9. Queer Digital Migration Research: Two Case Studies

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Abstract
After outlining theoretical debates within queer digital migration scholarship, this chapter focuses on two case studies. The first case deals with how queer refugees from the Middle East engage with digital platforms, particularly with dating apps. The messiness of experiences with such apps comes to the fore; while they can help migrants find love or practical support, they also reproduce racist structures. The second example traces the production of an online podcast series. This project provided an opportunity for diverse participants to celebrate and reflect upon the legacy of older generations of Turkish queer migrants and queer public figures. The process of its production also revealed fragmentation among the queer diaspora and highlighted the challenges of fostering queer intergenerational dialogue digitally.

Keywords: queer migration; digital media; diaspora; Turkey; Middle East.

9.1 Introduction

There is a growing scholarly interest in understanding how border regimes and migration patterns intersect with normativities relating to sexuality and gender identities, and how migrants from outside the landscapes of hetero- and cisnormativity cope with a world shaped by racist anti-immigration policies (Altay et al., 2020; Luibhéid & Chávez, 2020). Queer migration scholarship, as Eithne Luibhéid (2008) observes, has not only drawn on but also enriched several bodies of research, including feminist, race, postcolonial and globalization studies. Over the last couple of decades, scholars have explored a wide range of topics including, but not limited to,
queer migration politics that challenge the normative perspectives at the intersection of immigration politics and queer rights (Chávez, 2013); how the quantitative approaches, evaluations and statistical data that shape discourses on migration erase the struggles of queer migrants (Manalansan, 2018); the temporality of being in limbo and the sense of experiencing a “slow death” in places such as Turkey, where queer refugees await resettlement in the Global North (Shakhsari, 2014); or how humanitarian imagery portraying queer refugees reduce manifold queer migrant stories to a unidimensional representation of a suffering subject (Saleh, 2020). A relatively recent addition to this exciting growing body of literature, to which this chapter aims to offer a contribution, is concerned with how digital media are entangled with queer migration.  

Of particular interest here are possible directions, methodologies and theoretical explorations within queer digital migration research. In the following, I present two case studies drawing on my past research. The first focuses on how queer refugees from the Middle East engage with digital platforms, particularly with dating apps. I discuss the messiness of their experiences with dating apps, which turn out to not only help them find love or arrange liaisons, but also reproduce racism. While dating apps can be appropriated by migrants to address needs beyond those anticipated by the apps’ creators, such as finding accommodation or engaging in transnational activism, they can also impose culturally-specific understandings of sexuality and gender, which regulate intimacy. The second case study is concerned with a podcast series on a digital platform. While the series provided an opportunity for celebration and reflected upon the legacy of older generations of queer migrants and queer public figures, the process of its production also revealed fragmentation among the queer diaspora and highlighted the challenges of fostering intergenerational dialogue within it. Taken together, both cases demonstrate the manifold possibilities digital media can open up for queer migrants, while recognizing associated restrictions. Furthermore, they each showcase different ways of doing queer digital migration research.

Before I shed light on theoretical debates within the existing body of literature on queer digital migration, I would like to briefly discuss my understanding of queerness within queer migration. While some scholars use queer as an umbrella term for LGBTIQ+ identities, I feel more intellectual kinship with scholars such as Manalansan (2018), who use the term as

