

# Doing Digital Migration Studies: Introduction

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In our contemporary world, migration and digital technologies mutually shape one another. They have historically always been intertwined, yet their dynamic relationship is constantly evolving. People on the move mediate their being and belonging in increasing conditions of datafication and digitization. Mobile devices, social media platforms and smartphone apps are used to shape the transnationally connected, and locally situated, social worlds in which migrants live their everyday lives. Connecting with friends, peers and family, sharing memories and information, navigating spaces and reshaping the local and the global in the process illustrate the proliferation of migration-related digital practices. These digital intensifications and accelerations also constitute a Janus-faced development for mobile people as they face increased forms of datafied migration management, algorithmic surveillance, control and biometric classification as well as forms of transnational authoritarianism and networked repression. In this anthology, *Doing Digital Migration Studies*, we bring into focus, empirically trace and theorize the myriad everyday digital practices surrounding migration.

A variety of concerns, debates and commitments are at stake when addressing digital migrant practices in their full complexity. Figure 0.1 is a visual rendering of the kaleidoscope of perspectives that can be mobilized to do digital migration studies. The visual harvest by the visual artist Renée van den Kerkhof captures the complex interplay between oppressive infrastructures reflecting migration regimes and the personal, affective and symbolic agency of everyday technology use. The figure is indicative of the great variety of themes covered in the papers presented at the April 2021 virtual conference *Migrant Belongings: Digital Practices and the Everyday*. With large parts of the world in lockdown as a result of the Covid-19 health pandemic, over the course of three days we held an online PhD workshop and had keynote talks by Paul Gilroy, Saskia Witteborn, Engin Isin, Larissa Hjorth and Nicholas de

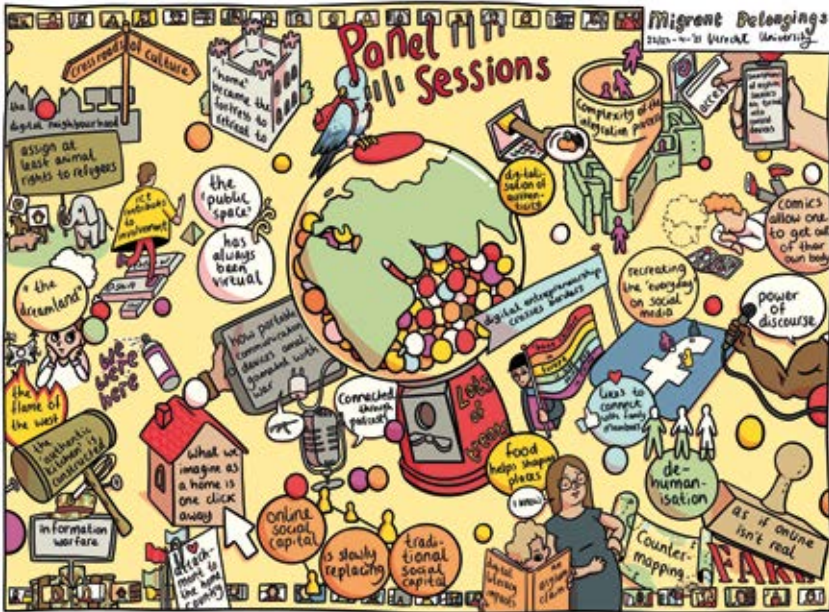


Figure 0.1. Visual harvesting of ideas, *Migrant Belongings*. Digital Practices and the Everyday conference, by visual artist Renée van den Kerkhof.

Genova (see the special issue “Digital migration practices and the everyday” published in *Communication, Culture and Critique*, Ponzanesi & Leurs, 2022). In parallel sessions, over 200 papers were presented, with an audience of over 1,000 registered participants. As scholars from across the world connected from their homes, the event was held using the video-conference platform Zoom. Informal gatherings took place in the interactive virtual space platform Gather.town, where we had built a digital rendition of our Utrecht University inner-city campus with the help of our assistants Julia de Lange and Frederik Köhler. The present anthology offers a selection of the exciting and innovative work that was presented at the conference, contributing to the interdisciplinary research area of digital migration studies.

We take digital migration studies as an umbrella term to refer to the study of migration in relation to digital technologies. This is not intended as a new area of academic specialization; rather, with this volume we seek to build further bridges and animate dialogue between the various disciplines that have started to study migration and mobility in relation to questions of digitization, datafication and artificial intelligence (AI), among others. Studies in media and communication, science and technology (STS), migration, and border studies, as well as geography, sociology, anthropology, psychology, gender and postcolonial studies, and human rights, among other

disciplines, have engaged with digital migration. Let us consider notable digital migration studies frameworks from several relevant disciplines, to illustrate how researchers address the top-down workings of institutional, governmental or corporate power, the bottom-up forms of agency in everyday digital practices of mobile people, and the middle-ground resulting from the interplay between top-down forces and bottom-up agency.

