6 Digital Media and Migration

Reflections from the Southern Margins of Europe

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This chapter aims at untangling the relationship between digital media practices and marginality in one of the geographical and discursive peripheries of Europe, namely Italy. Our intention is to explore the epistemological and methodological limitations of the field of digital media at the crossroads with migration studies while disrupting the myth of Europe (Balibar 1991) from below. Indeed, we believe that the focus on one of its Southern countries, Italy, might help to engage critically with concepts dear to North-Western European migration and new media scholarship, as the product of unequal power relations articulated between the centre and its peripheries. A 'Southern' look, then, offers the possibility to explore the interstice crossed by "power, knowledge and space" (Preciado 2017) of digital media and migration studies' knowledge production. Meanwhile, looking at the 'margins' from a Southern European perspective helps to unravel the discursive construction and the permeable, unstable and historically shifting character of what is meant by the 'margin' itself. This chapter aims to expose *who*, then, can define its meaning. The intention is to provide a more nuanced look at the usual points of reference for determining 'marginality': a condition of geographical, economic or social peripherality. Indeed, Italy is often considered marginal in Europe although it is a country that presents elements of both centrality and peripherality. What is produced, then, when these different elements overlap? What are the social, economic and cultural dynamics that shape digital media practices from this ambivalent condition?

We will offer a provisional answer to this question by presenting some of the findings of the ERC project ConnectingEurope,[1] in the hope of a continuation of this discussion. The ConnectingEurope project explored how different forms of co-presence, connectivity and conviviality were performed through digital means by Romanian, Somali and Turkish women living in Amsterdam, London and Rome, as three of the main multicultural urban centres of Europe, attracting a high number of migrants every year. The project investigated experiences of migration, diasporic identity construction and belonging in their interrelationship with digital media practices. This focus was motivated by the acknowledgement of the centrality that mediated communication has for diasporic subjects, impacting on their articulation of identity construction and community making within the new context of arrival (Georgiou 2006; Hegde 2016). Undoubtedly, digital media had an even stronger influence on these dynamics, giving the opportunity to keep and grow

local and transnational diasporic ties in an immediate and affordable fashion. At the same time, the project was interested in looking at the role of digital media from a feminist and postcolonial perspective, theoretically and methodologically sensitive to power relations as impacting different forms of diasporic digital connectivity.

One of the very first findings emerging from the project was linked to the different contexts that formed the background to the research. In particular, the case of Rome seemed hardly comparable to Amsterdam and London. Context had a huge impact on migrant women's diasporic experiences and digital practices. The specific character of Rome as a field of study presented features that were far removed from the 'global city' (Sassen 2005), in contrast to the other two cities. The socio-spacial dimensions emerging from the context of Rome deeply impacted the nature of Somali, Turkish and Romanian migration and the migrants' online and offline everyday experiences in the city, pushing us to look for a theoretical framework that could better help us understand these different dynamics. More specifically, we argue that the analysis of the Italian case study needs to depart from a theoretical framework that takes into account a different perspective on migration and digital media, compared with the current perspective which is often based on Northern European studies.

This is why we want to offer a critical approach to theories pertaining to Europe's identity construction, the 'city' and digital media practices, one that is enriched by a Southern European perspective. First, we will start by discussing the limitations of the current field of digital media and migration studies, and the problematic aspects that emerge from the canon. Secondly, we will describe some of the findings that emerged during the fieldwork with two of the three communities studied for the project: the Somali and Turkish communities of Rome. The findings resulting from the work with the migrant women belonging to these two communities, indeed, prompted a reformulation of our theoretical and methodological points of reference, disrupting dominant narratives about migrants' digital connectivity. Thirdly, this chapter will discuss theories based on the problematization of European knowledge production, conducting a review of some of the main critical epistemological contributions that Southern scholars produced while looking at Europe from its own 'margins.' This discussion will be followed by a more in-depth look at Italy, as an ambivalent context that is considered European, 'but not quite yet.' We will explore the consequences that its articulation of an in-between identity has for migrant populations, for processes of inclusion in and exclusion from its social fabric and for migrants' digital practices. Finally, we will problematize the concept of the 'global city' in relation to Rome, as a local context that mirrors the in-between character of Italy, making it a particular and challenging case that is hard to place within classic theoretical frameworks.

