internet, not only about online culture but also about bigger societal and cultural processes (Rogers 2013, 19–21). However, considering the epistemological groundings of this research project, as well as the specific digital ethnography methodological approach and the mixed methods proposal, I make use of digital methods in the context of, and starting from, social phenomena observed during the fieldwork and interpreted in my research. Considering the digital thus as secondary to the research process and the overall fieldwork context, I have not been able to apply the mixed methods approach in all three case studies. For the study of Romanian mothers and their participation in digitally mediated diasporic formation, I was able to make use of both ethnographic methods and digital methods, whereas, for the study of Turkish women's and Somali women's participation in digitally mediated diasporic formation, I have not been able to conduct the mixed methods techniques I initially intended to use.

Several factors contributed to this difference. First of all, access to data provided by platforms via various application programming interfaces (API) that allow for scraping and the collection of big data pertaining to users' use of social media was in some cases restricted. This was, for example, the case with Netvizz (Rieder 2013), an application that allows researchers to download data from the Facebook platform. While the application was available during my fieldwork with the Romanian community, it was suspended later on,[23] making it impossible for me to apply the same techniques to the other two case studies. Secondly, I intended to investigate diasporic Facebook groups dedicated to women and mothers from all three communities using digital methods. However, my access to these groups was limited. Most of the times, accessing and scraping data related to these groups

[23] "Facebook's app review and how independent research just got a lot harder," Bernhard Rieder, August 11, 2018. http://thepoliticsofsystems.net/2018/08/facebooks-app-review-and-how-independent-research-just-got-a-lot-harder Accessed May 11, 2020.

entails becoming a member. In this case, trust and transparency are very important to gain access and obtain data in ethical ways. While, for the Romanian case, access to the closed groups was granted due to my ethnic affiliation to the group—I am Romanian myself—access was not allowed in the case of the Turkish community by the administrators of the group. Additionally, for both the Turkish and Somali communities, language barriers also limited my access and the possibility of an in-depth understanding of group dynamics. Lastly, considering the ephemerality and continuous change of social media platforms, it was difficult to ensure a coherent approach in terms of selecting and using digital methods. For this specific condition, Rogers (2013, 25), for example, promotes the principle of "following the medium," a "strategy to cope with the ephemerality and instability of the Web, where a new feature, a changed setting or the shutting down of an Application Programming Interface (API) could stymie longitudinal studies" (Venturini et al. 2018, 6). However, due to the time restrictions in conducting fieldwork within three communities, the adaptation and flexibility of such an approach was not possible. While the methodological approach designed for this research and pursued in this thesis remains valid and useful for exploring innovative ways of researching digitally mediated diasporic formations, it does not work fully for *any* research on digital diaspora. Questions of trust and access strongly shape the viability and suitability of combining ethnographic methods with digital methods. For this reason, such an approach is always to be determined by the specific cases investigated, as well as the particular topics that become relevant in the interactions with the respondents.

Considering the abovementioned reasons, digital methods were, for the purposes of this dissertation, only employed in the case of the Romanian community.[24] A corpus of Facebook groups dedicated and managed by members of the Romanian diaspora was created, from which a final selection of four groups was made. Next, I collected anonymized data comprising messages posted on the groups' walls with the use of the Facebook API Netvizz (Rieder 2013). Afterwards, the data was investigated, visualized, and interpreted with the use of various visualization software—such as Tableau and Gephi—and programming software, namely Python. The detailed and comprehensive methodological approach for the Romanian case is explained further on and described in the chapter addressing the Romanian community. In the following lines, I proceed to discuss and consider the ethical implications of conducting research with digital methods and big data in direct reference to the research on this community.

[24] Several attempts were made throughout the research process to incorporate the use of digital methods in my research on the Turkish and Somali communities. Data was collected and explored, and consultations were made with research assistants in this regard. I have, however, decided to not pursue those avenues, either because the fieldwork itself shifted the research focus to other, more relevant topics of investigation, or because I considered it to not sufficiently comply with the ethical principles followed for this research.

With the rise of internet-based research, many scholars have started to investigate ethical issues related to big data research (see Metcalf and Crawford 2016) and developed guidelines for the ethical use of digital data (see, for example, K. Clark et al. 2015). Katrin Tiidenberg (2018) mentions how ethical concepts derived from earlier, pre-digital investigations on ethical issues —such as informed consent, confidentiality, anonymity, privacy, publicity, and harm—create "gray areas" for scholars who try to operationalize such concepts in the context of research on the internet (2). This is especially so because older conceptualizations of such ethical aspects, coming from more traditional disciplines, are of limited use (3). Markham and Buchanan (2012, 3), as members of the Ethics Working Committee of the Association of Internet Researchers (AoIR), identify, in their recommendations for "Ethical Decision-Making and Internet Research," three main principles common to most ethic guidelines originating from documents that are of paramount importance to discussions on ethics—the UN Declaration of Human Rights (1948), the Nuremberg Code (1949), the Declaration of Helsinki (1964), and the Belmont Report (1979): maintaining beneficence, respect, and justice for people involved in the research. However, both the 2012 (Markham and Buchanan 2012) and 2019 (Franzke et al. 2020) AoIR guidelines acknowledge digital technologies' and platforms' research dynamism and the subsequent difficulty to have a fixed set of rules to be followed. Reflexivity in the decision-making process is, however, recommended in the context of each research.

In this context, as Tiidenberg (2018, 4) further argues, the guidelines for ethical principles in research about digital contexts are still under debate. She identifies several important concepts that are contested in these discussions: human subjects research (are data always related to specific subjects, can such a subject be traced from the data? What counts as a human subject and are data to be considered as such?); informed consent (is the informed consent mode always suitable for digital research?); the public/private nature of digital data (is digital data private or public? Is it useful to think in this binary?); anonymity and confidentiality (are confidentiality and anonymity always possible?); and sharing and storing qualitative data (who has access to the collected data?), and argues for an "anti-checklist checklist" and "an approach of research ethics as situated, responsible decision-making" (12). In the end, the pursuit of ethical research practices in working with digital data, while grounded in principles centering harm reduction and respect toward human subjects, remains context depended as specific ethical choices are most likely to be made from a case to case perspective.

Throughout the making of the research design of the Connecting Europe project, I have had long discussions about the implications of working with big data with my colleagues. This aspect has also been taken into consideration throughout the process of conducting this specific project. In this sense, the particular ethical decisions taken with regard to the collecting, using, and analyzing of digital Facebook data follow several guidelines for the ethical use of digital data. In the ethical

decisions implied by the making of this dissertation, I was guided by Markham and Buchanan's (Markham and Buchanan 2012; 2017, 207) principles in relation to the ethical considerations of digital research. These principles emphasize the foregrounding of "the human" in ethical decision-making and paying attention to issues of vulnerability:

a) the correlation of the researched community's vulnerability with the obligation of the researcher to protect the participants;

b) the inductive nature of ethical principles makes ethical decision-making contextual to the specific research;

c) the consideration for the human aspect of the research even in moments when the human subject aspect is not visible;

d) the consideration of the rights of the subject with the risk of halting the research;

e) the consideration of ethical aspects in all aspects of the research; and, finally,

f) the deliberative nature of ethical principles and the subsequent consultation with other parties.

While it was impossible to contact all the members of the Facebook groups I investigated and from which I collected data, I did manage to interview members and/or administrators of those groups in order to obtain informed consent. In my conversations with them, I also touched upon insights and possible interpretations of the data that I was exploring at those times. For two of the four investigated groups, the possibility to collect anonymized data was possible without acquiring approval from its members or administrators. For this reason, in light of the anonymized character of the data, as well as the limited, non-individualized character of the data that I focused on (the ties between members of the groups), I decided to proceed further with using the data that was collected. For the groups that were private, I have contacted the administrators and communicated my intentions to collect data regarding the network visualization of the interactions between the members for the purposes of this research. The administrators agreed to proceed with the opening of the groups for the time needed for me to conduct the data collection. The data was stored in the work computer at Utrecht University and on the cloud service for Dutch education and research that Utrecht University grants their employees access to. However, access to the collected data was limited to my own use only.

Overall, I view the information collected as not pertaining to highly sensitive information (see Svenigsson's model of internet privacy in Markham and Buchanan 2017, 202). Through the analysis of the topic's sensitivity, the vulnerability of the subjects, and the specificities of the data collected (see McKee and Porter's dimensions for informed consent in Markham and Buchanan 2017, 202), I considered that it would be both unfeasible and non-imperative to pursue informed consent. Here, I followed Markham and Buchanan's (Markham and Buchanan 2017) proposition to focus on "harm

avoidance" and Leurs's (2017) invitation for reflexive ethics of care rather than following fixed standards that do not always fit the specific cases under investigation. I believe that the data shown in the chapter addressing the Romanian community presents harmless information about the communities studied, with care for anonymization and traceability. Furthermore, the collected data is safely stored and access to it is limited to the author of this dissertation.

2.5 Analysis methods

2.5.1 Comparison and open and selective coding

Considering the inductive character of the current research, comparison as a method is part of the set of methods used in the course of the fieldwork, analysis, and writing process inasmuch as these three parts of the research process mutually inform each other. This method implies inductive category coding and the constant comparison of the social phenomena observed. While the dissertation itself does not aim to provide a comparative analysis of the three groups investigated—some comparisons of the findings are, however, tentatively discussed in the "Conclusions" and they will, most likely, be developed in the future—constant comparison has been an important part of conducting the fieldwork and data analysis process within each chapter. Drawing from the ethnographic tradition of Barney G. Glaser and Anselm L. Strauss (1974) and their "grounded theory" methodological principles, the interpretive analysis was done through the systematic conceptualization of and constant comparisons with similar and distinct research areas working on the categories that emerged from the field (see Tavory and Timmermans 2009, 245). Social phenomena observed in the field were therefore compared across categories and the identification of relationships underwent constant refinement in the data collection and analysis processes (Goetz and LeCompte 1981, 58). As such, the main theoretical insights and directions have been based on lived and everyday experience of the people I have observed and interacted and discussed with during the fieldwork. This comparative approach can be understood in light of the emic–etic binary: while etic refers to the "distant observers' analytical categories," emic approaches "produce analytical categories, which retain traces of their practices of production" (Sørensen, Marlin, and Niewöhner 2018, 6). An example of how I engaged with this approach is the discussion of divisions based on participants' own class identifications. In all three communities under study in this research, class differences (but not only), and comparisons oriented toward these differences, emerged during the fieldwork. As such, in order to better apprehend the social phenomena under investigation—the formation of digital diaspora—I had to incorporate this aspect in the research process. It was through the practices and discourses of the

actors from the field that the formation of digital diasporas from the vantage point of migrant mothers emerged as a comparable phenomenon.

Furthermore, the data collected via ethnographic methods was analyzed through the process of open coding derived from the "grounded theory" approach of Glasser and Strauss (1974). The data coming from the fieldwork with the three communities was separately coded. The coding was guided by the research aim to understand if and in which ways mothering experiences trigger and shape diasporic coming together. First, I proceeded to open coding and the developing of initial categories. Subsequently, I continued with selective coding in relation to core concepts that became central to the cases I have researched. For this part of the research, I have used the NVivo software, a qualitative data analysis computer software package.

2.6 Conclusions

In this chapter, I addressed the epistemological and methodological grounding of the research pertaining to this dissertation. First, I addressed the epistemological principles I adhered to in making the research design, conducting the fieldwork, and analyzing the data. In this discussion, I referred to the epistemological paradigms behind the research of the digital era. Particularly, the difference between value-free, objective, and neutral knowledge production ambitions of the rise of a "new empiricism" and the situated and partial nature of knowledge production as discussed by feminist standpoint theories have been considered. By drawing on feminist standpoint theories and critical media studies interventions on big data and data-driven research, I have argued for a necessary feminist epistemological perspective that foregrounds location, context, situatedness, partiality, and reflexivity, and favors the voices of those who are less visible: migrant mothers. As such, the implications of this epistemological perspective are to research digital diaspora formation in a non-digital-centric way, and to center the understanding of digital mediation and diasporic formation within the experiences of my respondents and the communities they belong to.

Next, I have discussed the methodological approach of the dissertation by focusing on debates coming from digital anthropologists. Digital ethnography was highlighted here as a suitable approach that can meet the epistemological principles discussed earlier. The specific methodological approach that I proposed is thus based on an issue mapping of diasporic formation that places primacy on people's everyday practices and the larger meaning-making social context. I therefore argued for the use of a mixed methods approach that combines ethnographic methods with digital methods, starting with that what comes to matter for the members of the diasporas that I have investigated.

The methods used for data collection and data analysis were also addressed in this chapter. Ethnographic methods and digital methods were used for data collection and informed the interpretive analysis of the data. Ethical concerns were addressed in relation to the different steps of the research that I have undertaken as well. Considering the rather general guidelines developed so far with regard to researching the digital, I offered a particular understanding of those guidelines in the context of my own research: a focus on harm reduction and respect toward human subjects.

While this methodology has come about not only from the research design of the Connecting Europe project itself but also from the particularities of the fieldwork, its feminist commitment and interdisciplinary lens offers a useful template for the understanding of the intricacies of gender, digital media, and migration.

Chapter 3

Diasporic mothering as cultural reproductive work: Gendered and classed dynamics

3.1 Introduction

This chapter addresses processes of diaspora formation and digital mediation in the Romanian community in the Netherlands. It particularly engages with lived experiences of Romanian women who I had the opportunity to meet, talk, and interact with during the five months of ethnographic fieldwork I conducted in 2017. At the time, I set out to explore the Romanian diaspora by looking particularly at mothering practices and their role in diasporic processes. I was interested in understanding who the people are who bring into being the various instances of Romanian diaspora both locally and transnationally. Considering the inductive character of the research, the study ended up addressing the recent formation of a diasporic organization founded and led by members of the highly skilled Romanian community, with a specific focus on one of its subprojects: the Romanian school in Amsterdam. Starting from this case study, I will show how Romanian diaspora formation in the Netherlands is shaped by the migration context—in terms of regulations of mobility, for instance—as well as gendered and classed intercommunity dynamics. "How do Romanian digitally mediated diasporic spaces form in the context of highly skilled migration?" and "What specific roles do women and mothering practices have in these processes?" are thus questions leading this chapter dedicated to Romanian mothers living in the Netherlands.

In the first part of the chapter, I sketch a general image of Romanian postsocialist migration after the liberalization of the country's borders in 1989. I argue that, over the last few years—in the period after the 2007 European Union accession, and, in the context of migration to the Netherlands, after the 2014 Dutch labor market liberalization for Romanian and Bulgarian citizens—an increasing number of highly skilled labor migrants joined the already existing lower skilled and seasonal workers settled in various European countries, such as Italy, Spain, or Germany. Migration literature addressing Romanian migration to the Netherlands has so far focused mostly on Romanian labor migration within the bigger framework of Eastern European groups. The highly skilled dimension of Romanian labor migration to the Netherlands, as well as its gendered dimension, are, however, understudied to this day—with, perhaps, the notable exception of research on sex work—which

makes the focus of this chapter on highly skilled Romanian migrant mothers a relevant and timely contribution to migration literature in the Dutch context. This part will be followed by an introduction of the fieldwork conducted within the Romanian community. Here, I describe the specificities of the Romanian context that were not included in the methodological chapter of the dissertation, "Epistemological Groundings, Methodological Choices, and Reflections."

After having set up the context, I show in the following paragraphs how Romanian mothers create and maintain transnational ties with loved ones from Romania while, at the same time, building local diasporic spaces of belonging. I demonstrate how, from the vantage point of diasporic mothering, practices of mediated transnational connectedness and the setup of local diasporic spaces, such as the Romanian weekend school, are both part of a bigger system of gendered cultural reproductive efforts toward the maintenance of family ties and heritage language transmission. As part of diaspora, I argue, women engage in a variety of practices aimed at reproducing and passing on to their children elements of Romanian culture, which ultimately inform and shape their media practices.

Next, I discuss the formation of the highly skilled Romanian diaspora in the Netherlands. I refer to the formation of a Romanian diasporic organization and its connections to the politically conscious and increasingly visible Romanian middle class. This relation is discussed in the context of the 2013–2017 anti-government protests. I highlight how my respondents distinguish themselves from lower skilled Romanian mothers in their identification as "expats." This part emphasizes the broader classed dynamics that take place in the Romanian diaspora in the Netherlands, and these are ultimately reflected in mothering practices, both offline and online.

The final part of the chapter explores how the social media platform Facebook, with its technical and market-oriented affordances, shapes the interactions between members of the Romanian community with different socioeconomic backgrounds. For this section, I make use of digital methods and, through data visualization and interpretation, I illustrate how Facebook, with its "connectivity push," compensates for offline social capital deficits. By drawing on Bourdieu's concept of "social capital," I argue that Facebook's group feature affords a "connectivity potential"—a "social (media) capital"—that can eventually bridge the group's classed divisions otherwise reproduced in offline interactions and individual media use.

3.2 Postsocialist changes and Romanian migration

The collapse of state-socialist regimes in the period of 1989–1991 broke down the East/West divide imposed by the so-called "Iron Curtain." Together with other countries, Romania aligned itself with

the process of "(re)turning to Europe," especially by undergoing political and economic changes with the purpose of developing a free market, a capitalist economic system, and a democratic society (Gal and Kligman 2000), as well as joining European and international political organizations such as the European Union (EU) and the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO). At the same time, in this *de novo* nationalization process (see Brubaker 2011), European and Western-oriented sentiments began to gain popularity both socially and politically. In this context, Romania's symbolic "return to Europe," exemplified for instance through the metaphor of the "island of Latinity in a Slavic sea," marks the emergence of European-friendly, nationalist views both in the country and the diaspora (Trandafoiu 2013, 31–32). These perspectives supporting Romania's perceived "organic" affiliation with Western Europe, through, among other elements, its historical roots with the Roman Empire or its majority Christian population, ultimately rely on a hierarchical East/West distinction, with the eastern side situated at the lower end of the relation.

As scholarship coming from postcolonial and postsocialist studies has shown thus far, these types of discourses are indeed rooted in Western historical representations of Eastern Europe[25] as the necessary and continuous "other within" (see Todorova 2009; Bakić-Hayden 1995). Maria Todorova (2009), for example, theorizes this relation between Western and Eastern Europe and proposes the concept of "balkanism." She argues that, unlike "orientalism"[26] (Said 1979), which is based on oppositions between the West and the Orient (Self–Other), balkanism captures a relation based on ambiguity and in-betweenness that positions the Balkans as the "incomplete self" rather than the "incomplete other" (Todorova 2009, 16–18). As such, considering race and religious differences, she argues, "while orientalism is dealing with a difference between (imputed) types, balkanism treats the differences within one type" (19). This would then translate into aspirational relations of the Eastern European population toward their Western counterparts from a perceived inferior position. Milica Bakić-Hayden (1995) also addresses the making of orientalist discourses in relation to Eastern Europe and introduces the concept of "nesting orientalisms." The concept describes the phenomenon in which Eastern European populations, who are themselves subjected to "othering" in relation to Western Europe, attempt to claim their European closeness by identifying their own lower "others" (922). As such, against the ideal standard of a "civilized, enlightened and progressive" Europe, Eastern European populations compete against each other (930). In this process, differences between them

[25] Here, Eastern Europe refers to a region comprising of many nation-states that were affiliated to state socialism in and outside the USSR. The designation Balkans is also used in accordance with the authors who are referenced. I, however, take both terms to signify the same social and political processes, notwithstanding the geographical differentiation.
[26] "Orientalism" is a concept proposed by Edward Said (1978) to show how the formal study of the so-called "Orient," through a regime of disciplinary power–knowledge, created a discursive "Orient" that contributed to the hierarchical dichotomy between "the West, which is rational, developed, humane, superior, and the Orient, which is aberrant, undeveloped, inferior" (300).

are transformed into more irreconcilable oppositions. Drawing from this scholarship, namely Todorova's and Bakić-Hayden's arguments, it can be argued that postsocialist Romanian migration to the Western parts of Europe, which began with the opening of the borders in 1989, also carries with it complex othering discourses that are geographically and historically specific. As such, on the one hand, Romanian migrants might be subjected to discrimination, negative stereotyping, and othering discourses more generally by Western media, authorities, and some parts of the population. On the other hand, some Romanian migrants themselves might hold and reproduce, in the diaspora, similar discourses directed against other populations from or outside the nation-state (see, for example, Fox 2013 on the entanglement between whitewashing and racism toward Roma people in the case of Romanian and Hungarian migrants in the United Kingdom).[27] It is this tension that I attempt to capture and represent in the analysis of the Romanian diaspora in the Netherlands as well.

Besides ideological motivations for migrating to Western Europe, economic conditions also strongly contributed. As different national and international groups with financial interests aimed to reduce the power of the states (Verdery 1996, 35), Gross Domestic Products (GDPs) of postsocialist countries fell dramatically and, consequentially, so did public expenditures (Pascall and Kwak 2005, 29). These changes have not been without specific gendered consequences. Jaqui True (2000), for example, talks about how austerity driven economic policies affected women especially in that it triggered unemployment, household poverty, reductions in state social support, and the privatization of childcare and medical services. Referring in particular to Romanian economic postsocialist transformations, Mihaela Miroiu (2004a, 267; 2004b, 222–23), building on Vladimir Pasti's (2003) research on Romanian women's important economic role in the development of a capitalist economy, developed the syntagma "state men, market women" in trying to understand the gendered effects of neoliberal policies aimed at denationalizing state-owned heavy industry enterprises during the "transitional"[28] period. Both Miroiu and Pasti thus show how women were easily absorbed in the new service-oriented labor market, whereas men became what the two authors call "privileged victims" due to strong unionization and subsequent state compensations as a result of losing their jobs. The

[27] Anca Parvulescu (2016), drawing on Kim's (2000) work on racialization in the United States and his use of "racial triangulation," proposes the understanding of multiple hierarchies in the context of postcolonial Europe from a "triangle" perspective. She captures "the relational chronotope of European whiteness" (38) via the encounter between three characters in Michael Hanneke's film *Code Unknown* (2000), which represents three different precarious positions in the European metropolis. This perspective can offer a useful starting point for future explorations of Eastern European diaspora identity formation in a broader trans-diasporic context. For the purpose of this chapter, however, trans-diasporic dynamics outside the Romanian diasporic community itself have not been pursued further.

[28] The use of the word "transition" is debated among scholars researching postsocialist states. Verdery considers the use of the concept "transformations" as more suitable because it does not suppose a teleological dimension (1996). True (2000) also criticizes the term as it presupposes a rupture between "what was and what is to come." Finally, Gal and Kligman (2000) join the critique, rejecting the teleological assumptions as well. I will use the term "transition" as a historical period characterized by the fall of communism and a series of transformations that took place in Romania between 1990 and 2007, the year of joining the European Union.

high unemployment rate of Romanian men that followed might explain the predominance of men migrating during the first decade of the postsocialist period and the first two stages of Romanian temporary labor migration.[29] It was only after 2002 and the ability to freely circulate within the Schengen area that women began to mobilize more (Sandu 2006), and their entrance marks the most intensive emigration stage. This period came right after the first, and biggest at the time, post-1989 economic recession in the years 1997–1998, and the maximum period of general population social discontent (Sandu 2010, 59). This contributed to the general belief that the main reason behind the emigration of Romanian people before the EU accession was triggered by poverty and their search for a better life. The economic explanation behind migration from Eastern Europe to Western Europe seems to be preferred to the political one. Richard Black et al. (2010, 8), for instance, in their attempt to clarify the overestimation of the immediate postsocialist migration flow, argue that it was rather the economic collapse—which ensued much later during that same decade—than the initial political tumult to promote transnational mobility that triggered higher numbers in Romanian emigration. Corroborating these arguments, Swanie Potot (2010, 255) also describes Romania's various forms of transnational labor migration before the 2007 EU accession as a "multiplicity of individual strategies that are developed to minimize the deterioration of socio-economic conditions," in which searching for a better life became the main guiding principle.

If these are the conditions that initially triggered Romanians' transnational mobility, the question of their sociodemographic characteristics still remains unanswered. According to Romanian sociologist Dumitru Sandu (2006; 2010), Romanian migration was selective during the first stages, that is, until 2001: it were men rather than women who migrated, people originating from urban areas rather than rural ones, and there was a high degree of variance between regions (both in regard to destinations and numbers). The particularity of the 2002–2006 period seems to be its familial character, where men work especially in construction and women do care work and work in the domestic sector, and with Spain and Italy becoming the two main preferred destinations (Sandu 2010, 37–38). However, with the 2007 EU accession, a new stage of migration began. Temporary migration grew so intensively during this period that, according to the International Migration Report ONU,[30] Romania occupied the second place after the Syrian Arab Republic in 2015, with the fastest annual

[29] Sandu (2010) identifies four main stages of Romanian temporary migration. Of these four, he analyses in depth the first three. The stages are as follows: stage 1 1990–1995, individual exploration emigration, reduced; stage 2 1996–2001 characterized by increased numbers of emigrants with a maximum spread of destinations and high selectivity; stage 3 2002–2006 maximum rate of emigration, high concentration on main destinations Spain and Italy, less selectivity; stage 4 post-2007 emigration with characteristics typical of post-EU accession (64).

[30] International Migration Report 2015 Highlights (2016, 19). http://www.un.org/en/development/desa/population/migration/publications/migrationreport/docs/MigrationReport2015_Highlights.pdf Accessed June 3, 2020.

growth rate size of the diaspora. According to Eurostat, as of January 1, 2019, Romania had the highest number of citizens residing in any of the other twenty-seven EU member states.[31] During this stage, more highly skilled migrants—such as doctors, IT specialists, and other expats working in high status jobs in international companies or studying at Western universities—left Romania as well (Sandu 2010, 38). This trend of the diversification of Romanian migration (Sandu 2010, 91) therefore goes further than the image of the construction worker and the domestic worker that scholarship dominantly addresses. Yet, little information is available with regard to the mobility of Romanian people during the post-2007 stage, and its heterogeneity in terms of class backgrounds or gendered dynamics. Some academic studies have, however, focused on the phenomenon of "brain drain" as the latest dimension of Romanian labor migration. Brain drain or human capital flight refers to the transfer of human capital from countries that are considered less developed to those perceived as more developed (Beine, Docquier, and Rapoport 2008, 631; Ferro 2004, 381). This mobility specifically concerns highly specialized professionals, scientists, researchers, academics, and students (Patrutiu Baltes 2017, 225). Romania's brain drain phenomenon is part of a bigger trend of human capital transfer from Central and Eastern European (CEE) countries to Western European ones (Favell 2008).

Romanian migration to Europe is varied and representative of the population's sociodemographic diversity. Unfortunately, there is shortage of official data due to a focus on permanent migration. As such, more reliable information can be found either in the countries hosting large numbers of Romanian migrants (such as Italy, Spain, or Germany) or through special surveys (Goschin, Roman, and Danciu 2013, 93). In addition to that, the type of migration (in relation, for example, to the aims: labor, study, etc.; the temporality: temporary, circular, permanent) depends on national and European legal frameworks regulating transnational migration or labor market openness to new migrants. For instance, with the accession of the A8 CEE countries (the May 2004 accession of Poland, the Czech Republic, Slovenia, Slovakia, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Hungary, Malta, and Cyprus) and A2 countries (the January 2007 accession of Bulgaria and Romania), it was expected that all the older members of the EU would receive Eastern European migrants in the same way. However, Germany did not immediately open its labor market to the new EU citizens (Black et al. 2010, 11). Along the same lines, Potot (2010) shows how different political and legal changes in destination countries—such as Germany's increase of labor controls, France's limiting of asylum requests, or the tacit tolerance of undocumented work (as is the case in Spain in the agricultural sector)—influenced the movement of Romanian migrants from one country to another (257–58).

[31] Migration and Migrant Population Statistics (2020, 14). https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/pdfscache/1275.pdf Accessed June 3, 2020.

All these factors shaping the transnational mobility of Romanian people point to the importance of researching the many different layers of Romanian migration. The particular focus of this case study on classed and gendered dynamics offers a relevant and much-needed representation of Romanian migration to Western Europe in general, and the Netherlands in particular. In the next paragraph, I further contextualize Romanian migration to the Netherlands on both the local and national level.

3.3 Romanians in the Netherlands and the Amsterdam area

Even though it is not a traditional migration route, migration from Romania to the Netherlands became more significant after the 2007 EU enlargement, when Romania and Bulgaria became member states (Gijsberts and Lubbers 2015, 24). In 2007, the number of official Romanian residents in the Netherlands was around three thousand, but, per January 1, 2019, there are roughly twenty-five thousand Romanians who live in the Netherlands officially. The number of officially registered Romanians in the Netherlands has increased especially since the work permit requirement was lifted on January 1, 2014: it more than doubled between 2014 and 2019.[32] Initially, the Netherlands negotiated the opening of the labor market to Romania and Bulgaria differently from other EU countries. As such, Romanians needed a work permit[33] in order to enter the labor market. This measure, according to Engbersen et al. (2011, 17), contributed to a big gap between the number of registered and non-registered Romanian laborers. In 2010, for instance, there were between sixty-two thousand and seventy-two thousand Romanians in the Netherlands, eighty-seven percent of whom were not registered (Kremer and Schrijvers 2014, 3). No clear image exists of the current number of unregistered Romanians living in the Netherlands and, according to the same study conducted by Engbersen and his colleagues (2011), most of them are seasonal labor migrants.

According to the study "Roemeense migranten. De leefsituatie kort na migratie" (Romanian migrants. The life situation shortly after migration) by Mérove Gijsberts and Marcel Lubbers (2015), Romanian migration can be analytically categorized as, firstly, labor migration, where we find slightly more men than women; secondly, family migration, a group in which women are

[32] In 2014, the total number was 9,986 and, in 2018, 20,042, according to Statistics Netherlands (Centraal Bureau voor de Statistiek).
http://statline.cbs.nl/Statweb/publication/?VW=T&DM=SLNL&PA=03743&D1=0&D2=0&D3=148&D4=a&HD=181030-1800&HDR=T,G1,G3&STB=G2&CHARTTYPE=1 Accessed June 3, 2020.

[33] The access of Romanians and Bulgarians to the Dutch labor market was restricted in the first seven years of their accession to the EU. This right was granted by the accession treaties and it amounted to a maximum period of seven years. The restrictions were lifted per January 1, 2014.

predominantly present; and, thirdly, education migration, where both women and men are represented relatively equally. Their findings show that the majority of the officially registered Romanian migrants are highly educated and qualified, with an education average that is higher than the average of the overall Romanian population (101). The majority of registered people with a job are thus considered to be "highly skilled migrants," working in high status jobs in international companies or studying in Dutch universities (105). This latter aspect confirms earlier findings of the "Arbeidsmigratie in vieren. Bulgaren en Roemenen vergeleken met Polen" study (Labor migration by four. Bulgarians and Romanians compared with Poles; Engbersen et al. 2011) and, together, corroborate Romanians' participation in the bigger phenomenon of the "battle for brains" (Bertoli et al. 2009)—the "brain drain" from Romania and the "brain gain" for the Netherlands.