1. In media studies, the concept of “digital diasporas” (e.g., Alonso & Oiarzabal, 2010; Gajjala, 2019; Candidatu et al., 2019) promotes the study of how dispersed migrant communities maintain identity and belonging across distance, the notion of “migrant polymedia” (Madianou & Miller, 2012) alerts us to how migrants navigate the communicative affordances of devices and platforms, while the “digital border” (Chouliaraki & Georgiou, 2022) has been proposed to address how digital technologies shape experiences and meanings of migration at the interplay of bottom-up experiences and top-down forces.
2. In sociology, the concept of the “connected migrant” (Diminescu, 2008) can be used to account for everyday experiences of navigating a sense of co-presence in host and homeland societies, while “bio bordering” (Amelung et al., 2021) enables us to consider governmental use of biometric database systems across countries in the European Union to govern mobile people.
3. In information studies, the theory of “digital humanitarian brokerage” (Maitland, 2018, p. 244) provides a critical lens to address how institutional agents including governments, NGOs and the tech sector seek to improve flexibility and efficiency in their provision of humanitarian services, while the concept of “information precarity” (Wall et al., 2017) is useful to account for the fragile information landscape forcibly displaced populations experience in navigating journeys or governmental procedures.
4. In cultural geography, the “biopolitics of mobility” (Tazzioli, 2020) offers a tool to study governmental racialization, labelling and disciplining of mobile people through digitization and datafication; and researchers have developed ways to follow and narrate the “smart(phone) travelling” of irregularized migrants (Zijlstra & van Liempt, 2017).
5. In anthropology, the “autonomy of migration” perspective sheds light on how, through everyday practices, mobile people negotiate, contest and challenge digitization and datafication (De Genova, 2017; Mollerup, 2020), while researchers have also documented trafficker strategies of using “digital black holes” to control the digital connections of Eritrean refugees in Libya for purposes of extortion (Van Reisen et al., 2023).

6. STS scholars alert us to how the inner workings and logics of the infrastructural “migration machine” (Dijstelbloem et al., 2011; Dijstelbloem, 2021) produce, categorize and limit the mobility of mobile people; while increasingly STS scholars call for infrastructures to be adopted as a lens to study from below how migrants negotiate and contest technologized processes by making alternative use of infrastructures (Scheel, 2019; Pelizza, 2020).
7. Governance studies address whether forcibly displaced people who use technologies strategically may become “smart refugees” (Dekker et al., 2018); while also drawing attention to how government agencies are increasingly assessing digital traces of migrants, for example to verify claims of asylum seekers by screening their smartphones (Bolhuis van Wijk, 2021) or carrying out Open Source Intelligence (OSINT) screening of their public-facing social media profiles.
8. Feminist and queer studies have drawn attention to how mobile people digitally mediate affects and emotions while carving out a new home. Studies show they often have to balance obligations of caring at a distance while being controlled or being subject to surveillance within their transnational families or diasporas (Alinejad & Ponzanesi, 2020; Atay, 2017; Shield, 2021; Szulc, 2020).

These perspectives all serve an important purpose in producing new knowledge about migration in relation to digitization, datafication and AI. As we want to illustrate with this incomplete overview of disciplines and concepts, a wide range of specialized concepts has been developed to attend to digital migration from various disciplinary vantage points. However, to date, these discussions have commonly taken place within the silos of individual disciplines (Leurs & Smets, 2018). With this volume we seek to promote exchanges across disciplines.

The interdisciplinary research area of digital migration studies raises ontological, epistemological, methodological and ethical questions (Leurs, 2023). Migrants and the mobile come into being through spatial, legal, procedural and symbolic moves. Border crossing, visa applications, refugee status determination, surveillance, humanitarianism and population census registrations are increasingly digitized, datafied and machine-read. When addressing the ontology of digital migration, we attempt to identify, categorize and understand its basic elements and workings. On the ontological level, we see migration and technology not as separable entities existing a priori. Migration does not exist outside of the realm of digital mediation. Rather, we here propose a relational

understanding of migration and digital media, as mutually shaping digital migration.

We can for example begin to attend to this relationship by addressing the increased intersections between the dominant logics underpinning migration and the dominant logics underpinning technology development. Even though in the last decades international migration has remained stable at around 3% percent of the population, the idea we live in a time of unprecedented migration crisis situations persists (De Haan, 2023). The hegemonic logic surrounding human mobility, resulting from capitalism, imperialism and colonialism, has increasingly made migration into a technology of differentiation. When understanding technology as the production and application of knowledge to tackle problems, the logic of migration has become a technology to distinguish between “good” and “bad” migrants, enabling mobility for some privileged subjects (particularly white, male, heterosexual, elite and able-bodied persons from the Global North), while restricting mobility for others (particularly black, LGBTIQ+ and disabled bodies from the Global South) (Madörin, 2022). In parallel, the dominant logic shaping technological development revolves around trust in “algorithmic reason” to differentiate between and govern the “self and other” (Aradau & Blanke, 2022, p. 3). Based on capitalism, securitization and humanitarianism, technologies are purposefully imagined as neutral tools to efficiently classify populations and thereby govern “normality and abnormality across social worlds and political boundaries” (Aradau & Blanke, p. 3). The complex co-constitution of digital migration resulting from the interplay between these two dominant logics warrants further theoretical development; for this purpose, scholars might draw inspiration from the queer perspective of assemblage thinking (Puar, 2017), new materialism (Barad, 2007) or actor-network theory (Latour, 2005).

Whereas these logics of seeing migration and technology from the top-down perspective of the state and its governing policy frameworks are dominant—to the degree that they are deadly for people pursuing irregular migration routes—there are alternative understandings. Seen from the bottom-up perspective, the autonomy of migration offers an important insight into the logics of everyday lived experiences. The autonomy of migration emphasizes the agency and self-determination of individuals and groups in the migration process. This perspective sees migration as a decision made by individuals and groups, rather than a unidirectional consequence of external forces or structural constraints. From this perspective, migrants are seen as active agents who make choices about when, where and why to migrate, and who exert control over their own lives and experiences during

the migration process. This approach often highlights the ways in which migrants adapt to new environments, create networks and communities, and negotiate their identities in response to changing social and political contexts. For example, in Tunisia, Algeria and Morocco, the Arabic word *harraga* (الحرقاة), which can be translated as “those who burn,” is used among mobile people to describe their aspirations and activities of “burning” borders that stem from the colonial era through their mobility and expanding living spaces (M’Charek, 2020, p. 418). Through the prism of *harraga*, other “headings for Europe” (Derrida, 1992) have been most forcefully reclaimed by people who “burn up the road” to make it “Europe’s” duty to listen to the call of these others decrying the signs of radical closure of Europe’s borders (Kaiser & Thiele, 2016).