Migration, Digital Media and Marginality

Digital media and migration scholars have often shown a blind optimism when it comes to discussing the impact that digital media have on migrants' experiences of displacement and resettlement in a new context of arrival. Digital media are

seen as a revolutionary tool, able to create new and unprecedented possibilities for migrant people (*see* Diminescu and Loveluck 2014; Everett 2009; Mitra 2001). Digital media seem not only to respond to migrants' need to reconstitute their identity more easily in a context of displacement but also to give them immediate access to virtual networks where migrants can receive support from compatriots, by sharing information about the context of arrival or in the search for jobs (Keles 2015). According to some of the scholars who studied the impact of digital media on migratory experiences, it seems that the mere existence of online networks among migrants and refugees has disrupted the traditional need for 'offline' social networks founded on 'strong ties' (Granovetter 1973), such as relationships based on kinship, friendship or belonging to the same community or clan (Leung 2018). Dekker and Engbersen (2014) argue that nowadays building migrant networks based on 'weak ties' through the use of digital tools has become crucial for refugees in mitigating or overcoming problems encountered in their journey. According to the scholars, contemporary conditions of displacement make digital media more useful in expanding migrants' social capital in an easy and immediate fashion, helping to create early connections that provide information and resources to avoid the risks associated with migration.

Investigation of the power of digital media in the field of migration studies has often focused on how it enhances and strengthens migrants' 'social capital'[2] (Bourdieu 1986), which is a concept often used to measure the possibility for migrants to experience economic stability and social mobility in the country of arrival. For the purpose of our discussion, social capital is seen as a tool to distance and/or mitigate migrants' condition of marginality, "building and constructing a sense of community that may contribute to building mutual benefits, reciprocal trust, strengthening pre-migration and new social ties, exchange of information and opinions" (Keles 2015, 105). This is why the field of digital media and migration studies has often focused on investigating how migrants network through the Internet and the impact that these new forms of connectivity have on their everyday lives. Nevertheless, studies focusing on the role that digital media have in creating new ways of 'making community' are often based on data that is globally and publicly accessible on the internet. This means that theory is often grounded on case studies where migrants – usually residing in the Global North – perform high levels of transnational connectivity, providing data that researchers can easily access on the internet (*see* Brinkerhoff 2009; Diminescu and Loveluck 2014; Kok and Rogers 2016; Osman 2017). In this respect, it seems clear that most studies confirm optimistic ideas about the impact that digital media have on migrants' experiences, while not really engaging with more local, bottom-up and small-scale case studies that might offer different perspectives.

The limitations of this disciplinary tendency emerged clearly during the fieldwork in Rome, as migrant women's digital practices in Italy showed quite a different dynamic that was not in line with most of the literature. Indeed, as will be shown in the next few paragraphs, the context of Italy more broadly, and Rome more specifically, had an undeniable impact on migrant women's experiences and use of digital media. It is precisely for this reason that we argue that the epistemological

limitation of a top-down approach in the study of migration and digital media is twofold: firstly, it does not account for the dynamic and contextual character of migrants' digital formations (Alinejad et al. 2019), nor does it consider the "diverging geopolitical motivations to form communities, the multispacial specificities of living and communicating within and across the Global North and the Global South" (Candidatu, Leurs, and Ponzanesi 2019, 33). Secondly, this approach is unable to acknowledge how migrant connectivity and digital media practices are deeply entrenched in a grid of power relations that act at a local level, both online and offline. This leads to a dangerous homogenization of migrants' experiences of digital media that is unable to grasp how migrants' intersectional *positioning* (Anthias 2007) along the lines of gender, race, class, (dis)abilities, age, level of education, digital literacy and so on impact their ability to take advantage of the medium on a local level, hence in their ability to mitigate a condition of social, cultural and economic marginality in the context of arrival.