As reported by the municipality of Amsterdam,[34] Romanian official migration represented almost 0.3 percent of the total population in 2016. Furthermore, Gijsberts and Lubbers's (2015) study shows that Romanians living in Amsterdam mostly speak English, have an international orientation, and are expected to interact and socialize more with other international highly skilled migrants (11, 85). With regard to low-skilled Romanian people, the study "EU-migranten, netwerken en ondersteuning in Amsterdam. Roemenen in Amsterdam" (EU migrants, networking and support in Amsterdam. Romanians in Amsterdam; Klooster 2014, 18) states that Romanians with a lower education work mostly in the food service industry (*horeca*) and service sector. It also indicates that a part of them work within the informal labor circuit. Moreover, in terms of in-group dynamics, the research shows that the Romanian community in Amsterdam does not have an extended community network and that the main interactions take place via social media, especially Facebook (24).

An important dimension of Romanian migration to the Netherlands is thus related to the latest Romanian migratory trend: the so-called "brain drain," understood as "human capital transfer" in the context of the migration of highly educated individuals, usually from developing to developed countries (Beine, Docquier, and Rapoport 2008, 631). In short, most of the officially registered Romanian people in the Netherlands are highly educated and came to the Netherlands as labor, family, or study migrants (categories that may overlap in some cases). Lastly, a big part of this highly skilled population is located in the city of Amsterdam and its surroundings.

The highly skilled labor migration of Romanians to the Netherlands is, however, still relatively understudied. Rich scholarship regarding Romanian migration to the Netherlands comes from demographic and sociological perspectives and situates Romanian migration alongside

[34] According to the *Amsterdam in cijfers 2018* yearly report (Amsterdam in numbers 2018; Onderzoek, Informatie en Statistiek Gemeente Amsterdam, 2018), as per January 1, 2018, there were 2,952 Romanian residents in Amsterdam, out of a total population of 854,316 residents.
http://82.94.199.215/pdf/2018%20jaarboek%20amsterdam%20in%20cijfers.pdf Accessed June 4, 2020.

migration from Bulgaria and Poland in the broader trend of (postsocialist) labor migration (Heyma et al. 2008). Yet, little is known about the life situation after migration (Gijsberts and Lubbers 2015, 99; Engbersen et al. 2011, 17). Moreover, research done so far does not offer a more holistic approach to the phenomenon, as studies focus mostly on labor migration—both legal and illegalized—and integration dynamics (Engbersen et al. 2011; Kremer and Schrijvers 2014) or the effects on the Dutch economy (Heyma et al. 2008). Analyses of family migration are left out and, even more so, gendered analyses are less developed. This aspect is especially important as the topic of gender neutrality in "brain drain" research is gaining visibility in academic debates. Eleonore Kofman (2000), for instance, argues for the importance of inserting women's narratives in those around the human capital transfer. Furthermore, together with Parvati Raghuram (2006), she discusses how the exclusion of women's specific positions contributes to the invisibility of professionally active women in male-dominated sectors or that of women who enter migration through family migration schemes in their roles of wives and, oftentimes, mothers (287). In this context, the case of Romanian mothers living in the Netherlands offers new insights with regard to the specific ways in which highly skilled and highly educated women form and shape diaspora communities.

3.4 Methodological considerations

Over a period of five months, in March 2017 and from September to December 2017, I conducted a short-term ethnography (Pink and Morgan 2013) of the Romanian diaspora in the Netherlands. I held interviews with Romanian women and also participated in various events organized by and for the Romanian community in the Netherlands. While the initial focus of the research was the city of Amsterdam, it was difficult to limit myself geographically due to where my respondents resided or the locations of events that were of interest. By following the lead of the discussions and the "diasporic traces" that they offered, I expanded the geographical area of research, conducting interviews and participating in events outside the city of Amsterdam.

My research with the Romanian community started with a one-month pilot in March 2017, in which I followed different leads regarding the ways in which the Romanian diaspora from Amsterdam comes together, the roles digital media play in that, and how women participate in these processes. I initially approached a wide range of women, from their late twenties to their early forties, through snowball and purposive sampling, which led to ten interviews lasting between fifty minutes and two hours approximately. I talked with two women working in international corporations following their studies in the Netherlands, two women working in academia following their studies in the Netherlands, two active members of the recently formed diasporic NGO *Fundatia Români pentru*

Români or ROMPRO (the Romanians for Romanians in the Netherlands Foundation, set up in 2016), a filmmaker studying in Amsterdam, a woman working in an Utrecht-based association supporting Eastern European people living in the Netherlands who are facing homelessness, one secondary school English teacher and administrator of a Facebook group for Romanian mothers, and a researcher who, in her free time, used to manage a blog about Romania and Romanian culture dedicated to Dutch-speaking audiences. All women I talked with during this pilot phase were highly educated professionals.

Although I entered the fieldwork phase with more general, preset thematic interview topics (which derived from the Connecting Europe project research aims), the respondents were given space to go off topic if needed and recurrent patterns were followed up on. The interviews conducted during the pilot were transcribed and open coded and, during the next step, two main categories emerged: diasporic formation processes and mothering and diasporic formation processes and homeland politics. I decided to further pursue these two recurring themes. First, I wanted to explore the role of motherhood and its derived practices in diasporic engagements,[35] both with family and friends from Romania, and within their everyday lives in the Netherlands. Secondly, I was interested in juxtaposing this aspect with the recent engagement of Romanian people living in Amsterdam with anti-government protests taking place in Romania and the Romanian diaspora between 2013 and 2017.

My four-month fieldwork period started in September. I chose a Romanian weekend school located in Amsterdam as my main field site. The school is one of the regular projects managed by ROMPRO. From September to December 2017, I participated in seven sessions of the Romanian weekend school. While my daughter participated in a class on Romanian language and culture, I listened to conversations and talked with parents while they were waiting for their children to finish their various courses. During this second phase, I conducted a total number of eight interviews. I spoke with two mothers whose children were enrolled in the Romanian school and a teacher of the school whose children also took part in the classes. I also had a follow-up interview with a woman I interviewed earlier during the pilot and whose child participated in classes offered by The Hague's Romanian school. Furthermore, I spoke with three other mothers I met at the "Romanian Days" festival organized by ROMPRO. Finally, I had an interview with a woman who organizes events for diaspora outside the activities of ROMPRO. Seven out of the eight women interviewed during the second phase of the fieldwork are highly educated. Beside this, four of them have Romanian nationals as partners, whereas the partners of the remaining four are foreign nationals.

[35] The issue of mothering and diaspora ultimately became the key lens of the whole dissertation.

In addition to the interviews, I participated in events organized by or for Romanian people living in Amsterdam or the Netherlands in general: the Romanian Days festival (organized by ROMPRO in De Rijp on September 15–17, 2017); the film morning organized for children, teenagers, and parents during the Romanian film festival "Spotlight: Romania" (organized by the Eastwards foundation in The Hague on October 28, 2017); "Romania Express," a charitable event supporting Romanian non-profit organizations that help children in need (organized by the FOR Children foundation in Amsterdam on November 26, 2017); and an anti-government protest taking place at the Amsterdam Dam Square on November 26, 2017. Notwithstanding the initial ethnographic focus on the city of Amsterdam, in following the traces of the Romanian diaspora there, my research sometimes led me to the city's suburbs (Amstelveen, one respondent) or even to other big cities such as Leiden, Utrecht (two respondents), De Rijp, and The Hague.

The textual analysis presented in this chapter is thus based on material consisting of eighteen recorded interviews (out of which one follow-up interview) with Romanian women (of which thirteen are mothers), as well as fieldnotes based on participant observation. The data collected was coded and analyzed with the use of the qualitative data analysis computer software NVivo, on the basis of which the textual analysis was produced.

Throughout the fieldwork, I also observed discussions taking place in Facebook groups designed for the Romanian community living in the Netherlands. Some groups I was already a member of before I began my fieldwork, whereas I became a member of others after my respondents mentioned them. A corpus of Facebook spaces of interaction for the Romanian diaspora was made so that, after coding and preliminary analysis, I was able to make a selection of Facebook groups that I wanted to further explore with the support of digital methods. From the initial corpus, I selected the four that were mentioned most often by my respondents or whose members they were or used to be. After exploring the digital methods possibility of scraping data from Facebook groups with the use of Facebook API Netvizz (Rieder 2013), I collected anonymized data comprising messages posted on the groups' walls from the moment they were set up until 21–26 February 2018 (depending on the moment of scraping). In the case of two groups, I was able to gather the data freely as the groups' public character allowed for this type of action. The other two groups were private, and the data scraping was therefore possible only in agreement with their administrators. I then proceeded to investigate, visualize, and interpret the data with the support of a research assistant who specialized in critical data studies (see Appendix 1, Algorithmic accountability statement), and with the use of various visualization software packages such as Tableau and Gephi, and programming software, namely Python.

Lastly, I use pseudonyms for individual people throughout the chapter. Each respondent has, however, signed a consent form allowing for the use of the interview data for academic and research purposes.

3.5 Mediated transnational connectedness and heritage language transmission as gendered efforts for cultural reproduction

I met Elena at the beginning of my fieldwork, in my process of mapping out the main online diaspora outlets of the Romanian community. Elena is in her early forties and has lived in Amsterdam for almost twenty years. She had two children aged eight and twelve at the time of the interview, which she raises together with her Dutch partner. Aside her job as a freelancer, she manages a blog and a Facebook page where she shares different news pieces about Romania. This page and its content are mostly catered to Dutch (and Dutch-speaking) audiences, which is unique in the Romanian diaspora scene. Elena is, however, well connected with other diaspora leaders and participates in the organization of some important diasporic cultural events. I approached her from a desire to understand what motivated her to create these media channels about Romania and what triggered her involvement in diaspora spaces. Below, she identifies becoming a mother as an important trigger for her diasporic consciousness:

> [My daughter] was born and when my [daughter] was born that was the moment when…I went with her, I remember she was a baby, and I went with her to the park and I realized that I was not comforting her in Romanian. I was ashamed to talk in Romanian. And one day, I remember, I was breastfeeding in the park and I was talking to her, caressing her, and I thought: what is happening to me? Where is my self-esteem if I cannot stand up and talk in my own language with my child? And then something changed, and I thought, OK, now everything will change.

Elena was the first of my respondents who, in some way, referred to the intricate relation between mothering, identity, and language in the context of migration. She realized that speaking Romanian with her children is directly connected with her consciously assuming a Romanian identity that is later to be transmitted onto her own children. This process, however, does not come easily: in her description of what led her to start her blog years later, she mentions both a push to be proud of her Romanian heritage and an embarrassment that she needed to overcome in order to be able to manifest her difference. Mothering was the experience that triggered a conscious connection with her Romanian identity and made Elena take on the role of "culture bearer."

For Andreea, a social worker living in The Hague and working in Utrecht, contact with other Romanians was not a priority during her first years of living in the Netherlands. However, she reconsidered this aspect in light of her children's needs. She emotionally remembers how she came to realize the importance of her son being more exposed to Romanian culture:

> We (my husband and I) are both Romanians. The beginning was difficult and slow and, during the eight years since we have been here, as a family, we went to Romania only once. Halfway through, after four years. So, the little one went to Romania when he was four, four and a half. And along the way, during the holiday, he asked me: "Mama, why did you never tell me that I am Romanian?" And he started crying . . . And then I realized that he was having a little identity shock. He really did not understand who he was . . . And this was another reason that made me think it would be good for him to know more about Romania.

With feelings of guilt for not seeing it on time but happy to have been able to change the situation since then, Andreea speaks in positive terms about both her and her children now having regular contact with the Romanian community.

Deciding to further pursue the impact of mothering on processes of identity construction and cultural transmission, I met Alexandra, who is part of the coordination team of the Romanian school in Amsterdam. Alexandra and her Dutch partner share a daughter, who was five at the time of the interview. I asked her to meet me and share her experience of mothering in a foreign country and tell me more about the vision behind the Romanian school. She emphasizes the important role such an institution has for Romanian children living in the Netherlands (or, as in her case, children from bicultural—namely Romanian–Dutch—family settings):

> And I consider this Romanian school to be very necessary for children. Because I see my daughter . . . until she was four, she was all Romanian. Since she started school, the school's influence is so big, and her language goes down, even though I keep going. I only speak in Romanian (with her) and I always will. She is in a battle with this Romanian side of her . . . you know, she comes to the Romanian school because I say so. She has started to refuse to go.

Alexandra regards the Romanian school to be very important for the development of children with a Romanian background, even if the children themselves are not always aware of its value. In her situation, for example, she had to initially insist and rather coerce her daughter to participate in the

classes, as she developed a sense of reluctance and embarrassment to be identified as ethnically different:

> I don't remember what I told her, in Romanian of course . . . and she whispered: "Mom, you are embarrassing me. Don't talk in this language because no one talks in this language here . . . I am embarrassed by this weird language." She is in a period where she wants to be like everybody else. Why should she be special, you know? And I have to keep my lucidity and see how I can help her with these two cultures.

For Alexandra, the Romanian school is thus a necessary counterpart to the Dutch cultural input, supporting parents and children in finding the balance between the two cultures. Alexandra's words very clearly reflect what other Romanian mothers have shared with me during the fieldwork: in their role as mothers and in conditions of migration, Romanian women take the responsibility of mediating and negotiating between the two cultures in which their children are raised. For the women I interviewed, mothering in a foreign country triggers awareness not only of their own difference but also of their children's diasporic stance and multicultural exposure. In this new experience, mothers navigate between securing their children's integration on the one hand, and keeping contact with Romanian cultural elements and, most importantly, Romanian language on the other. Accordingly, mothers support their children in learning Dutch, performing at school, making friends, and arranging playdates, among other things. For some of them, their children are even the first push factor in expanding their own Dutch social circles by, for example, interacting with the parents of their children's schoolmates. At the same time, mothers are also preoccupied with transmitting and reproducing elements from their own cultural backgrounds. Mothering experiences set in motion different levels of diasporic awareness: the recognition of one's own difference, the acknowledgment of their children's hybridity, and the responsibility toward the reproduction of one's own culture. These steps take place in different manners and in ways specific to each individual; they do, however, seem to strongly contribute to many women's first intentional contact with Romanian diasporic communities.

In the context of mothering, for both Alexandra and Elena, diasporic identity negotiations and reflections are ultimately crystallized around the issue of language and language acquisition. For example, Alexandra reproduces a dialogue below in which she tries to convince her daughter of the many benefits that speaking Romanian has:

> And don't forget, when you will grow up, you will be the only one from your environment who speaks Romanian. You never know what you will do with this language when you will be twenty. Maybe you will do something, it will help you in life. And besides, when we go to Romania, my love, you only speak Romanian, you cannot speak any other language. Do you think your family from Romania will ever learn Dutch? No, it is my duty to teach you Romanian so you can speak with your grandmother.

It is thus the language of mothering that becomes an important site of identity construction for the mothers I talked with and their children, contributing to the making of a collective cultural heritage and the creation of lasting bonds between them (see Kackute 2016).[36] As many studies on migration and heritage language show, the desire to pass on the mother tongue is closely related to the intent of transmitting parents' cultural legacies (Nesteruk 2010, 273). Heritage language transmission and maintenance is not an easy process as it represents an "emotionally demanding work" that is, most of the time, invisible both on a societal level and in terms of research (Okita 2002, 225–26). Toshie Okita (2002, 26–28), in her work on bilingualism in bicultural families, highlights the gendered dimension of child-rearing and efforts to achieve bilingualism, with mothers feeling more pressure in these processes. Although perhaps more demanding in mixed families, this pressure takes a similar toll in migrant families in general. As is the case with other practices behind social reproduction work, and despite the more recent positive progress regarding gender roles in parenting, language and culture transmission is usually still performed more by mothers than fathers (Nesteruk 2010, 283) in heterosexual families.

As is the case with other diasporic groups, bilingualism in general, and the issue of heritage language transmission in particular, pushes Romanian women to develop Romanian cultural ties and pursue activities such as those offered by the Romanian weekend school. Alexandra manages to break down this assumed goal by offering two main reasons for it, which are also mentioned by other mothers: the positive, scientific benefits of bilingualism, and the importance of maintaining a good connection with Romanian-speaking family members and friends. First, some mothers mention especially the benefits of bilingualism, placing the learning of Romanian thus in a more cosmopolitan

[36] In her work, Eglė Kačkutė (2016) addresses the relationship between mothering and collective cultural heritage in the analysis of two diasporic novels: *Mother Tongue* by Betty Quang and *Chorus of Mushrooms* by Hiromi Goto. Even though she uses literary artefacts to understand diasporic processes in the private sphere and, more specifically, within the mother/daughter relationship, I find her insights regarding the importance of this phenomenon in creating collective cultural heritage extremely useful and relatable to the discussions I had with my respondents.

vision of the expatriate family.[37] For instance, for Delia, a mother living in Amstelveen, part of the Amsterdam suburbs, coming to the Romanian school simply represents an activity that other international children engage with. She mentions how her daughter asked to participate in one after finding out that two of her school mates went to a Bulgarian and an Iranian weekend school respectively. Secondly, many of my respondents, especially those who are part of mixed families (foreign father and Romanian mother), consider the need for their children to learn the language in order to speak with Romanian family and friends as equally important. This engagement is sometimes considered so important that, in certain situations, it overcomes children's own unwillingness to do so. Ada, a former teacher of the school, whose children also attend the classes, talks about her son's difficulties to relate to the language and his reluctance to learn it: "He says that 'I don't know, I find it hard . . . I do not need to speak it.'" In a similar way to Alexandra's insistence with her daughter, Ada reminds him of the importance of being able to communicate with extended family members from Romania: "And how are you to talk with the grandparents, my brother, your uncle?" Indeed, for the mothers I interviewed, language is also a vital tool to keep the connection with family from abroad alive. Speaking Romanian is essential for the communication between children and their grandparents and other members of the family. In this sense, the case of my respondents exemplifies previous scholarship on how language facilitates communication across generations within Eastern European migrant communities. Members of these migrant communities highly value extended family relationships and the grandparents' presence in their grandchildren's lives (Kuroczycka Schultes 2016, 179), and media (and, more recently, digital media) is an important way to maintain these connections when there is a geographical distance (see Nesteruk and Marks 2009; Nesteruk 2010).

Indeed, research on migrants' media use shows the strong relation between kin work and digitally mediated transnational ties (Baldassar 2007, 2008; Nedelcu and Wyss 2016). Romanian mothers, too, use a variety of digital platforms to keep in touch with their parents and extended family as video calls and chats on WhatsApp, Facebook Messenger, or Skype are part of their diasporic polymedia environment. In terms of everyday practices of connecting with family members from the homeland, my informants talk about having regular video calls their children also take part in. They thus develop digitally mediated "keeping in touch" routines (Nedelcu 2012) and mediated "ordinary co-presence" practices (Nedelcu and Wyss 2016) as an integral part of maintaining intergenerational transnational ties not only between them (the daughters) and their parents but also between their children and their children's grandparents.

[37] This classed aspect of the process of diaspora formation is highly relevant for the discussion of the Romanian diaspora in the Netherlands. It will, however, be discussed in more detail in the following sections of the chapter, which will focus on the creation of local diasporic ties.

Like language transmission itself, digitally mediated practices of keeping in touch with family members from Romania, and thus of maintaining kin from a distance, is an active and intentional gendered process (Nedelcu and Wyss 2016, 205). Even though they may seem disparate, I argue that the two practices of language transmission and regular digital connectedness with family and friends from Romania are two sides of the same cultural reproduction coin. Romanian mothers' various digital media practices of connectedness with family from Romania are therefore part of a bigger web of diasporic cultural reproductive work that includes, among others, the transmission and preservation of the maternal language so that their children can develop and maintain a sense of closeness with members of the extended family. From the vantage point of mothering, what becomes visible are the specific ways in which Romanian women, in their role as mothers and members of the diaspora, actively participate in the creation and maintenance of local and transnational diasporic ties that are digitally mediated. As media "have always been highly socialized and mediated by the relationship within which media are employed" (Madianou and Miller 2012, 150), the situated context of Romanian mothers highlights a particular dimension of digital diaspora that places media practices of transnational connectivity within gendered efforts to maintain family ties, transmit language, and reproduce culture in general.

Diaspora formation involves mediated transnational ties with loved ones from abroad. What is more, diasporic coming together involves local ties between members of the same ethnic communities. In the development of such ethnic local diasporic ties, media, and especially digital media, is again a ubiquitous element that lends itself to the wider diasporic setting. In the next section, I will focus on the formation of local diasporic ties. The specific forms the Romanian digital diaspora takes in this setting, and the role Romanian mothers have in the process, will be addressed in the following sections of the chapter.

3.6 Local diaspora spaces. Homeland politics, mothering, and class

3.6.1 Diasporic spaces of belonging

This section addresses the creation of local diasporic ties and spaces of belonging in the Romanian community, mainly in Amsterdam but also elsewhere in the online–offline continuum. It specifically focuses on the relationship between mothering and class in digital diaspora formation. It does so by showing the conditions that led to the formation of the diasporic group behind the Romanian school where I conducted a part of my fieldwork, as well as its visions about the people it is aimed at. As such, I will first talk about the formation of the main diasporic organization for the Romanian

community, which is the organization that initiated and manages the Romanian school in Amsterdam. I will show how its founding is related to the rise of a politically conscious Romanian middle class. This step is relevant in order to understand what led to the formation of such an organization and what type of values framed this process. Here, I will argue that this community presents traits that are typical of an expatriate, rather elitist community. I will then reflect on how such values and norms are reflected in the discourses used by the mothers I interviewed against the backdrop of more class-diverse, Facebook-mediated diasporic interactions.

As discussed in the previous sections of the chapter, Romanian weekend schools[38] are diasporic spaces of belonging where children can take classes in Romanian language and culture, practice their language skills, and be around other children with a Romanian background. At the same time, it is a place where parents can share experiences of living in the Netherlands, network, and support each other. These activities and events are disseminated and promoted through various social media, within which Facebook occupies a central role. If dedicated websites and their affiliated forums were the main communication channels for the diaspora before the popularization of social media, nowadays Facebook pages and especially Facebook groups take center stage. Romanian people living in the Netherlands come together in a variety of Facebook groups, with some being more generic (*Romani in Olanda*/Romanians in the Netherlands, *Romani in Amsterdam*/Romanians in Amsterdam, etc.) and others being focused on specific issues such as student life or mothering. Indeed, most of the mothers I interviewed used Facebook to get informed and communicate with each other about mothering in a Dutch context, confirming thus a more global trend of mothers turning to social media for support networks when physically distanced from family and friends (Basden Arnold and Martin 2016, 3–4). However, while group membership can overlap on Facebook due to its social media and platform specific affordances (see Bucher and Helmond 2017)—one can belong to multiple groups, which is oftentimes based solely on one's self-assumed Romanian ethnic identity and regardless of social class—offline spaces appear to enact less permeable boundaries. More specifically, class-based differentiations seem to govern the interactions between Romanian migrants living in the Netherlands. As such, lower skilled migrants or marginalized groups are less organized in offline spaces, participate less in events or activities organized offline, and, more importantly, seem to benefit more from the more accessible online diasporic spaces created via Facebook.

[38] At the time of writing—June 2020—there are three Romanian weekend schools in the Netherlands: in Eindhoven, Amsterdam, and The Hague. Besides these three more general schools, there is also a Romanian Orthodox Christian school in Schiedam.

3.6.2 Highly skilled Romanian diaspora

At the beginning of 2017, I began the preparation of my pilot fieldwork by trying to trace the active and formal Romanian diaspora in the Netherlands, find out who its leaders are, and what aims such a community might have. In my searches, I came across a recently established organization—ROMPRO—and, in March 2017, I had the chance to interview Amalia, one of the people who were involved in its setup. Amalia is a highly skilled professional working in the corporate sector, who also engages in entrepreneurial activities. With a wide social network in the Romanian diaspora, Amalia was very helpful in putting me in touch with other respondents. Furthermore, in her narration of how the organization came about, she refers to the initial elitist dimension of the organization, as most of its first members were highly skilled and self-identify as "expats,"[39] against and in relation to other Romanians who are lower educated and lower skilled:

> Amalia: In 2014, I felt it. And there were some important clicks that determined me to start this thing. The click was with the elections . . .
> Laura: And it is then that you started the LinkedIn group [for Romanians]?
> Amalia: Yes, I started it. And, in 2015, we had the first physical meeting with everybody. Then the group was focused more on professionals. We first said, we, the intelligent ones and the ones who are open to and capable of understanding how the [Dutch] society is, who are studying, who are working on a certain level, we should be the first to trigger a change in attitudes . . . There were (people) saying no, we keep the group closed, we don't want to have contact with the others.
> Laura: The non-expats?
> Amalia: Yes, or the nonprofessionals. Not someone who is not like us. Now, [the organization] is for everybody. But I cannot say that, so, we avoid, or we filter, you know, our events are quality events.

"Expat" is a relatively recent term that is used more colloquially. It derives from the Latin-based concept of "expatriate," and was initially used to describe foreign workers who work abroad from the perspective of the homeland (see Green 2009 for a historical overview of how the concept of expatriate changed over time in the United States). Nowadays, the term captures the migration of

[39] Here, I want to highlight the importance of identifying the "expat" terminology as self-identified and therefore performative (see Patterson and Leurs 2020). It is not an analytical tool per se. Here, I draw on Sarah Kunz's (2016) building on Brubaker and Cooper's (2000, p. 4) distinction between "categories of analysis" and "categories of practices." Kunz emphasizes how the migrant/expatriate distinction should not be taken for granted but should rather be questioned through the scholarly investigation of the making of the category "expatriate/expat" (96).

privileged categories of population in contradistinction to the non-white, non-Western, non-elite type of migration (Kunz 2016, 89). The differences between expats and migrants are as of yet not clearly and definitely established (Andresen, Bergdolt, and Margenfeld 2012; Andresen et al. 2014). Sarah Kunz (2016, 91–92), however, remarks how the two terms are differentially employed to resignify the "West and the rest" Self/Other distinction. As such, she argues, expatriate identities are, in the end, built in relation to lesser "others" along differences in race, class, nationality, and economic status. As such, expatriate people's migration seems to be highly charged with classed connotations (see Polson 2016) as well as gendered and racialized ones (see D. P. Berry and Bell 2011).

Indeed, during another discussion, Ada also confirms the classed blueprint of the organization:

> It is a select club. And this is the truth, there is no reason to be upset about it. If one wants to change, then one can change it. One has to make a choice. How much one wants to grow, how many people are out there. Because the others are not going to come . . . I understand very well that, the moment when you come for construction work, as a driver, or you come to clean houses and you do not have a residence permit, everything is clandestine, you don't have medical insurance, you do not care about networking. You need to have the basic needs [met].

Both Amalia and Ada describe the formation of the main diaspora group around the needs of people who, after having settled in and having covered their "basic needs," can begin to be involved in diaspora cultural and political activities. Furthermore, according to its own mission statement, ROMPRO is an association meant to promote Romanians' success and involvement in Dutch society, as well as their involvement in social and personal development projects.[40] Yet, according to Amalia, it is also an organization addressed to all Romanians, regardless of their background or social status. It is true that, while their main regular events are mostly directed at highly skilled or highly educated Romanian people, the organization also answers to ad hoc emergency calls for help from within the larger community. However, I argue that, when considering its founders and the events surrounding its creation alongside the self-identification as "expatriate," the organization is connected to a particular socioeconomic class within the Romanian population: right-leaning, urban middle class, highly educated, politically conscious, Western, and in support of the EU. I made this connection due to the involvement of many of the organization's members or sympathizers in the organization and support of the Romanian anti-government protests between 2013 and 2017.[41] These protests were

[40] https://rompro.nl/despre-noi Accessed June 1, 2020.

[41] Among the protests, the ones that received more media attraction were the following: the Romanian Autumn protest—from September 2013 to February 2014, thousands of people protested each Sunday against the mining exploitation project in Roșia Montană (see Margarit 2016); the November 2015 #colectiv protests following the

mainly focused on the issue of anti-corruption and were framed around an anti-communist and somewhat elitist rhetoric.[42] Indeed, in the context of the Netherlands, as per the conversations I had with some of its first members, the story of ROMPRO's coming together is narrated through two main moments: the November 2014 presidential elections that led to the election of Klaus Iohannis, when Romanians formed long lines at the Romanian embassy in The Hague and had to wait hours to cast their votes, and the aftermath of the October 25, 2015, fire in the Colectiv Club in Bucharest, which killed 64 people and injured 146. This last unfortunate event led to massive demonstrations in Romania—particularly by urban middle-class citizens[43]—but also intense mobilization in the Netherlands to support some of the victims who came for treatment, as well as the hosting and supporting of their accompanying family members.

Furthermore, many of my respondents were involved in the organization of, or simply participated in, the #rezist 2017 protests organized in Amsterdam and other cities in the Netherlands. These protests were connected with the #rezist movement that was already taking place in Romania. Following an executive emergency act aimed to amend the Penal Code and soften the criminalization of negligence and power abuse within public offices, many Romanian people took to the streets in Bucharest and other big cities in Romania at the beginning of 2017. Shortly after, many diaspora groups[44] started protesting in dozens of cities around the world (Adi 2017a, 86). The #rezist hashtag was used by protesters throughout the period to attract local and international attention to the issue of Romanian corruption. Both in Romania and the Netherlands, and in other diasporas as well, these protests mobilized more highly educated and professional people, who were considered to be part of "a new generation of 'beautiful people,' the urban middles classes, including the 'creatives,' IT workers, capitalist businessmen."[45] According to a survey by the Romanian Institute for Evaluation and Strategy in 2017, the average rezist protester was an urban dweller, employed mainly in the private sector, and with an average to high level of education (Adi 2017b, 56). The protests were also

Colectiv nightclub fire (see Pop 2016); and the #rezist protests that took place throughout the 2017–2018 period (see Adi and Lilleker 2017). Besides these, another anti-government protest took place in January–February 2012, triggered especially by post-2008 economic crisis austerity measures. Unlike the later protests, and particularly the #rezist ones, this first wave involved more socially diverse groups of people (see Tatar 2015).