On the level of epistemology, we can reflect upon how we know what we know about digital migration. A variety of stakeholders produce knowledge about migration and digital technologies. In this book, the aim is to contribute to academic discourse by putting migrant voices centre stage and attending to how migrants live, construct, negotiate and/or resist dominant framings through their everyday practices. While the chapters are written by both migrant and non-migrant academics, the chapters highlight and amplify a variety of migrant voices. The focus is on the digital practices of a wide range of mobile subjects living under various circumstances across geographies. For example, Daniela Jaramillo-Dent, Alencar and Yan Asadchy describe the creative practices of Latin American migrant content creators living in the United States and Spain (see Chapter 10); Marie Godin and Bahati Ghislain share experiences of Congolese refugee influencers living in Nairobi, Kenya, who are seeking to monetize their YouTube videos (see Chapter 6); while Fungai Machirori discusses African and diaspora activist voices advancing cosmopolitanisms (see Chapter 5). In addition, Nishant Shah details the work of Anushka Nair, a migrant performance artist living in the Netherlands who drew attention in her work to the exodus of internal migrants under Covid-19 lockdown conditions in India (see Chapter 8). Catriona Stevens, Loretta Baldassar and Raelene Wilding showcase how Chinese transnational grandparents in Perth, Australia, engage in digital kinning and homemaking (see Chapter 4). These voices provide insight into how everyday digital practices affect and shape migration from below. Besides these chapters, the volume also presents insights from the perspective of the state. Daniel Leix Palumbo addresses how governmental agencies in Germany turn to voice biometrics in their attempt to digitally identify asylum seekers (see Chapter 13). As public-private partnerships proliferate, the perspective of corporations also warrants attention. Luděk Stavinoha

uncovers the technocratic fantasies of consultancy firms promising orderly migration management in Greece (see Chapter 14) and Kaarina Nikunen and Sanna Valtonen explore how datafication shapes the bordering practices and lives of undocumented migrants, showing how, through datafication, digital borders permeate the everyday lives of migrants, whose humanity becomes evaluated and assorted through inconsistent and biased data practices (see Chapter 15).

In recent years, digital media and migration scholars have addressed producers, audiences and texts, focusing on infrastructures, media representations and users, among others. As regards to methodology, both qualitative, ethnographic studies and discourse analysis are conducted, addressing digital migration holistically as a situated, contextual, and complex constellation, while quantitative, survey and data-driven studies are carried out to find patterns, model, predict and visualize mobility, drawing on digital traces. With respect to ethics, to avoid the silencing of the personal, embodied and situated narratives of those on the move, we advocate continued commitment to participatory action and mixed-method approaches alongside aggregation (Leurs & Witteborn, 2021). This way, we can remain attentive to the granular level of everyday life and, in combination with quantitative overviews, we can hold organizations and corporations accountable for injustices, exclusions and human rights violations.

## **On Doing Digital Migration Studies and the Everyday**

‘Doing’ in the title *Doing Digital Migration Studies* is a term used to refer to the myriad activities needed in pursuit of knowledge production on digital migration. It refers here both to the theoretical exercise of thinking through the relationships between migration and digital technologies, and to methodological acts of elaborating and reflecting on the ethics of one’s fieldwork and the intricacies of gathering empirical data. It also covers the agential aspect of media users, who are now active participants and can for example claim their communication rights through acts of citizenship performed through digital media practices (Isin & Nielsen, 2018).

Another key concept of this anthology is that of the “everyday,” as we are theorizing media and digital technology not in a void but as embedded practices that affect the more mundane and banal ways of media usage. Avoiding polarization that follows the use of technology as quick fixes for new global challenges (techno-solutionism of biometrics and AI for border control, refugee containment and hospitality management as an example)

or as a new, inescapable system (techno-determinism), the focus on the everyday posits the inherent entanglement of users and technology across different realms of activities and interests, mainly as a continuous and contiguous experience between different forms of socialities and realities. Therefore, it is important to pay attention to the ways in which technology is deployed by governmental and supranational organizations that play a role in the everyday lives of migrants, as well as to study the subjective and affective dimensions of everyday practices as articulated from the bottom up in the form of myriads of transnationally connected, and locally situated, social worlds.

The theories of the everyday evoked throughout this volume reflect several genealogies of critical thinking, including the following:

- The Frankfurt School of critical theory, which emerged in the mid-20th century, developed a number of neo-Marxist critical theories of the everyday that emphasized the ways in which the routines and habits of everyday life can reinforce and reproduce inequality, domination and social injustice. These theories often focused on the role of mass media and consumer culture in dominating people's perceptions, desires and values in everyday life, and on the ways in which people's experiences of work, leisure and social relationships can be shaped by and reinforce oppressive social structures (Nealon & Irr, 2002). From this strand, we digital migration studies scholars can learn that the everyday is something to be critically engaged with, by seeing it as a site for understanding how mobile individuals are increasingly subject to the control of bureaucratic, corporate and technological forces.
- Poststructuralist theories of the everyday, which emerged in the late 20th century, challenged the notion that everyday life can be understood as a coherent, unified and stable concept. The analytic pair of "strategies" and "tactics" proposed by Michel de Certeau, for example, captures the dynamic between how structures such as the built environment can govern, limit and channel people, and how people "make do" with these structures in their everyday tactics (1984). For digital migration studies scholars, poststructuralist theories can be useful to emphasize the ways in which everyday migrant lives are constantly changing, are fragmented and contradictory, and the ways in which people on the move experience everyday life are impacted by the shifting power relations, categories and modes of governance that emerge in a datafied, rebordering world.