For all these reasons, we have used in our approach a different set of concepts that could better help us read the data that emerged from our fieldwork. First, inspired by feminist and postcolonial theories, we identified those power relations that characterized the context in which migrants were acting, keeping our focus 'local' (Postill 2011) and 'situated' (Haraway 1988). This meant seeing diasporic digital networking as a social practice that is deeply influenced by offline dynamics, hence by how diasporic subjects are situated along a grid of power relations that are acting at a local level. Second, inspired by Bourdieu's (1986) theory of 'field' and 'capitals,' we acknowledge the importance of grasping how diasporic subjects are 'positioned' within that particular context, and the impact that their cultural, economic, symbolic and social resources have on their possibility to mitigate or improve their conditions (Anthias 2007) through the use of digital media. Only in this way is it possible to understand the different and multiple reasons behind the emergence of specific forms of migrants' transnational and local digital connectivity. In the following section, we offer examples of this approach from the fieldwork with the Somali and Turkish communities in Rome. Through these examples, we also show the fragility of dominant narratives regarding concepts such as 'centrality' and 'marginality,' demonstrating the importance of enriching digital migration studies from a Southern European perspective.

Ethnographic Observations from the 'Margins'

Castrense is a particularly important area for the Somali community of Rome: many shops run by Somali and Ethiopian people are located there, making it a point of reference for the community's social life in the city. On the first day of the first author's work in the field, in November 2017, the area was dominated by young Somali men chatting at the entrance of the shops. When Minchilli started talking with one of them about her research, explaining that the focus was on Somali women and their use of the internet, he replied with vehemence that "Women don't use the internet." He took out of his pockets an old Nokia and a smartphone, arguing that women only knew how to use the older kind of mobile phone. After months

of fieldwork, this statement was not confirmed by Minchilli's findings. Even so, there was some truth in what that Somali man said, as most Somali women who participated in the research used their smartphones mainly for calling their family and friends and not much more.

To understand the reasons for women's digital practice in Rome, it was central for us to contextualize *who* these women were, framing their background, migration histories and the reasons that brought them to the city. The role of Rome was not a secondary element. Indeed, Rome is not a city that attracts all kinds of migration, only certain kinds. This is due to the particular character of the Italian capital, which is generally considered one of the most important cities in Europe while being less economically attractive than Northern European cities. Indeed, most Somalis who arrived in Italy after the outbreak of the civil war[3] did not stay in the country but continued their journey to Northern Europe or Northern America, as Italy was often considered a 'stopping-off point' (Gerrand 2016) for them. This was due to the country's weak welfare system, historically characterized by few social benefits, and lack of state support and employment possibilities for refugees (Pirkkalainen, Mezzetti, and Guglielmo 2013). As a consequence, at the time of Minchilli's fieldwork, most of the Somali community in Rome was composed of two distinct generations of migrants. One generation was composed of women who arrived before or right after the outbreak of the civil war. Those women were quite old at the time of the research, were locally rooted as long-time residents of Rome, and were part of a 'postcolonial flow' of migration composed of people who had experienced the Italian presence in Somalia in the decades that preceded the outburst of the civil war. The second generation of migrant Somali women was composed of young refugees who arrived in more recent times by boat crossing the Mediterranean Sea. Their main reason for staying was the Dublin Regulation, which got them stuck in the country by forcing them to apply for asylum in the first EU country of arrival (Minchilli 2021).

The two generations had some similarities, among which is the use of digital media mainly for oral communication through apps such as WhatsApp, Viber and IMO. This was linked, on the one hand, to widespread illiteracy among young Somali women due to the lack of education received in Somalia during the civil war and, on the other, to the lack of digital literacy due to the so-called grey divide that was widespread among elderly Somali migrants (ibid.). Only a small group of women who were part of the oldest generation of refugees had a higher level of literacy and, as a consequence, digital literacy. This positioning was reflected in their role within the community, as key points of reference in Rome for Somali people, connecting the transnational diasporic communities with the local one through digitally led forms of communication. As a consequence, digital media impacted on dynamics of social stratifications within the community, defining who was considered a *leader* of the local diaspora. For newcomers, however, their condition of economic precarity and uprootedness at a local level was linked to social isolation and particular forms of digital media practices. Indeed, Somali women used digital media mainly to maintain transnational social relationships with their loved

ones left behind, with little growth in their social capital. Digital media did not particularly facilitate diasporic networking, while promoting social class mobility for those who were already well rooted locally within the community.