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1 Earlier versions of some of the arguments made in this chapter appeared in Sexuality & Culture (Bayramoğlu, 2022) and Global Media Journal (Bayramoğlu & Lünenborg, 2018).
an adjective that destabilizes concepts, presumptions and normativities while questioning the very notion of identity. For my purposes here, the coupling queer migration productively intervenes into the scholarship and politics of migration by critically questioning the racialized hetero- and cisnormativities that shape current migration discourses, representations, policies and more. It also distances itself from homonationalist perspectives on migration that oversimplistically construct the movement of LGBTIQ+ individuals from the Global South to the North as a teleological progression from repression to liberation. While some earlier studies of queer migration identified sexuality as the primary motivation for migration for persons hoping to reinvent themselves as non-heterosexuals (e.g., Gorman-Murray, 2009, p. 443), I explore queer migration within its wider context including aspects beyond sexuality and gender identity. As the recent armed conflicts in Syria and Ukraine have shown, LGBTIQ+ individuals flee not only from homophobia and transphobia, but also from war. Furthermore, critical scholarly engagement with digital media allows for an exploration of the wide range of coping strategies, transnational connectivity and new forms of affectivity such media make accessible to queers, while remaining alert to potential negative aspects such as datafication of queer migrant lives, increased fragmentation among queer communities and the reproduction of inequalities. Taking the above considerations into account, this chapter seeks to examine everyday digital media practices that can shed light on the ambivalences of digital media for queer lifeworlds (Ponzanesi & Leurs, 2022, p. 116). For queer migrants entangled in postcolonial continuities, racialized border regimes and digitalized borders (Chouliaraki & Georgiou, 2022), the ambivalent character of digital media becomes all the more apparent as they utilize digital technology in their quest for self-empowerment, connection and becoming.

9.2 Queer Digital Migration: Theoretical Debates

The theoretical debates within queer digital migration scholarship address several key concepts and frameworks such as identity, social and global inequalities, spaces, emotions and affect. Like other identity constructions and performances in times of “deep mediatization” (Couldry & Hepp, 2017, p. 145), queer migrants’ sense of self and identity is deeply entangled with digital media technologies. As one aspect of this, some scholars have explored how forced and voluntary migration are digitally mediated and impact upon coming out processes among queer migrants (Patterson & Leurs, 2019). While
coming out might be a useful concept in understanding digitally mediated and constructed identities, there has been growing critique from queer of colour scholarship of the Euro-American-centric emphasis on coming out as key to understanding queer lifeworlds (Gopinath, 2005; Manalansan, 2003; Savcı, 2021)—a criticism that digital migration scholarship has yet to respond to. As the queer of colour critique pointed out, not everyone needs to come out in order to develop a happy, healthy sense of identity. Looking at the everyday digital media practices of queer migrants can also reveal multiple facets of identity that are far more complex than singular categorizations can account for. Multiple experiences and intersectional inequalities often lead to the fragmentation of identity. Alexander Dhoest’s research, for instance, explores how some queer migrants hide their queerness on Facebook, which they use to stay in touch with straight friends and family, while choosing PlanetRomeo, a gay dating platform, to seek connections with other queers (Dhoest, 2019, p. 395). This differential usage of digital platforms splits certain aspects of identities across digital presences. By borrowing José Esteban Muñoz’ concept of “disidentification” (Muñoz, 1999), Szulc explores how Polish non-binary and trans migrants cope with the binary gender constructions of digital media platforms (Szulc, 2020). Szulc’s work also demonstrates how queer migrants’ selves become fragmented as they move not only between languages but also from one digital platform to another. Moreover, digital media simultaneously open up possibilities to experiment with gender and sexuality while universalizing Euro-American categorizations of sexual and gender diversity (Atay, 2021; Bayramoğlu & Lünenborg 2018).

Importantly, current theoretical debates address the reproduction of inequalities in digital spaces. Digital media platforms can become harmful places that reproduce not only heteronormativity but also racism (Daroya, 2018; Robinson, 2015). Andrew Shield’s research, for instance, explores how the gay dating platforms Grindr and PlanetRomeo reproduce patterns of racism, and shows how everyday racism, including insults directed at immigrants, racial/sexual exclusion and racial fetishization, have become part of everyday digital communication (Shield, 2018). Queer digital migration brings forth a critical engagement with global inequalities as well, tracing how current racialized border regimes immobilize and inflict suffering (Shakhsari, 2014). In this context, queer migrants can develop strategies of “digital resilience” (Udwan et al., 2020) by using digital media to get in touch with transnational solidarity and support networks that might be able to assist their migration to safer countries. This, in turn, is intertwined with another form of global inequality, in which media represent the Global North.
as a safe haven, rendering the inequalities that persist there invisible. Such media representations feed homonational perceptions of Muslim countries in particular as places where queer lives cannot survive (Lee & Brotman, 2011; Puar, 2007). In addition, further intersectional inequalities relating to class, age and ability may lead to unequal access to queer digital platforms. This need not necessarily be due to a lack of resources but can be an effect of simply not feeling part of a digitalized world (Bayramoğlu, 2022, p. 12) or refusing to use certain digital platforms in order to distance oneself from “surveillance capitalism” (Zuboff, 2019).