- Drawing both on the Frankfurt School and poststructuralist theorists, media theorists have sought to understand how and why media “are treated by everyone as part of the taken-for-granted furniture of ordinary, daily existence” (Scannell, 1995, p. 4). Ien Ang (1991), for example, famously studied television audiences, and, drawing on a Foucauldian analysis of power/knowledge, she found that audience members are active social subjects, who engage with television in contextual, cultural and creative ways.
- Feminist, postcolonial, decolonial and queer theories of the everyday, which have emerged from various traditions, have successfully placed experiential ways of knowing on the research agenda. Researchers in these areas have developed important frameworks to address the ways in which gender, race, class, sexuality, nationality, ability and other forms of social inequality and discrimination shape people’s lived experiences, embodiments and emotional processing of everyday life (Ahmed, 2017). These theories provide tools to highlight the ways in which the routines and practices of everyday migrant life and digital practices can reinforce and reproduce historical power relations, roles and stereotypes, and the ways in which migrant individuals and collectives can highlight, resist and transform these patterns of inequality and discrimination in their everyday lives (Ticktin & Youatt, 2022).
- The everyday is also important for the field of cosmopolitanism. We can discern different approaches within discussions on cosmopolitanism. Approaches range from conviviality (Gilroy, 2005), which is an agential modality of choice for togetherness, shared values and bridging in practice, to more inevitable global structures of the “everyday” as imposed by “banal ways” of cosmopolitan coexistence (Beck, 2010; Calhoun, 2003). Achille Mbembe (2018) suggests that for alternative thinking about borderless worlds, we should turn away from Western concepts, and reconsider how everyday life under modernity in Africa has always revolved around pursuing mobility, circulation and networking across borders, to escape the entrapment of confinements, displacement and forced labour.

The everyday is therefore not only to be understood as “locally” and “temporally” determined but as practices that can encompass different relational scales and geographical planes where the personal, the institutional and the systemic will intermingle in mediated communication. The chapters in this volume explore the lived experience and emotional facets of digitally mediated migrant socialities in a variety of socio-cultural and geographic

locales. Such examinations raise important questions about how digital media ubiquity shapes global migration experiences and multicultural media publics across various scales. The contributors to this volume have addressed the everyday from a variety of analytic and methodological perspectives.

A first approach is to use critical theory to analyse the ways in which power, inequality and social domination shape people's everyday experiences. As is reflected by the contributions by Nishant Shah in Chapter 8, Yener Bayramoğlu in Chapter 9 and Moé Suzuki in Chapter 12, critical theory provides tools to focus on the ways in which dominant institutions and corporations use digital forms of control, coercion and persuasion to maintain their power and privilege, and to shape people's perceptions, beliefs and actions in everyday life. By exposing and challenging these mechanisms of control, critical theorists aim to empower mobile people to resist domination and to imagine more equitable alternatives of mobility, movement and border-crossing.

A second approach is to use ethnographic methods to study the details of everyday life and digital practices in a particular context of migration and mobility. As illustrated by Catriona Stevens, Loretta Baldassar and Raelene Wilding in Chapter 4 and Elisabetta Costa in Chapter 5, ethnographers are well equipped to observe, participate in and document the digitally mediated activities, interactions and experiences of migrant people in a particular community or setting, in order to understand how they make sense of their everyday lives and how they navigate the challenges and opportunities of their political, social and cultural environments.

A third approach is to use discourse analysis to study the ways in which people use language and other forms of digitally mediated communication to construct, maintain and challenge the meanings and values of everyday migrant life. As Daniela Jaramillo-Dent, Amanda Alencar and Yan Asadchy (Chapter 10), Daniel Leix Palumbo (Chapter 13) and Luděk Stavinoha (Chapter 14) show, discourse analysis provides insight into the ways in which language is used to express and shape people's beliefs, identities and social relationships, and to construct and contest ideas about what is normal, desirable or acceptable in everyday constellations of digital migration.

Another approach is to revisit the visual modality of representation, challenging existing registers and genres and proposing alternative ways of seeing, as well as of co-creating. This is especially evident in Chapter 1 by Nadica Denić on auto-ethnographic films to describe migration journeys through the notion of an oppositional gaze, Chapter 2 by Irene Gutiérrez Torres on border visibility through archival participatory filmmaking as a way of countering stereotypical media representations, and Chapter 3 by

Rosa Wevers with Ahnjili Zhuparris on AI used as artwork that activates critical reflection on the politics and logics of predictive policing systems. These approaches entail returning the gaze, staging an oppositional gaze, or resignifying existing visual practices and convivial practices which are becoming more and more obvious and relevant in social media. In Chapter 10, Jaramillo-Dent, Alencar and Asadchy discuss migrant strategies through the use of TikTok, and how new forms of creative practices shape platformed belonging. In Chapter 11, Estrella Sendra focuses on the use of Facebook as a virtual festival space to enact alternative forms of rooted cosmopolitanism, and in Chapter 12 Suzuki brings forward the role of virtual reality (VR) as challenging traditional forms of representation and proposing empathy as a new mode of connection in VR films.