The literature on digital media and migration did not help in unravelling the above dynamics in the Somali community, as most research involved contexts that are commonly considered 'central' and economically attractive, with a high level of digital engagement among Somali migrants (*see* Kok and Rogers 2016; Osman 2017). A similar issue emerged with the Turkish community of Rome. For Turkish migrant women, Rome, far from being considered a hub of 'global economic activities' (El-Tayeb 2011), not only shaped the composition of the local diasporic community but also the quality of its internal relations. Usually, studies of Turkish women's migration to Europe have described it as a consequence of male migration and family reunification, focusing on experiences of community-making in contexts of social and economic marginalization (Ogan and d'Haenens 2012). Contrary to these expectations, one of the main aspects that emerged clearly from the beginning of the researcher's work in the field was the wealthy background of most respondents. Indeed, Turkish women living in the Italian capital were in most cases skilled or highly skilled professionals. This aspect was far from being secondary in their diasporic identity construction and everyday digital practices. One of the first author's respondents described the particular character of the Turkish community in Rome as follows:

> […] the migrant is a person who left a country because they had to, inevitably, because of their ideas, or because of a war, or because of an intolerable situation […] So, here in Rome there are not so many of those… but there are more people who are here for reasons… let's say, because they married or for work, or other reasons, [but] they were fine in their own country.[4]

In this excerpt, the respondent marks the specific character of Turkish migration's flow to Rome: this flow is of economically privileged migrants, able to afford to live in the city by choice and not out of necessity. This brought up very specific classed dynamics in their use of the internet: Turkish women were very disconnected from the community, rarely using digital media to connect to other Turkish migrants living in the city while using such media to connect with other expats or Italian locals. They were not looking for social capital from their own migrant community. Actually, belonging to the Turkish community was often coupled with shame, detachment and rejection. Their migrant identity was constructed as *cosmopolitan*, hence disconnected from a Turkish identity that was the expression, instead, of a lower class of migrants who often had different political views. Indeed, Turkish women's diasporic identity was also very politically charged. In most cases, these women were quite liberal and critical of Erdoğan's government. Hence, political activism was the only reason that pushed some of them to network locally through digital media with other leftist Turkish expats. This led to unstable and temporary forms of political activism emerging at times of crisis such as during the Gezi Park protests, while being disrupted once the crisis in the homeland was over.

The Turkish case seems the exact opposite of the Somali case, but that opposition is only apparent. Somali and Turkish women's experiences are, indeed, two sides to the same coin, where decisions to stay in Rome are unrelated to financial opportunities, thus leading to particular forms of digital practices, quite different from the ones described by the literature mentioned above. Migrant women's digital practices were often related to specific class dynamics, a finding that was difficult not to take into consideration. Social class emerged strongly in respondents' accounts as defining their everyday diasporic lives and social practices. It is, as we will show, a defining element of inclusion in the Italian social fabric and a way to 'pass' as quasi-insiders. These different dynamics demonstrate how important it is to 'situate' the context in which migrants' digital practices take place in Europe, empirically and theoretically. Precisely for this reason, the following paragraphs provide a theoretical roadmap that aims at dissecting Eurocentric theoretical assumptions, while showing the partiality of 'Northern' epistemologies and enriching their perspectives. This represents the key element of our critical intervention.

Theoretical Discontents from the 'Margins' of Europe

As previously mentioned, our research shows how the universalization of theories formulated by digital migration scholarship has rarely taken account of the specificities of Southern European countries, recreating a form of intellectual imbalance which has erased intra-European differences and relations of power in its theoretical articulations. Hence, we want our reflections to be part of a critical discussion initiated by many Southern European scholars, whose theoretical productions have sought to answer the question of "who speaks for whom, both in defining a history, a space, a language, a literature, and the subsequent articulation of a critical agenda?" (Chambers and Curti 2008, 387). This section intends to identify the roots of this internal hierarchy in knowledge production, even when critical, whose effects reverberate in various scholarly fields. With this aim, we explore some of the key contributions by Southern scholars on the matter, looking at European knowledge production, representation and internal hierarchies of power from below, from Europe's own 'margins.'