[42] According to Ovidiu Tichindeleanu (2017), this rhetoric appealed widely to Western media, which popularized the protests while ignoring, for example, the role international neoliberal interests play in the larger process of postsocialist transition. See "Romania's Protests: From Social Justice to Class Politics." http://www.criticatac.ro/romanias-protests-from-social-justice-to-class-politics Last accessed June 1, 2020.

[43] Cîrjan. D. 2016. "Did it Ever Happen? Social Movements and the Politics of Spontaneous Consensus in Post-Socialist Romania." http://www.criticatac.ro/lefteast/social-movements-and-politics-of-spontaneous-consensus-in-romania.

[44] An overview of disparate protests organized by the Romanian diaspora can be found on the Facebook page Rezist Diaspora. https://www.facebook.com/pg/Rezist.DIASPORA/about/?ref=page_internal Last accessed November 13, 2018.

[45] Tichindeleanu, O. 2017. "Romania's Protests: From Social Justice to Class Politics." http://www.criticatac.ro/romanias-protests-from-social-justice-to-class-politics Last accessed November 13, 2018.

rallied around the ideological vision of a "new" and "modern" Romania, in contrast with the "old" Romania represented by the counterprotests supporting the government that formed reactively in February 2016 (Borțun and Cheregi 2017).

As such, the #rezist protests, like the #colectiv ones happening in 2015, were mobilized by more right-wing leaning, elitist, liberal, and Western-oriented followers, opposing conservative and traditional tendencies coming from the historical left-wing political forces, which are generally associated with the socialist regime. These social forces behind the #rezist and #colectiv protests, I argue, fit into an earlier postsocialist vision of a European-friendly Romanian identity (Preda 1999) oriented toward Western ideals rather than Eastern European specificities. In this sense, the exceptionality and unique connection of Romania with European values is emphasized in contrast to local and regional, rather negative idiosyncrasies. As such, the classed diasporic differences identified in this chapter and discussed so far can, in the end, also be read as internalized instantiations of "balkanist" (Todorova 2009) discourses that set Western expats as aspirational Selves in comparison to lower educated and lower skilled Romanian "failed Selves." More particularly, together with their participation in middle-class national struggles, my respondents' self-identification as "expats" further links the process of diaspora formation with that of class formation. Diasporic community building by highly skilled Romanian migrants is therefore intrinsically classed, since its materialization is, at the same time, the expression of a class positioning, both in the Romanian national context and in that of a larger European one.

From the data presented in the beginning of the chapter, the insights gained from my ethnographic fieldwork, and the information about the Romanian anti-government protests, it appears that the people who managed to mobilize resources to institutionalize and support a form of Romanian diasporic community are highly skilled professionals who are part of a Romanian middle class that identifies with Western "expatriate" elites. The events and main activities of the association thus mainly reflected the interests and needs of such a social class: cultural, educational, business-oriented, and networking-related ones. Moreover, while more actions are currently taken toward the support of lower skilled or more marginalized Romanian migrants, at the time of the research, a big part of the Romanian temporary medium or lower skilled migrant community was still underrepresented in the activities, events, and interest of the main diaspora groups.

3.6.3 Class and diasporic mothering

The classed differentiation mentioned so far in relation to the founding of ROMPRO and the Romanian school is also present in the discourses of the mothers I had the chance to interview. Firstly, most of the mothers I interviewed, but also those who are affiliated to the two related organizations,

are highly skilled professionals, highly educated people, or identify, at least, as expats. Even more so, in their social media use, the women I talked with carefully curate their interactions and affiliations based on this distinction. For instance, in discussing their membership to a Romanian mothers' Facebook group, many of the respondents disidentify from the majority of the active members of the group, which they consider to be "a typical Romanian mother": a mother who is too protective and unable to navigate Dutch society and the institutional setting on her own. These mothers, in opposition to these highly skilled or highly educated mothers, have, in their vision, less cultural capital resources. Some of the respondents allude to the lower level of education and social status of active members of the respective group by referring to their common grammar mistakes, the themes and advices that are discussed, and the questions asked. For Ada, for example, the faulty language and the ways in which certain topics were framed made her leave the group:

> It was about the language. Because I have a bit of an allergy to a sort of, a certain type of Romanian who . . . I don't know if you looked in the Romanian Mothers [group], but the discussions there are horror. It is a level that doesn't fit me.

Therefore, most of my respondents choose to be active in spaces catering to expat mothers' needs, such as the modern and cosmopolitan mothers from the international group Amsterdam Mamas. Diana explains why she left the Facebook group of Romanian mothers and chose, instead, to make more use of the group dedicated to Amsterdam expat mothers:

> Diana: I stayed [in the group for Romanian mothers] for around three days and then I got out.
> Laura: Why?
> Diana: I couldn't stand it anymore. They were annoying me, the comments, they were annoying me. They are different, they think so narrowly . . . But maybe it was also the way they expressed [themselves], the faulty Romanian language, I am bothered highly by this sort of thing . . . And you know what my conclusion was? I won't stay here because I don't really have anything to learn around here. I better stay in Amsterdam Mamas, in a group for expats. There, the questions are much more interesting, the issues are much more interesting, I have more things to learn.

Diana thus makes a clear distinction between the ethnic-bound group of Romanian mothers and the expat mothers' group—the expatriates, highly skilled professionals, coming from a range of countries, and bound together by their experience of expat life around the city of Amsterdam. This distinction indeed holds for many mothers: while they do have contact with other Romanians through

their children—via the Romanian school, for example—in their digital media diasporic practices, they prefer groups of people who belong to the same socioeconomic class. As such, local digital media practices of connectedness of Romanian mothers appear to be shaped by a form of classed division along the ethnic bonds versus cosmopolitan ties binary. Indeed, this demarcation has been noticed and conceptualized by Leah Williams Veazey (2016) in her piece "Mothering in the Digital Diaspora." She identifies two types of practices of migrant mothers looking to address migration-related challenges: I. Local, focused, and closed Facebook groups of mothers ethnically bound by language and/or nationality. II. Expatriate mothers' spaces represented by linked blogs and cross-platform communication. According to the author, the two processes are not mutually exclusive, yet they do work according to contrasting logics: rootedness after rupture versus continuous connectivity and mobility; privacy and boundaries versus links and public space; national, ethnic, and linguistic identity bonds vs expatriate identity (86). Notwithstanding that the online structuration proposed by the author is not entirely replicable in the case of the Romanian mothers from my study, the boundary-making dimension of the expat versus ethnically bound migrants can also be seen at work in the offline and online mothering practices of the Romanian mothers who I interviewed. Despite the relative open access of the Facebook groups, in which ethnicity is sufficient to grant membership most of the time, self-identification as an expatriate, highly skilled professional, and being generally open toward other cultures functions as an invisible norm that sets up diasporic boundaries of interaction both online and offline.

Having shed light on how the Romanian diaspora in general, and Romanian mothers in their mothering practices in particular, are marked by classed divisions, both in their offline manifestations and in their digital media usage, I am interested to further explore these findings with the use of platform specific investigation tools in the next step of the analysis. Taking the cue from the ethnographic insights mentioned in this section, I explore how classed dynamics might manifest in Facebook groups destined for people from the Romanian diaspora in the Netherlands in the following. I am thus interested to see if and how classed structuration is reproduced in Facebook facilitated diaspora spaces, as well as what role platform specificity occupies in the process.

3.7 Exploring Facebook connectedness with digital methods

As discussed in the previous section, the offline manifestations of the Romanian diaspora are marked by classed divisions. Particularly, the main diasporic activities and events I participated in and observed during my fieldwork were organized and catered mostly to highly educated and highly skilled professionals from the Romanian community. This aspect can be seen in mothering practices

and parenting related activities, such as those associated with the Amsterdam Romanian school, as well. What is more, this particular expat versus non-expat division shapes individual mother's choices in mothering related Facebook usage and, in particular, Facebook group membership and belonging. However, in spite of the lack of regular (offline) interaction between lower or lesser-skilled Romanians on the one hand, and expats on the other—a dimension that has been reflected in my lack of access to the former group as well—non-expat Romanians were recurrently mentioned in most of the interviews. Be it in contexts of digitally mediated conflicting discussions or just plain, passive observation, the two groups do seem to pass each other's path online in various Facebook groups for the Romanian community living in the Netherlands.

While, in the previous two sections, I tried to show the underlying conditions that shape such a classed division by relying on my ethnographic work, I explore in this section to what extent members of the Romanian diaspora belonging to a variety of social backgrounds are connected on Facebook with the use of digital methods: the Netvizz application (see Rieder 2013) for Facebook data crawling and other software for data visualization and analysis, such as Python, Tableau, and Gephi. I intend to take a close look at the ways in which a platform such as Facebook affords connectedness for diaspora groups, and how classed divisions might manifest or not in these online spaces. I will then proceed to interpret the findings against the backdrop of the ethnographic insights I have gained in the previous sections.

For the purpose of this analysis, I firstly identified four Facebook groups dedicated to the Romanian diaspora in the Netherlands that my respondents are or were members of. Two of the groups address a more general Romanian public, irrespective of their skills and work status. One has no thematic specificity (Group 1) and the other is dedicated to issues of mothering and motherhood (Group 2). The remaining two groups are either aimed at or managed by expats and highly skilled migrants. Again, one has no thematic specificity (Group 3) and the other is dedicated to cultural issues and events (Group 4). Moreover, two of the groups are closed (meaning that membership is granted only through validation by the administrators of the group, and information exchanged and communicated in the group is visible only to its members: Groups 2 and 3) and two are open (membership is obtained by simply joining the group and information exchanged and communicated in the group is visible regardless of one's membership status: Groups 1 and 4). In terms of access to digital data, I was able to scrape data freely and without the consent of its administrators for the open groups. For the closed ones, the groups' administrators facilitated this process by making the groups temporarily public for the purpose of this action. Together with the administrators, we thus set up a date and a time when the group was less active and could be made public for an hour. The data collected comprises posts shared on the groups' walls from the moment they were set up until 21–26

February 2018, and its corresponding metadata, such as date of posting and the user hash.[46] The names of the users posting in the groups are thus anonymized and each user has an allocated user hash. However, the user hash is consistent throughout all groups, which allows for the possibility to see connections between the four groups through a network visualization. The network (see Image 1) obtained in Gephi[47] was processed with the Force Atlas 2 algorithm. This algorithm is a force-directed layout through which one can create a physical system in order to spatialize a network, supporting thus the analysis of social networks. The nodes repulse and the edges attract the nodes, turning structural proximities into visual proximities that are ultimately seen as communities (Jacomy et al. 2014). The nodes represent the users who post in the group and the ties connecting the users are the acts of posting in the groups.

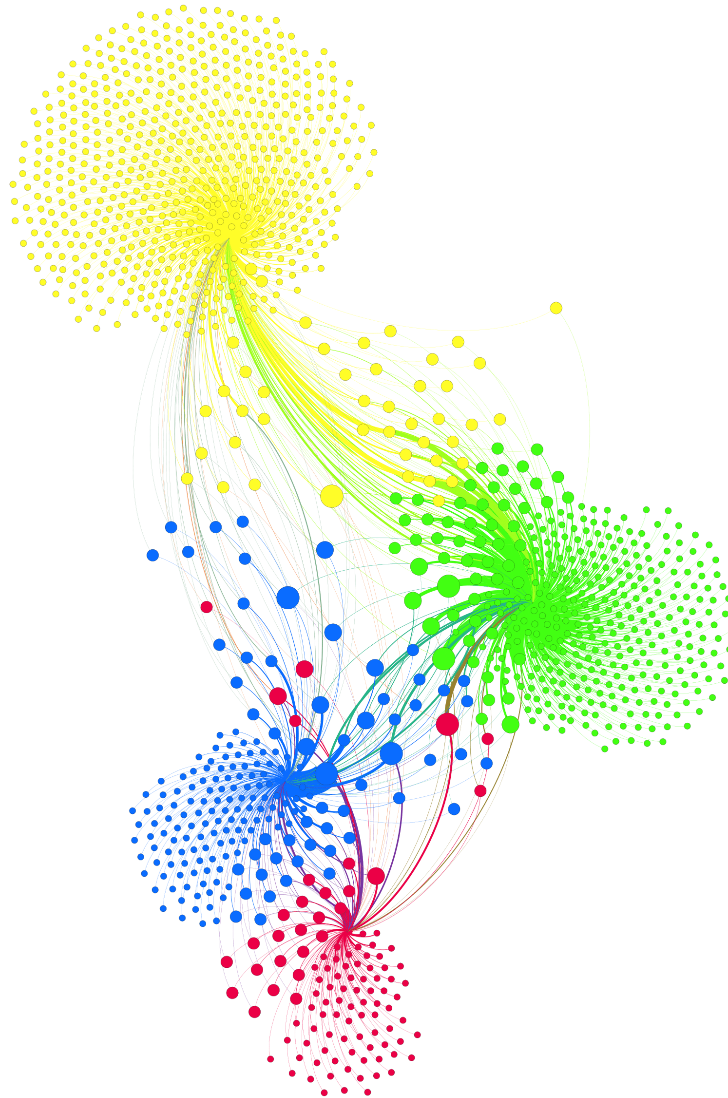
[46] A hash value is a number generated by a formula with the purpose of anonymization and security enhancement. In the case of this data scrape, the username of the members of the groups has been replaced with a hash with the purpose of anonymization. The hashing is consistent throughout the four groups, which makes it possible to combine the data from all four groups.

[47] Gephi is an open-source, free visualization and exploration software for graphs and networks (see Bastian, Heymann, and Jacomy 2009).

Image 1:

Posting and cross-posting activity across four Facebook groups of the Romanian Diaspora

Bipartite network displaying unidirectional relations between commenters and groups



Force Atlas 2:
Scaling: 300
Gravity: 1

Formatting:
Node size: Out-degree (2–60)
Node color: Modularity (res. 0.75)

Legend:

Group 1
Group 2
Group 3
Group 4

The different colors were allocated by the cluster identification algorithm: yellow (Group 1) and green (Group 2) refer to the groups aimed at the larger Romanian community (the yellow group is the one with the general theme and the green group is dedicated to mothers and mothering related issues); the blue (Group 3) and red (Group 4) clusters are the expat ones (the blue group is the one with the general theme and the red group addresses topics related to culture). Following the Force Atlas 2 clustering, the expatriate groups are placed closer to each other and the other two groups are also similarly clustered together. This suggests that the expat groups do share more members who are active in those two groups, and that the other two are connected by the same relationship. This graph therefore supports the class division interpretation from the ethnographic data.

For a subsequent exploration of the relationship between users' group affiliation and their postings, I further developed a model that allowed for the nuancing of users' potential multiple affiliation to more than one group. This relationship could show whether certain users tend to post more in certain groups and therefore set up a closer tie between two groups. During this next step, each unique user was counted as to how often they commented in each of the four groups in order to determine if another group is commented in and, if so, which group is commented in the most. Where two or more groups had an equal score, the biggest and second biggest group could not be determined. When there were no posts in the other three groups, the output is "none." When there was a tie between two or three groups, the results are "inconclusive." Following the analysis of the data, as indicated in Table 1 below, it can be deduced that a large number of comments were uniquely posted in one group, meaning that many users are active in only one group. However, a number of users posted in a second preferred group. The most evident relation and stronger connection is between the two expat groups (Groups 3 and 4), as a larger number of users posting in each group were second most active in the other. In the same vein, the mothers' group is closer to the other more generic groups dedicated to a variety of Romanians living in the Netherlands (Groups 2 and 1). Lastly, this latter group comprises a relatively similar number of users who posted in one of the other three groups, making it the one group that is connected in relatively equal terms to the other groups.

Table 1:
User comments on the four Facebook groups, second preference

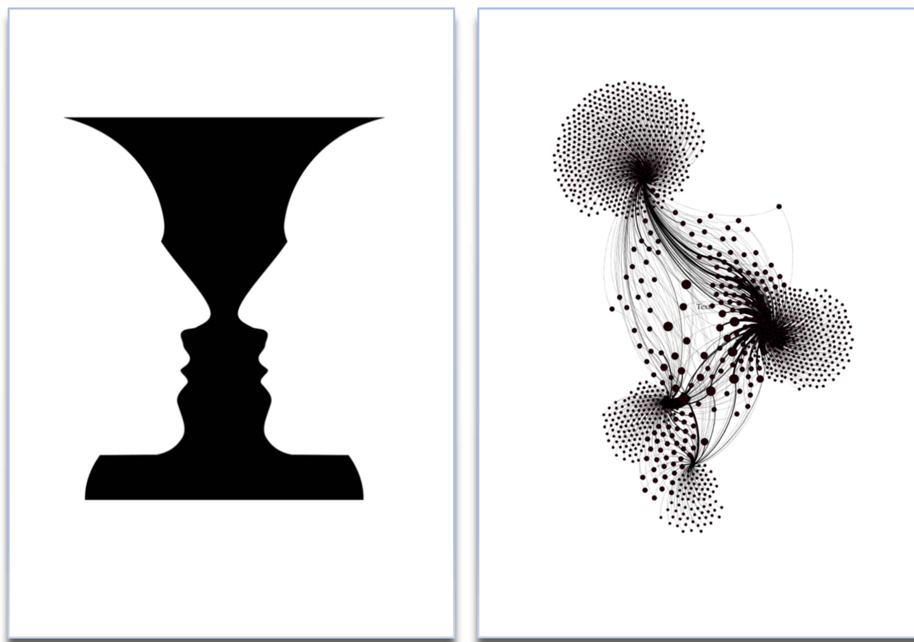
First preference	Group1	Group 2	Group 3	Group 4	Inconclusive tie	None	Total
Group 1	X	**8 (1.3%)**	**9 (1.4%)**	**5 (0.8%)**	-	602 (96.5%)	624 (100%)
Group 2	53 **(13%)**	X	18 (4.5%)	6 (2%)	2 (0.5%)	316 (80%)	395 (100%)
Group 3	8 (4.7%)	10 (5.9%)	X	22 **(12.9%)**	1 (0.6%)	129 (75.9%)	170 (100%)
Group 4	1 (1%)	-	18 **(18%)**	X	1 (1%)	78 (80%)	98 (100%)
Inconclusive tie	-	-	-	-	X	23 (100%)	23 (100%)

In both visualizations, however, there are a number of users who, regardless of the two pairs of expat/non-expat clustering, do ensure a relative connectivity between all groups. In the case of Image 1, there are the nodes that, in spite of their assigned algorithmic affiliation, are relatively separated spatially from their core clusters. In the case of Table 1, there is the "inconclusive" category, which is assigned when there is a tie between two or three groups with regard to the number of comments a user posted, or when the users posted outside of the classed paring assigned in this analysis. This deems a number of users as belonging equally to two or more groups with respect to their posting/commenting activity. Taking the cue from Dana Diminescu's (2008) discussion on the complexity of contemporary digitally mediated migration, I am interested in further nuancing this division/connection dynamic, which is articulated in the simultaneous processes of classed offline interactions and social media practices on the one hand, and the platform's—that is, Facebook's—algorithmic push toward connection on the other. In "The Connected Migrant," Diminescu (2008) uses Rubin's "Vase" (see Image 2a) to capture the condition of the twenty-first-century migrant. Similar to Edgar Rubin's figure, where one can see either the two profiles or the vase itself, in analyses of the figure of the migrant, she argues, one can see either the ruptures a migratory move might entail, or the continuities that are maintained nevertheless. And, while more meaning is attributed to continuity, that is, connectivity, the shifting between the two frameworks depends on both the societal changes as well as the direction of one's gaze (569). In the network visualization of

the four Facebook groups (see Image 2b), both the classed clustering and intermediary ties between them are part of the same whole as well. Whereas offline social norms can enhance class-based divides that are also reflected in users' particular interaction with the medium, specific affordances of the platform can indeed counteract this tendency through the algorithmic incitement to stay connected.

Image 2a: An illustration of Edgar Rubin's (1915) ambiguous image "Vase" (Source: http://clipart-library.com/clip-art/silhouette-heads-20.htm)

Image 2b: Bipartite network visualization of posting activity across four Facebook groups of the Romanian Diaspora



José van Dijck (2012), in "Facebook as a Tool for Producing Sociality and Connectivity," offers a political economy analysis of social media in general, and Facebook in particular, calling for a new analytical model that can shed light on various interests that govern social media platforms. Through market-derived interests (coming from the platforms themselves but also from third parties, such as advertisers), she argues, social media platforms not only support and "facilitate" connections, but they "forge" and "engineer" them (164, 168). As part of its various affordances,[48] Facebook enhances connectivity between people based on various data about users' profiles. In the case of Facebook

[48] See Bucher and Helmond (2017) for an overview of different conceptualizations of "affordances" in relation to (social media) platforms.

groups, for example, users can receive suggestions to join other groups based on criteria such as the groups one already belongs to, pages the user likes, groups that their friends are part of, geographical locations, and so on, as mentioned in Facebook's Help Center:

> "Facebook suggests groups we think you might like to join based on many factors, including:
> - Pages you've liked or interacted with.
> - Groups your friends are members of.
> - Groups you've joined or recently visited.
> - Groups that are popular near you or relevant to your location.
> - Your interactions on Facebook with posts, videos, events and other content."[49]

This is one of the situations in which, "by virtue of their technological capabilities, social media sites connect data that users consciously or unconsciously provide be it profiling data or metadata on search behavior" (Van Dijck 2012, 168) for the aforementioned market interests. In the case of the Romanian diaspora in the Netherlands, Facebook's group feature further affords encounters between individuals who are otherwise separated due to classed divisions. Even though the Facebook groups I analyzed cater to different needs and to people coming from different social backgrounds, with some of them even designed along the lines of those differences, they are also governed by an algorithmic connecting potential. This potentiality is designed by the platform's rationale in keeping people connected and, particularly, the connectivity logic behind the group feature. As such, this specific affordance can have a diasporic connection role when, as in the case of the Romanian diaspora in the Netherlands, offline ties are weaker. This phenomenon is, for instance, captured well by my respondent Andreea in her attempt to describe the interaction between Romanian expats and non-expats. Andreea works for an association that runs a reconnection program for migrant people from Central and Eastern Europe who experience homelessness in the Netherlands, and she is mainly in charge of managing the Romanian cases. In her personal life and in her role as a mother, Andreea has regular contact with the expat community in The Hague as well, especially through the Romanian school in The Hague her son goes to. Below, she explains her perception of the interaction between highly skilled Romanians and those who are lower and lesser skilled:

> But for example, I went to . . . this is just to say a bit more about the atmosphere around this [expat] group. Because, sometimes, I like to participate [in this type of expat group] as well,

[49] "How does Facebook suggest groups for me to join in?" https://www.facebook.com/help/382485908586472?helpref=popular_topics Accessed June 3, 2020.

> and I am also with my kind [the people she helps through the association she works for]. It is such a pleasure to see my Romanians from the street, my musicians [referring to Romanian street musicians] on the same [Facebook] page with [name of one of the leaders of the Romanian community]. This fascinates me. Anyways, so at a certain point, I don't know how, via via, I participated in [a diasporic event]. At a certain moment, it came out, this point of view, very insensitive, that kind of hurt me. There was a successful young lady, she had been traveling around the world, studies, things like that, she had been working. Of course, congratulations, it is not an easy thing to do. And she was talking about a shameful moment she experienced once in the Netherlands when, probably while waiting for the bus, in a corner of the station, there was a man begging. And there was also a police officer trying to ask him what was going on because he was not allowed to [do that]. And then this young lady said that, in that moment, she was praying the man wouldn't show a Romanian passport. And yet that was the case. And in that moment, she felt like going and hitting that man. To tell him: "How dare you come here and not work and basically bring shame on our country?"[50]

In her story, Andreea manages to bring together two instances of intersection between Romanians in the Netherlands who occupy different class positions: one offline and one online. She describes a moment when the image of a Romanian man begging in the street is juxtaposed with the embarrassment of a highly educated and professional young woman. In addition, Andreea notices amused how, regardless of the separate offline social worlds between people of different class backgrounds, in certain online instances, such as on Facebook, people can temporarily inhabit the same spaces. As such, in spite of offline normative classed boundaries, Facebook, in this case, offers the potential of bringing closer those people who otherwise would not have come together in real life: a leader of the highly skilled community and a Romanian person from a marginal position who Andreea encountered through her work.

If, from a political economy perspective, social media connectivity serves bigger market interests, Facebook can also, in the specific case of classed divisions in a diaspora group, compensate the lack of offline social interactions by offering an alternative connection path. This alternative can be interpreted within the framework of Pierre Bourdieu's ([1986] 2011) research on the positive outcomes of social relationships and networks. He identifies three forms of capital that structure the social world, adding thus to the economic understanding of capital that was popular at that time: economic capital, cultural capital, and social capital. Of these three, the conceptualization of the latter

[50] This quote has been edited for clarity and brevity.

is beneficial to the purpose of this chapter. According to Bourdieu, social capital represents the *potential* or actual resources associated with social relationships and group belonging ([1986] 2011, 86–87), with its reproduction having a role in the reproduction of social inequalities. The relationship between social media and its benefits for gaining social capital have been addressed so far by various authors (see Hampton, Lee, and Her 2011; Ellison, Steinfield, and Lampe 2007; Ellison and Vitak 2015). Nicole B. Ellison and Jessica Vitak (2015), for example, drawing on Putnam's (2000) distinction between "bridging" and "bonding" social capital, show how mediated technology and its networked logic can contribute to the increase of "bridging social capital," since certain network members who belong to multiple clusters can "help spreading the information quicker and more efficiently through a network and close 'structural holes' between otherwise unconnected groups" (209). From the specific perspective of Facebook users, who benefit less from resources associated with offline social capital, Facebook can thus fulfill an important role in the enlargement of their social networks and the possible benefits associated to it. In the case of the above example, Andreea, for instance, can represent such an important node in connecting the two Romanian groups she comes in contact with through her work and her personal life.

Offline social norms regulate how people meet and come together, who is in and who is out. In the case of the Romanian diaspora in the Netherlands in general, and that of Romanian mothers in particular, online and offline social connections are shaped by classed interests and values. The main diaspora association has been, for example, created by and for highly skilled members of the Romanian community, while mothers from expat circles prefer to meet more regularly offline and have more social and symbolic power to organize and materialize their connections, the non-expat mothers reach out more in online spaces to share and support each other. The connective potentiality of digital spaces and social media, however, through their own connective logic, offers users a "social (media) capital" of connectivity. This capital form can, in turn, compensate for the lack of social or cultural capital in offline spaces that oftentimes regulate boundaries in social interactions.

3.8 Conclusions

This chapter explored the digitally mediated manifestations of the Romanian diaspora in the Netherlands. It has taken the lens of diasporic mothering practices to shed light on how women, in their role as mothers and digital technology users, participate in digital diaspora formation processes. In doing so, I have focused on the relatively recent institutionalization of the Romanian highly skilled migrant community and chose as my main field sites a diasporic organization based in Amsterdam and its affiliated Romanian weekend school for children.

First, I introduced postsocialist Romanian migration and its main tendencies after the liberalization of the country's borders. I argued that Romania's "return to Europe" carries with it orientalist and balkanist discourses that position Eastern Europe as less developed in relation to its Western counterpart. These discourses are also reproduced in diasporic spaces.

Next, I showed how, due to the specific border and mobility arrangements within Europe and the Netherlands, in contradistinction to the first two decades after the end of the socialist regime, the number of highly skilled and highly educated Romanians who migrate to the Netherlands increased over the last years. As such, I identified the most recent population of Romanian migrants in the Netherlands as a highly skilled one. I argued for the urgency to research this phenomenon both in its classed and gendered dynamics as it, for now, remains scarcely addressed.

I then proceeded to the analysis of Romanian diaspora formation from the vantage point of Romanian mothers. I showed how Romanian mothers connect with loved ones transnationally, and with each other locally. I argued that local diasporic practices, such as the Romanian school in Amsterdam, and transnational digital media use are part of a bigger phenomenon of intentional, gendered cultural reproductive efforts toward family ties maintenance and heritage language transmission.

Furthermore, I looked at the formation of local highly skilled diaspora in relation to a growing politically conscious Romanian middle class. I argued that, in the Romanian community in the Netherlands, and in Amsterdam more specifically, classed distinctions regulate diasporic formation processes. As such, the differentiation between self-identified expat mothers and ethnically bound mothers creates boundaries in offline interactions and individual media use.

Lastly, I explored the interactions between members of the Romanian diaspora in four different Facebook groups. With the use of digital methods, I tried to understand the medium in its specificity, analyze it in the context of the ethnographic insights, and, in the end, obtain a richer understanding of the process of diasporic digital mediation. I particularly looked at the medium's affordances in relation with the classed divisions that manifest in offline interaction and the individual use of the Facebook group feature. I showed how Facebook as a medium, through its technical and market-oriented affordances, compensates for offline social capital deficits by providing a "connectivity potential." I then put forward the notion of "social (media) capital," understood as the inherent connective potentiality of social media in general, and Facebook in particular. Class divisions are therefore shown to be sporadically and potentially disrupted via Facebook afforded, connecting digital pathways.

This chapter demonstrated the gendered and classed dimensions of the Romanian community in the Netherlands. It represents the first illustration of this dissertation of how mothering experiences

shape the formation of transnational diasporic ties with family and loved ones and diasporic local ties with members of the same ethnic community. More particularly for this case, it has emphasized how the spaces that are created through these mothering and mediated diasporic processes are nevertheless marked by classed differences. While class and gender have been main analytical categories for the understanding of how mothering is part of diaspora making in the Romanian community, in the next chapter, dedicated to the Turkish community in the Netherlands, the interplay of mothering, religion, and class becomes central to mediated diaspora formation.

Chapter 4

Beyond the guest worker. Class, ethnicity, and mothering in the Turkish diaspora

4.1 Introduction

The second case study of this dissertation focuses on diasporic formations of the Turkish community living in the Netherlands and the use of digital media herein. It investigates mothering experiences of Turkish women living mainly in Amsterdam but also in other large cities of the Netherlands. During the four-month fieldwork, I had the chance to speak with two different groups of Turkish women. The first group belongs to the historical Turkish minority living in the Netherlands and exists of members of families that were formed following the agreement between Turkey and the Netherlands for the recruitment of guest workers in 1964. The second group of women belongs to a more recent community of highly skilled migrants that has, so far, been seldomly studied. In this chapter, I show the different positions from which the two communities form different diasporic groups to support each other, highlighting thus the differences between the two, and validating earlier work on the intrinsic heterogeneity of diasporas. I show how, in a similar way to but distinct from the Romanian community, diasporic community building from the perspective of mothers in the Turkish community is also marked by gendered and classed social processes. I discuss in particular how these differences are enacted in relation to homeland politics, and how they inform respondents' affinities toward certain social media platforms and the affordances therein. The questions I try to answer in this chapter are the following: How do Turkish mothers living in the Netherlands participate in the formation of digital diasporas? What specific role do mothering practices have in these diasporic processes? And, what other categories of difference besides ethnicity are at work in the coming together of Turkish migrant mothers?