Existing research has demonstrated how digital media change the perception of space: seemingly reducing the relevance of physical distance and thus compressing the world (van Dijk, 2020, p. 112). Exploring this idea, scholars have studied how digital media help migrants to stay connected with their countries of origin (Diminescu, 2008) and to continue to engage with the discourses and policies of places that they have left behind (Alonso & Oiarzabal, 2010, p. 11). For queer migrants, the compression of the world may open opportunities for transnational activism and connectivity (Bayramoğlu & Lünenborg, 2018). And yet, some queer migrants might prefer to be disconnected from certain ethno-cultural spaces, or from family members and relatives in their countries of origin, to protect themselves from potential harm (Dhoest, 2019). Maintaining weak ties with the country of origin via digital media can help processes of placemaking in the country of settlement (Yu & Blain, 2019). Furthermore, digital technologies utilized in surveillance reinforce the racialized and heteronormative structures of borderscapes. For example, Christine Quinan and Mina Hunt have observed how advanced biometric technologies deployed in airports are dependent on a stable, binary conception of gender. Devices such as body scanners register nonconformant bodies as errors, therefore forcing trans and non-binary individuals to bend to these heteronormative technological systems (Quinan & Hunt, 2022).

By making it possible for migrants to build and sustain emotional and affective ties with people in geographically distant spaces, digital media create new forms of affects and emotions (Alinejad & Ponzanesi, 2020; Andreassen, 2017). Digital social networking is not only dependent on the body’s capacity to be affected by what is shown on a smartphone, but also by its capacity to affect other bodies with which it is “in contact” via the smartphone. Users interact with each other via digital devices and through digitalized affects. Furthermore, in the case of virtual intimacy or online dating platforms, affects often come into play before any online communication has taken place. Hopes and fears shape the decisions made when setting up
McGlotten’s ethnographic research (2013) illustrates, for instance, the impact of anxiety on Black gay men’s online self-representations. Sexual encounters may help migrants to feel connected, but can also exacerbate feelings of “otherness,” as Atay (2021) observes. While most scholarship on migrants’ experience with gay dating platforms has focused on men, Haili Li’s recent study explores the significance of the Chinese social app Rela for Chinese queer women living in Australia. Li shows how Rela is used to create transnational romantic relationships between diaspora and China, thus achieving an imagined physical intimacy (Li, 2020, p. 700).

9.3 Queering Methods in Digital Migration Research

The case studies that I discuss in this chapter were inspired by queer interventions in research methods. Particularly in the social sciences, attempting to queer methods can often bring challenges, not least because a substantial part of empirical data analysis in social scientific research is based on identifying and “coding” patterns within data in order to formulate generalizations and categorizations. Rejecting this, scholars who experiment with queer methods, such as Manalansan (2018), argue that research needs to embrace the messiness of everyday experiences. This proposal lends itself well to the exploration of everyday media practices, suggesting that research should not try to order data into “neat” categories but should try to grasp the fleeting moments of queerness embedded within everyday interactions with digital media. Another reason why queer methodologies may be met with suspicion is their critical stance towards single-method approaches, which again implicitly questions methodological orthodoxies. For scholars such as Ken Plummer, deploying queer methods involves refusing to be loyal to any single conventional method (Plummer, 2005, p. 366). Using a combination of different methods and data types and rejecting disciplinary orthodoxies, what Jack Halberstam refers to as a “scavenger methodology,” offers ways to approach aspects of queerness that conventional methods would risk erasing or making invisible, since they are inevitably difficult to identify, define and categorize (Halberstam, 1998, p. 13).