Roberto Dainotto (2007) is one of the principal scholars whose work exposes the power dynamics emerging in the South of Europe's discursive representations. He proposes a genealogy of Eurocentrism that shows how theories that constructed modern European identity were based on the opposition and marginalization of Southern European countries such as Italy, Greece, Spain and Portugal. In his work *Europe (In Theory)* (2007), Dainotto claims that from the creation of the European Economic Community (EEC) on, the South of Europe has been represented as a pathological appendix affected by a syndrome, the 'Mediterranean syndrome,' which made it unable to sustain development rates reached by Northern countries. Dainotto's efforts focus on piecing together the theoretical genealogy that produced Eurocentrism and "the surfacing of structures and paradigms that have since then informed ideas of the continent and of its cultural identity" (ibid., 4). According to the scholar, the construction of this identity could begin only "when

non-Europe is internalized – when the South, indeed, becomes the sufficient and indispensable *internal* Other: Europe, but also the negative part of it" (ibid.). Eurocentrism becomes possible, on one hand, thanks to its dialectical nature of inclusion and exclusion, and on the other, through the "parochiality of its universalism" (Said 2004, 53). The consequence in reproducing this paradigm is that

> the homogenizing assumptions of the term […] run the perpetual risk of obliterating the interior borders and fractures of European hegemony; they hide from view Europe's own subaltern areas – the south – of knowledge production. Along with the 'damaging assumption' that theory is limited to some sort of 'Eurocentric archive'.
>
> <div align="right">(Dainotto 2007, 5)</div>

Franco Cassano's book *Il Pensiero Meridiano* (1996) seeks to offer new strategies to counter these power dynamics. The scholar formulates an interesting and controversial "epistemology of the South" (de Sousa Santos 2016), departing from a critique of 'modernization' theories which makes the South a pathological example of a lack of modernity. Cassano (1996) explains the reasons that led him to the articulation of a 'Southern Thought.' It certainly did not come from thinking in terms of an 'us,' in other words, not from some sort of parochialism articulated through a blind defence of Southern European identity. Rather,

> the strongest push towards the claim of the value of the South came from the rebellion against its representations made by the dominant culture, to the racism sometimes gone unnoticed of many of their variants, even those more unexpected and politically correct.
>
> <div align="right">(ibid., v–vi; *authors' translation*)</div>

This rebellion must be guided by the intertwinement of two dimensions: division and mediation. More specifically, on the one hand, there is the need for rupture and a demand for Southern autonomy in order to disrupt the false neutrality and universality of dominant epistemologies, while on the other this act of rebellion must be coupled with the acknowledgement of the 'situated' (Haraway 1988), 'provincial' (Chakrabarty 2000) and multiple characters of knowledge.

   After having discussed theories based on the problematization of European knowledge production, one can wonder if its substitution by a 'Southern' onto-epistemological approach can really represent a counteraction and a form of resistance to the centralization of 'European' thought. We are quite doubtful about this. The messy intertwinement of power relations and the dialectical nature of social and cultural hierarchies can only be understood through analytical investigations that take into account the relational dynamic of those hierarchies, not through their obliteration. For this very reason, the operationalization of an 'epistemology of the South' might be problematic, leading to a flattening of theoretical inquiries and reproducing further oppositional binaries between the Global North and its margins instead of deconstructing and problematizing them. Rather, a critique

coming from 'the margin' can help see the theoretical necessity of problematizing the 'North' in order to de-centre it, exposing contradictions, fractures and internal hierarchies. In this sense, our aim is to look for epistemological relationality, which seeks out continuities and ruptures with that theoretical heritage, acknowledging the relational character which structures the continuities and, at the same time, the specificities that characterize the ruptures. Daring to think of digital media and migration scholarship from this perspective means avoiding the creation of normative constructions of theoretical paradigms, and so the reproduction of hierarchical epistemologies in the field. It is precisely for this reason that we want to highlight how important it is to 'situate' the many different fields of power in which migrants' everyday experiences take place, in order to understand the role that digital media has on migrants' everyday lives, mitigating or reinforcing experiences of marginality.