In the first empirical section of the chapter, I address the setting in which I met my respondents, conducted the interviews, and approached the fieldwork methodologically. Here, I also present the methodological information that is specific to this community and was therefore not included in Chapter 2 of the dissertation, "Epistemological Groundings, Methodological Choices, and Reflections."

I then proceed to, firstly, discuss the formation of the first diasporic group, which is composed of first-generation Turkish mothers who are part of Turkish–Dutch communities and live in the

Slotervaart neighborhood of Amsterdam. I analyze the specific location from which they came to bond as a group and support each other in dealing with the hardships of being migrant mothers in the Netherlands. In order to do this, I refer to their experiences as mothers, as Turkish migrants, and, lastly, as Muslims to show how the intersection of these three particular identity axes shaped the community they built. In light of this identity nexus, the last part of this section presents and contextualizes this group's social media use for digital diaspora formation.

The second empirical section of the chapter addresses the formation of the second diasporic group, formed around a number of Facebook communities dedicated to Turkish mothers and managed by highly skilled Turkish women, of whom most moved to the Netherlands only recently. I, firstly, show how their coming together was built on the classed differentiation from the already settled Turkish community and their subsequent desire to create new spaces addressing in particular the needs of mothers who are highly skilled professionals. This classed differentiation is furthermore discussed in relation to Turkey's political context, with a focus on the so-called secular–religious divide. Furthermore, I show how the highly skilled and higher educated diasporic group of mothers is formed at the nexus of mothering experiences, ethnic ties, and class belonging, and through a process of disidentification from the historical Turkish community in the Netherlands.

In the last section of the chapter, I discuss the different social media uses for diasporic building of the Turkish mothers belonging to the two groups through the lens of privacy. Although both groups refer to privacy as a central concern in their media use for diaspora formation, they nevertheless place this aspect in relation to different issues. The first group brought privacy up in relation to the gendered dimensions of their community, while the second one discussed it in relation to issues of transnational surveillance on the part of the Turkish state. In this sense, drawing on Miller (2016), I make use of the concept of "scalable sociality" as an affordance of current social media use to explain how social media can facilitate a wide range of diasporic networks within the Turkish community in the Netherlands, contributing to the two groups staying relatively separated not only in offline spaces but also in those that are digitally mediated.

4.2 Methodological considerations

Over a period of four months, from February to May 2018, I conducted my fieldwork with the Turkish diaspora in the Netherlands. While, as was the case for the other communities, I initially intended to geographically limit my research to the area of Amsterdam, following the different patterns emerging in my discussions and observations during the fieldwork process, I ended up extending the fieldwork to various other cities, such as The Hague, Leiden, Almere, and Utrecht.

I conducted the fieldwork in what I consider to be two distinct communities, which I later on differentiated analytically on the basis of their migration route: members of Turkish communities formed as far back as the 1960s, when the first Turkish guest workers came to the Netherlands; and the highly skilled professional members of a group that came to the Netherlands only during the past decade, some of whom are strongly driven by their opposition to the current Turkish political regime.

At the beginning of the fieldwork, I first tried to get in touch with Turkish organizations working especially with women. After a few unsuccessful attempts, I came across an event celebrating the beginning of the year, organized by the organization "Nisa 4 Nisa." This association is dedicated to migrant women living in the Center West part of Amsterdam and aims to support women in their social lives (in meeting other women, taking bike lessons, visiting the city of Amsterdam, offering babysitting services when needed, or organizing occasional meetings over tea or coffee), in their professional lives (by offering sewing lessons or Dutch language lessons), or in moments of difficulty. The organization was set up and is run by Fatima Sabbah, a Moroccan–Dutch woman who, in her own words, highly values women's role in managing migrant families and communities: "Als het met de vrouw niet goed gaat, gaat het met het gezin niet goed. Met alle gevolgen van dien voor het gezin en de omgeving" (If a woman isn't doing well, her family isn't doing well either. With all its consequences for her family and its surroundings).[51] Initially, this seemed like a good place to begin my fieldwork. However, I later found out that the organization mostly serves Moroccan women and could not provide much support for my specific research. Yet, on the occasion of the event, I had the chance to meet one Turkish woman, Gamze. She occasionally participates in the events organized by the organization as she lives in the Amsterdam neighborhood where the organization's office is, Slotervaart. She was thirty-five at the time I met her, and was born and raised in the city of Amsterdam. Her father came to the Netherlands as a guest worker in the 1960s, followed by his wife and three sons a few years after he had settled. Gamze is married herself and has two children. She was unemployed at that moment after having worked for the Dutch Employee Insurance Agency. After introducing my work to her, she agreed to meet me for an interview but also to assist me in finding other respondents. With the support of Gamze, I had the chance to talk with seven Turkish women living in Amsterdam between February and April 2018. In February, I first interviewed Gamze and her sister-in-law, and, in April, I had a collective interview session with five other women. The interviews were simultaneously translated by Gamze from Turkish to Dutch. The interviews were not audio recorded due to the women's wishes to keep the conversations as private as possible. Even though the participants were assured of the restricted access

[51] See "Nisa 4 Nisa" website: https://nisa4nisa.nl/over-nisa-for-nisa/ Accessed July 1, 2020.

to the collected data, I believe more time would have been needed for a higher degree of trust to be established between me and the respondents. At the same time, it is worth mentioning that, throughout these interviews, I encountered several moments of confusion on the part of the participants with regard to the academic nature of my PhD research. This confusion might also have played a role in their refusal to be audio recorded. To the best of my abilities, I explained both the educational level of a PhD program and the possible implications of publishing the findings of this research. In the end, the participants agreed on me taking notes during our talks. For this reason, an imbalance of direct quotation between the two groups can be observed in the analysis. All the women (including Gamze and her sister-in-law) are part of a group that meets to discuss the Quran but also to share their everyday lives and to support each other with advice and help when needed. They communicate mainly through a WhatsApp group where they set the logistics behind organizing their meetings. All the other women friends of Gamze are first-generation Turkish migrants who came to the Netherlands via family reunification and formation processes and they have lived in the Netherlands between seven and twenty-five years. Their ages are between thirty-one and forty-eight years old.

Over the course of the same period, I also had the chance to learn about the existence of a Facebook group dedicated to Turkish mothers living in Amsterdam. After having reached out to the administrators of the groups, one of them, Zeynep, agreed to meet me for an interview. Besides our discussion related to the subject of the thesis, she also agreed to pass on information about my research and search for respondents in the group, in the form of a public post. Soon after, I was contacted by several women willing to meet me for an interview. Even though these women were active members of the Amsterdam group, they were also founders or members of other Facebook groups dedicated to expat Turkish mothers living in other cities. These groups were created following the popularity of the Amsterdam group and with the desire to create ties between women who live in other cities besides Amsterdam. As such, I had the chance to meet in total a number of ten women members of different Facebook groups for Turkish mothers living in Amsterdam, The Hague, Leiden, Almere, and Utrecht. With the exception of one, they all previously lived in big Turkish cities—either Istanbul or Ankara—and had highly skilled professional positions or high education levels, with their ages ranging between mid-twenties and late thirties. All the interviews from this group were audio recorded and transcribed *verbatim*.

In the analysis, some quotations of the respondents are shown both in English and in Dutch. The quotations in English are from interviews that were conducted in English. For some interviews that were held in Dutch, or that were translated from Turkish to Dutch, I opted to show both the Dutch version and my English translation of it. This is related to my own relation with these languages, since I am less proficient in Dutch than I am in English. I wanted the quotations I considered highly

relevant for the analysis to retain their initial meaning as well as to make obvious the translation process throughout.

The textual analysis presented in this chapter is thus based on material consisting of ten recorded interviews with Turkish women (all of them mothers), fieldnotes from two individual unrecorded interviews and five collective unrecorded interviews, as well as fieldnotes from various moments during the fieldwork. The data collected was coded and analyzed with the use of the qualitative data analysis computer software NVivo, on the basis of which the textual analysis was produced.

All the women approached during the fieldwork consented to the use of the collected data for the purposes of this research. All the names used in this chapter are pseudonyms, per wishes of the respondents.

4.3 Digitally mediated gendered diasporic networks in Turkish guest worker communities in the Netherlands. The interplay between ethnicity, motherhood, and religion

Turkish people represent the largest population group with a migrant background (Dutch nationals included) in the Netherlands. A big part of this group is formed by former guest workers and their families, who came to the Netherlands at the onset of the 1960s following a recruitment agreement between the Dutch and Turkish governments. Most of the laborers came from rural Turkey, more specifically the Central-Anatolia and Black Sea area (Aarssen, Backus, and Van der Heijden 2006, 221). This first group of Turkish people coming to the Netherlands was mostly composed of lower skilled and vocationally trained men who occupied working positions in industries such as textile and road construction. They were part of a broader group of temporary workers coming from different countries. Due to the oil crisis of 1973, most of the guest workers coming from Mediterranean countries such as Portugal and Italy returned to their homelands. Turkish workers, however, stayed and were, in the following years, joined by other family members through migration paths of family reunification and family formation, which intensified until the 1980s and then decreased due to more restrictive migration policies on the part of the Dutch government (Beets, ter Bekke, and Schoorl 2008, 27–28; see also Nicolaas, Sprangers, and Witvliet 2003).

Most of the research done on first-generation Turkish migrants addresses the historical guest worker communities, focusing especially on issues related to integration and ethno-religious identification (Doomernik 1995; Ersanilli and Saharso 2011; Vedder and Virta 2005; Maliepaard, Lubbers, and Gijsberts 2010). More recent literature addresses the topic of social mobility with a focus on the second generation (Crul and Doomernik 2003; Vermeulen and Keskiner 2017).

Literature addressing the particular issue of diasporic community building usually addresses the Turkish community and the Moroccan community in a comparative frame within the collectivistic versus individualistic cultures dyad (see Verkuyten, Hagendoorn, and Masson 1996; Crul and Doomernik 2003). This frame offers a rather homogenous understanding of the community and, with some notable exceptions (Eijberts 2013; Eijberts and Roggeband 2016), migration scholarship rarely addresses its gendered aspects. The everyday negotiating between the Dutch and Turkish cultures done by Turkish migrant women from their position as mothers in trying to raise their children, build social capital, and make a life are thus still to be investigated. Understanding the specific ways in which Turkish women from former guest worker communities come together for diasporic purposes, from their position as mothers, thus offers new gendered insights on the Turkish diaspora in the Netherlands.

The women I refer to in this first section are all part of a group that meets regularly to discuss the Quran, share their everyday experiences, and support each other in negotiating their lives between the Turkish and Dutch cultures. They keep in touch via WhatsApp, where they created a group chat to communicate more easily. They are all mothers, Turkish, and define themselves as Muslim. They also all don the veil and see themselves as responsible for transmitting to their children Turkish and Muslim values for intergenerational cultural maintenance and transmission. Their coming together is indeed mediated by the use of WhatsApp, but it also relies strongly on regular face-to-face meetings. Although the purpose of the group is related to the study of the Quran, the group often shares and discusses everyday family-related experiences and, when needed, they rely on each other's help. They relate to each other as Turkish Muslim mothers living in Amsterdam, situating the formation of this specific diasporic network thus at the intersection of three important identity dimensions: being Turkish, being a mother, and being Muslim. The distinct entanglement of these three lived experiences, I argue, shapes the formation of this particular mediated diasporic group.

4.3.1 On being Turkish in a foreign context. Finding a common language

Ik ben niet de enige die niet kent (I am not the only one who does not know).
—Kader

Kader came to the Netherlands in 1991 to get married, moving from a small town in Eastern Turkey to Amsterdam. She referred to some of her first moments in the Netherlands as being very difficult. Because she did not know the language and had no friends, she felt alone. She mentioned how hard it was to go to shops and not being able to say what she wanted or explain what she was looking for,

to take the wrong bus, miss the stops, and, ultimately, feel like a foreigner. Meryem, on the same note, remembered how alone she felt when she experienced a miscarriage, or, later, when being a young mother, how she missed the support of her parents. Indeed, when mentioning this, one of her friends from the group intervened by recalling how young she was and how they helped each other during those hard times. For Deniz, the newness of her surroundings also made her afraid to leave the house because she did not want to get lost.

All my respondents talked about the difficulties of their first years of living in the Netherlands, and Amsterdam specifically. One element that they considered central in feeling so foreign was not being able to speak Dutch. Not knowing the language of the place they lived in created many obstacles in navigating the different institutions relevant to their daily lives. As such, accessing and managing interactions with various public institutions, such as social services, schools, and hospitals, was challenging. Meryem, for instance, talked about how one can be precluded from receiving the benefits they might be entitled to—"ik weet het niet wat ik recht op heb" (I don't know what I have a right to)—because they cannot access the proper information, while Deniz emphasizes how "important (it is) to know the language in order to be able to go to the doctor, to make an appointment, to talk for your child[52]." Indeed, language and cultural barriers can often lead to a lack of information regarding proper health care services and other types of benefits and, ultimately, to the inability to access services and/or fully benefit from them. Thus far, this relation has been addressed in public health studies. Zanchetta and Poureslami (2006) show, for instance, how linguistic, religious, and cultural factors can affect one's access to health services and contribute to newcomer migrants' social isolation in the context of Canada. Along the same lines, Bekker and Lhajoui (2004) correlate the degree of literacy (varying from pure illiteracy, a lack of language skills in the host country language, to a lack of access to written language, or generally mastering less words) with the negative health profile of Berber Moroccan women living in the Netherlands.

The women in my study often found support in each other when specialized help from school or the Municipal Health Care services was not available. In the particular diasporic network that I looked at, Gamze is the one who occupies an especially important bridging role when it comes to transferring knowledge and helping women navigate the intricacies of life in a foreign land more easily. Being the only one from the group born in the Netherlands and thus a native Dutch speaker, she will, for example, translate for her friends when needed. Reflecting on the specific role she

[52] This quote has been edited for clarity

occupies in her circle of Turkish friends, she recalls how she supports her friends who do not know Dutch or Dutch bureaucracy by translating at school or at the hospital.[53]

Not knowing the Dutch language, being unemployed, and being a full-time mother represent barriers in properly accessing public services. At the same time, these restrictions can also trigger more community aid and, subsequently, contribute to the building of diasporic support networks. In this sense, the commonality of ethnic ties reflected in the language sameness contributes to social support and diasporic network building.

Besides the common ethnic ties manifested in having language commonality, everyday mothering practices contributed highly to women developing friendships and common social activities. This aspect will be addressed in the following part.

4.3.2. Social encounters in everyday mothering practices. The role of schools in social interactions between mothers

Being mothers and having to care for their children is a central experience that regulates the social lives of the women I talked with. School plays an important role in determining the everyday rhythm of not only the children but also the mothers. This social space contributes to a spatial proximity for mothers to interact with each other as well: in the school yard, or during other, formally organized activities.

With children going to school, the women admit to gaining more independence and being able to do more for themselves. Kader, for instance, identified the moment her children went to school as the moment her life started to get better and it helped her in getting out of her social isolation. “Leven wordt breder na (sic) de kinderen naar school gaan” (Your horizon broadens after the children go to school), she said. Moreover, via the school, women also have the opportunity to engage in various classes, such as Dutch language classes, bike lessons, or sewing classes.

The school program of their children thus regulates the daily and weekly rhythm of the mothers. For the women I spoke with, the similar life patterns facilitate their social interactions, leading to friendships and the enlargement of their social circle. “Taking care of children, taking them to school, picking them up, taking them to swimming classes, shopping, spending time with family, going to the mosque,” as Ilkinur narrated, are regular activities that create many moments of encounter between Turkish mothers. School is thus an important place where unplanned encounters between

[53] This dimension of the relationship between Gamze and her friends who do not speak Dutch is reminiscent of the phenomenon of “language brokering.” Scholars use the concept of language brokering to describe how, in migrant families, some children who are proficient in the language of their country of residence engage in translation activities for their parents (see Morales and Hanson 2005; Weisskirch and Alva 2002).

mothers can take place, leading to mutual support and socialization in many situations. Even more so, I argue, besides ethnicity and language sameness, mothering as an everyday experience and its social embedment represents an element that creates many opportunities for Turkish mothers to come together.

4.3.3 Everyday religious practices and transmission of faith

Religion represents one other element of diasporic identity that shapes this particular diasporic network. All respondents from this group identify as Muslim and they relate positively to the possibility of exercising their religion freely in the Netherlands. They negatively compare this freedom with the restrictions experienced in Turkey. Indeed, until recently, women's access to universities and public institutions was conditioned upon them not wearing the headscarf. The removal of the ban in late 2013 under the Erdoğan government represents one important reason why these women support the current Turkish government and politics, confirming research findings that associate the majority of guest worker communities with being supporters of Erdoğan and the Justice and Development Party (AKP). However, this is not to say that the women from this first group do not perceive negative attitudes directed toward their religious affiliation from those belonging to the Dutch majority. My respondents mention various negative interactions with non-Muslim Dutch people due to their religion. Comments that question their choices vis-à-vis the headscarves they wear—and thus being made visible as "others" by their clothing choices—or fasting during Ramadan made them feel uncomfortable and stigmatized[54] (Goffman 1963). They did not, however, perceive a general discriminatory attitude against Muslim or Turkish people. This is in sharp contrast with research showing the increase of Islamophobia within Dutch society (Abdelkader 2017, 38; see also Vellenga 2018). The contradiction might be explained by what research has thus far termed the "integration paradox," a phenomenon in which minority groups that are more integrated on the labor market and have higher levels of host country language acquisition perceive more attitudes of discrimination, whereas less contact with mainstream media or the majority population can prevent groups from coming into contact with the overall negative perception (Van Doorn, Scheepers, and Dagevos 2012, 382; see also Rouvoet, Eijberts, and Ghorashi 2017).

Respondents' religious beliefs and identification as Muslim was central in the setup of the WhatsApp group they all belong to. As such, via this group, the women communicate and arrange their meetings to discuss the Quran and other religious teachings. Even more so, all of them are

[54] For research on Moroccan and Turkish Muslim women's everyday negotiations with stigma, see, for example, Eijberts and Roggeband (2016).

strongly committed to this dimension of their everyday lives and define it as central in their mothering approach. Religious identity and faith are thus highly important to the process of mothering in a predominantly non-Muslim country for the women I interviewed. For them, faith and Muslim identity are a key element to be transmitted across generations. As such, they, as mothers, take the main responsibility to transmit their religious legacy and supplement the school's program with principles derived from their religious beliefs. When asked about the important values they transmit to their children from their position as Turkish mothers, they all stress the importance of faith. Either via the mosque, in their daily lives, or through organized visits to Turkey, they actively participate in their children's acquisition of ethno-religious values. Religiousness has indeed been shown to play a relevant role in fostering ethnic identity and, in the case of the Turkish–Dutch people, it has been shown to take place mostly within the space of private life, that is, within the family (see Arends-Tóth and Van de Vijver 2004) and extended community. These aspects thus suggest a strong entanglement between ethnic and religious identity and mothering practices in the larger process of cultural and religious transmission processes.

4.3.4 Mediated encounters. Gendered uses of digital platforms, privacy, and reproduction of food culture

In their participation in mediated diaspora formations, the women belonging to the group studied in this section enter from a complex position: that of being Turkish Muslim mothers. This identity matrix specifically seems to strongly shape their digital media use for diasporic purposes. Two main digital media uses are central for this argument. First, there is their WhatsApp communication, which is used for regular Quran discussion meetings at the local level, and to keep in touch with family from abroad at the transnational level. Second, there is their use of various Turkish digital outlets—websites, (associated) Instagram accounts, and YouTube channels, specifically those with a Turkish culinary profile.[55] Both relate to the making of their ethnic, religious but also mothering identity formation, and they both imply the making of digitally mediated ties. In addition, what is particularly interesting in both processes is the centrality of the women's concern for privacy in navigating the various platforms.

[55] Some of the culinary vloggers and bloggers the respondents mentioned: Hatice Mazi, a Turkish–German culinary vlogger, YouTube https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCVXQmOQt18QUKt3EXIyJZ_g, Instagram: https://www.instagram.com/haticemazi/; Nefis Yemek Tarifleri, website: https://www.nefisyemektarifleri.com/, YouTube channel: https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCeh3XQszWO6lLdKz_SZmm1Q; Mütevazı Lezzetler, multilingual website: https://ml.md/?fbclid=IwAR1BwwWaE6qJCwNw1aXK98THhhb-LOYmrmF6G33WNtgaP8glSZ19Gb6pykU, Facebook page: https://www.facebook.com/lezzetler Accessed August 20, 2020.

To begin with the first media usage, the women addressed in this section mentioned relying much on the use of their smartphones, with the application WhatsApp being by far the most popular one in their daily use. They use it both to keep in touch with family from Turkey or elsewhere, and in maintaining diasporic connections in the country where they live. They make use of videocalls to talk with loved ones from a distance and they are members of various groups shared with members of their (extended) family, parents from school, or people from the mosque. When asked about their participation in Facebook communities dedicated to Turkish people or women living in the Netherlands, they informed me that they do not have a Facebook account. In some cases, some of the women declared using their husbands' accounts. Indeed, for most of the respondents, it are the husbands who use Facebook, whereas the women prefer to use WhatsApp even if they do have Facebook. Ilkinur, for instance, explained this differentiation in platform use in relation with having more privacy by saying that "WhatsApp is alleen van mij, Facebook is van meerdere mensen" (WhatsApp belongs to me only, Facebook belongs to more people). It is perhaps not only the affordances and specificities of the mobile WhatsApp application that offer the women I talked with a sense of more privacy but also its association with the personal smartphone. Because their preferred application is linked to their personal smartphone, they experience a stronger sense of control over the management of their digital communication. Elisabetta Costa (2016), in her book *Social Media in Southeast Turkey*, notices, for example, how the appearance of smartphones contributed to an increase of individuals' autonomy and individual connectivity in the Kurdish city of Mardin (30–33). Additionally, looking at the use of WhatsApp in the frame of the public/private dichotomy, Costa reveals how, in the city of Mardin,

> WhatsApp has been received and accepted with less concern, anxiety and excitement than Facebook, because it is mainly a "private" medium that does not challenge traditional boundaries between the private and the public. It cannot reveal secrets and intimate confidences in public and, above all, it cannot put people in touch with strangers. (40)

This seems to be the case for the small sample studied in this section as well. The distinction between Facebook and WhatsApp and the different domains they occupy in the public/private dyad thus implies a preoccupation with privacy with regard to how media is used, who participates in conversations, and who has access to this space. For Turkish women from guest worker communities in the Netherlands, privacy, as a desire to keep one's personal matters and relationships to oneself, is therefore important when it comes to the formation of digitally mediated diasporic spaces. Within this distinction, gendered preferences for one platform over the other are highlighted, reflecting more

general public/private normative gendered boundary making in regulating the relations between men and women.

With regard to the second type of media use, the women I talked with lean toward using digital platforms with a low threshold for participation, in other words, platforms that restrict access to people they do not know, such as WhatsApp, or platforms whose use is not conditioned on the making of a public profile, such as Google, YouTube, or websites in general. A particular place in their use of digital media is occupied by food vloggers and cooking websites managed by Turkish women either from the diaspora or from Turkey. This interest in finding and sharing recipes from their homeland can be associated with research on gendered digital media use for "home-making"[56] (Massey 1992) and diasporic cultural reproduction. Food and the making of food have indeed been an important part of processes related to the creation of domesticity and the digitally mediated making of home in transnational families (see Marino 2019). This particular entanglement between the gendered work of diasporic cultural reproduction and food via new digital affordances has been, for instance, emphasized by Radha Hegde (Hegde 2016, 76–89) in her discussion of domesticity and the digital. This form of digital media use thus emphasizes one of the specific locations from which Turkish women from Turkish guest worker communities in the Netherlands engage in diasporic media use: the private space of the domestic, from their position of identifying as Turkish and as mothers. As such, this finding highlights the way in which cultural reproductive work is an important part of migrant mothers' engagement with the digital diaspora.

Following the discussions in this section, I argue that Turkish women belonging to the historical Turkish community in the Netherlands that formed on the initial guest worker migration route, create and maintain social relations with each other from the specific nexus of ethnicity, religion, and gender: as Turkish, as Muslim, and as mothers. Mothering experiences, cultural and ethnic sameness, and centrality of religion in identity formation are the main pillars for diaspora formation. By looking at diaspora formation from this identity nexus, the issue of privacy becomes highly relevant for the understanding of digital mediation of gendered diasporas. In my respondents' use of digital media platforms for diaspora making, privacy takes center stage in the gendered selection of the media platforms. As I will show in section 4.5 of this chapter, while their diasporic groups are formed from different identity positions, Turkish mothers who are highly skilled professionals also see the issue of privacy as very relevant to the making of digital diaspora.

[56] In her piece "A Place Called Home?," Massey (1992) rethinks the concept of home from the fixity of the space-bounded conceptualization to a more processual one in which the home is constructed through a particular set of social interactions, as a "complex product of the ever shifting geography of social relations present and past" (15).

4.4 The formation of a highly skilled Turkish diaspora. The interplay of class, ethnicity, and motherhood

From the 2000s onward, an increasing amount of highly skilled Turkish people chose to emigrate, due to various reasons: economic ones (better income), professional ones (career advancement in more competitive environments), and political ones (a general discontent with the government and the political environment) (Elveren 2018, 52–53). The political dimension of the increased highly skilled migration of Turkish people will be addressed in more detail in this section as it is strongly connected to how the second group of Turkish women relates to the first group addressed earlier in the chapter.

The Netherlands represents one of the Western destinations chosen by those opposing the current Turkish government and who are in search of better career opportunities outside of Turkey (Geurts, Davids, and Spierings 2020, 3). According to the Annual Report on Integration 2018 (Statistics Netherlands), Turkish people now account for approximately three percent of the total population, divided between first generation (191,500) and second generation (212,900).[57] A new group of Turkish migrants has thus joined the more historical route of Turkish migration to the Netherlands,[58] and Turkish people are now the second highest group of *kennismigranten*[59] (knowledge migrants or highly skilled migrants) in the Netherlands (Buers, Klaver, and Witkamp 2019, 13). Literature addressing Turkish migration in Europe and Turkish transnational practices focuses predominantly on lower skilled groups, especially in countries such as Germany or the Netherlands. Considering the recentness of first-generation Turkish highly skilled professionals, little

[57] According to the Dutch Statistics Institute CBS, there were 409,877 people with a Turkish migrant background in the Netherlands in 2019.
[58] The number of Turkish emigrants increased by 27.7 percent in 2018 compared to the previous year. The absolute total numbers were 323,918 people, out of which 136,740 persons were Turkish citizens and 187,178 persons were foreign nationals
http://www.turkstat.gov.tr/PreHaberBultenleri.do?id=30711 Accessed July 8, 2020.
It is worth mentioning that the number of Turkish asylum seekers in the Netherlands has increased from 480 in 2017 to 1300 in 2018 as well (https://www.cbs.nl/en-gb/news/2019/07/more-asylum-seekers-in-2018 Accessed July 8, 2020). Since the failed coup in July 2016, the number of Turkish asylum seekers coming to the Netherlands has thus risen. In the second quarter of 2018, Turks constituted the third largest group of asylum seekers and following relatives, after Syrians (1345) and Eritreans (1145) (https://www.cbs.nl/en-gb/news/2018/30/further-increase-in-number-of-turkish-asylum-seekers Accessed July 8, 2020).
[59] The Dutch government defines knowledge migrants as non-EU citizens who can come and work in the Netherlands under specifically regulated conditions. These migrants must be highly educated and can work and live in the Netherlands due to their highly specialized skills and knowledge. Their immigration process is mainly mediated by the company hiring them and the process is generally faster than regular non-EU immigration. See https://www.rijksoverheid.nl/onderwerpen/buitenlandse-werknemers/vraag-en-antwoord/wanneer-mag-een-kennismigrant-in-nederland-werken Accessed July 20, 2020.

is known about these newly formed diasporic communities in the Netherlands—with some exceptions from the field of sociology (see the work of Geurts, Davids, and Spierings 2020; and Geurts, Lubbers, and Spierings 2020 on Turkish highly skilled migrants' low sense of belonging in the Netherlands)—in particular about the gendered dimension of this form of migration. In this section, I address the particular ways in which Turkish women who are highly skilled professionals form diasporic ties via their common experience of mothering in a foreign land.

4.4.1 Expat identity formation and disidentification from Turkish–Dutch communities

Irem is a young Turkish woman in her 30s. She comes from Istanbul and has studied and worked as a business consultant in the Netherlands. She describes herself as a young professional. She currently resides in Amsterdam and is in a relationship with a Dutch man with whom she has a little girl. She is part of a new labor migration wave from Turkey that has been growing over the past three years. I met Irem in a restaurant outside the city center of Utrecht, in an area populated mostly by office buildings. She asked to meet me there as, prior to our meeting, she had a job interview. At the time of our interview, Irem was on maternity leave and was looking for a new job that would fit her needs better. With her previous job, she had to travel intensely and she wanted to reduce this aspect of her work due to her new role as a mother. The restaurant was very busy, with most of the people there seemingly enjoying their business lunches. Unlike many of the places in Utrecht I knew, English seemed to be the more common language here. The whole atmosphere immediately made me think of the highly skilled corporate life. Irem herself clearly stated during our interview how she identifies as an expat.[60] In this identification, besides the presumed closeness to global elites and highly educated professionals, she also emphasized the distinction between Turkish "expats" and members of Turkish communities formed in the aftermath of the guest worker agreements of the 1960s. She thus describes two distinct and highly different Turkish communities in the Netherlands:

> And I actively actually ran away from old Turkish communities . . . The majority of Turkish people living here had a very bad reputation among the Dutch and I tried to stay away from them. But more and more, like through [name Facebook group], I see that, actually, there are so many people like me. They run away from Turkey and come here to work. There has been an explosion in the past couple of years.

[60] See Chapter 3, "Diasporic Mothering as Cultural Reproductive Work: Gendered and Classed Dynamics," for a more nuanced discussion on the classed dimension of expatriate identity formation in the case of the Romanian diaspora.