Across these different approaches, the questions of common humanity, cosmopolitanism and solidarity are analysed through different lenses and strategies, from the humanitarian communication approach to the intervention of social media activism intervention and the legal perspective and datafication framework. In Chapter 13, Leix Palumbo explores the problematic use of voice biometrics during asylum procedures and the ways in which sounds also become part of an essential datafication procedure in which the “language, accent, everyday sonic” becomes co-opted into regimes of control about origin, authenticity and verifiability that are always prone to error and misrecognition. In Chapter 14, Stavinoha studies how the management of refugees and migration is outsourced to private companies in the name of efficiency, professionalization and automation. This not only reduces subjects to numbers and depersonalized objects of bureaucratic knowledge, but also produces skewed relationships in terms of privacy, safety and trust. In Chapter 15, Kaarina Nikunen and Sanna Valtonen explore how datafication shapes the bordering practices and lives of undocumented migrants. It is argued that datafication involves a temporal shift towards *anticipation* that focuses on predicting, profiling and pre-empting different forms of migration. According to these approaches, the very notion of common humanity and cosmopolitan solidarity is debunked in favour of quantification, abstraction and rationalization.

The various chapters explore not only the reverberations and consequences of these new governmental practices but also the incompleteness, discontent and undesirability of technological quick fixes that do not take into account the practices of the everyday. They also consider the importance of doing digital migration as a collaborative, collective and creative dynamic that proposes new forms of engagement with the digital and with the very notion of civic participation.

Finally, what is striking is that despite technological imaginaries of neutrality and efficiency, addressing the everyday as a research site in which to study digital migration reveals the many emotional and affective dynamics at play. Conceptually, theorizing emotion and affect does not so much address the discrete inner states of mobile people but rather the conditions emerging from the relations of people to their social, material and digital surroundings. Attention to such registers opens up new possibilities for investigating emotionality as quintessentially social and always mediated.

## Outline of the Book

*Doing Digital Migration Studies* is divided into five sections, each of which contains three chapters. The chapters were written by 22 contributors, from various disciplinary orientations, at various stages in their careers, who work on various communities in a variety of geographical locations. Each individual section is preceded by a short introduction written by an invited author. The section introductions are brief personal interventions that serve to introduce readers to the theme and field, indicating relevant discussions and possible future research questions.

### Section I: Creative Practices

Section I pays serious attention to creative practices as an alternative mode of knowledge production. In this section we address creative practices as forms of social innovation, because creative practices can spur new ideas, interventions and solutions to problems. As Karina Horsti writes in her introduction to this section, the digital mediation of everyday life enables unexpected possibilities for migrants' connectivity, visibility and voice (e.g., Horsti, 2019, 2023; Leurs & Ponzanesi, 2018; Nikunen, 2018; Smets, 2018). The use of digital technology, for example, does not only enable new creative practices for self-expression but also different representational modes that respond to difficult journeys and violent borders through alternative visual, linguistic and technological repertoires. Given the increased accessibility and democratization of mobile media and recording tools, migration becomes part of more complex narratives, which counter the institutional and governmental rhetoric of the traditional broadcasting and national media coverage, while also developing new visual and participatory strategies through the creative engagement of artists, independent filmmakers, curators and journalists who might be migrants themselves. Creativity is, therefore,

perceived as challenging dominant and hegemonic practices, in favour of migrants and civil society organizations that become active agents and narrators of their life stories, everyday experiences and affective archives.

In Chapter 1, media scholar and film curator Nadica Denić conceptualizes migrant auto-ethnographic films through the notion of an oppositional gaze on migration journeys. Documentary film maker and communication scholar Irene Gutiérrez, in Chapter 2, examines participatory filmmaking as a way of countering stereotypical media representations of migration. These films interrogate the “European” gaze by reversing the perspective. Instead of Europe looking at “them,” “they” look at Europe and in doing so, make visible the violence Europe produces in its bordering practices. In Chapter 3, gender studies scholar and curator Rosa Wevers examines the politics and logics of AI used in predictive policing systems. The author engages with a special interview with artist Ahnjili Zhuparris and her project *Future Wake* (2021), an artistic web project that examines predictive policing technology through the lens of analysing patterns of police brutality. By shifting the focus from possible future crime offenders to police violence, the artwork activates critical reflection on the politics and logics of predictive policing systems while creating awareness of police-related fatal encounters.

Digitization, datafication and AI contribute to the making of creative practices but also the circulation of innovative forms of visibility and media expressions. How this richness of self-narration and alternative visualities manages to circulate in multiple media platforms, to be distributed through social media channels and archived raises the issue of how and when creative practices can be produced, consumed and re-accessed. The multiplicity of images and narratives creates a potential for the democratization of the collective memory of migration in Europe. Yet the fragmentation and proliferation of film narratives, visual stories and artistic interventions entails a risk of falling prey to governance and control, or hegemonic forms of archiving and cultural distribution. Many creative practices disappear, or are left at the margins of alternative festivals, exhibition spaces and collaborative labs. It is then important to have the digital space as a possibility to interact with the memory of these productions in order to keep them active, accessible and reusable.