Italy: Between Centrality and Marginality

The need to identify and situate the grid of power relations in which migrants' digital practices take place in Italy pushed us to frame, first, how Italy is positioned within Europe (see also the chapter in this volume by *Antonio Sorge,* 'On the Margins of Europe: Migration and Sicilian Liminality'). Indeed, this step was central to grasping the extent to which the particular position of Italy within the continent articulated specific constructions of its national identity and its Others, hence influencing dynamics of inclusion/exclusion of migrants in its social fabric. What seems clear is that the position that Italy occupies within Europe is ambivalent and contradictory: the country is considered, indeed, marginal to Europe while being central within the Mediterranean area. While Italy is one of the largest economies in Europe, it is still depicted as "socially and morally ill, politically unstable and culturally backward" (Albahari 2009, 143). The reasons that justify these discursive constructions lie in the economic, political and social problems faced by the country, including the presence of Mafia organizations on its territory, the severity of its economic deficit, and the disparity between the Northern and Southern regions (Agnew 1997). Interestingly, these same problems are not described in the same way when occurring in countries such as the UK, France or Germany (ibid.). These different discursive practices underline how Northern European countries are put in a position of dominance, being, according to Agnew, the "norms against which the historical evolution of other national spaces should be compared" (ibid., 23–24). This is the reason why discourses about how Italy is situated in relation to 'Europe' should be approached as a "general question in historiography: how to deal with the particular experiences of different territories in relation to a standard account of national development" (ibid.).

   The construction of Italy as 'backward' when compared to 'modern' Northern European countries is not a recent phenomenon. Historically, the construction of Europe's internal hierarchy was functional for Northern European countries in bolstering their 'fictive' ethnic and national identity (Balibar 1991), which was articulated in opposition to the European and Global South. Regarding this matter,

it is important to remember that Northern and Western European identities were constructed through the intertwinement of cultural, religious and phenotypical elements that were used to justify an economic system based on capitalism and colonization. This dynamic, while producing asymmetries within the continent, also had a profound impact within Italy on its construction of its own national identity. According to Giuliani (2013), that identity aimed to resemble that Northern European ideal, at the expense of certain internal Others: the Southerner and colonized people.

Giuliani (2013) argues that national identity and its 'Whiteness' in Italy were constructed through a system of racialization based on "the assignment of a precise colour (from a darker nuance than white, to black) to the internal/colonial Other" which "implicitly produces the racial identity of the Self" (573). More specifically, the scholar highlights how the constructed Blackness of people living in the South of Italy or in the colonies was functional to the creation of the legitimate national subject and its 'Whiteness.' That Whiteness was represented by the ruling class in the North of Italy while their legitimacy in the eyes of other European powers was acknowledged only through their opposition to an *internal* Other (Southerners and Jewish people) and *external* Other (the colonized populations) (ibid.). In this endeavour, the growing Italian urban bourgeoisie distanced itself from the 'decadent' *Meridione* and the colonies, while trying to mirror the culture of the Central and Northern European bourgeoisie. In this way, the Italian ruling class was able to move the 'colour line,' making Italians part of Europe (ibid.; Mellino 2012). A noteworthy aspect is the clear interrelation between the development of capitalism and these processes of racialization. It shows how the articulation of racial hierarchies in Italy was and still is, at its core, very much intertwined with class oppositions.

The relevance of class in processes of racialization is not restricted to the past. On the contrary, it is still foundational in contemporary dynamics of inclusion/exclusion in the Italian social fabric. As Lombardi-Diop (2012) highlights, contemporary constructions of Italian national identity are based on a whitening process that began after the economic boom in the 1960s, which gave rise to a widespread "elevation to wealth, health, social privilege, access to resources, commodities, and technologies, all associated with whiteness at the expense of the exclusion, the restrictions, the marginalization, and the economic deprivation associated with blackness" (177). This dynamic applied to the racialization of working-class migrants, both Southerners who migrated to work in the factories based in the North of Italy during the economic boom and, later on, international migrants and refugees who started to migrate to the country, especially during the 1980s. In this sense, contemporary "processes of class formation" (ibid.) are deeply bound with processes of race formation (Mellino 2012). Lombardi-Diop (2012) and Mellino (2012) highlight another aspect which should be considered central for understanding diasporic social practices in Italy: contemporary forms of racialization as experienced by international migrants are connected to specific contemporary capitalist dynamics and demands. It is precisely within the grid of those power dynamics that Somali and Turkish women's social practices took place and emerged in specific

ways. Indeed, those social practices were strongly influenced by the position that migrant women assumed in line with specific colour/class inscriptions that, in turn, influenced migrant women's use of digital media to enhance their diasporic social capital.