> Laura: But would you say then that they are different, these more expats, than the community that is historically here?
> Irem: Absolutely, like 180 degrees different people. One is really super traditional, I don't know, religious, conservative. They don't even speak any other language than Turkish and are very close-minded, gossip-oriented, almost no education. And then there is this modern side that, you know? They are world citizens, they follow art and are highly educated, they have hobbies. I thought this group almost didn't exist.
> Laura: And how did you come to know about this other group? You asked around? Or you started reading? You started seeing it in the media?
> Irem: Every time, every time I was saying I am Turkish—I mean, this is pretty much the first question when you speak English: "Where are you from?" So, you cannot run away from it. And the conversation always comes to Turkish people living here: "You don't look like them." Well, okay, one time, fine, two times, fine, but when you hear it for the thousandth time, it's like, "I'm not from this group," right? [61]

Many of my respondents talked about a recent group of highly educated Turkish people who came to the Netherlands in the past year—2017—"forced" by the political situation in their country (especially the 15 July 2016 coup attempt and the following repressive government actions) and their disapproval of the Erdoğan government.

Irem mentioned how, from the very beginning, she was not interested in making contact with the already settled Turkish diaspora in the Netherlands. Similar to other respondents, she already had an image of former guest worker communities, which she did not feel a part of. Similar to the case of other respondents, this image has been shaped since her childhood and referred especially to the German–Turkish second generation that would sometimes spend their holidays in Turkey. Many of the respondents referred to the derogatory term that is occasionally used to describe the Turkish–German communities—*almancı:*

> They are harsher about everything. Their gestures are strong and they're very [back] in time, they also cut their hair different. Like, we make a joke. You know? In Turkey. This is *almancı*, you know. What they wear, how they talk. Yeah, it's not the best image, but it's, let's say, funny.[62] (Miray)

[61] This quote has been edited for clarity.
[62] This quote has been edited for clarity

> They just remained stuck in history, came here, with their grandparents, or with themselves, came here to work and earn all the money, send it back to Turkey. So, it's like, they're like stuck in between. They stay in whatever, whatever they were years ago.[63] (Defne)

> And when they come to Turkey, they have a funny accent and they speak Turkish four hundred years backwards and they. . . They are the toilet cleaners in their country and when they come, they pretend to be kings. So, they are very shallow people. I mean, this is the image. (Irem)

> They are different. They are the ones who moved here one hundred years ago or fifty years ago and who did not adapt to Dutch life. But also, not adapted to the Turkish life in Turkey either. So, I was really, I really hate those people. (Merve)

The term *almancı* is close in meaning to "German-like" or "Germanized" as it represents a mix between German—*Alman*—and foreigner—*yabancı* (Tschoepe 2017, 119). Kunuroglu et al. (2015) describe it as a pejorative term denoting Turkish returnees from Western European countries that holds "several negative connotations of 'otherness'" (198). In their study on Turkish return migrants, the authors show how returnees perceive negative and discriminatory attitudes directed at them in their readaptation process, including the particular use of the term *almancı* to signify their othered status (205–206, 208). Aylin Yıldırım Tschoepe (2017) also addresses the use of the term among his Turkish, Istanbul-based respondents and describes it as a "derogatory term for a culturally inferior Other" (118) who "left (Turkey) without money and skills," and "(re)turn to Turkey as financially potent but culturally (Western/German) corrupted others" (118–119). In emphasizing the disconnect between themselves, as modern, in line with the current times, and open to the West, the highly skilled professionals describe Turkish–German and Turkish–Dutch individuals as "stuck in time" and detached from the dynamics of current Turkey in terms of both politics and daily life. In a similar way, Tschoepe's study (2017, 119) on Turkish–German returnees also connects the formation of the Turkish–German "allochronic Other" as conservative and traditional, outside modernity.[64] This othering dimension is additionally supplemented by a classed differentiation, with the respondents above highlighting the perceived low social and professional status of Turkish *émigrés* from the Netherlands or Germany.

[63] This quote has been edited for clarity

[64] The modern/traditional distinction is especially relevant for the different political stances the two groups have toward the Turkish government and will be discussed in detail in a separate paragraph.

For my respondents, even though these clear in-group distinctions might have originated outside of the Dutch context, they took an even stronger shape in various interactions with Dutch people. These interactions confronted the newcomers with the strong negative and oftentimes discriminatory views that are reproduced in the Netherlands with regard to Turkish migrants (see for example Verkuyten 2008; Verkuyten and Zaremba 2005; Verkuyten and Thijs 2002; Andriessen, Fernee, and Wittebrood 2014; Huijnk and Andriessen 2016; Andriessen 2017). Some respondents mentioned their discomfort with being associated with these groups during their stay in the Netherlands and their desire to disassociate from Dutch negative outlooks on Turkishness. Furthermore, they referred to work-related discrimination and offensive reactions from different Dutch people they interacted with.

Merve mentioned how, in her search for a job, she made sure to distinguish herself from the stereotypes Dutch employers might have toward the Turkish–Dutch community by emphasizing the "modern" side of her ethnic identity:

> But I really felt it often [the discrimination]. That is why I also applied for jobs anonymously. When you apply for jobs, they are also looking at your name, unfortunately. And if it is a Turkish name, then they hesitate; will this person speak good Dutch or not? That is why I always put on my CV, always, in short, "I am a modern Turkish woman." And then, during each of my interviews, they are asking me: "Why did you put 'modern' here?" I say, "I am not a Turkish that came here fifty years ago." They like to hear that. You feel it everywhere [the discrimination].[65]

Miray also referred to the moment her Dutch manager stated the difference between her and the stereotypical image he had of Turkish people living in the Netherlands:

> I had an interview in Dutch, with a Dutch manager. And he told me that, "In my perspective, Turkish people [who came] from before are, like, not educated." In a low quality and working in like bazaars and low-paid jobs, you know? . . . Turkish people, they say like, they can lie a little bit, they are not harmful, but they always try to find the tricks within the system, you know . . . And, but then he said, "I have never worked with high educated Turkish people."[66]

[65] This quote has been edited for clarity

[66] This quote has been edited for clarity

Lastly, Irem remembered how, during her student years, Dutch students would show and act upon their negative views on Turkish people:

> At the university. International people had no background in it, so I was accepted well. But for instance, one night, I was at the fraternity, a Dutch fraternity, they are very strict and very, you know? A closed community. And we were guests there. And I remember one instance where I was buying beer from their bar and then a guy came to flirt and talk. And, of course, the first question is, "Where are you from?" I said, "I'm from Turkey." He literally looked at me, turned his back, and moved away . . . I was like, what did I do? I didn't even know the image of the Turkish people. So yeah, what is wrong? And I never thought I would be classified into this, you know, migrant Turks thing. I was shocked.[67]

As such, the unfriendly Dutch environment toward Turkish people and the negative stereotypes about Turkish communities contributed to an even stronger push of highly skilled Turkish people to disassociate from the Turkish guest worker communities. This finding is also reflected in Nella Geurts, Tine Davids, and Niels Spierings's (2020) and Nella Geurts, Marcel Lubbers, and Niels Spierings's (2020) work on highly skilled Turkish migrants in the Netherlands. Here, it is shown how highly skilled newcomers feel improperly perceived by the Dutch majority (as non-secular and with a lower level of education) on the basis of the negative images it holds about the Turkish–Dutch community. In both articles, the authors, using a sociological lens, address the sense of belonging of highly skilled and highly educated Turkish migrants. In the first article, Nella Geurts, Tine Davids, and Niels Spierings (2020) discuss the "integration paradox," which, in the case of Turkish highly skilled migrants in the Netherlands, directly relates high levels of education with a low sense of belonging in the country of residence. By means of analyzing survey data, they argue, firstly, for a multidimensional understanding of belonging. Secondly, they suggest that the low sense of belonging of highly skilled Turkish migrants might be related to the exclusion from both Dutch and "Dutch–Turkish" communities (17). Nella Geurts, Marcel Lubbers, and Niels Spierings (2020) argue that, during the early phase of migration, both a high education level and a high economic position do not stimulate and can even hamper migrants' sense of belonging in the Netherlands (1844–45). They link this relation to the possible "international outlook" of those surveyed. While the two studies offer valuable insight with regard to the identity formation of recent highly skilled Turkish migrants and their sense of belonging, the two articles also bring about critical questions regarding the ways in

[67] This quote has been edited for clarity

which cosmopolitan identities of the self-identified world citizens (8–9) carry hierarchies of difference with them. As Craig Calhoun (2016) argues in his piece "'Belonging' in the Cosmopolitan Imaginary," this view from nowhere and everywhere is not neutral, and it is not "a freedom from social belonging" but rather "a special sort of belonging" imbued with privilege (532). Findings from this chapter show how the identification of highly skilled Turkish migrants with global mobile elites, as "expats" or "expatriates," is made in contradistinction to the Turkish–Dutch communities that settled in the Netherlands earlier. The analysis from this chapter can thus supplement this more sociological research with a nuanced background regarding the bigger Turkish community in the Netherlands and challenge the unidimensional understanding of highly skilled migrants' identity formation.

The highly skilled Turkish women I spoke with distinguish themselves discursively from the older Turkish communities in the Netherlands. Their disidentification is in this sense understood as identifying against (Henry 2004, 7) the Turkish-Dutch identity and its guest-work imaginary. As such, they participate in a discourse that strongly differentiates between highly skilled Turkish professionals and the Turkish communities that settled in the Netherlands earlier. In so doing, they posit two different and interrelated issues as main points of contention: the relation between religion and the state (a secular, Kemalist approach versus a so-called Islamist approach), and the political affinities (opponents of the current Erdoğan government versus its supporters[68]). On both levels, classed differences seem to have an especially strong hold, with higher educated Turkish people expressing support for secularism and opposing the Erdoğan government. Below, I address how religion, politics, and class together shape the distinction between the two groups studied in this thesis.

4.4.2 Secular–religious divide as political differences

Turkey's laicism has been discussed in many academic works, with authors addressing issues ranging from the relation between Islam, modernization, and Europe (see Göle 2015; Özyürek 2005), to the relation between religion and women's emancipation (see Çınar 2008; Cady and Fessenden 2013), among others. Indeed, not all secular states share the same vision when it comes to the role of religion in a society and its state regulation as secularism can take different forms depending on the nation-

[68] The majority of the Turkish diaspora in (Western) European countries is considered to be in favor of the AKP and the Erdoğan government. The Turkish diaspora in Austria, France, Germany, and the Netherlands voted, for example, in support of the government's constitutional reforms aiming to change the current parliamentary form of government into a presidential one during the 16 April 2017 Referendum (Sloat 2018, 8), whereas the highly skilled respondents opposed these changes (see http://www.turkeyanalyst.org/publications/turkey-analyst-articles/item/579-weaponizing-the-diaspora-erdo%C4%9Fan-and-the-turks-in-europe.html Accessed July 8, 2020).

state in question. For this reason, to understand precisely what the "secular/religious" divide reproduced among the Turkish diaspora in the Netherlands signifies, one is required to take a deeper look at the Turkish historical and political context.

Turkey's modernization process and its secular turn was set up in the context of a series of reforms undertaken by Mustafa Kemal Atatürk and his acolytes during the 1920s and 1930s.[69] The process of making modern Turkey involved the establishment of political and cultural institutions that aimed to break with the Ottoman past and to adopt Western modern principles (Keyman 2007, 220). Kemalism, named after Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, who was Turkey's first president, is the ideology on which the Turkish Republic was established. Based on six main principles—republicanism, nationalism, secularism, statism, populism, and revolutionism (Esen 2014, 202)—Kemalism aimed to reach modernization through the double move of removing Islam from political discourse, and, at the same time, creating a secular nation-state. As such, secularism, out of the six principles, occupied a primary role in Turkey's modernization process (Keyman 2007, 221).

Framing current discussions around the secular–religious divide as simply a divide between secular Kemalist supporters and Islamic fundamentalist reactionaries does, however, not do justice to the complexity of contemporary Turkish socio-political dynamics. In order to understand the Turkish *laiklik* (laicism), one needs to look at secularism and Islamism together, as "mutually constitutive and interactive concepts" (Sawae 2017 quoted in Yavuz 2019, 56). Parla and Davidson (2008) argue that, in Turkey, religion and the state have actually never been completely separated, making Turkey's laicism a weaker version of secularization that mostly entails the control of religion by the state (see also Yavuz 2019, 56). In order to support their arguments, Parla and Davidson (2008) analytically separate the terms "secularism" and "laicization" by equating the first with challenging the ideas of religion and God, whereas the second refers to a separation between the state and religion without actually being anti-religious. As such, they define Kemalist laicism as a political arrangement characterized by an "anticlerical interpretation of a religious tradition" (60) that presupposes the coexistence of a form of laicism and a Kemalist Sunni Orthodox version of Islam. Following this line of argument, religion occupied a central position in Turkey's process of transition from an Islamic monarchy to a modern republic, making it an important identity element in the creation of the nation-state and its affiliated nationalistic ideology. Through the control of religion by the state, Islamic norms and values remained strongly tied to culture, everyday routines, and national identity (Yavuz

[69] See Mardin (1981) for the different pre-Atatürk institutional, intellectual, and political measures taken within the Ottoman Empire that laid the groundwork for Kemalism. The initial important measures that placed religion under the control of the state were the following: on November 1, 1922, the Sultanate was abolished; on October 29, 1923, the Turkish Republic was proclaimed; in 1924, a series of laws were passed that relegated the education to the state, prohibited religious schools, and abolished the Caliphate; and, shortly after, the Directorate of Religious Affairs was created to regulate religious activities on the part of the state (Keyman 2007, 222).

2019, 59, 65), as, "in forming the nation, the republic assumed Muslim-ness as a *sine qua non* for becoming a Turk" (63). As such, going back to the topic of this chapter, understanding the expat–guest worker distinction only through the religious–secular lens is not only inaccurate, but it also precludes highly skilled professionals from self-identifying as Turkish Muslims. More than a few of the highly skilled respondents were careful in emphasizing that their "modern" approach to religion and their criticism toward the government did not in any case equate to them not identifying as Muslims nor to them not assuming a religious identity. Pinar, for example, restated her religious and Muslim identity in her negotiations with her Dutch husband on how to raise their young son:

> And, of course, his dad wants to, well, we are kind of like in the same line but, like on certain things, like religion and stuff, of course, it is different because he, he does not believe in anything. And I am a Muslim.

Merve described her particular "modern" stance on religion by calling herself a "part-time Muslim":

> No, we are also [religious]. I also have faith. But I also drink wine. I always say, "I am a part-time Muslim."

Religiosity in general, and Islam in particular, is therefore not the precise point of contention between the two diasporic groups. Indeed, with the postsecular turn in cultural and feminist studies (see, for example, Braidotti et al. 2014; Asad 2003), religion is no longer only seen as contained within the realm of personal spiritual beliefs and practices but also as a more integrated part of people's everyday cultural practices, which dismantles the clear-cut division between faith and reason. Religion, as such, becomes a marker of identity in a more complex and intricate way within the class, ethnicity, race, and gender matrix.

4.4.3 Classed distinction in the secular–religious divide

In this paragraph, I address Turkey's political context and how the secular–religious divide manifests in political discourses and conflicts. The aim is to locate diasporic differences between Turkish people in the Netherlands in relation to their own positionings vis-à-vis homeland politics. In addition, it connects the currently increasing (high-skilled) Turkish migration to a high degree of discontent with the Turkish government.

If, in its earlier forms, the Kemalist regime triggered tensions between the so-called Islamist groups and the secular ones, during the first years of the Justice and Development Party (AKP), which came to power in 2002, these tensions decreased. In spite of its support of Islamic traditions and more conservative values, the AKP was open toward modernization (Çarkoğlu and Toprak 2007, 18). Its newly appointed prime minister, Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, endorsed, for example, Turkey's adherence to the European Union (Yavuz and Koç 2016, 136). These relatively harmonious relations between the secular and religious sides are, for instance, captured by two studies conducted by the Turkish Economic and Social Studies Foundation in 1999 and 2006, which were aimed at analyzing Turkish people's attitudes toward issues such as religion, democracy, terrorism, and minorities. In the 2006 study, "Religion, Society and Politics in a Changing Turkey" (Çarkoğlu and Toprak 2007), the authors observe a moderation in people's attitudes toward the "Secular versus Islamist" debate since the 1999 survey. One conclusion drawn in the study is that the majority of people who participated in the survey do not feel that the two groups—the rather religious one and the rather secular one—are exerting any pressure on each other (33–34). Notwithstanding the fact that the majority of people define themselves primarily as "Muslims," the majority of respondents do not perceive secularism as being under threat, nor that Turkey leans toward a form of a theocratic state. In addition, the overall fears regarding the oppression of religious people have also decreased (101). The study shows that, at a general level, the secular–religious tensions are not central to people's everyday lives. However, part of the population did mention they were worried about the rise of religious fundamentalism and its threat on secularism. This group of people belong to a rather highly educated, urban section of the population with a high socioeconomic status.

Even though the study shows that the secular–religious tensions do not take central stage in people's lives, religion essentially remained a main point of popular and political contention in the popular imagination. As such, Hakan Yavuz (2019, 64) argues that state-imposed Kemalist secular modernization managed to create "an oppositional and ideological Islam" that often added religious nuances to a variety of popular struggles (triggered by class, ethnic, or regional differences). Indeed, with time, religion became a political tool for various factions looking to consolidate their political power.

Çarkoğlu and Toprak (2007), in their analysis of the 2006 survey, correlate the moderation in people's attitudes toward the secular–religious discussion with the AKP government coming to power in 2002, and its acceptance of secularism without denying Islam's central place in the Turkish identity formation. Despite its conservatism and devotion to Islamic traditions, the AKP emerged as a supporter of Turkey's opening to the West and the EU. However, further political developments of the AKP government reinstated worries regarding Turkey's secular *status quo*. These changes of the

AKP's political measures are analytically distinguished by Hakan Yavuz (2019) in three periods: the period of liberalism (2002–2007), the period of "soft" Islamization due to the coalition with the Gülen movement (2008–2013),[70] and the "Erdoğan-ism" period, which he defines as a kleptocracy (a corrupt regime) (71), the last period being the one preceding the 15 July 2016 coup attempt and the subsequent repressive government actions.

One important political and media event that worsened the Erdoğan government's stance on secularism was related to the military's—the informal guardian of Kemalist secularism—opposition to the election of president Gül due to his wife's head covering and the subsequent decision of the government to remove the headscarf ban in 2008 (which was annulled the very same year by the Constitutional Courts) (Yavuz 2019, 71). A following series of events—the conviction of the AKP by the Constitutional Court for anti-secular activities and the counteroffensive of the trials condemning active military officers to jail with the aim of reducing the secular tutelary role of the military (Taş 2018, 398)—triggered a coalition between the AKP and Gülen movement,[71] which manifested mostly in support of Islamic-oriented bureaucrats, military members, NGO's, and business leaders (Yavuz 2019, 72). The relationship between the two groups worsened, however, after 2010, due to opposite views on how international relations should be approached but also to non-publicized fears and conspiracy rumors. In 2013, with the breaking up of the Gezi Protests, the conflict became visible to the public and the Gülen movement became part of the anti-Western plot framework of the Erdoğan government (Taş 2018, 398–400). To the confusion of their common electoral base, the conflict intensified that same year. Gülenists became central to the government's campaign aiming to reveal the functioning of a "parallel state," a threat to the proper workings of the Turkish state, and various dignitaries and their family members close to the Erdoğan cabinet were charged with corruption (Yavuz and Koç 2016, 140–41). Against the backdrop of this conflictual relation, a group of military officers opposing the government tried to seize bridges, television stations, airports, and police headquarters on the evening of July 15, 2016, with 240 people being killed during the encounters. Due to the fact that the majority of the military did not join the coup, as well as the gendarmerie, and commanders of the land, naval, and air forces, the coup did not succeed (142). It did, however, affect Turkey's following domestic and foreign policies, with the Erdoğan

[70] Although both founded on Islamic activism, the AKP and the Gülen movement come from two different traditions. The AKP elite originated from the National Outlook movement (Milli Görüş), which aims at participating in the political arena with an Islamist agenda. A number of reformists split from this movement in 2001 and continued to form the AKP party. The Gülen movement originated from the Nurcu movement, which followed a rather cultural approach to the role of Islam in Turkish society (Taş 2018, 396).

[71] For a more detailed account of the conflict between the AKP and Gülen movement, see Hakki Taş (2018). The author discusses the relation between the AKP government and the Gülen movement in four different phases: 2002–2010, the period of "strategic alliance"; 2010–2013, the period of "hidden confrontation"; 2013–2016, the period of "overt confrontation"; and post-2016, the "all-out war" period.

government declaring a state of emergency on July 20, 2016, and taking various measures to "purge disloyal elements" (144). Many Turkish citizens have been detained or imprisoned since, with many public employees being replaced in the state apparatus (Taş 2018, 402) and thousands of academics being fired, investigated, or prosecuted because of their alleged links with terrorism and the Gülen movement (McTighe 2018).[72]

It is under the aegis of this political context that the influx of Turkish highly skilled migration increased. Moreover, against the backdrop of these political developments, new Turkish labor migrants distance themselves from the already settled Turkish communities in the Netherlands, who are seen as supporters and voters of Erdoğan and the AKP. While the highly skilled Turkish laborers come from large urban areas such as Istanbul and Ankara, the guest worker communities are known to have come mostly from the rural Anatolia region. Embracing a cosmopolite outlook and declaring themselves proponents of Western-oriented modernization, the newcomers shape their migrant identity around their class position and education level, putting themselves within the "expat" placeholder. This tendency has been, for instance, also observed by Cesur, Hanquinet, and Duru (2018) in their analysis of Turkish highly skilled migrants residing in the UK, Italy, and Romania. They also notice a tendency among the highly skilled to distinguish themselves from more conservative and lower skilled groups and to present themselves as Westernized and modernized Turks (140). Due to the domestic political tensions specific to the Turkish context and the AKP government's instrumentalization of religion for political power, the secular–religious divide became metonymic for the support—or the lack thereof—of the Erdoğan government and AKP party within the higher skilled and educated Turkish diaspora in the Netherlands.

4.4.4 Highly skilled Turkish mothers building new digitally mediating diasporic networks

In a similar way to highly skilled Romanian mothers, highly skilled Turkish mothers also identify the moment of becoming mothers as one that triggered in them the need and desire to take part in a community based on ethnic bonds. The experience of motherhood in a foreign country pushed highly skilled Turkish migrant women to seek support from international (Facebook-mediated) groups. Comparable to non-migrant parents, my respondents identified their transition to parenthood as a specifically difficult period in which, as new parents, they sought more support from people in the same situation. Irem, who highly valued her international belonging via her studies and corporate job,

[72] Previous attacks on Turkish academia were related to the Academics for Peace petition calling authorities to cease state violence in Kurdish areas of the country (see Baser, Akgönül, and Öztürk 2017).

described how, once she became a mother, a shift took place from her belonging to a cosmopolite expat community to one that would allow her to be in touch with other Turkish mothers:

> The first couple of years, I did not really need to find, you know, Turkish friends, because I also was abroad several times. It is not like I am desperate to find certain people to keep my identity. It was not like that. I think it is the same for many expat people. And I really did not need anything like that. But yeah, it changed. Especially when you become a mother.[73] (Irem)

However, this need, again in a similar way to the highly skilled Romanian mothers, was to be fulfilled from the position of their identification as "expats." Indeed, as research has shown so far, highly skilled professionals living abroad also look for informational and emotional support from other individuals who are savvier in the host country and city via social media platforms (Aksoy 2016). Facebook communities for expats can thus be useful to highly skilled professionals to connect with each other around topics related to living, work, business (see Polson 2016), or, in the case of the current study, motherhood.

While, at the beginning, some of my respondents were part of the more international mothers' Facebook group "Amsterdam Mamas," once they became aware of each other's presence in the group, they started to get in touch and set up a new group that would answer their needs as migrant mothers with a Turkish background more specifically. Below, Zeynep describes the context that led her to set up the first Facebook group for Turkish mothers living in Amsterdam:

> I learned about "Amsterdam Mamas" and I really liked it. And I was just, you know, following some conversations and I saw a Turkish mother who gave birth and posting there. Saying, "Hey, I am a new member, I have a newborn here. Hello, hi everyone," et cetera. Introducing herself. And I saw several Turkish people reply to that. Saying "Congratulations," et cetera. And I thought, why don't we just have a group of our own? Because obviously there are more and more people here. And I really did not know any mothers. At all. None. It was more like my need, you know, to socialize. But it became really bigger and bigger and bigger. So, I set up the group and then, you know, I just told a few Turkish friends. My husband works in a Turkish bank, so he told some people. And I told some people. And then it just, you know, word of mouth. People came and came, and now it is, I do not know, 1200 or something[74].[75]

[73] This quote has been edited for clarity
[74] At the time of writing (July 2020), the group had over three thousand members.
[75] This quote has been slightly edited for clarity.

It is from the nexus of mothering experiences and highly skilled migrant identification that new diasporic support communities were formed via Facebook. The creation of several Facebook groups aimed at Turkish mothers living in various cities of the Netherlands was therefore a two-step process. It firstly involved participation in the Facebook mothers' group "Amsterdam Mamas," which is dedicated to mothers living in and around Amsterdam. It is an English-speaking group with both Dutch and international members, most of them highly skilled professionals. Secondly, it involved the creation of ethnic-based, Turkish-speaking Facebook communities for highly skilled mothers. As such, ethnic digitally mediated community building was possible via a prior classed migrant identity formation process.

By now, the mothers' groups, based on ethnic bonds, occupy an important role in Turkish mothers' processes of settling in, negotiating between cultures, and making decisions for their families. Mothering is central in the experience of migration as it is the position from which all main decisions are made. Some of my respondents, and especially the admins of the various Facebook groups, explained how, in the Turkish culture, a strong emphasis is put on children's education and the schools they attend. In accordance with their class status, many opt for private schools and are aware of the informal inner hierarchies regulating the school system and the choices parents make. For this reason, for my Turkish respondents, one important aspect of the first moments of being in the Netherlands is choosing their children's school, from which all other decisions, such as housing, are made. Newer members described the Facebook groups for Turkish mothers as the place where newcomers can get all their information regarding the moving to another country: bureaucratic information, schools for children, housing, etc. Others, and especially the older members or administrators of the groups, mention the importance of being able to meet offline and develop friendships beyond the online interactions. Melek, for instance, talked about her initial difficulties in deciding on the place to settle by having only known the workplace of her husband. In the end, she and her husband decided for him to commute for one hour so that they could be in a place that met other conditions, in terms of budget, good neighborhood, good school, etc. Much of the information in making various decisions was provided by other Turkish women already living in the Netherlands, via the Facebook groups for Turkish mothers. By means of the same channel, she also made her first friends in the Netherlands:

> I think I found the Amsterdam group before I came here but after selecting the school and the house. Because I wrote something there, yes. I wrote that a friend of mine from Turkey, a really old friend, added me to the Amsterdam group. After learning that I was coming to Netherlands.

> She added me to the group, and she said that I can ask anything that I don't know about. My first question was: "I couldn't find a kindergarten for my children. My younger one. What should I do? They're saying [it costs] lots of money. Is it true?" I asked something like that. And then a friend of mine, now my friend, but at that time we didn't know each other, she said that we would be, we will be close to each other, because our home will be close to her home. We should meet. I said okay, because I didn't know anybody. We met each other and afterwards we made another event together with people who are close to our home. Because she knew everybody here. So, after that, she opened a group, a new group [for Turkish mothers in The Hague].[76]

These Facebook groups, created, curated, and dedicated to Turkish mothers living or with the intention of moving to the Netherlands, represent to many a relevant social network for managing their migration plans and settling in a new country. Bartholomew et al. (2012) discuss the role Facebook has in building and maintaining social capital in the process of adjustment to parenthood in a social capital perspective (455). New parents, and especially mothers, thus tend to look for support such as "parenting advice, childcare recommendations, or commiserations about the difficulties of having an infant from Facebook friends" (457). The authors conclude that Facebook may play an important role in parents' adjustment to parent life, with women using the platform more intensely than men (464). This could be the case even more so for migrant parents, that is, mothers (Joinson quoted in Bartholomew et al. 2012, 458), for whom the range of topics to be covered are even more diverse. In the same line, Holtz et al. (2015), in their study "Connected Motherhood for Moms and Moms-to-Be on Facebook," show mothers' perceived benefits of using online support groups, especially the ones on Facebook where they seek information about the topic of motherhood and raising children. Bartholomew et al. (2012) offer an additional reading of the digitally mediated parental community building through the lens of identity theory. Drawing from Alicia Cast's (2004) study on well-being and the transition to parenthood, they mention how the moment of becoming a parent could trigger individuals to seek validation in their parental identity and "control meanings contained in the social environment so that they match meanings contained in their identities" (466). Taking this perspective further, it can be asserted that the ethnic diasporic communities built by highly skilled Turkish women was only possible under the condition of class sameness. This finding complements Marieke Slootman's (2017) analysis of the ethnic and national identifications of second-generation university educated Turkish and Moroccan–Dutch migrants. She observes how

[76] This quote has been edited for clarity

ethnic and national affiliations are not mutually exclusive and, in the case of respondents with a university education, social mobility does not necessarily lead to the dissolving of ethnic identity. She concludes by highlighting the different ways in which ethnic identification processes take place in higher and lower educated migrants (135–36). It can therefore be said that, in the case of higher educated and highly skilled Turkish women living in the Netherlands, the formation of digitally mediated diaspora appeared in the interplay between three main identity elements: motherhood, ethnicity, and class.

4.4.5 Intersections and (in)visible norms of interaction

> And that is not only Amsterdam anymore, of course. It has become a, like a network that is wide. There are like smaller groups now. But we're all kind of sister groups.[77] (Zeynep)

> For example, this woman from the Lelystad mothers' groups, I know her from the Amsterdam mothers' group. So, she moved from Amsterdam to Lelystad. So, she hasn't seen any people in Lelystad, any Turkish women. She made two groups [one for Turkish mothers and one for expats]. She speaks English and then she is working at the university, so she is just trying to find expats in Lelystad to meet and to drink a beer or something. And then, now, this weekend, they are also organizing a picnic in Lelystad. So, most of the time, they, the more educated, the new expat women, they make the groups.[78] (Neylan)

There are now several Facebook groups dedicated to and managed by first-generation highly educated Turkish mothers: besides Amsterdam, the initial group from which all others sprung, there are now groups in The Hague, Leiden, Utrecht, and other, smaller cities. My respondents also mentioned that, besides mothers and fathers, highly skilled Turkish newcomers who are not parents have also started to join, seeking answers to their various questions. In a similar manner to the lower skilled migrants, highly skilled ones build and rely on diasporic networks for local incorporation and mutual support. This finding is congruent with Jörg Plöger and Anna Becker's (2015) data on the importance of migrant networks for mobile middle classes (1531). Outside of the offline migrant networks built around guest worker communities,[79] highly skilled Turkish migrants thus rely on social media, that

[77] This quote has been edited for clarity

[78] This quote has been edited for clarity.