## **Section II: Digital Diasporas and Placemaking**

In Section II we address the room for manoeuvre and intervention experienced by mobile people in their use of digital technologies. Digital diaspora refers to the movement of individuals, ideas and information across

digital devices, networks and platforms. It is a concept used to describe how people from all over the world, who share common interests and values, can be connected through digital technology. It is also used to describe how digital technology can help people find a sense of identity, community, and connection to their heritage and culture. In her introduction to the section, the sociologist Mihaela Nedelcu describes digital agency as the degree to which digital practices provide means to “make a difference” (Giddens, 1984, p. 14). She points out the ways in which information and communication technologies have broadened our ability to cross national borders and forge new forms of transnational connectivity. The field of digital migration studies has risen to the task to analyse and study these phenomena in their many facets, from the ways in which technology empowers refugees and undocumented migrants in their perilous journeys and struggle with precarity and vulnerability to the mundane and everyday forms of connectedness (Diminescu, 2008), co-presence (Baldassar, et al., 2016) and digital diasporas (Nedelcu, 2018).

Though the empowering and agential potential of migrants’ digitally mediated practices has been widely recognized, less attention has been paid, as Nedelcu argues, to the “micro-fabric” of digital transnational practices. Therefore, not only are more empirical studies needed, but also approaches that take into account the positionality of the researchers vis-à-vis the populations studied and the intersectional dimensions of race, gender and class, keeping in focus the ethics and politics of North-South divides as well as the methodological challenges of accounting for people who live their lives simultaneously embedded in local and global contexts, across national, cultural or social boundaries. As Beck has theorized, “the internet is then not only a space of action or a tool to organize, communicate, and exchange but ... it is a process of becoming a cosmopolitized world” (2016, p. 139). This is due to an unprecedented global condition of interconnectivity and ubiquity, which relies, as Nedelcu (2018) argues, on both the logic of action and belonging which means tackling the continuous ambivalence of being inside and outside, included and excluded, nationally embedded and transnationally involved.

This is reflected in the chapters included in this section, which deal with the ways in which digital media allows for the transformation of individual agency, in making sense of transnational lives increasingly positioned at both the local and transnational levels. In Chapter 4, the anthropologists Catriona Stevens, Loretta Baldassar and Raelene Wilding explore the digital practices of Chinese transnational grandparents in Australia, which generate a sense of belonging and at the same time a sense of disconnection from their

peers in their homeland. In Chapter 5, the digital practitioner and sociologist Fungai Machirori investigates the specificity of African cosmopolitan practices through the analysis of social media such as TikTok or Instagram use by African digital influencers who play a role in wider political issues informed by local, intracontinental and global perspectives. In Chapter 6, refugee studies scholars Marie Godin and Bahati Ghislain focus instead on the role of YouTube for Congolese refugee-influencers living in Nairobi who reach out to their diasporic audiences through creatively developed channels that provided economic niches during the Covid-19 pandemic.

The different uses of digital media, locally informed and transnationally oriented, challenge mainstream narratives and produce different forms of “cosmopolitan” belonging, resistance and creativity. African women influencers help foster their followers’ cosmopolitan awareness and change their views of politics (Chapter 5). Congolese refugee YouTubers use their “small acts of resistance” as a way to challenge gender (diasporic) normativeness, showcase refugee talents, change refugee representation within local communities, and enhance refugee interconnectedness, both locally and across borders (Chapter 6). In time, these forms of digital agency could play a key role in forging new kinds of transnational collective action and processes of political change.

### **Section III: Affect and Belonging**

Theories of affect and emotion typically distinguish between the two by emphasizing how emotions are conscious experiences that are given meaning on the basis of one’s biography, whereas affects are pre-conscious, and pre-emotional bodily transitions. In doing digital migration studies, we can turn to affect to study the physiological, cognitive and behavioural bodily responses that happen in result to stimuli such as interacting with a family member or loved one living far away through the screen of a device. One might think for example of how an interaction with someone through a video call may cause you to change your facial expression, body language or vocal intonation, or you may feel it in your skin when you get goose bumps. The variety of theories of belonging that exist commonly share an understanding of how individuals are connected to and part of a larger whole, such as a family, community, network or society (Marlowe et al., 2017). We are attentive to how belonging may be produced through digital practices and networks, particularly by drawing out the workings and implications of affective and emotional registers shaping these processes. Belonging is the individual or collective affective sensation and emotional registering

of being accepted, respected and valued, regardless of possible differences. Digital belonging thus can revolve around the sense of connection and acceptance experienced, being an active member of a digital community and the feeling of being seen, heard, valued and appreciated there. This may concern affective perceptions of shared intimacy in digitally mediated long-distance relationships or felt trust in the reliability of fellow community members (Marino, 2015).

The literature suggests that when migrants develop feelings of belonging, they are more likely to be resilient and engaged. In the special issue on *Migrancy and Digital Mediations of Emotion*, Donja Alinejad and Ponzanesi (2020) focus on the importance of emotions and feelings in people's mobile lives and the way these affect features in the everyday lives of transnational migrants: in their experiences of belonging, intimate relationships and aspects of how they experience and respond to political and economic realities (Bocagni & Baldassar, 2015; Skrbiš, 2008; Svašek, 2012; Wood & Waite, 2011). On a global scale, digital communications have always mediated varied aspects of migrancy, from long-distance calls and personal messaging to remittance transfers and access to information about jobs, immigration procedures and smuggling routes. More recently, migrancy has become mediated via platforms, which are essential for new forms of communication and participation (van Dijck, 2013). Alinejad and Ponzanesi discuss the theoretical understandings of emotion and affect—not as discrete inner states but as conditions emerging from the relations of people to their material and social surroundings—which have opened up an array of possibilities for investigating emotionality as quintessentially social and always mediated:

Therefore, the study of emotions in relation to digital media under conditions of migrancy emerges as being about what emotions “do” rather than what emotions “are.” The emotions refer not only to transnational families in the traditional sense but also to various forms of digital intimacy such as friendships, queer relations, diasporic motherhood, connective services, and entrepreneurship (Alinejad & Ponzanesi, 2020, p. 633).