Rome: Destabilizing the 'Global City'

The classed character of the internal dynamics of inclusion in and exclusion from Italy's social fabric raised other theoretical challenges when approaching Rome as the main field for our investigation. Indeed, as we have also previously highlighted, Rome has features that are hardly comparable to London and Amsterdam, especially in relation to migration dynamics and migrants' digital media practices, which do not fit classic theoretical frameworks such as the 'global city' (Sassen 2005). The in-between character of Italy within Europe seemed to be mirrored by its capital, which has preserved a character that cannot be considered central but, at the same time, is not truly marginal. Nevertheless, this distinctive element is not always acknowledged by the literature. A clear example of this comes from the work of El-Tayeb (2011), who, in her analysis of postcolonial processes of racialization of European minorities, includes Rome among one of the main 'global hubs' of Europe where these dynamics take place.

El-Tayeb considers 'global cities' to be the key sites where dynamics of classed racialization take place and where national hierarchies are spatially revealed through the creation of "fortified border zones, divided into sections, housing populations with radically different positions and prospects in the national hierarchies, whose paths are rarely crossing" (El-Tayeb 2011, 20). El-Tayeb considers these dynamics to be reinforced by a process of deindustrialization experienced by the main European urban centres. This has led to the remodelling of the city from industrial metropolis to post-industrial centre, becoming a fulcrum of the service sector. The rise of the service sector at the expense of industrial work has further marginalized the migrant population, as they are no longer considered a valuable resource for the local economy (El-Tayeb 2011, 20–21). In this global trend, El-Tayeb identifies Rome among the European cities where these dynamics are emerging particularly clearly. The Italian capital is considered, like Berlin and Paris, a hub "of global economic activity" and centre "of transnational mobility, symbols of a world 'without borders'" (ibid.).

El-Tayeb's consideration of Rome is nevertheless incomplete. Indeed, contrary to the scholar's claims, the Italian capital is "clearly peripheral to the global streams of capital, finance and investment" (Marinaro and Thomassen 2014, 7) that characterize European post-industrial hyper-cities cities such as London, Berlin or Amsterdam. An example of this concerns the location of multinationals' operational headquarters in Europe: even if multinationals have business activities in Rome, none has ever located their operational headquarters in the city for the purposes of production, investment or marketing (ibid.). Moreover, Rome is not connected to other important financial hubs as it is one of the few European capitals not to have a stock exchange. This positions Rome outside the current

global economic and financial architecture. Nevertheless, the city has some definite 'global' features as it is a centre for international diplomacy, religion, tourism, culture, art and immigration. As Marinaro and Thomassen (2014) highlight, this also applies to "its current urban transformations" that "are intertwined with global processes: deindustrialization, neoliberal policies, gentrification and housing segregation, emergence of new social movements" (3). As a consequence, Rome represents a very particular typology of city, exhibiting features where the 'global' and the 'national' (Sassen 2005; Marinaro and Thomassen 2014) share elements of localism that generally exemplify the Italian nation-state (Herzfeld 2005). In this sense, Rome assumes an ambivalent position in which the character of a global city is mixed with a more 'informal' character, which gives the city an identity "as both 'core' and 'periphery' within the Italian nation-state and Europe more broadly" (Marinaro and Thomassen 2014, 3).