I implemented a combination of different innovative methods to address the queer migrant media practices studied. The non-digital-media-centric approach within digital ethnography (Pink et al., 2016, p. 10) guided me to not only observe activity on digital platforms such as the dating apps, but also to examine how digital media are entangled with everyday practices of belonging, transnational communication and community building. My
first case study focuses on digital ethnographic observation of dating apps, Facebook groups, and inquiries about what smartphones mean to queer refugees in Berlin (Germany) and Istanbul (Turkey); the second is based on participant observation of the production of a queer migrant festival that had to migrate to a digital platform when the Covid-19 pandemic prevented live events from being held. My fieldwork for the first study took place between June 2016 and June 2017; for the second between July 2020 and April 2021. Intimate insider research as a queer methodology was a useful starting point when I conducted interviews for the second study. Building on feminist ethnographic research that rejects positivistic researcher/researched or subject/object binaries (Abu-Lughod, 1990, pp. 13-14), intimate insider research (Taylor, 2011) embraces the possibility of conducting research through friendships. Some of the interviewees, for instance, were my own friends or became my friends over time. Crucially, I shared my own queer migration experience with the interviewees that I had not known before the research. This allowed the interview situation to become a dialogue about common or divergent experiences; a situation in which researcher and interviewee both get to know about each other’s lives. Such queer methodologies understand research participants as co-creators of knowledge. In my second case study, I was inspired by ethno-mimesis (O’Neil, 2009), a methodology that allows ethnographic data to be visualized together with the research participants. The interviews I conducted became a podcast series that was uploaded to the website created for the festival.2

9.4 Queer Cases

First Case: Regulatory Digital Spaces

Although Turkey is considered a safe country for queer refugees by the UN, hate crimes against trans women in particular, intensified repression of human rights since the Gezi Protests and pervasive state homophobia and transphobia impact not just Turkey’s citizens but also queer refugees in Turkey hoping to be resettled somewhere in the Global North. Nonetheless, queers who manage to make that journey do not necessarily experience migration as the one-way-street from repression to liberation that it is often portrayed to be. In my research, I was interested in studying how queer migration is shaped by messy experiences whereby digital media help migrants maintain

2 http://madiancestors.com/#/podkest.
a sense of attachment to places they have left behind, or make it difficult to feel at home once they arrive at their destination. Embracing the messiness allowed me to trace the complexities and contradictions of queer migrants’ interactions with dating apps and digital practices of belonging. I found that dating applications not only help people find love, but also function as regulatory forces that integrate queer migrants into a European matrix of sexualized and racialized difference. Furthermore, queer migrants appropriate dating apps for uses beyond those intended by their creators, such as for finding accommodation, getting information about migration or conducting activism. Existing research shows that migrants and refugees use digital media before they leave their countries of origin to help them navigate across national borders, inform themselves about their destination and even build networks in places where they hope to arrive (Emmer et al., 2016). During my fieldwork in Istanbul and Berlin, people I spoke to described similar strategies. My interviewees cited gay dating platforms such as GayRomeo, which was very popular at the time, and Facebook groups for queer refugees as useful platforms for the exchange of information on where to go and stay before they reached arriving their country/city of destination.

Sayid, one of my interlocutors, who had migrated from Syria to Istanbul and then to Berlin, used GayRomeo to find accommodation. When we first met, he was living in a refugee shelter in Lichtenberg, in the outskirts of Berlin, and was trying to get a room in a queer refugee shelter in Berlin operated by Schwulenberatung, a German NGO. Through the contacts he established via GayRomeo he managed to get a room in the queer refugee shelter. Then he used the same app again to seek an apartment or a room in a shared apartment.

In some cases, dating apps can become tools of transnational activism. Yahia’s story provides a good example of how dating platforms and online queer migrant activism can intertwine. Yahia migrated from Egypt to Germany to escape persecution in Egypt. After reaching Germany, instead of seeing his country of origin as a closed chapter of his life, he used digital media to get involved in queer activism in Egypt. One of his online activism activities led him to Grindr. Instead of banning dating applications, the Egyptian government was using them to track down queers: Egyptian police created fake profiles to gain information, making the platforms non-safe spaces. Egyptian queer activists, including Yahia, informed dating application platforms about the persecutions, which led Grindr to issue a warning to its users that online dating in Egypt is dangerous.