In her introduction to this section, media scholar Athina Karatzogianni discusses her own long-standing scholarly engagement with topics of digitality, migration, affect and belonging, along different lines of enquiry. The first line she mentions is in relation to affinity networks dominated by active affective structures for socio-political change, to be seen in contrast to networks dominated by reactive affective structures, which use violence



to achieve their objectives (Karatzogianni & Robinson, 2010). This line of enquiry has moved into the realm of political theory, where the utilization of active/reactive affect dominates networks and movements of hackers, dissidents and whistleblowers. The second line of enquiry concerns the role of affect in digital politics and culture (Karatzogianni & Kuntsman, 2012), which involves cyber-conflict in computer-mediated environments. In collaboration with Adi Kuntsman, Karatzogianni analysed the affective and embodied emotional aspect of resistance beyond the representational and semiotic approach, for example when the affective structures overflow, creating new interfaces between the actual and the digital, such as when digital protests materialize in the physical world, making changes in the political arena through the circulation of affects. In her third line of enquiry, she mentions the return to the “public sphere” where normalization of the affect and role of migrants is evident as part of everyday digitally networked media in less optimistic and dialogical ways. However, through engagement with artists and art production, technologies can still be used to mobilize people in online campaigns and counter misinformation about events taking place in their country of origin.

The chapters in this section explore different takes on the experiences of migration, affect and belonging. In Chapter 7, the digital anthropologist Elisabetta Costa investigates belonging among highly skilled migrants in Groningen, the Netherlands, stuck in the city during the Covid-19 lockdown; in Chapter 8, feminist technology scholar Nishant Shah problematizes the “aporetic body” in digital migration studies; and in Chapter 9, queer media scholar Yener Bayramoğlu theorizes queer digital migration, arguing that “digital technologies utilized in surveillance reinforce the racialized and heteronormative structures of borderscapes” (Bayramoğlu, this volume). Within such digital surveillance environments, two different problems emerge, as Shah states: “Although the geographical restrictions disallow migrants to move, the digital practices are all only geared towards movement which creates a great schism between the imagined and the lived” (Shah, this volume). Migration and belonging acquire different relationships to space and temporality as influenced by affective relations. Migrants mobile people and border crossers may feel stuck, in limbo or out of place, rethinking their social relations through digital relations and reconfigured material embodiment. What remains central is understanding the ways in which virtual relations impact on the lifeworld of migrants in ways that are different from non-migrants and how this helps rethink the role of affect in ideology, for reshaping the imaginary beyond the digital/virtual matrix and its affective capacities.

## Section IV: Visuality and Digital Media

In Section IV, we address visuality and digital media as a form of knowledge, power and communication. Visuals online are not politically neutral, but rather always carry certain world views. As part of visual culture, digital practices are embedded in everyday life and used to construct shared understandings of the world. Emergent digital practices on TikTok create, reinforce and possibly contest certain ideologies, beliefs and practices. Visuality can become an important tool for social change, as it can be used to challenge dominant power structures and create new narratives. As visual communication scholar Giorgia Aiello writes in her introduction to this section, visual images have become central to the ways in which migrants view and represent themselves in a variety of digital arenas, including but not limited to social media. Here, representation is more complex than something coming from mainstream media or governed by border crossers themselves. Relations of agency and power make the circuits of visuality not clear cut, but part of a web of producers, receivers and repurposings. It is particularly relevant to see the connection between migration and digital technologies as part of repetitive, mundane and everyday visual productions that are always imbricated in a politics of representation (Aiello & Parry, 2020; Hall et al., 1997; Mirzoeff, 2006).

The chapters included in this section highlight these double-binding aspects of digital visibility. On the one hand, the chapters show that migrants' digitally mediated practices are key to generating solidarity, support and community and contribute to new visual registers and formats, fostering more democratic and inclusive "ways of seeing" (Duguay, 2016). Yet, on the other hand, these self-representations and narrations are dependent on the media affordances and techno-social constraints of the platforms and digital tools migrants use. Their expression online creates "affective publics" (Papacharissi, 2014) that contain both the potentialities and limitations of these new modalities of visuality and visibilization. As Aiello writes, "digitally mediated socialities are both enabled and constrained by the algorithmic logics of particular platforms together with the aesthetic demands of specific media—from the visual formats that are typical of social media platforms like TikTok and Facebook to the immersive and experiential qualities of virtual reality" (Aiello, this volume). In Chapter 10, media scholars Daniela Jaramillo-Dent, Amanda Alencar and Yan Asadchy give an original analysis of the creative practices and platformed belongings of #migrantes on TikTok. This includes not only new, original ways of curating migrant presence online but also clashes with the infrastructure

and forms of censorship and hate responses. In Chapter 11, film scholar and festival practitioner Estrella Sendra highlights the different practices of cosmopolitanism as generated during the International Festival of Folklore held in Louga, Senegal, which activates forms of rooted cosmopolitanism, generated through the virtual space of Facebook, that animate the festival in particular ways. Finally, in Chapter 12, political science scholar Moé Suzuki offers a novel take on the role of virtual reality in the creation of a “human” connection with refugees and migrants, making an intervention not only in the idea of VR as an empathy machine, but also rethinking the ways in which this embodiment generates paradoxes and reactivates stereotypes connected to everyday life, as portrayed in *Clouds over Sidra*, while also attacking the sensorial perception of the viewer and creating a sense of discomfort and disconnect instead of empathy.