[79] In the Netherlands, different Turkish groups mobilized around religious and ideological beliefs. Approximately eighty percent of these organizations are religious, and most of them have links with the Turkish Ministry of Religious Affairs, with the remaining being focused on political, socio-cultural, commercial, or regional issues (Vermeulen and Keskiner 2017, 307; see also van Heelsum 2004; Vermeulen 2013).

is, Facebook-mediated networks, for information regarding migrating to and settling in the Netherlands. As in the case of Brazilian and Ukrainian communities in the Netherlands, for example, inner-diasporic divisions on the basis of class and education level precluded the formation of common online and offline support networks (Dekker and Engbersen 2014, 415) and favored classed digitally mediated spaces of interaction. The Facebook groups aimed at Turkish mothers living in the Netherlands do not, however, officially restrict other Turkish women, such as those who are not highly skilled and highly educated and belong to guest worker communities, from accessing or participating. Although the administrators of the groups manage the participants and discussions, the communities are virtually open to any Turkish woman who desires to join. The groups are closed and Turkish spoken. Access is granted by the administrators to women who speak Turkish and live in the Netherlands (or express their intention to move there in the near future), and only after the completion of a set of questions regarding their interest in the group and their location.

When asked about the interaction with women from the guest worker communities, both the administrators of the Amsterdam and The Hague groups mentioned a variety of members in terms of social status. They, however, make use of a set of rules to moderate the discussions. They both referred to a clear limitation of the subjects of conversation: political and religious issues are not allowed. Below, Merve described a situation in which she had the administrator of one of the groups intervene to stop a heated discussion between different members. She emphasized how, in the group she administers herself, especially politics and religion are not allowed as topics of discussion:

> Yes, they have also these rules [in the Amsterdam group]. Last time, someone said: "I bought a puppy; I want to give it to someone." This, also, I think you cannot do. A lot of people argued about it in the comments. You cannot say, "I bought a puppy, I want to sell a puppy, a dog" . . . It does not go like this. You have to make a story and then say . . . you know? And then two people argued with each other. I said to [the administrator], "pay attention," and she removed them. Yes, some people share weird things. This I don't accept. But most of them, if they have a good enough reason, I accept it and then everybody is welcomed. I don't remove things, people. Preferably, **everything is ok, except religion and politics** (my emphasis)[80].

By setting up politics and religion as topics to be avoided in the groups' posts and discussions, highly skilled Turkish mothers leave open the space for members who might hold different political and religious opinions than their own. Through motherhood and from the specific position of being

[80] This quote has been edited for clarity

a mother in a foreign country, Turkish women in well-managed spaces and under specific conditions overcome inner-diasporic divisions. As such, online spaces manage, as in the case of the Romanian diaspora, to create a space for a potential interaction between the groups as the ethnic threshold suffices, most of the times, for access and membership.

Yet, when it comes to interactions, power dynamics do regulate the content, the direction of conversations, and the issues that are addressed. Therefore, there is an awareness on the part of the highly skilled Turkish women with regard to the divisive dimensions of the two groups of women. The nexus of religion and politics contained by the attitudes toward the government are thus recognized as the main point of contention and carefully placed outside of their interactions. When the boundaries of the established set of rules are nevertheless transgressed, it triggers the elimination from the group of those considered at fault:

> The two segments are really thinking differently. But they're not arguing about it in these groups, because the group is not that. And if they try, they're removed from the group, these people. So, they are not . . . Because the groups are not. . . they're for helping each other.[81] (Melek)

Indeed, the group, as stated in the description and group rules mentioned on Facebook, is intended to occupy a position of impartiality, in the sense that it does not side with any politico-religious affiliation: "Political content/speculative posts: Due to the principle of **impartiality** of [name of group], the posts that express a personal view of political content/speculation will be removed" (my emphasis).

The one-sided establishment and management of interaction rules suggest a certain power dynamic within the groups that inevitably silences members who cannot express sentiments and opinions that oppose the general views. The classed interaction offers the power of interpretation as to what is "right or wrong" to the highly skilled migrants who are in charge of managing the groups.

> I see that other groups of people are quite silent. I do not want to cross them; it is not that. It's just that if they do support the government, they cannot say anything against what they are doing . . . I'm sure there are a lot of people who are very bothered about us, but they cannot raise their voices.[82] (Zeynep)

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[81] This quote has been edited for clarity
[82] This quote has been edited for clarity

While the (mostly) lurking presence of Turkish women from guest worker communities is acknowledged, the interactions between the two groups of women are regulated by the norms and rules set up by the highly skilled migrant women. This could result in a possible silencing of unwanted engagements that stem from differing politico-religious and social beliefs as the visibilities of such opposing views would have the questioning of the claimed impartiality as a side effect.

Mothering experiences, cultural and ethnic sameness, and class position shape the formation of the highly skilled Turkish diaspora in the Netherlands. The experience of becoming a mother in a new country has strongly contributed to the formation of a main diasporic group existing of highly skilled Turkish migrants. This process has, however, been strongly shaped by the class position these migrants occupy both in Turkey and in their place of residence. Identifying more with the image of the expatriate and highly skilled professional, the women from this second group, through their disidentification from the Turkish–Dutch communities, created new Facebook-mediated diasporic groups that can specifically address their diasporic needs: as Turkish mothers who are higher educated and highly skilled. In this discursive polarization, the secular–religious divide seems to be the main issue of differentiation. I, however, argue that this binary represents merely a metonymic illustration of opposing political views with relation to the current government.

4.5 Turkish digital diaspora in the Netherlands. Privacy, social media, and state surveillance

Locating the digital mediated forms of Turkish diaspora in the Netherlands is not an easy task. This is not only due to earlier mentioned reasons in the chapter addressing the theoretical framework of the dissertation, "Diasporic Mothering in the Digital Diaspora: Feminist Interdisciplinary Theorizing on Digitally Mediated Diasporic Formations," such as the polymedia context of today's digital diasporic interactions, but also due to specific worries regarding privacy. Access to the digitally mediated forms of community building in the Turkish community is restricted to outsiders of the diaspora. Members of the community, be it lower or higher educated or skilled, all show concern toward the boundaries of access and privacy and manage their media practices accordingly. Although stemming from different concrete considerations[83], women from both groups studied here are consciously managing the level of access to their social media lives.

On the one hand, the women from Slotervaart avoid public social media platforms such as

[83] Much attention has been given in the past years to issues of privacy in relation to social media platform. Less has been discussed however about the meaning users themselves give to this issue. In this sense, Viseu, Clement and Aspinall (2007) for example show that there is a socially situated and dynamic dimension of privacy. This makes it possible for users to have different understanding and relations to privacy online, as is the case with the two groups of Turkish women that are studied in this chapter.

Facebook and make use mostly of more private platforms such as WhatsApp. These preoccupations seem to stem from a gendered outlook on the relations between women and the public space and from considerations in regard to community surveillance. On the other hand, highly skilled and higher educated Turkish women, while still using WhatsApp for more personal communication with family and close friends, prefer to make use of Facebook for diasporic connections, albeit within the protected walls of closed Facebook groups and, even then, subjects such as politics and religion are avoided.

One particular aspect that contributes to the latter group's strong desire to keep the community away from the public eye, but also to restrict the possibility of politico-religious conflict, is the aspect of state social media surveillance. They all relate their avoidance to make their political opinions public on social media to the latest surveillance measures taken by the Turkish state. Indeed, in the post-coup context, new laws regulating the censoring of online content and monitoring of users have been passed in Turkey. The amended internet law—Law No. 5651—and the amended law on State Intelligence Services and the National Intelligence Agency—Law No. 6532—now allow the censorship of websites and grant authorities access to information about individuals from all public and private institutions (Topak 2017, 538–39). Additionally, online activities of dissidents are being suppressed with thousands of social media accounts being monitored, and with some of the people even being taken into custody due to their postings (Ataman and Çoban 2018, 1019). This fear of repercussions, for them or their loved ones still residing in Turkey, influenced my respondents' engagement with social media. Merve told me how she and many other anti-Erdoğan Turkish newcomers keep their political opinions to themselves in order to avoid possible legal complications:

> All the expats that are coming here are against Erdoğan, like us. But you don't have to say it towards others . . . All is read and watched. And so, you can be, just like that, arrested at the airport. I don't want this. My opinion is my opinion, that is it.

Most of the highly skilled and educated Turkish mothers I talked with are aware of the new changes in state legislature and restrict their online postings in order to avoid negative outcomes. One respondent, for example, mentioned how her husband had been blacklisted and denied entrance into Turkey due to one anti-government tweet. After a year-long process, with legal support, and only after deleting the problematic tweet, her husband was allowed to enter the country again.

Both groups studied in this chapter were able to make use of social media platforms for diasporic purposes without compromising their needs for privacy and the particular values of the communities they are part of. Daniel Miller and his team (2016) from the Global Social Media Impact

Study developed the concept of "scalable sociality" to describe the space within which people form social relations via social media. Building on previous research done by Madianou and Miller (2012), in which they coined the concept of "polymedia" (the media ecology in which people make choices with regard to what medium fits a certain type of communication best), Miller et al. (2016) argue that the particular characteristic of today's social media is scalability. The authors propose two scales along which people socially interact on social media platforms: the public/private scale and the group size scale (3–4). We therefore have, on the one hand, the individual's freedom to choose between social media platforms and, on the other, the platform's design, which is suited for particular communication genres. The intersection of these variables can then lead to the different ways in which social media are lived by social groups, as, once the platform is localized and infused with content, "cultural alignment" follows as a consequence (15). The concept of "scalable sociality" is thus useful in understanding the heterogenous way in which the two groups of Turkish women navigate social media for diaspora formations. For the understanding of these two different practices of "making privacy," however, gender and class, alongside the cultural characteristics of the communities, are also of particular importance. While both groups are Turkish and both groups identify as Muslims, albeit in different ways, their common cultural belonging in terms of religion and ethnicity is not a common basis for their preoccupation with privacy. For the first group, gendered perspectives on media and the public–private dichotomy determines preferences for media with a low threshold for participation and that can easily accommodate women only interactions, for example. For the second group, state surveillance strongly influences how they regulate their participation in social media spaces.

Two different settings then shape the forms that digital diasporas of Turkish women living in the Netherlands take: firstly, women from guest worker communities prefer more private connections built on the interplay of motherhood, ethnicity, and religion. This diasporic connectedness relies more on older, already set diasporic ties that, in turn, allow for a more intimate physical closeness (through kinship, the neighborhood, the mosque). Secondly, newcomers who are highly skilled and higher educated, in the absence of strong, already existing community ties, find Facebook more suitable for diasporic connections based on the interplay of motherhood, class, and ethnicity while still having the freedom to choose the appropriate level of privacy.

Lastly, it is as important to remark that the same features that allow groups to define the boundaries of access and keep those outside of the community at a distance, can also facilitate and maintain inner-community divides. While polymediated communication that fosters scalability can, in some situations, offer possible communication avenues of high relevance for marginalized communities—in the case, for example, of state surveillance, to avoid context collapse—as argued

by Deborah Chambers (2017), in the context of this research it can also foster intracommunity divisions.

4.6 Conclusions

This chapter set out to investigate the formations of the digitally mediated Turkish diaspora that is mainly connected to the city of Amsterdam, either through residence or relating to it as a nodal point for making diasporic ties. It has focused on two groups of Turkish women belonging to different diasporic communities: 1) the communities built in the aftermath of state agreements for receiving temporary workers from Turkey in the Netherlands, and 2) the more recently formed groups of highly skilled and higher educated Turkish migrants. Through the lens of motherhood, I explored the gendered dimensions of diasporic formations by focusing on diasporic mothering practices and their embedment in cultural reproduction processes.

First, I looked at the diasporic practices of a group of Turkish women from guest worker communities who live in the multicultural Slotervaart neighborhood in Amsterdam. I showed how, from their position of Turkish Muslim mothers, they came together for support in navigating the Dutch context. Language barriers, religious differences, and everyday mothering practices thus contributed to the formation of a diaspora network mediated by the use of WhatsApp. I additionally referred to their preoccupation with privacy and how this shaped their digital media use. In this section, emphasis has been put on the role of food culture in their diasporic reproductive cultural reproduction work.

Next, I looked at how diasporic groups, initially formed around a Facebook group dedicated to Turkish mothers from Amsterdam, formed within the community of highly skilled and higher educated Turkish women. I showed how, in the processes of diasporic identity formation, a classed distancing from the guest worker communities played a central role. This classed dimension has also been discussed in the regard to Turkey's political context and the current population polarization in relation to the government. Then, I described and analyzed how this differentiation is lived in Facebook groups dedicated to Turkish mothers living in the Netherlands. I finally concluded that the formation of this diasporic network stems from the interplay of motherhood, class, and ethnicity, with all of them strongly intertwined in their diaspora identity formation.

Moreover, in the last section of the chapter, I discussed how both groups studied here attributed a particular importance to issues of privacy in their use of digital media for diasporic purposes. By using the concept of "scalable sociality" (Miller et al. 2016) to explain the heterogenous way in which the two groups make use of social media for diaspora formation, I specifically identified gender and class of high relevance to how the two groups differently manifest their privacy concerns in their

digital media use.

This chapter has addressed the gendered and classed dimensions of the Turkish community in the Netherlands. As is the case with the previous chapter on the Romanian community, it showed how mothering experiences contribute to digital diaspora formations. Different identity positions shape the coming together of Turkish mothers in the Netherlands. In the case of the former guest worker communities, mothering, ethnicity, and religion together trigger the crystallization of diasporic support networks. For the recent, highly skilled migrants, mothering, ethnicity, and class shape the formation of new Facebook-mediated diaspora spaces. In addition, in this chapter, I particularly emphasized how classed identifications contributed to the separate digital diaspora formation of highly skilled migrants, in contradistinction to the Turkish–Dutch guest worker communities.

Chapter 5

Diasporic memory and the formation of local support groups for Somali mothers

5.1 Introduction

The last case study of this dissertation focuses on the Somali diaspora in the Netherlands. More specifically, this last chapter investigates the formation of the Somali digital diaspora in Amsterdam and its surroundings from the vantage point of mothers. Here, I focus especially on the activities of an Amsterdam-based organization—*Stichting Somalische vrouwen Amsterdam en Omstreken* IFTIN (Foundation for Somali women in Amsterdam and surroundings IFTIN)—which is led by Somali women and aims to support both Somali women and women refugees of other nationalities in adjusting to their lives in the Netherlands. With specific regard to the Somali community, the organization supports Somali women in understanding and adapting to their lives in the Netherlands by stimulating their participation in Dutch society, preventing their social isolation, and letting them know about their rights.

In this chapter, I analyze the relation between two groups of Somali women in the Netherlands—one that came to the Netherlands during the first phase of Somali migration in the late 1980s and early 1990s, and one that came during what is to be considered a second phase, which started in the year 2006—and highlight how experiences of mothering shape their diasporic coming together. The analytical distinction between the two groups is made in reference to their lives before they came to the Netherlands, with the members of the first group having had a higher socioeconomic status in Somalia from before the civil war first started, and members from the second group having scarcely benefited from formal education due to having lived under civil war conditions for many years. Aiming to show once again the heterogenous nature of diasporic identities, I address the different positions from which they participate in diaspora formation. Furthermore, in this chapter, I also investigate the role of digital media herein. I particularly look at how digital media in general, and social media in particular, are used in the everyday lives of Somali women to both keep in touch with family and loved ones from Somalia and elsewhere, and to create and maintain diasporic ties in their country of residence.

How do digital diasporas form in the Somali diaspora in the Netherlands? In which ways are Somali mothers taking part in diaspora formation processes? And, what role does digital media play in the diasporic lives of Somali mothers? are questions leading this last chapter of the dissertation.

In the following, I firstly offer a general picture of Somali migration, with a focus on Somali migration to the Netherlands. In this part, I emphasize the importance of researching and making visible the position of Somali migrant mothers in the process of settling in the Netherlands. Then, I introduce the field site and the context in which I conducted the interviews. There, I present the methodological information that is specific to this community and was therefore not included in Chapter 2 of the dissertation, "Epistemological Groundings, Methodological Choices, and Reflections." Afterwards, I delve in the specific issues that bring women from the two Somali groups together by looking specifically at the parenting classes the IFTIN organization makes available to Somali mothers, particularly newcomers. I put forward the claim that the gendered diasporic ties that are formed between the two groups are built on the collective memory of past tense relations between the Somali community and Dutch social welfare institutions, notably child protection services. Next, I address the role of digital media in strengthening these ties even further, and also in supporting transnational connections with family and loved ones from Somalia or elsewhere in the global diaspora. Lastly, I emphasize the multisite nature of Somali diasporic identity and its reflection in diasporic media use. In this context, I show how the Dutch institutional and policy context might contribute to the specific forms Somali women's mediated diasporic connections take by facilitating physical and local encounters. This last aspect is seen to have two implications: the reduced mobilization of the Somali diaspora in the Netherlands at a national level, and the rather secondary role digital media plays in diasporic community making.

5.2 Somali migration and the local Dutch context

Due to its unique characteristics in terms of the country's long-term conflict history, the population's exile in many places of the world, and its strong transnational engagement, the Somali diaspora represents a complex and unique research site. The Somali diaspora is a widely scattered one, making it difficult to assess the total Somali population in and outside of Somalia (Lindley 2005, 5). With an estimated two million Somalis (refugees and migrants together) currently living abroad, almost two-thirds of the diaspora is located in neighboring countries and within the wider region.[84] The rest of

[84] United Nations Population Division in PEW Research center (2016) https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2016/06/01/5-facts-about-the-global-somali-diaspora Accessed July 29, 2020.

the exiled Somali population mostly lives in the Global North. However, due to population data being collected differently depending on the national context and the various statuses of people (refugees, asylum seekers, naturalized citizens, first and second generation), it is difficult to retrieve the exact amount of Somali people living in these countries, or in Europe in particular (Sheikh and Healy 2009, 7–8). Regardless, Somalis are considered one of the biggest refugee communities on the European continent and the main growing minority group (Open Society Foundations 2015, 7). Filling in this numerical gap, Open Society Foundations has published a series of reports in 2015 that offer background and local context information regarding Somali communities in seven European cities: Amsterdam, Copenhagen, Helsinki, Leicester, London, Malmö, and Oslo. The numbers offered vary between around sixteen thousand Somalis in Finland and little over one hundred thousand Somalis in the UK, where the largest community resides. Nevertheless, the unofficial numbers are estimated to be much higher due to earlier exchanges (in the case of the UK, for example, Somali seamen and merchants settled in port cities as early as the nineteenth century) or the presence of a second or third generation (Open Society Foundations 2015, 13–14). During the early 1990s, the Somali displacements were already associated with "diaspora," with the term becoming part of the common language of both policy makers and researchers or politicians and the Somali migrants themselves (Kleist 2008b, 307).

Per 1 January 2018, 39,737 Somalis were registered in the Netherlands,[85] with 1,598 of them living in Amsterdam.[86] Somali people living in the Netherlands can be found throughout the country, with some minor concentrations in the regions where refugee centers are located (Nijenhuis and Van Liempt 2014, 26). Additionally, as is the case with other minority groups, concentrations can be found in main cities, with Amsterdam being one of the three large cities with a larger Somali community (28). Both at the national level and in the cities, the actual number of Somalis present is considered to be higher than the official ones.

Somalis are one of the most vulnerable minorities living in the Netherlands. In terms of education, they have some of the lowest education levels compared with other refugee groups (Dourleijn and Dagevos 2011, 13). According to the "Somalis in Amsterdam" report (Nijenhuis and Van Liempt 2014), their labor market participation is also low when compared with the general population, with only around thirty percent of them having a paid job (62) and the remaining seventy percent having the smallest chance to be employed (de Lange et al. 2019, 44). In the same report,

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[85] Statistics Netherlands (*Het Centraal Bureau voor de Statistiek*).

[86] Gemeente Amsterdam, "*Amsterdam in cijfers 2019. Onderzoek, Informatie en Statistiek*" (2019) https://data.amsterdam.nl/artikelen/artikel/jaarboek-amsterdam-in-cijfers-2019/ab46663b-4e21-4838-876a-90b11f8bbffd/#:~:text=In%20totaal%20telde%20Amsterdam%20op,de%20prijsstijging%20vlakt%20wel%20af Accessed July 29, 2020.

experiences of discrimination on the labor market are mentioned as well, especially due to religious identifications or, more generally, their position as migrants or refugees (Nijenhuis and Van Liempt 2014, 65). In the same report, the issue of discrimination has been related to cases of racial profiling and criminalization of young Somali men. It is, however, considering the growing Islamophobia in recent years, not difficult to imagine experiences of discrimination against veiled Somali women, especially not if one considers how religious discrimination is oftentimes racialized, ethnicized, and gendered (see Van der Valk 2015; Kassaye, Ashur, and Van Heelsum 2016). Furthermore, Somali women occupy a particularly vulnerable position in Dutch society since approximatively a third of them have not benefited from any form of education and only seventeen percent have paid employment (Dourleijn and Dagevos 2011, 16). Naturally, this last aspect is also influenced by other factors[87] such as their mothering role, as many of them are taking care of their children, with some of them being the head of the household as single parents (Nijenhuis and Van Liempt 2014, 60, 64). Single mothers therefore represent an especially vulnerable category, both in terms of theirs and their children's education but also in terms of labor market participation. Mothering responsibilities thus have a significant role in the ecology of building a new life in a country whose assimilationist policies from the last years place the main responsibility of integration on individual efforts (Entzinger 2006, 131–32; Nijenhuis and Van Liempt 2014, 34–35). The specific position Somali mothers and Somali single mothers occupy is, however, scholarly understudied and oftentimes rendered invisible in policy making. Even more so, when their marginalization is addressed, lived experiences are rarely the focus of research on diasporic Somali women in the Netherlands.

5.3 Methodological considerations

Throughout this study, researching digital diasporas by investigating people's online presence proved a challenging task from the beginning. Not only because of the proliferation of the online communication platforms people use to get in touch with each other but also because of the multitude of issues and themes that can bring people together. As argued earlier on in the thesis, some temporary social events or specific local contexts can trigger diasporic aggregation and push people to come together for a shorter or longer period of time. Not being a part of the community one wishes to engage with for research purposes can, of course, lead to additional obstacles. Getting to know and investigate the Somali diaspora in the Netherlands had its challenges. Besides the factors mentioned

[87] In the focus groups organized for the "Somalis in Amsterdam" report (Nijenhuis and van Liempt, 2014), some participants reported situations of discrimination on the labor market related mostly to their religious identities and their general position as an immigrant (16).

above, the language barriers were also stronger than in the other cases as neither Dutch nor English were enough to get to know people more in depth. Other important reasons that limited my access to the community as a whole were previously mentioned in Chapter 2 of the dissertation, "Epistemological Groundings, Methodological Choices, and Reflections." There, I referred to the over-researched dimension of the community either due to high academic interest or the lengthy and repetitive bureaucratic process refugees go through. Further research has the potential to deepen the vulnerability of people having undergone such trajectories even more. As such, this dimension contributed to potential respondents refusing to take part in the research. My position as an outsider to the community was also discussed in the methodological chapter. By using Kirin Narayan's (1993) work on the insider/outsider position of researchers in the fieldwork, I discussed the complex and various ways in which connections can be built in light of the possibility of "enacting hybridity" (679). Against the fixity of the "native" and "non-native" distinction, the author argues for multiple identifications of those who do fieldwork (682). As such, besides ethnic/cultural differences, other identity factors can contribute to closer ties between the researcher and those studied. However, in order for those connections to be built, access first has to be given and here I benefited from the support of key informants from the Somali diaspora. Their support was thus more than necessary in making this part of my PhD research possible.

Over the period of three months, from April to June 2018, I researched the Somali communities in the Netherlands, and in Amsterdam specifically. I approached people previously working with the community, contacted various Somali organizations, and mapped the online presence of the Somali diaspora in the Netherlands. At the same time, at the beginning of April 2018, I got in touch with Najma, one of the more active members of the Somali diaspora in the Netherlands. Trained as a pedagogist, Najma is, besides her work for different Dutch institutions on the topics of education and parenting, also one of the founding members of the IFTIN organization. As mentioned earlier in the chapter, IFTIN was set up by Somali women who have been living in the Netherlands for a longer period of time, being associated with the first group of Somali refugees that arrived in the Netherlands at the beginning of the 1990s. Najma is also one of the members of the organization, which prepares and delivers workshops for Somali women on the topic of "parenting between two cultures." Together with two of her colleagues from the organization, Najma has mediated my relationship with the women interviewed for this chapter and, when necessary, translated from Somali to Dutch or English. Najma has also been the one who contacted and selected the participants for the research, having in mind a nuanced representation of the community's diversity.

In contradistinction to the other two case studies, I have conducted only interviews for this part of my fieldwork and had little chance to participate in diaspora-organized events. Next to the

language differences, the specific period of the year—summer—contributed to my limited access to the community as, from what I could observe, little to no events were organized during that time.

The textual analysis presented in this chapter is thus based on material consisting mainly of fifteen recorded interviews with Somali women, with six of them belonging to the first group of Somali migrants to the Netherlands and nine of them to the second group. The length of the interviews varied: the interviews with founding members of IFTIN lasted from thirty minutes to an hour, whereas the average length with women from the second group was thirty minutes. The ages of the women I talked with ranged between early twenties and late fifties. All women live in Amsterdam or Amstelveen, a municipality situated on the outskirts of Amsterdam. However, some of the women living in Amstelveen work or volunteer in Amsterdam.

Next to the interviews, I also had the chance to participate in one of the parenting classes organized by IFTIN. Even though the language of the workshop was Somali, the visuals accompanying the oral presentation were in Dutch. On this occasion, I thus had the chance to observe the interactions between the women and the general setting of the meetings. The interviews took place in the public library in Amstelveen and in a community center in Amsterdam where IFTIN holds its parenting classes.

The interviews from this group were audio recorded and the data collected was coded and analyzed with the use of the qualitative data analysis computer software NVivo, on the basis of which the textual analysis was produced.

All the women approached during the fieldwork consented to the use of the collected data for the purposes of this research. The names used in this chapter are pseudonyms.

5.4 Somali diasporic formation. Encounters between two distinct groups of Somali women

The organization IFTIN was founded in 2005 and, according to Najma, the start of onward migration of Somalis from the Netherlands to the United Kingdom represented an important push for its making. The initial aim, Najma says, was to support Somali women in processes of social participation, and also to help them in their efforts of "parenting between two cultures." Supplementing official governmental and municipal approaches to the integration of Somalis, and particularly Somali women, the organization and its leaders developed culturally sensitive projects that could support Somali mothers. Through programs such as *Opvoedcoach* (Parenting coach), for example, the organization supports families of refugees in their first moments of settling in the Netherlands, with

the aim of preventing eventual crises that might arise due to the differences in children's upbringing between Western and non-Western countries.[88]

Idil, one of the volunteers of the organization, is a forty-eight-year-old Somali woman living in Amsterdam. Shortly after getting married in 2000, she joined her husband, who was already living in the Netherlands. They now have three children, and she currently works in the care sector. Below, she explained to me the rationale behind the making of the organization:

> We are a group of women; we are many women. So, we are higher educated in our country, university. We have decided to start a Somali organization . . . At least to start with something small, to organize meetings, to drink tea together. To take people out of their homes. Because people stay only inside, inside, inside, inside. Many people are excluded, really. Just because they cannot learn the language. Difficult. They want to do a lot of activities, but they do not know where to begin. Well, it is a shame. And we also had many Somalis who lived in the Netherlands, all of a sudden moved to England because it is easier to have a future in England. They speak English and it is easier . . . Then we decided that we were going to organize activities. Well, we started small and afterwards [became] bigger. Najma is pedagogist, and Sumaya is specialized in law. I am in the care sector and Hawa is a seamstress. And we also have social work; Ilhan, she is guiding people if they receive letters and so.[89]

By using their skills, training, past experiences, and knowledge of the community, they created a diasporic network that mediates the relation between state institutions and Somali migrants. Even more so, these types of diasporic efforts are seen as necessary in the current conditions in the Netherlands, as my respondents noticed a change in the last years with regard to the situation of refugees. On the one hand, they noted the changes in attitudes that people have toward refugees, which correlates especially with Islamophobia and the highly mediatized Syrian refugee crisis from 2015. On the other hand, the higher educated Somali women remarked the changes in terms of institutional support, with municipalities reducing subsidies. In a touching way, Idil proceeded to portray the specific location of Somali women in adapting to their new lives in the Netherlands after having experienced political instability and violence in their own country:

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[88] https://www.stichtingiftin.nl/actueel_item.php?dumvar=Y&ActueelID=28&ActueelType=projecten&ActueelCategorie=algemeen&language=NL&SP=250&Titel=Programma+Opvoedcoach Accessed July 29, 2020.

[89] This quote has been edited for clarity

> In our time, we did not have any good support. We had to hit all the walls ourselves. Many depressive women who [had] many children. And the parents, it went a bit wrong because if you come here, the culture is different. The weather is different. Here, it is cold, in my country it's very warm. And it rains all the time, and it is going to snow. So, many things, many activities, you are not going to be able to do them because of the weather. Then you look out the window: "I am not going outside because it is raining" and "Oh, it is cold, I am not going outside." You actually do not have any chance: I do not know how to ride the bike; I do not know how to ride a car. I have to depend on my feet or public transportation. And it is a bit difficult to cross all the fences you are supposed to cross. And at the same time, you are looking for a better future. You want to have a better life. You just want to be a role model for your children, and you want to achieve something yourself. And at the same time, you have to do many things. But you are also tired yourself, you have fled, you have experienced many things. Some people experienced very strange things, their parents murdered in front of them, their sisters or brothers abused in front of them. And all that pain, pain, pain, you carry with you. And how are you supposed to process it? Here, it is dark, dark, dark. It makes you depressive. It makes you crazy. And these people really cannot find any movement [to attach to]. We decided, a group of women, OK, we ourselves were not supported, but we are going to support (other) people.[90]

Idil described the experiences of women who were among the first to arrive in the Netherlands at the start of the Somali civil war. She talked about their unique position: having to adapt to a new and different environment while, at the same time, carrying with them memories of pain and war trauma. It is within this particular experience that Idil placed the momentum and locus from which the organization was built and its principles were derived.