A number of people whom I spoke to during my fieldwork described a complex form of racism, whereby being Arabic or coming from the Middle
East was constructed as desirable—such racism was intertwined with fetishization. This was fostered by the definition of users’ ethnicity/"race" which is built into the interface of such applications, as well as by other information featured that can lead to online interpersonal communication in which migrants feel racially objectified and fetishized. One such feature is the language section. Yahia, for example, told me that once he realized some white users searched for “Arabic” in the language section in order to find people like him, he removed that entry, so that such people would not find his profile. He did not want to be the object of someone’s “orientalist desire,” as he termed it.

A further finding of my fieldwork was that digital dating platforms function as regulatory forces that reproduce homonormativity. This is reflected in the following excerpt from Yahia’s interview:

Since moving to Germany I have become more normal. I was more radical in Egypt. When I moved to Germany and when I started using the apps I realized that I wanted to have a typical relationship. That was never the case in Egypt. I was more like a political activist there. I don’t know, maybe I am just getting old (Yahia, 17 October 2016).

Describing his sexuality and activist engagement with sexual rights in Egypt as relatively “radical,” Yahia felt that his sexuality had become more “normal” since he came to Germany because he had discovered a desire to build a faithful, monogamous relationship. This seems to have been triggered by his experiences with dating applications. He also adds that it might be simply because he is getting older, relating his experience with dating apps to chronopolitics (the politics of time). As theories of lifecourse and temporalities demonstrate (Castro Varela & Bayramoğlu, 2021; Halberstam, 2005), the fulfilment of certain social, personal and cultural expectations associated with different phases of life is seen as a prerequisite for a “successful” lifecourse. While LGBTIQ+ subjects’ lives are shaped by delays, diversions and discriminations that mess up “the usual flow” of life phases that integrate cis-heterosexual subjects into the economic and biologically reproductive circle of life, comments like Yahia’s show that queers are not exempt from normative chronopolitics, especially when they engage with digital media.

Not just time but also space (Berlant, 1998) regulates values, expectations and normativities around intimacy. This also applies to virtual spaces: media-based intimacies create spaces in which specific kinds of intimacies are promoted, while other forms appear less intelligible or less representable.
Sayid, for instance, said that he had not had any fixed ideas about what constituted a romantic relationship between men before he migrated to Germany. It was only through online dating apps that he had discovered that a romantic relationship between two men could be possible. One of the men he met online fell in love with him. Sayid struggled initially, unsure how to respond:

There was no understanding of a relationship between men, no definition for me when I was in Syria and Turkey. We were free, we were having fun without expectations (Sayid, 27 September 2016).

It is important to emphasize that while they make interpersonal connections possible, digital media also impose meanings on those connections by circulating specific ideas about what constitutes queer romantic relationships. Following Berlant (1998), virtual space functions here as a regulator that normalizes and stabilizes intimacy. In relation to queer migration, we can argue that such digital media platforms force migrants to reconfigure their ideas about queer intimacy to correspond with European ones. Often, such a transformation of concepts of sexuality as a result of migration is portrayed as emancipative and progressive. Sayid turns this narrative upside down when he describes having had no expectations or definitions concerning intimacy as a sense of real freedom. Sayid’s and other interlocutors’ experiences thus shed light on practices of belonging after arriving in Europe as well as between physical and virtual spaces. Next, I would like to shift the focus away from space to time; to generations and memory.