For these reasons, Rome represents an original and challenging context for studies of migration and digital media, where processes of globalism and localism at the intersection of specific dynamics of inclusion/exclusion assume unique contours. As previously highlighted, the lack of global corporations and their production centres means there are not many job opportunities for migrants as skilled or unskilled workers. This leads to specific classed dynamics among the migrant population residing in the city. This has been shown above by the case of Turkish and Somali women, whose reasons to stay in Rome were clearly unrelated to economic interests, leading to original digital practices intended for diasporic networking. The ambivalent position of Rome among European cities is, then, a factor that requires a different theoretical framework when inquiring into social phenomena pertaining to the migrant population residing in the city. Indeed, only a transparent analysis of the context which also takes into consideration the social positioning of migrants within that context can put the brakes on over-optimistic assessments of the value of digital media for migrants' everyday life experiences. In this way, a more realistic understanding of digital media's role can be offered that goes beyond superficial and blind considerations about their supposed 'subversive power.' The question, indeed, is *who* can benefit from digital media's subversive power in overcoming conditions of marginalization in the city, rather than homogenizing the medium as a source of power *per se*.

Conclusion

In this chapter, our aim was to expose the epistemological and theoretical limitations of the field of digital migration studies through our research on Somali and Turkish women's digital practices in Rome. We accomplished this by offering a rebellious, critical approach aiming at showing asymmetries and internal hierarchies in its knowledge production. Indeed, we argue that the disciplinary field of digital migration studies is based on studies that universalize theories and concepts that were designed to read social phenomena that are *situated* in specific contexts, mainly referring to North-Western Europe. Hence, we decided to turn this epistemological map upside down, showing what a Southern look can offer to the canon.

Theoretically, we have approached the question of who can define the meaning of 'the margin' itself, showing its porous, unstable and historically shifting character. Moreover, looking from the perspective of one of the 'margins' of Europe, namely Italy, we have explored the social, economic and cultural dynamics that have led to specific hegemonic identity constructions and its Others in relation to European identity, based on the development of capitalism and colonization. In addition, we have shown the key role that race and class play in processes of inclusion in and exclusion from the Italian social fabric.

In this endeavour, we have shown how difficult it would be to fully grasp the value and reasons for the emergence of specific forms of digital networking among Somali and Turkish migrant women without taking into account those dynamics and the specific character of Rome, as the field in which their everyday lives and practices are performed. Rome is a challenging field of academic inquiry for digital migration studies, as it is a city that cannot easily be included within the theoretical framework of the 'global city' alongside Northern European cities such as Amsterdam and London. Its quality of 'almost but not quite' a global city has a clear influence on the character of migratory flows arriving in the Italian capital, making it necessary to redefine the theoretical points of reference that we use when approaching Southern European urban contexts. This leads us to some closing considerations. Our contribution is not intended to be a final discussion; rather it seeks to initiate a dialogue aimed at enriching the scholarly field of digital migration studies. This can only be done by acknowledging and correcting internal epistemological hierarchies and asymmetries of power in the discipline. There is a need for such theoretical disruptions, creating a new branch of digital migration studies from the South that, while disrupting dominant narratives of belonging, centrality and universality, dissects the margin by creating porous, contaminated epistemological contact zones.

Acknowledgements

Notes

1 See project CONNECTINGEUROPE (Digital Crossings in Europe: Gender, Diaspora and Belonging). http://connectingeuropeproject.eu/ ERC-CoG-2014 Grant Number: 647737.
2 In using the term 'social capital,' we refer to Bourdieu's (1986) definition of it as "the possession of a durable network of more or less institutionalized relationships of mutual acquaintances and recognition – or in other words, to membership in a group" (51), which facilitates access to economic, symbolic and cultural resources.
3 There is a long history of postcolonial relations between Italy and Somalia. These relations continued even after the end of the colonial administration that Italy had in the Horn of Africa, when Italy was forced by the United Nations to help Somalia transition

to independence (Guglielmo 2013). This led to the beginning of the 'Italian Trusteeship Administration of Somalia' (1950–1960). Nevertheless, Italy's presence in Somalia continued until 1990, through international development projects and privileged commercial relations between the two countries. Because of this, the country was one of the preferred destinations of Somali migration (Colucci 2018). This continued after the outbreak of the civil war in 1990, with the fall of Siad Barre's three decades long regime due to internal clan-based antagonisms. Nevertheless, this last flow was temporary and motivated by the presence of family and friends already residing there.

4 Dilara, interview; Rome, 22 May 2018.

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