The women who offer the classes and who are also behind the formation of this diasporic network are part of an earlier group of Somali migrants and most of them came to Europe as refugees between 1991 and 2000. Having been confronted with the hardships of a new beginning in a foreign country after fleeing civil war in Somalia, they are now trying to offer information and guidance especially to the newcomers who arrived in the Netherlands over the last years.

There are indeed two important moments of arrival of Somali people in the Netherlands. The first moment is connected to the fall of Siad Barre's military regime in 1991. Following arrivals connected especially to family (re)unification procedures, it reached its peak in 1995. The second

[90] This quote has been edited for clarity

moment can be placed around the year 2007 and is related to the 2006–2007 humanitarian crisis in Somalia (Van Heelsum 2011, 12–13; Nijenhuis and Van Liempt 2014, 22–23). This second moment was triggered by an intersection of factors that worsened the living conditions in the south of Somalia: the Ethiopian and African Union military intervention, the intensification of Islamist militias' activities related to the Islamist Union of Islamic Courts, such as al-Shabaab, and counterterrorism actions by the United States, among others (Menkhaus 2010, 320; Civins 2010, 123–24). Even though Somalia's first parliament in over twenty years was formed in 2012, Somalis continued to leave their country due to its volatile security situation, combined with climate related issues such as drought[91] and/or the desire to unite with family members who had already migrated (see Van Heelsum 2011, 13).

The people who arrived during the first phase were mostly higher educated and higher positioned in Somali society, which made it easier for them to leave the country (Van Liempt 2011, 257). However, the Somalis who came after 2006 have a lower level of education (Van den Tillaart and Warmerdam 2010). Due to the civil war and the country's instability, this second group was precluded from taking part in formal education. This difference is used by Klaver, Poel, and Stouten (2010, 12) and Nijenhuis and Van Liempt (2014) to explain the decrease in level of education within the Somali community living in the Netherlands later on. This dimension can be related to the phenomenon of the onward migration of those from the first wave who, due to various push and pull factors (see Van Liempt 2011), remigrated to the United Kingdom from the Netherlands. This context and the differences between the two groups are detailed below by Najma:

> Because the first group were, actually the higher educated fled the first time. And who is actually left behind? The lower educated, the old people. People who could not flee or sick people, or people who . . . And who have no work, no money to flee, they stay in the country. And in particular people from the countryside moved also to Mogadishu, to the capital city . . . And this group is also [helped] by the families that live in Europe or America and give them chances to flee, they sent money . . . And (people from) this group were raised or born during war times, twenty-eight years was the war. So, twenty-eight years without government, twenty-six years. Now there is a government, in the last two years. But twenty-six years without government, without a system. All that the former government built, all was devastated and

[91] Ministry of Foreign Affairs (Ministerie van Buitenlandse Zaken), General Official Message South and Central Somalia (*Algemeen ambtsbericht Zuid- en Centraal Somalië*), March 2019 https://www.rijksoverheid.nl/documenten/ambtsberichten/2019/03/19/algemeen-ambtsbericht-zuid--en-centraal-somalie-2019 Accessed July 30, 2020.
UN Security Council, November 2019 Monthly Report https://www.securitycouncilreport.org/monthly-forecast/2019-11/somalia-6.php Accessed July 30, 2020.

> destroyed. No rules. So, what kind of person does one become? And if you arrive in developed countries, then it is difficult. And then it's also difficult for the society in which you arrive because then you need a lot of help and a lot of support. Therefore, it is difficult for you also because you have gone through a lot of problems. So, that is the difference, the first group were the entrepreneurs, they wanted more. And this [new group], they do not participate anywhere.[92]

Here, a clear image is shaped about the second group of refugees coming from Somalia to the Netherlands by the ones who arrived earlier and are higher educated. The first dimension put forward refers to the lower level of education and its effects on the possibilities of participating in Dutch society. They also refer to the specific Somali context from which they came, that is, the condition of having lived in a war zone for a longer period of time, a situation that takes a huge toll on one's basic needs and possibilities of feeling a part of Dutch society. These conclusions are also to be found in a 2010 study (Van den Tillaart and Warmerdam 2010) about the Somali newcomers who arrived in the Netherlands between 2007 and 2009 and their adjustment to the new, Dutch context. The study was done in four Dutch cities—Amsterdam, The Hague, Rotterdam, and Eindhoven—and entailed between twenty and thirty interviews with recent Somali refugees, with a total of hundred people taking part in the study. Similar to the women from my research, the study also portrays the newcomers in terms of their low education levels, their experience of trauma, and their low participation on the labor market. Furthermore, the study found that, of the total number of respondents, about a quarter of them formed single parent households, out of which more than ninety percent were women.

Secondly, mirroring the policy language, my respondents also emphasize the low labor market participation and the need to empower women in order to overcome their social exclusion. They relate this last aspect especially to the experience of mothering when it comes to the ability to properly guide and support their children in their school and general education efforts. As fellow Somali mothers living in the Netherlands, they take on the responsibility of supplementing the state's and municipality's tasks in easing the adaptation of newcomer mothers to the new conditions. This sense of responsibility seemed to grow after the January 2003 elections, when asylum and residence procedures became stricter and integration approaches switched toward the individual responsibility of newcomers in managing their integration. For example, from 2004 onward, the once public language and integration courses are now provided in the private market (Entzinger 2006, 130–31).

[92] This quote has been edited for clarity

This change was also brought up by some of the volunteers from IFTIN I talked with, as they also noticed the difficulties experienced by the newcomers due to public budget cuts.

As such, the more established Somali women from the first group fill in a much-needed role to support newcomers in getting to know the new society they arrived in and guide them in their navigation of various social settings. Mothering and parenting are especially seen as main topics to be addressed in this context as, in the past, this issue caused tense relations between the Somali community and Dutch public institutions, such as schools or the child protection authorities. In the next section, I address more in detail how these experiences in particular shape the interaction and diasporic ties between mothers belonging to the two different migration groups.

5.5 Mothering and collective memory experiences in Somali diaspora formation

One central theme of IFTIN's activities for recently arrived Somali mothers is that of mothering and child-rearing "between two cultures." The topic of raising children in the Netherlands is actually one of the organization's main issues besides the social participation one. As stated on their website, they aim to support parents and families in understanding the values and principles of Dutch education and child upbringing through their parenting classes. As such, the organization positions itself as a bridge between Dutch institutions and refugee parents.

Difficulties of parenting and family management in the context of migration, and the role of the state within that dynamic, has been the subject of many debates, both in academia but also in policy making (see Hess and Shandy 2008). Worries are usually expressed toward the capacity of parents, and most of all mothers, to support their children in properly integrating in their new countries. Research has, for instance, investigated the role of mothers in the involvement of migrant youth in criminal activities (see Van San 1997) or the general failure of parents in adapting to the new country's norms by focusing too much on reproducing cultural elements from their country of origin (see Renzaho, McCabe, and Sainsbury 2011 for a discussion on how Arabic-speaking migrant parents in Australia negotiate the preservation of their cultural heritage). Furthermore, assimilationist trends contribute to a growing skepticism toward the value and capacity of supporting migrant children's hybrid identities, which usually lead to intergenerational conflicts. The case of Somali refugee families has been addressed, for example, in the Finnish context by Degni, Pöntinen, and Mölsä (2006) in their paper "Somali Parents' Experiences of Bringing up Children in Finland: Exploring Social-Cultural Change within Migrant Households." Here, they show the difficulties Somali parents experience in raising children due to intergenerational conflicts, changing norms regarding gender roles, and cultural differences in child-rearing practices. A particular situation that

arises in this context is related to the measures by Finnish authorities to control Somali parenting practices due to the belief that children coming from Somali families are being mistreated, with physical discipline being used upon them or with girls undergoing female genital cutting—also discussed in literature as female genital mutilation[93] (5). Along the same lines, the "Somali in Amsterdam" report (Nijenhuis and Van Liempt 2014) also addresses the issues mentioned in relation to the Finnish case. With regard to the intergenerational conflicts, the authors mention the tensions that appear between the children's receptiveness to the Dutch culture, within which they are educated via official institutions such as schools, and their parents' struggles to maintain and reproduce cultural elements from their country of origin (87). Additionally, as in the case of Somali parents living in Finland, the same report refers to a widespread fear within the community of having children placed in foster care. Deborah A. Boehm (2008), in her study on Mexican migrant families living in the United States, shows how, due to the precarious legal position these migrants occupy, a tense relationship with the state and fears of children being taken away or placed in custody contributes to further fears around interacting with state authorities as well (796). In a similar way, the tensions between Somali parents and Dutch authorities, such as the Child Welfare Council, contributes to suspicions toward state support and difficulties in communication that can, in the end, feed into that already tense relationship. Ultimately, according to the study (Nijenhuis and Van Liempt 2014), this dynamic precludes openness and support seeking on the part of the Somali community.

[93] UN Women and UNICEF both consider practices of female genital cutting, addressed as female genital mutilation (FGM), to be included in the array of gender-based violence (see, for example, the background paper commissioned by UN Women in its collaboration UNICEF-UNFPA Joint Programme on FGM/C, http://endvawnow.org/uploads/browser/files/policy-note-female-genital-mutilation-cutting-and-violence-against-women-and-girls-background-paper-en.pdf Accessed August 4, 2020). Here, the practice is defined as the partial or total removal of the female external genitalia or other injury to the female genital organs for non-medical reasons. The issue has been much debated in policy making and development but also in academia, and it is usually a subject of strong controversy. It is commonly put under discussion within the framework of women's autonomy, cultural relativism, and gender-based violence. The practice is addressed in literature under the terminology of "female genital mutilation" (in its association with gender-based violence), female genital circumcision, or female genital cutting in its less charged forms. For the purposes of this chapter, I chose to use the terminology of "female genital cutting." This is, firstly, due to the fact that the subject has not been purposefully addressed with my respondents during my fieldwork. The subject came to discussion only in my interaction with one of the fifteen respondents. In that instance, my respondent used the term *meisjesbesnijdenis*, literally translated as "circumcision of girls." In the Netherlands, the term *vrouwenbesnijdenis* (circumcision of women) has been preferred in the past, while, nowadays, policy language refers to it as *vrouwelijke genitale verminking* (VGV), that is, female genital mutilation. However, it is important to acknowledge that the practice takes various forms, all differing in the extent of risks that can ensue in the lives of those on which it is performed (see World Health Organization, https://apps.who.int/iris/bitstream/handle/10665/70638/WHO_RHR_11.18_eng.pdf;jsessionid=1A8FF6D08780C9E1EFBBBD8AC4F97333?sequence=1 Accessed August 4, 2020). Secondly, drawing from Diana Tietjens Meyers (2000), I chose, on the one hand, to avoid the term "female genital mutilation" for its "morally condemnatory language" and for how it "prejudices the question of women's autonomy," and, on the other, to avoid the terminology of "female circumcision" due to its cultural relative dimension and the subsequent danger of suggesting the risk free dimension of the procedure (470).

In the Netherlands, the issue of female genital cutting, a practice that triggered much attention on the part of Dutch authorities, also occupies a particular place in this discussion. The practice has indeed played an important role in the tensions built within Somali households in the Netherlands. While the practice is widely spread in Somalia, it is forbidden and punishable by law in the Netherlands. Since 1993, the Dutch state has taken a stance against "female genital mutilation" (Nijenhuis and Van Liempt 2014, 85). According to the penal Code (articles 300–304, 307 and 308), "female genital mutilation" is considered a form of child abuse and is therefore punishable with a maximum prison sentence of twelve years or a fine of a maximum of seventy-six thousand euros for those involved in the process: parents, main care takers, or anybody who supported, gave instructions, paid for it, supplied means with which the procedure was carried out, and/or helped during the procedure.

The issue of female genital cutting has entered the public debates in the Netherlands from a wider discussion on multiculturalism and its so-called failure. Baukje Prins and Sawitri Saharso (2008) show, in their article "In the spotlight. A Blessing and a Curse for Immigrant Women in the Netherlands," how the discussions related to migrant women moved from the periphery to the center of public debates after 9/11. By framing the changes in discourses on integration in the genre of new realism, they are particularly interested in shedding light on the gendered dimensions of these debates. In this sense, they argue that public critiques of multiculturalism have been going hand in hand with issues related to gender and sexuality, such as female genital cutting, the wearing of the headscarf, and homophobia, among others (368). Even more so, they identify Ayaan Hirsi Ali in particular as one of the important figures who put the discussion about female genital cutting on the Dutch political agenda, and, I would add, who contributed to the attention being paid to the practice within Muslim communities in general, and Somali communities in particular.

Ayaan Hirsi Ali is a Somali-born woman who came to the Netherlands as a refugee in 1992 and, starting in January 2003, occupied the position of member of parliament for the People's Party for Freedom and Democracy (VVD). Her political and public positions against religion, and particularly the Islam, raised many controversies, with her claiming Islam as culpable for practices that oppress women, such as, *inter alia*, female genital cutting or forced marriage. Via a collaboration with the filmmaker Theo van Gogh, which resulted in the 2004 short film "Submission: Part I" (Van Gogh 2004), she repeated those positions. Shortly after, in that same year, Van Gogh was murdered by a Dutch–Moroccan man. The tragic event contributed to an even harsher public opinion toward Muslims in the Netherlands. Ayaan Hirsi Ali went into hiding due to threats to her life. Two years later, following inaccuracies regarding her identity during her asylum procedures, her Dutch

citizenship was taken away and, in the end, she moved to the United States, where she pursues her ideological work in various forms.[94]

Regardless of how Hirsi Ali came to be perceived in the Netherlands after her citizenship was revoked, Prins and Saharso (2008) still consider her rise in the public spotlight as having contributed tremendously to the public and political preoccupation with the position of Muslim migrants in the Netherlands that began in the year 2003 (369). Hirsi Ali, for example, went as far as to propose to the Parliament a compulsory yearly medical check for all underage girls from high-risk groups, including those belonging to Somali migrant communities. Although the proposal fell through, a policy plan was instated to both prevent and prosecute practices of female genital cutting in 2005. However, the authors mention that, at the time of writing, no single case of perpetrators being brought to the court had been registered (377).

Although no official studies are available on the topic of Somali families and child protection measures on the part of the Dutch state,[95] some of the women from the first wave I talked with mentioned situations in which families, and especially families led by single mothers, were officially monitored by Dutch childcare institutions in the past, leading, in some situations, to children being placed in foster care.

In the Netherlands, the national expertise center Pharos, together with two other organizations in the field of social work, developed a training program in 2010 aimed at those working with Somali families living in asylum centers titled "Je wilt je kind niet kwijtraken" (You Do Not Want to Lose your Child).[96] In this study, they refer to the informal knowledge passed among people working with Somali families about the difficulties they experience in child-rearing—due to their living conditions but also to the specific traumas experienced in conditions of war—and the temporary placing of children in foster care. Adopting a discourse that centers mothers' roles and deploring the often absent

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[94] Ayaan Hirsi Ali is currently a fellow of the Hoover Institution, an American, conservative libertarian public policy think tank associated with Stanford University.

[95] In the study "Somalis in Amsterdam" (Nijenhuis and van Liempt 2014), the issue of "female genital mutilation" is discussed in relation to women's health (84–86). The study "Werelden van Verschil" (Worlds of Difference, Sociaal en Cultureel Planbureau, 2015), in providing an overview of the Somali community in the Netherlands, reminds how the Federation of Somali Associations in the Netherlands (*Federatie van Somalische Associaties Nederland* FSAN) is against female genital cutting as a way to support Somali people's integration in the Netherlands (118). https://zoek.officielebekendmakingen.nl/blg-646457 Accessed August 4, 2020. Furthermore, a study conducted by the organization Pharos (Exterkate 2013) offers statistical data and estimations with regard to the women and girls either having undergone "female genital mutilation" or who are at risk of undergoing the procedure, as well as assessing the situation at that time (2012) in the Netherlands. There, the author points out to the role Youth Health Care authorities have in preventing and assessing the risk for "female genital mutilation" in the Somali community in the Netherlands. The Advice and Reporting Centre for Child Abuse and Neglect and Child Protection Board are also mentioned as institutions that are involved in the process of registering possible cases of "female genital mutilation" (36).

[96] Bram Tuk, "Je wilt je kind niet kwijtraken" (2010) https://www.pharos.nl/wp-content/uploads/2018/10/Je_wilt_je_kind_niet_kwijt_raken_training_opvoedingsondersteuning_somalische_ouders_Pharos.pdf Accessed January 20, 2020.

role of the father, the approach pinpoints the specific cultural family constellation as the root of the problem, running the risk of overshadowing the systemic socioeconomic conditions that contribute to such situations. While the parenting classes proposed by IFTIN also focus on the importance of making mothers aware of Dutch education and child-rearing norms and values, as well as the ensuing expectations, the organization's volunteers offer a more sensitive and complex portrayal of the situation. Like Idil explained earlier on, they portray an array of elements that contribute to the difficulties Somali families, and especially Somali women, encounter: from cultural shock, to loneliness and social isolation and a general lack of knowledge when it comes to the language, institutional settings, and cultural norms. It is here, they believe, that the already established Somali women from the diaspora can intervene to improve the lives of their fellow Somalis. The knowledge that they possess, going back to their own past experiences or those of others, shapes the specific actions their organization proposes: face-to-face meetings, workshops, and guidance in daily life—paying the bills, and understanding school requirements and the Dutch education system. In these instances, it becomes visible precisely how the experiences of mothering in the diaspora determine social interactions between Somali women. Even more so, it is in these processes of exchange between mothers that the gendered efforts for community maintenance and reproduction become especially salient.

With regard to the issues of child abuse, childcare shortcomings, and their potential consequences, most of the respondents from the first group portray the situation as being less dramatic than is perceived from the outside. Faduma, for example, who has lived in the Netherlands for fifteen years at the time of the fieldwork, mentioned a situation in which her children's teachers were asking the children inquisitive questions regarding the situation at home and their parents' behavior. Additionally, she brought up how a social worker monitored her family for three months and how, fearing her children to be taken away from her, she threatened with contacting a lawyer. This, according to her, ended the monitoring. The women leaders of the community believe, however, that these measures are sometimes too drastic and have strong negative effects on women's and children's lives. Amina, for example, mentioned how taking children away seems too harsh a decision, especially when advice and support could, most of the times, be more efficient and sufficient to solve the situation.

When it comes to the practice of female genital cutting, the women from IFTIN provide information to newcomers about the risks involved medically and also legally if such practices were to be performed on underage girls. Idil is one of the people who offers information on the subject during the activities organized by IFTIN. She mentions how many women lost custody of their children because of this practice, with some of them even being sentenced to prison. In her view, it

is a lack of knowledge that leads to these kinds of complications, people not being aware of the consequences and the context they find themselves in: "It is pure lack of knowledge. They did not know. It is their culture . . . And now you can tell people what the risks are."

Based in the collective memories of the diaspora, and remembered and narrated by women leaders of the community, this women-based diasporic network works actively to prevent situations that can affect the stability and safety of Somali families, and especially that of mothers and children. The issue of mothering therefore becomes central in diasporic formation processes via a form of preventive gendered support, born out of the collective remembering of the tense, past relations between the community and Dutch public institutions.[97] Here, collective memory has a role of utmost importance for the diasporic cultural reproduction work that Somali women engage with to maintain the diasporic communities they are a part of.

Thomas Lacroix and Elena Fiddian-Qasmiyeh (2013), in their introduction to the special issue of the *Journal of Intercultural Studies* dedicated to bridging diaspora studies, memory studies, and refugee studies, talk about the various ways in which collective memories can contribute to diasporic identity formation. They analytically distinguish between "exilic memory" and "diasporic memory" in order to shed light on the complex ways in which various displaced groups evolve and form their political and social identifications. For them, "exilic memory" is in direct reference to the classical approach to diaspora—the archetypal diaspora associated with forced displacement such as the Jewish one—while "diasporic memory" refers to more postmodern conceptualizations of diaspora as nomadic communities shaped in the interaction with more sedentary cultures (Lacroix and Fiddian-Qasmiyeh 2013, 687; see also Gilroy 1993).

Although, for the authors, the two forms of memory are not mutually exclusive as both can manifest in any diasporic formation, for the aim of this chapter, I am interested in connecting the concept of "diasporic memory" with the formation of the diasporic network of Somali women that is analyzed in this chapter. Building on the authors' insight on how "any diaspora generates a memory of its own, fed into by the human, economic or political experiences it produces and through its diverse experiences of interacting with new societies" (Lacroix and Fiddian-Qasmiyeh 2013, 688), I suggest that the materialization of the Somali diaspora during the events organized by IFTIN, especially the parenting classes offered to women, is based on memories of tensions between, on the

[97] It is important to remark that this cultural-sensitive and gender-sensitive support is, however, delivered in rather "culture blind" frameworks: fears around child abuse are, for example, framed as the issue of "child upbringing between cultures." This particular move can be explained by Prins and Saharso's (2008) finding on how, once migrant women took center stage in public debates, practitioners working with migrant women developed a form of pragmatism aiming to avoid the direct link between issues such as violence against women and particular cultural and religious backgrounds (380).

one hand, the Dutch state, and authorities involved in child protection specifically, and, on the other, the Somali community living in the Netherlands, and particularly Somali mothers. Experiences of Somali women belonging to the first group of refugees coming to the Netherlands—such as difficulties related to parenting and the possible dire consequences in terms of child custody—are thus part of the collective diasporic memory of the community, shaping not only the type of inter-diasporic support offered by volunteers from IFTIN but also the form this diasporic network takes. The way in which Somali mothers from the second group talk about Dutch society, their lives in the Netherlands, and the parenting classes they attended further strengthens this argument: in contradistinction to leaders of the organization, the newcomers first declare being very satisfied with their conditions of living in the Netherlands, their social interactions, and the general reception in society. They do not mention any tensions with child protection institutions or schools. Of course, that is not to say that they did not experience the hardships that are inevitable in any forced displacement, arrival in a new country, and lack of family support and social network. They all, for example, talk about the difficulty of managing the household and childcare responsibilities while also having to find a job or learn Dutch. However, the specific issues addressed by the women from IFTIN—the isolation, the difficulties of rearing children in a new culture—are not evidently crystallized in their perception of their everyday lives. The preventive character of IFTIN's activities thus comes to the fore stronger when the two groups are compared. This dimension is then an illustration of how diasporic support is built based on memories of harm from the past that might be repeated if newcomers do not benefit from the guidance of the community's "elders."

5.6 The global Somali diaspora and it mediated transnational practices. From fragmentation to shared practices

From early on, members of the Somali diaspora have been adopters of computer-mediated communication to keep in touch with each other or with those still in Somalia (Issa-Salwe and Olden 2008, 570; see Olden 1999). As such, the internet and digital media have become useful means to "communicate, regroup, share views, help their groups at home, and organize activities" (Issa-Salwe 2008, 54) through news reading and sharing, chatting, participating in forum discussions, being active in social media groups, etc. Moreover, the proliferation of Somali websites, which started at the beginning of the 2000 decade, was mostly brought about by the diaspora (Gaas, Hansen, and Berry

2012, 3), as access to the internet was and continues to be scarce in Somalia.[98] Abdisalam Issa-Salwe (Issa-Salwe 2006, 58–59) informs us that there were around four hundred Somali websites in 2004, and their number continuously grows. Between 2006 and 2011, for example, the number of Somali websites had a forty-four percent growth rate (Issa-Salwe quoted in Gaas, Hansen, and Berry 2012, 1), with them covering a wide range of themes in a dynamic online media ecology: from news outlets to cultural, political, religious, or personal-oriented websites. In the context of the digital divides between the diaspora and the country,[99] the exchange of information between the two was mostly ensured by the common practice of republishing online information already published in print in Somalia (Issa-Salwe 2008, 57).

Besides the connection between members of the diaspora and family and loved ones from Somalia, mediated transnational connections are also taking place between Somalis dispersed throughout the world. Some authors explain these multiple connections within the global diaspora by referring to the fragmentation and division caused by interclan conflicts[100] (Issa-Salwe and Olden 2008, 578). As such, members belonging to the same clan, while living in various nation-states, can still share political views and a common sense of belonging to the same community. Clans are therefore still considered to be influential in the overall setup of Somali media (Gaas, Hansen, and Berry 2012, 2–4), with transnational diasporic media, according to Idil Osman (2017), often contributing to the reinforcing and reproducing of local tensions and conflicts. Digitally mediated connectivity promoting clan affiliation does not, however, preclude diasporic mediated interactions between Somalis belonging to different clans altogether. A common sense of belonging and shared investment in the political reconstruction of the Somali state represents one of the main issues that bring together a variety of members of the diaspora (see Issa-Salwe and Olden 2008). Somalinet, for example, is one of the websites that, by explicitly assuming a neutral political position, hosts various members of the diaspora, prevents conflicts, and facilitates interactions, hereby contributing to a common identity (see Brinkerhoff 2006).

Digital media have thus played an important role in the involvement of the Somali diaspora in projects of humanitarian support and development. This involvement of members of the diaspora

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[98] In 2016, it was estimated that around 1.9 percent of the population was using the Internet. See: https://publications.jrc.ec.europa.eu/repository/bitstream/JRC117947/mp_somalia_2019_online.pdf Accessed August 5, 2020; https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/so.html Accessed August 5, 2020.

[99] Linda Leung (2020), in her discussion on "digital divides," emphasizes the danger of understanding this relation in simplistic terms of "haves" and "have nots" (79) and shows that there are multiple factors that determine unequal access and use of digital technologies and the internet (80), such as age, education, race, and level of urbanization, among others. In my reference to the digital divides between the Somali diaspora and Somalis from Somalia, I refer rather to the issue of infrastructure and access in light of the country's economic and political instability. I am aware that, both within the Somali diaspora and among the Somali population, differences in access and internet use are based on multiple other factors— such as age, class, level of education, etc.—rather than purely the geographical location.

[100] See Issa-Salwe (1996) on ethnic divisions and clan differentiation in Somalia.

in the country's development has also, for instance, contributed to the proliferation of telecom companies, ensuring a higher level of connectivity between Somalis living in Somalia and those abroad (Gagliardone and Stremlau 2011, 15). Scholars have long addressed the strong impact diasporic remittances have had on the country's economy and the population's economic welfare (see C. Horst et al. 2014; Lindley 2009; Hammond et al. 2011). At the same time, somewhat along the lines of the above discussion on the fragmentary nature of transnational connectivity due to conflicting political views, European governmental agencies and non-governmental ones are wary of the political nature of such involvement. Cindy Horst, however, in her article "The Depoliticisation of Diasporas from the Horn of Africa: From Refugees to Transnational Aid Workers" (2013), asks for a reframing of the political nature of the diasporic involvement in the country of origin. She argues for the understanding of refugees and forced migration diasporas as inevitably embedded in the political transformation of their country of origin. As conceptualizations of diaspora have expanded beyond the initial discussions of forced exile, she states that diasporas from the Horn of Africa, such as the Somali one, are evaluated on the basis of an ideal type that is supposedly neutral, impartial, and unified. However, she continues, diasporic transnational engagements, especially those enacted by forced mobility, are most likely to be joined by political transformation interests (235–36). Horst proposes to reframe these transnational (political) engagements as forms of civic participation that give way to societal concerns and forms of solidarity (240–43).

Based on Horst's intervention, despite social division and fragmentation based on differing political views and ethnic differences, it can then be argued that mediated transnational connections between the members of the Somali diaspora, with the country of origin or among themselves, rely on a common interest in the betterment of the country. As such, one can furthermore assess the Somali diaspora as a meaningful community that is based on a shared continuing identity, marked nevertheless by degrees of difference in local, national, and transnational diasporic coming together. While the globalized dimension of the Somali diaspora can be seen in various digitally mediated, humanitarian-derived transnational practices, the same community fosters multiple different forms of coming together based on a variety of transnational, national, and/or local mediated practices. Below, I show how these different levels of mediated diasporic connections take place in the Amsterdam-based diasporic groups of Somali women and mothers.

5.7 Local and transnational digitally mediated diasporic formations

As the case with the communities studied thus far, the main questions driving this chapter are related to the ways in which Somali mothers living in Amsterdam come together in digitally mediated

diasporic networks to support each other, and how their transnational practices support their sense of identity. Indeed, considering the unique and multilayered formation of the Somali diaspora at a global level, the case study addressed in this chapter feeds into the idea of the various forms the Somali diaspora can take, depending on the local and national context as well as the specific lived experiences one looks at. This section contributes to discussions related to the multiple ways in which Somali people from the diaspora come together and how the local context (state and municipal policies, local institutions), as well as everyday experiences, inform their media use.

All Somali women I talked with make use of digital communication technologies to keep in touch with family and friends from abroad, located both in Somalia and elsewhere. This mediated communication is also part of their everyday coming together, be it in the context of IFTIN's projects, local events organized at the neighborhood level in *buurthuizen* (community centers), or more informal ones. More than the women from the two communities studied in the previous chapters, the Somali women I interviewed are familiar with, and use in their daily communication, a variety of social media platforms and applications: from the more known ones in the Netherlands, such as Facebook and WhatsApp, to video-chat and video-call platforms such as Paltalk and Imo, or the instant-messaging platform Viber. This polymedia environment is congruent with the strong transnational dimension of the Somali diaspora's engagement across different nation-states. The use of media platforms is dependent on the locations of those with whom people engage in communication as some platforms are more popular in certain areas around the globe than others. All respondents mention having family members not only in Somalia but also in the United Stated of America, in European countries, or in African ones. The women from my study are thus part of different digitally mediated groups (WhatsApp or Facebook) with family members who live outside the Netherlands but also with other diasporic groups where political issues are discussed, or where, in other instances, gendered topics are covered. Ilhan, for example, told me about a closed Facebook group dedicated to Somali women from all over the world where women post about topics such as marriage, raising children, relationships, and so on. Asha also mentioned how she is a part of a WhatsApp group for her family members, who reside in the United States, the Netherlands, Sweden, and Somalia.