It is precisely this affective dimension that characterizes all three chapters. Questions of visibility are connected to the visceral implications of digital media (Marston, 2020). Scrutiny of the emotional, material and sensorial implications of (self)representations can lead to embodied understanding of migrant identities and experiences while not losing sight of the political engagement and the opportunities for activism. This shows migration and digital media are not just a simple interface, but raise all kinds of issues around migrants’ participation in digital communication in which agency, performativity and embodiment play out individually as well as collectively. As Aiello so cogently concludes, “Ultimately, the visibility of digital media is a fraught terrain which however also potentially offers uplifting and even liberatory means to take part in networks of solidarity and affirm one’s identity in the face of erasure and discrimination” (Aiello, this volume).

## **Section V: Datafication, Infrastructuring and Securitization**

In the final section, we address everyday digital migration practices from the perspective of datafication, infrastructuring and securitization. The relationships between migration, infrastructures, securitization and datafication are complex and multi-layered (Browne, 2015; Pugliese, 2010; Walters, 2018). In media, STS and migration studies, infrastructure scholars seek to open up the “black box” of migration and technologies by revealing the assumptions, ideas and processes that underpin ideologies of migration governance that are baked into technologies (Seuferling & Leurs, 2021). From an infrastructural perspective we can seek to explore “the digital force in forced migration” (Witteborn, 2018, p. 21), for example

by addressing how migration has historically been used as a tool for political and social control, and how this development shapes the contemporary datafication and digitization of migration governance and control. Data collection, analysis, modelling and prediction have become important tools for governments, border agencies and humanitarian organizations to manage and curtail migration (Amelung et al., 2021; Dijkstra, 2021). The turn towards efficiency-driven datafication has happened in tandem with an increased securitization of migration. Migration is both a cause and a consequence of the development of infrastructures of securitization. Data is used to identify and track potential migrants, to assess and predict the risk they pose to security and to develop strategies to deal with that risk. As argued above, migration itself operates as a technology, as it is an organized system, based on legal frameworks, procedures and agreements, that increasingly processes, categorizes, decides, creates and delimits the mobility of people digitally depending on how they become known in digitally mediated systems.

In her introduction to the section, Saskia Witteborn states there are important continuities and changes we should attend to in how digital and datafied infrastructures impact upon the material and discursive production of the migrant. As the securitization of migration results in making particularly vulnerable groups of migrant people hyper-visible, she calls for broader awareness of the “systemic, feedback-driven character of governing by datafication and discursive reproduction and the consequences of automated technologies and digital identity tools for algorithmic body politics” (Witteborn, this volume). In Chapter 13, media scholar Daniel Leix Palumbo addresses the distinctive situated context of the German asylum procedure. The German Bundesamt für Migration und Flüchtlinge (BAMF, or Federal Office for Migration and Refugees) is one of the frontrunners in the European digital asylum landscape, advocating for digitalization in the name of transparency, accountability and efficiency. As part of this move, BAMF has since 2017 put to use an automatic dialect recognition system named “The Language and Dialect Identification Assistance System” (DIAS). In the chapter, Leix Palumbo addresses the deployment of voice biometrics as a form of bordering power, which builds on the weaponization of sound. In Chapter 14, media and development scholar Luděk Stavinoha addresses the outsourcing of migration management to the consultancy firm McKinsey in refugee camps on islands in Greece. Drawing on analysis of internal documentation obtained through freedom of information (FOI) requests, Stavinoha explores the role of data practices in the imaginaries of control articulated by consultants. In Chapter 15, media scholars Kaarina

Nikunen and Sanna Valtonen address the anticipatory logic underpinning the datafication of undocumented people in the specific context of Finland. They demonstrate how in the everyday lives of undocumented migrants, borders proliferate as they become mobile and follow people around.

Overall, we would like to emphasize that we have purposely carved out different sections, and invited author (teams) with the specific assignment to include reflection on how they themselves “do” digital migration studies, conceptually, methodologically, ethically and/or empirically. As such, the volume seeks to acknowledge the multiplicity of different approaches and methodologies used within digital migration studies, which stem from different disciplinary backgrounds, including anthropology, media, sociology, migration studies, STS, security, gender and postcolonial studies. As a result, some chapters prioritize empirical work, while others are more theoretical. Some emphasize an ethnographic approach, in combination with specific techniques such as digital ethnography, diaries or digital methods. Other chapters are more conceptual and draw on discourse analysis in combination with critical theory. Each chapter is grounded in its positioning within a debate, carving out the space of the specific intervention and specified approach and material selected. The five separate sections are introduced by agenda-setting colleagues in the field. Their introductions signal the different theoretical and methodological traditions that contribute to digital migration studies within that specific area. The sections therefore purposefully show the kaleidoscopic richness of approaches and methodologies to characterize what we have titled “doing digital migration studies”. Doing digital migration studies here thus does not refer to a static, singular or prescriptive way of approaching the interrelationships between migration and digital media, but concerns a growing interdisciplinary research area of interaction and negotiations that explore different ways of making migrant voices emerge.

These sections, chapters and trajectories are not meant to be in any way exhaustive or representative of what is a rapidly expanding field that is very rich in methodological approaches and theoretical discussions. The aim is to foreground original and innovative research-setting agendas in digital media and migration studies. The focus on the everyday helps to magnify the agential experience and creative practices of migrants and refugees, grasping the new possibilities and potentials offered by digital media technologies on the one hand, as well as countering the drawbacks and restrictions posed by increased datafication and surveillance on the other. This is often studied as the Janus-faced articulations of digital media practices, which here become demystified through concrete empirical case studies and critical reflections.

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