The strong transnational dimension of the digital media use of the women I have talked with is in sharp opposition to the national dimension of their digital media use for diasporic formation. Most women are not part of any digital media network or digital group dedicated to Somalis, Somali women, or Somali mothers living in the Netherlands. One exception is the presence of the website of the *Federatie van Somalische Associaties Nederland* (Federation of Somali associations in the Netherlands). What is, however, stronger in terms of diasporic coming together is the local context,

especially at the neighborhood level. Here, WhatsApp appears to be the most used social media platform, which mediates local gatherings between Somali women and the Somali mothers I have talked with. Indeed, together with the specific use of WhatsApp groups to keep in touch with family, the same feature is used to create and maintain ties between smaller groups of women who interact on a more regular, everyday basis (groups with mothers from school, groups with women who participate regularly in activities organized at community centers, etc.). Through WhatsApp, small but more significant groups ensure everyday diasporic communication both transnationally and locally, supporting as such the platform's own stated purpose with regard to the group feature: "to keep in touch with the groups of people that matter the most, like your family or coworkers."[101]

How Somali women create friendships with each other and get to know other members of their community relies much on their neighborhood and local interactions. A few women have described this way of expanding their social network, within the Somali community but also with other women of migrant background from the area, as "*via, via*." This expression is often used in the Dutch language as a way to describe how one got to know a person, obtained information, etc. It refers to meeting people through another person. Less than is the case for the other two communities—the Romanian and Turkish ones—digital media platforms are thus not in themselves contributing to the expansion of diasporic networks but are rather used for the support and the maintenance of everyday communication. Unlike the two communities discussed previously, where groups of newcomers built their own, new digitally mediated networks, either in the absence of such a diasporic network or due to their desire to distinguish themselves from the already existing ones, the Somali women I have talked with seem to have a more localized, offline network of social connections that is less dependent on digital media in its formation.

In the following, I bring forth two possible interrelated factors that might have contributed to the more localized dimension of the Somali diasporic formation within the Netherlands and the weaker organization at the national level. The first proposed explanation is related to Dutch public policy approaches to integration of migrant communities and the subsequent development of an institutional support network via *stichtingen* (foundations) or *buurthuizen* (community centers), *inter alia*. Even though the current approach to integration has, in recent years, taken a turn toward more individual responsibilities for integration, and although the funding has diminished over the years, the institutions mentioned above still function, with some occupying an important place in the social life of multicultural neighborhoods. Indeed, according to Han Entzinger (2006, 1–3), the Netherlands has been known for its public policy with regard to immigrant integration and its emphasis on

[101] https://www.whatsapp.com/features/ Accessed August 5, 2020.

multiculturalism by setting up a system of *verzuiling* (pillarization). Since the late 1970s, a number of measures were taken to support the self-organization of migrant communities, which were encouraged to keep their own cultural identity. This approach actually has a history in how the Netherlands previously approached the diversity of religious communities. The pillarization system allowed different faith-based communities (catholic, protestant, etc.) to make up their own institutional arrangements—schools, hospitals, and so on—via public funding. Furthermore, the community elites, representing "the common roof the pillars support" (3), occupied an important role in these arrangement as they were in charge of representing the interests and needs of the community members and the community as a whole. While, in the late 1960s, the interest in this approach lost grounds in relation to the Dutch majority, it was considered suitable for migrant communities, especially since their presence in the country was seen as temporary. As mentioned earlier, even though a turn toward more assimilationist policies was instated at the beginning of the 2000s, the institutional legacy and the sociality of the pillarization approach facilitated intercommunity and intracommunity encounters between "ethnicized" migrants. As such, these strong, already established institutional and social ties in multicultural neighborhoods in general, and the Somali community in particular, reduced the role of digital media in the making of diasporic groups.

The second factor influencing the more localized and less digitally mediated diasporic coming together of the Somali diaspora is related to the phenomenon of onward migration, which the Somali community in the Netherlands has been confronted with over the past years. As mentioned earlier in the chapter, from the early 2000s onward, many Somalis from the Netherlands have relocated to the United Kingdom (see Van Liempt 2011), which affected the national cohesion of the Somali diaspora in the Netherlands:

> But in the Netherlands, because actually many people went to England . . . so now everyone lives in small towns. So, people are split up . . . If they would really live in the same place, then they will also be seen as a big community. (Najma)

Moreover, Najma mentions, many of those who left were people with a strong sense of entrepreneurship and some of them were active in various forms of civic engagement in the Dutch scene. An important part of the community leaving to the United Kingdom thus affected national diasporic formation processes, which were, until then, founded on a more professional basis—such as, for example, the Federation of the Somali Associations in the Netherlands or the Facebook page *Netwerk Somalische Ondernemers* (Network Somali entrepreneurs). As such, within the bigger

institutional constellation, one of the important elements in the formation and maintenance of the (national) diaspora—the community elites—has become less strong.

Next to the two factors mentioned previously—the Dutch public policy approaches to the integration of migrant communities and the onward migration to the United Kingdom—the Dutch policy regarding the reception of asylum seekers, specifically in terms of geographical representation as the Somali community is relatively spread out throughout the Netherlands, further contributes to the disconnect between local Somali diasporic groups. The aim is to distribute the costs across multiple municipalities and reduce the imbalance between smaller and larger cities (Nijenhuis and Van Liempt 2014, 72). In addition, while asylum seekers from reception centers are intentionally discouraged from integrating (in case the application is rejected), for those who succeed in obtaining their refugee status, housing can be offered in any location in the Netherlands, with little control over this decision on the part of the refugees themselves. This leads to a high level of dispersal at the level of the community. All these factors corroborated can then explain the salience of the local dimension in the diasporic formation of Somalis in the Netherlands.

5.8 Digital media ecology of Somali mothers from Amsterdam

The diasporic digital media ecology of the women who participated in this study consists mainly of two main sets of practices: everyday communication practices, with women in their physical proximity; and transnational communication practices, with family and friends in Somalia and elsewhere in the world. In alignment with previous research on the Somali diaspora, these two dimensions reflect the double spectrum the Somali diasporic identity and engagement is constructed upon: on the one hand, there is the dimension of integration efforts associated with the managing of life in exile, and, on the other, there are the strong transnational efforts diasporic Somalis put into supporting the country of origin development wise (Kok and Rogers 2016, 24; see Kleist 2008a, 2008b). Contrary to beliefs that the two allegiances—both to the country of origin and to the country of residence—are incompatible, both dimensions are therefore part of the same process of diaspora identity formation (see Erdal and Oeppen's 2013 work on the co-occurrence of integration and transnationalism in migrant people's everyday lives). This "migrant balancing act" (Erdal and Oeppen 2013) is addressed by Cindy Horst in her analysis of how young Somalis from the diaspora do civic engagement in Somalia. Building on her work addressed earlier in this chapter (C. Horst 2013), Horst (2018) argues in a more recent article that belonging and civic engagement are embedded in multiple sites, as the Somali community can be located "locally, nationally, transnationally or globally, and can be defined by a range of characteristics, of which national identity

is but one" (3). The author critiques the opposition that is often assumed between transnational engagement and local practices of diasporas, and she argues for the complementarity between the two dimensions. The concept of "multi-sited embeddedness" is then proposed to capture people's engagement between and across locations while analytically leaving open the possibility of integrating other categories of difference. Furthermore, "multi-sited embeddedness" also acknowledges variations in time and context, making it a fluid experience (1353). Horst's insights regarding the multi-sited embeddedness of Somalis from the diaspora supports the idea of a variegated Somali digital diaspora, with multiple local, national, and transnational diasporic spaces connected via a diverse range of digital media. Digitally mediated diaspora formation, following Horst, is then context dependent: situated lived experiences are highly important to understand why and how people from certain locations come together. This, of course, is also the core of this research's intervention in the study of digital diaspora formations. As such, while the Somali community outside of Somalia is very diverse and variegated in its media use (due to various community-specific factors such as, *inter alia*, clan differences, a wide geographical presence, or family culture), the ways in which they come together in the digital diaspora are also strongly determined by the contexts they live in.

The digital aspect of Somali diaspora networks has been addressed by Saskia Kok and Richard Rogers (2016) in their article "Rethinking Migration in the Digital Age: Transglocalization and the Somali Diaspora." In their endeavor to explore the role of the web in identity formation processes and diasporic engagement through medium-specific methods and network and web content analysis, Kok and Rogers argue that Somali community formation is mostly shaped by their social integration practices in the host land. However, they continue, these processes coexist together and alongside national and transnational diasporic engagement in a structure they call "transglocalization." They define transglocalization as "the dynamic state of migration, traceable online, in which national networked formations exist alongside the local as well as the transnational, each operating with knowledge and awareness of the other yet acting separately" (42). Basing their findings solely on their online explorations, the authors offer a more general understanding of how the Somali diaspora manifests in online spaces, at the local, national, and transnational level. Their perspective, however, suggests an intrinsic quality within the Somali diaspora that favors preoccupations for integration in the host land, running the risk to locate diaspora formation outside hierarchies of power and in an ahistorical framework.

This study aims to supplement the insights on how the Somali diaspora forms in a digitally mediated way by offering a more situated perspective. By considering the historical and material context together with the lived experiences of Somali women, it shows how the formation of the

Somali diaspora in the Netherlands was determined not only by processes located within the community itself (efforts for integration, transnational ties with the homeland, etc.), but also by Dutch policy measures on migration, and the social and political views on diversity, racial, religious, and gender differences in the country. The institutional legacy of managing migrant communities and its subsequent social practices in multicultural neighborhoods contributed to local encounters and, later, limited the possibility for Somalis to come together in larger diaspora groups at the Dutch national level.[102] Furthermore, regarding the facilitation of physical encounters between migrants in general, and Somalis in particular, within multicultural neighborhoods, the role of digital media in the creation of diaspora spaces has yet to play a determining role. While digital media is used in everyday social encounters, both locally and transnationally, it does not have a primary role in how people bond in their everyday lives. In this sense, while digital and social media can enhance connectivity, it seems to work best in communities where people have limited to no physical encounters.

In the Somali community in the Netherlands then, as well as in the diaspora spaces created by Somali mothers, sociality based on local physical encounters—strongly determined by Dutch policy approaches to migration—decenters the role of digital media in community making.

5.9 Conclusions

This chapter set out to explore the formation of the digitally mediated Somali diaspora from Amsterdam, from the vantage point of mothers. In so doing, I have investigated two groups of Somali women who I analytically distinguish between based on their moment of arrival in the Netherlands—one that arrived in the Netherlands from the 1990s onward, and the other arriving after the year 2006. I have, furthermore, added another dimension of comparison between the two groups based on their education level and position in the community, which is ultimately related to the specific context in which they lived in Somalia. Women belonging to the first group benefited from higher levels of education and belonged more to the elite of Somalian society, whereas women belonging to the second group, having lived in a conflict zone for a longer period of time, did not have or had very little access to formal education and experienced great levels of distress due to the civil war.

I then explored the diasporic coming together via the interactions between the two groups. I particularly paid attention to the parenting classes offered by IFTIN, an organization led by Somali women from the first group. I put forward the claim that the creation of these diasporic ties is strongly

[102] This aspect raises interesting questions with regard to the effects of the Dutch policy measures supporting local encounters between migrants in multicultural neighborhoods, and the geographical spreading of Somali people in the Netherlands.

informed by the collective memories about past tense relations between the Somali community and the Dutch authorities and child protection services, placing the experience of mothering at the center of this diaspora formation. Furthermore, I situated the experiences of tension with the Dutch state authorities within the larger context of an unfriendly political climate toward cultural and religious differences and the gendered dimensions of migrant (Muslim) communities. This part also offered insights into the lived experiences of the Somali diaspora in relation to more restrictive public policies on migration management. These findings underline the salience of mothering experiences in diaspora formation.

Next, I proceeded to investigate Somali women's use of social media for diasporic purposes. I firstly showed the strong intertwinement between the globalized dimension of Somali diaspora and its diasporic digital media use. I discussed how both the high level of diversity of the Somali diaspora and the specificities of the local contexts it inhabits inform people's digital media use. Moreover, I looked at the Dutch context and illustrated how the Somali mothers from my research use digital media to keep in touch with other Somalis from abroad (family and friends, in Somalia and elsewhere) and to maintain and strengthen their local diasporic ties.

I then argued for the necessity of a situated understanding of the Somali digital diaspora in the Netherlands. With literature long showing the variegated and globalized nature of the Somali diaspora, I argued that, next to the community-specific factors (types of migration and cultural factors, among others), local contexts have a strong hold on the forms diasporas end up taking. As such, the Somali diaspora formation was strongly shaped both by specificities of the community itself (cultural, political) and the local context in the form of Dutch policy measures on migration, as well as the social and political views on diversity, racial, religious, and gender differences in the country. Dutch policy approaches to migration management facilitated migrants' coming together mostly at a local and neighborhood level via different organizations and institutions such as community centers and NGOs. Together with the onward migration of Dutch-based Somalis to the United Kingdom and the state approach to asylum seeking procedures and refugee integration, these factors reduced the possibilities of diaspora formation at a national level further.

In this context of strong local and physical social encounters, I made the claim that digital media plays a rather secondary role in diasporic community making. This is due to the strong local institutional structure that favors local physical encounters. While used in everyday interactions for strengthening and maintaining sociality, digital media is not at the core of how women come together in the Somali diaspora in the Netherlands. This is a contrast to the highly skilled communities studied in the Romanian and Turkish chapters but somehow bares resemblance to the Turkish–Dutch women belonging to guest worker communities. These findings then suggest a strong relation between the

role of digital media in community making for people who have rather limited or no previous physical social contacts.

In a way, this last case study rounds up what has been argued in the three analytical chapters of this dissertation: firstly, it showed the rather heterogenous nature of diaspora formation, with digitally mediated diasporic groups being strongly shaped by hierarchies brought about by various categories of difference. Secondly, it demonstrated the important role mothering experiences have in diaspora formation. This not only shows the gendered dimension of digital diaspora formations but also the unique way in which women—in their role as mothers, and in their efforts for cultural heritage transmission, the maintenance of family ties, and negotiations to raise their children between multiple cultural spaces—create and participate in the making of digital diaspora. Last, this chapter, in a similar way to the other two case studies and via the methodological approach proposed in this dissertation—which accentuates the processual character of diaspora formation, its situatedness, and its grounding in everyday practices on the online–offline continuum—has highlighted how diasporas form from a variety of lived experiences and identity positions in congruence with the historical and social contexts in which they manifest. These findings will be further highlighted in the "Conclusions" part of this research.

Conclusions

This dissertation investigated how diasporas are digitally mediated from the vantage point of migrant mothers. It focused specifically on how women from three diasporic communities in the Netherlands—Romanian, Somali, and Turkish—use digital media to both keep in touch with family and friends from abroad and form local diasporic groups. I was interested in understanding what needs, contexts, and practices determine migrant mothers' diasporic coming together and in which ways their social positioning—informed by, for example, race, ethnicity, gender, and class—shapes this process.

I have thus shown how mothering experiences strongly influence how migrant women support each other in local ethnic networks. In addition, I have also demonstrated how, in light of the heterogeneity of migrant communities as well as that of local contexts, these diasporic groups can take many forms: expatriate communities, groups based on ethnic and religious bonds, and neighborhood-based formations. Diaspora formation is thus shaped by categories of difference such as class, religion, and geographical location. This variegation, I argued, is also reflected in the multiple ways in which migrant mothers make use of digital media for diasporic purposes.

By taking the lived experiences of migrant mothers as my entry point for the investigation of how diasporas are digitally mediated, in Chapter 1, "Mothering in the Digital Diaspora: Feminist Interdisciplinary Theorizing on Diaspora Formation," I put forward the idea of "diasporic mothering" as a gendered site where difference and belonging are negotiated by the use of cultural reproduction, collective identity construction, and stable homemaking. To support this proposal, I drew from scholarship coming from feminist and migration studies that address the unique position from which migrant mothers participate in processes of feminization of migration. The works of Irene Gedalof (2009) and Eleonore Kofman and Parvati Raghuram (2015) were relevant for proposing mothering and mothers' reproductive work as a location from which to understand the making of digitally mediated diasporic communities. This diaspora-focused intervention contributes to larger discussions from media and migration studies on the ways in which transnational motherhood and digital media shape each other in the context of migration (see the works of Madianou and Miller 2013; Parreñas 2000, 2001; McKay 2012).

This thesis therefore contributes to discussions on how migrant people in the diaspora experience multiple belongings without being intrinsically compelled to choose allegiance to either their so-called "homeland" or "hostland." Rather, I argued, people in the diaspora navigate between different belongings in local, national, and transnational spaces. Experiences of mothering specifically bring about negotiations and efforts to accommodate these different positionalities. This

dissertation thus shows how mothers occupy these multiple positions in managing their own diasporic subjectivities but also the lives of their children, the well-being of their families, and the maintenance of their communities. Mothering therefore revealed unique and oftentimes unseen digital diaspora spaces that dismiss the idea of digital diaspora as a gender-neutral space.

Furthermore, in Chapter 1 of the dissertation, I proposed the reconceptualization of digitally mediated diasporic formations by building upon postcolonial and feminist scholarship. Through the works of Paul Gilroy ([1993] 2008) and Stuart Hall (1990) on the hybrid nature of diasporic identities, as well as Avtar Brah's (2005) conceptualization of diaspora as a process, I understood diaspora as a material social process that is inherently marked by social inequalities manifested through intersecting classed, racialized, ethnic, and gendered axes of differentiation. In addition, rather than focusing solely on the digital side—in a media-centric, data-driven paradigm—or solely on the social side of digital diaspora—a non-media-centric, ethnographic paradigm—I foregrounded how the digital and the social shape each other in the making of digital diasporas.

As such, digital diasporas were defined as heterogeneous, in the making, shaped by hierarchies of difference, and embedded in everyday practices within the online–offline continuum. In addition, by starting its investigation from the conceptualization of diasporic motherhood, I made a proposal for a non-media-centric, interdisciplinary feminist, and intersectional study of digital diasporas. This proposal has several methodological and epistemological implications for the study of media and migration, which will be detailed below.

Methodologically, in Chapter 2, "Epistemological Groundings, Methodological Choices, and Reflections," I have shown that, in the context of social media and the myriad ways in which people are connected, earlier approaches to studying such formations—on dedicated migrant websites and their affiliated forums, for example—remain insufficient to account for today's digital media platforms and smartphone culture. I thus considered the idea that medium-specific methods, such as data scraping and network visualization, can offer new insights with regard to how digital diaspora spaces are formed. I, however, proposed a non-media-centric understanding of digitally mediated diasporic processes by foregrounding the meaning-making processes in the everyday lives of the people I studied. Digital ethnography was identified as an adequate way to meet the proposed methodological approach. In this sense, I adhered to a mixed methods approach, combining ethnographic methods with digital methods, that was grounded in the everyday practices of the women that participated in the study.

Epistemologically, in the same chapter, I advocated for a feminist epistemological grounding of the research. The diversification of digital media and communication possibilities has led to new medium-born tools for visualization, measuring, and analysis of digital data. In this context,

humanities-based research became more preoccupied with providing critical analyses of what such research shifts might entail, denouncing especially the risks of a "new empiricism" (Van Es and Schäfer 2017). In reaction to the perils entailed by perceived value-free, objective, and neutral aims of current big data and data-driven research, I have argued for the use of feminist standpoint theories that highlight the situated and partial nature of knowledge production. In such an approach, location, context, situatedness, partiality, and reflexivity are central to the non-digital-centric understanding of how migrants participate in and create digitally mediated diasporic formations.

Together with my colleagues from the Connecting Europe project (see Alinejad et al. 2018), I designed a non-media-centric approach based on digital ethnographic principles that uses both ethnographic and digital methods. While staying committed to the proposed research design and its epistemological principles, I, however, encountered challenges in implementing all its steps in the ways the approach was intended. As such, an important finding for the methodological approach of this dissertation is related to access to the online spaces my respondents participate in. Considering the variegated dimension of the ethnographic fieldwork in relation to the three different communities under study, I early on prioritized—along the lines of the non-media-centric approach—the meaning my respondents gave to their use of digital media rather than my own access to those spaces. Should access itself become a focus in future employments of this methodology, longer ethnographic periods of time might be needed. Moreover, it is also important to acknowledge that having access to big data and digital-born data in an ethical manner required, in the context of this dissertation, the same sensitivity, care, and ethical concerns as any endeavor to collect data from human respondents. For example, in my working with the Turkish and Somali mothers, I became aware of various digital spaces where they interact with each other. However, I encountered some form of resistance to the possibilities of having access to those groups or the data concerning them. As such, I continued my research through their own narration of the social interactions within those spaces and did not pursue alternative avenues for obtaining other (digital) data. In this sense, the interviews with members of those communities put the "humans" in the digital traces while socially situating those traces as well.

I empirically supported my arguments by bringing together various data that was collected ethnographically and, in the case of the Romanian community, with the use of digital methods. The empirical dimension of the relation between digital diaspora formation and diasporic mothering practices was addressed in the three case studies.

In Chapter 3, "Diasporic Mothering as Cultural Reproductive Work: Gendered and Classed Dynamics," I investigated the formation of digital diasporas in relation to mothering practices in the Romanian community in the Netherlands. There, I firstly showed how an important part of the (digitally mediated) diasporic formations within this community materialized in relation to women's

conscious preoccupations with the maintenance of family ties across generations and heritage language transmission. This finding underscores the specific characteristics of mothering in the diaspora. In this chapter, I also demonstrated how the Romanian diaspora, following the expansion of the highly skilled community, is now divided along the lines of class belonging. Based on the ethnographic data, I claimed that the offline organization of the Romanian diaspora around a Romanian weekend school is shaped around the rather highly skilled community of Romanians. Next, I argued that this classed division is also reproduced in online spaces. However, through the use of medium-specific digital methods (mostly data scraping and network visualization), and in the context of the ethnographic study, I claimed that the Facebook platform provides a "social (media) capital" of connectivity that offers the potential to bridge intracommunity divisions that are manifested mostly in offline spaces. Digital diaspora can thus be more inclusive than more traditional, elite-led, and institutionalized diasporic formations.

Chapter 4, "Beyond the Guest Worker. Class, Ethnicity, and Mothering in the Turkish Diaspora," focused on the formation of digital diasporas starting with the experiences of Turkish women in the Netherlands. Here, I also showed how mothering experiences shaped the coming together of Turkish mothers from different backgrounds: mothers from Turkish–Dutch communities that are shaped by the guest worker migration route and mothers who are part of a more recent, highly skilled migration group. Mutual support in overcoming the hardships of migrant life and desires to maintain one's ethnic and/or religious heritage have both been identified as main factors for Turkish mothers to come together in diasporic groups. In addition, like in the Romanian case, I have illustrated how classed dynamics strongly influence how women from the Turkish community participate in diaspora formation. Highly skilled professionals tend to create spaces outside the already established Turkish–Dutch communities that belong to the former migration wave of guest workers. The divisions between the two discursively manifest in the support for the Turkish government or lack thereof. Furthermore, I demonstrated how, in trying to distinguish themselves from the earlier Turkish–Dutch communities, highly skilled Turkish mothers use Facebook as an important resource for diaspora formation. As such, even though both groups are preoccupied with the issue of privacy in their everyday diasporic media use, they form and belong to different digital diaspora spaces in accordance with their socioeconomic backgrounds and their stances in relation to homeland politics.

Chapter 5, "Diasporic Memory and the Formation of Local Support Groups for Somali Mothers," investigated digital diaspora formation and the mothering experiences of Somali women from Amsterdam and its surroundings. In this chapter, I discussed the distinction between two groups of Somali women, which was based on their arrival trajectories and their socioeconomic backgrounds at the time of living in Somalia. For example, in comparison with the first group, people from the

second group, due to the civil war and the country's instability, were precluded from taking part in formal education. I then showed how mothering took central stage in the formation of diaspora spaces between these two groups of Somali women. I argued that the local Dutch context—in terms of public policy on migration and multiculturalism and societal and political views on religious difference—contributed to the specific forms the Somali diaspora takes today. Particularly, I demonstrated how the local context shapes digital media uses for diaspora making, with transnational and local ties being stronger, while the national ones are yet to be developed.

The remainder of this section will address the comparative implications that derive from the three empirical chapters while also pointing out further research directions that might arise.

All three empirical chapters together indicate the strong interest people display for homeland politics in the diaspora. However, this is not to be perceived as a unidirectional relation. Many of the political transformations in their countries of origin have had real material effects on the lives of those from the diaspora: in the case of Romania, the organizing of the elections in the diaspora, the distress around political turmoil, and its effect on people coming together in protest or diaspora organization; in the case of Turkey, its surveillance of social media and the distress regarding political crises such as the 5 July 2016 *coup d'état*, among others; or, in the case of Somalia, its long, armed conflict, the need for humanitarian relief, and the mobilization of Somalis abroad for support. While discussions of "methodological nationalism" (see Wimmer and Glick Schiller 2003) rightly argue for the understanding of social, political, and economic flows as permeating national borders, this thesis demonstrates how nation-states, on certain levels, have not lost importance and relevance in people's everyday lives in the diaspora.

Class has been a recurrent factor of differentiation within the different diasporas that were studied here. This dissertation showed how class can shape the interactions between different members of the diaspora and, in certain cases, can even prevent those interactions from happening altogether. In two of the case studies, the one on the Romanian community and the one on the Turkish community, the class dimension is closely related to the recently formed groups of highly skilled migrants. Expatriate identifications take center stage in these groups' diaspora participation. The relation between elite migrants, diaspora, and their use of digital media is an interesting avenue for further research. This topic remains understudied, especially in relation to groups of migrants who have so far been researched mainly in relation to past, more visible migration routes. For example, Eastern Europeans, and Romanians in particular, have been studied through the lens of care and domestic work, or generally as lower skilled migrants. Research on Turkish migration has focused mostly on the guest worker agreements between Turkey and Western and Northern European

countries in the 1960s and 1970s. In the case of Somali migration, the focus tends to be on forced migration.

For some diaspora groups, digital media proved to be a space in which the classed distinctions reproduced in offline spaces could be overcome in some way. This aspect, I believe, deserves further investigation in order to understand the precise ways in which social media platforms—which are designed with corporate and profit-making interests in mind while simultaneously being in an intimate affording relation with its users—direct and transform social interactions between people in general, and in the context of migration in particular. Yet, from a more holistic perspective, I have also shown the versatility of practices people engage in on today's social media. Namely, in all three case studies, the variety and multiple possibilities of people coming together clearly demonstrate the "scalable" dimension of digitally mediated sociality (see Miller et al. 2016). This suggests that the digital dimension of diaspora formation might already have gained a tautological understanding. Even more so, this points to the multiple ways in which people, and, in this context, migrant people who are physically separated from their family and loved ones, come together in digital spaces. I argue that it is only by foregrounding the study of people's everyday practices within the online–offline continuum that these various forms of sociality can be identified and understood.

The variety of media platforms used for diasporic connectivity was salient during this study. Facebook especially has appeared as an important social media platform for groups of highly educated migrants in this dissertation. This suggests interesting avenues for further research on the relation between Facebook's participation in community formation and its recent active support of community leadership programs in relation to these communities. Likewise, the specific relation between diasporic mothering practices and the use of Facebook in the context of highly skilled migration deserves further exploration. Such research can, for example, account for how digital platforms can support migrant mothering practices in different geographies in a similar or different way.

Next to Facebook, other social media platforms were mentioned as being relevant for everyday diasporic practices. I remind here some of them: Instagram, Twitter, Paltalk, or Viber. While not central to my respondents' mothering practices, they do play an important role in maintaining local and transnational connections. This aspect points to the interesting relation between cross-platform sociality, affordances, and domestication, in the context of community building. More attention to the medium specificity and medium specific methods can add to t the findings of this research a valuable political economy component.

This dissertation contributes to the painting of a more diverse and intersectional picture of contemporary diaspora formation by recognizing women's and mothers' reproductive work in both

child-rearing and community-building practices. In the context of digital media and its ubiquitous role in migrant people's social lives, this study highlights the gendered ways in which diasporas are digitally mediated, contributing to a better understanding of how the digital and the social shape each other. Even more so, this interdisciplinary approach to studying the digital mediation of diaspora formation is part of a larger critical humanities-based investigation of the underlining social values and power dynamics of recent technological advancements and the digital turn.

Appendix 1

Algorithmic Accountability Statement

Basic Information	
Name of the algorithm/script:	userextractor_laura_20180327.py/ userextractor_laura_20180425.py (extensive commenting)
Name of the researcher(s):	Laura Candidatu / Maranke Wieringa
Research for which the algorithm was developed:	ERC Connecting Europe
Research for which the algorithm was used:	ERC Connecting Europe
Date:	March 26th – April 13th 2018

Accountability statement
What does the algorithm do, in pseudocode*? * Pseudocode refers to the description of a program or script from a programming language into a natural language.
Imports packages needed Loads 5 files and transforms these 5 flat text files into lists of lists. Then, for each unique user in unique commenters, we count how often that particular user has commented in group a/b/c and d. Then we determine if/which group is the most commented in. If there are two or more groups with an equal score, the biggest group cannot be determined (and neither can the second group). If the biggest group is determined, we then proceed to determine the second biggest group in a similar manner. If there is no post in the other three groups, we output 'none'. If there is a tie between two or three groups, the results are inconclusive. Once biggest and second biggest group are determined, we proceed to write the details to the new file: which holds the username and for each user the hits for the five groups.
What patterns, correlations, or sequences does the algorithm look for?
It checks the number of comments a user has placed by comparing the username hash to the hashes of users who placed particular comments. If there is a match, we count it as a hit. We also check for "biggest" number of comments in a particular group. A would be the biggest if a is bigger than b, and bigger than c, and bigger than d.
What might it miss? What is invisible? What are the biases or the presuppositions?
If there is no biggest group, a second biggest group can also not be determined. The script does not discriminate between zeros and ties in the case of the second biggest group.
In what context was the algorithm developed, and for what kind of data?

It was developed after Laura Candidatu manually developed the procedure on a small scale, after which Maranke Wieringa translated the procedure to a Python script so that it may be run on a bigger scale. The script works on Facebook data gathered via Netvizz.
Have you checked if the outcome is valid, and under which conditions?
Outcome is valid, ties are not explicated, but listed as “inconclusive.”

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Curriculum Vitae

Laura Candidatu was born in Alexandria, Romania on February 15, 1986. In 2008 she obtained her bachelor's degree in Political Sciences from the Faculty of Political Sciences, at the National University of Political Studies and Public Administration in Bucharest, Romania. In 2011, she graduated from the research master program in Politics, Gender and Minorities from the same university. In 2013 she followed the One-year (Post)Graduate Training program offered by The Netherlands Research School of Gender Studies, at Utrecht University, the Netherlands. In 2016, she started her PhD as part of the ERC project "Digital Crossings in Europe. Gender, Diaspora and Belonging (CONNECTINGEUROPE)," under the supervision of Prof. dr. Sandra Ponzanesi, Prof. dr. Rosemarie Buikema, and Dr. Koen Leurs. During her PhD, she has published on the topics of digital diaspora, migrant mothering, and feminist research on the digital. Laura works currently as a lecturer in the Graduate Gender Program, in the Media Studies Department, at Utrecht University.