Second Case: Intergenerational (Dis)connectivity

With most scholarship on queer digital migration focusing on concepts such as identity, spaces, inequalities and affection, questions of time, generations and history have so far been rather neglected. My second case analysis focuses on how digital media can foster, and also complicate, intergenerational interaction within queer migrant communities. I conducted participant observation within a project called Madi Ancestors (hereafter referred to as MA), which was initially planned as a physical festival to remember Turkey’s queer idols (Zeki Müren, Bülent Ersoy, Huysuz Virjin) and acknowledge their significance for queer migrants and diaspora in Berlin, but was obliged to migrate to a digital platform when Covid-19 broke out. Those who participated in the project all emphasized that the idols had been important not just for Turkey, but also for Berlin’s queer diaspora, as
key figures for a community that is not built around ethnic affiliations, biological kinship or similarly structured ideologies. Explaining the impetus behind the festival, Gizem, a musician who produced music for the digital platform based on songs by the queer idols, commented that many in the queer diaspora experience a disturbing sense of lacking knowledge about their own heritage:

There has been migration [from Turkey to Germany] since the 1960s, and music migrated with the people as well ... I am a musician who’s been living in Berlin for the past seven years, but I have come to realize that I don’t know on whose heritage I am creating new work in Berlin (Gizem, 1 February 2021).

Some diaspora studies of how a sense of belonging can be evoked through music have focused on music that laments lost homelands or expresses nostalgia for places left behind. Gizem, however, sees music as a way of writing a new historical continuity between different queer diasporic generations, a continuity that does not (yet) exist in public consciousness, and, one might argue, has been kept invisible—but can be discovered. Gayatri Gopinath has observed two ways that diaspora communities can be sustained through music: either by building on intergenerational interconnectivity between heteronormative immigrant men or through revolutionary politics (Gopinath, 2005, p. 58). Queer diasporic kinship through music, however, appears far more “ephemeral,” to use a term chosen by José Esteban
Muñoz in his writings about how diasporic music and performance often remain hidden in undocumented, un-archived fleeting moments. Heard briefly, unrecorded sound waves leave no trace in (national) audio histories. Queer diasporic connection through music is “lost in space or lost in relation to the space of heteronormativity” (Muñoz, 2009, p. 72).

While the podcasts of the project aimed to create an archive of queer diasporic memories of music, the entire digital platform became a way of creating transnational connectivity between Berlin and Turkey. This was not always a harmonious process, however—indeed, the translocal connection opened up new contestations around concepts of belonging. The project exemplified queer diasporic interconnectivity between Turkey and Germany not just by virtue of its participants’ transnational biographies, but also because stimulating such interconnectivity was the essential aim that structured the whole enterprise. The Berlin-based organizers collaborated with graphic designers, activists and writers living in Istanbul. This was seen as a way to demonstrate that border regimes can be transcended, while making a genuine economic contribution that could help those suffering from the impact of the pandemic as well under the increasing authoritarianism in Turkey. All around the world, queer spaces such as nightclubs were struggling economically from the long lockdowns, but Turkey's queer spaces were also impacted by measures to repress queer public presence imposed by the increasingly authoritarian regime in Turkey (Özbay & Öktem, 2021; Yalçinoğlu, 2020).

Nonetheless, migrating the offline festival to a digital platform brought some substantial challenges. One of the initial motives for the live festival had been to open up a space for intergenerational dialogue within the queer diaspora. Guests of different ages with different migration trajectories were invited to take part in panel discussions. The transformation to a digital format prevented such face-to-face “intergenerational dialogue” from taking place. The alternative that was developed, the podcast series, proved alienating for the oldest participant, who said he felt uncomfortable with the “nature” of being on a digital platform. Unlike most conclusions that are drawn by scholars who address digital divides within diaspora, this participant was not hindered by economics, nor did he lack the knowledge required to use digital technology. During a phone call, the participant said that he simply did not feel he was part of the “digital age.” While he had been keen to join a public discussion on stage and to talk spontaneously about the history of Berlin’s queer diaspora, the idea of being interviewed as part of a podcast series, which would be recorded, edited and therefore “less spontaneous” (or “less ephemeral”) made him feel nervous and uncomfortable. In the end, he decided to completely withdraw from the project.
Furthermore, while the activists and artists involved in the project liked the idea that a digital platform would allow them to be truly “transnational” and reach people in Turkey as well as those in Berlin, the adaptations required to move from offline to online caused fragmentation and even exclusions within the local diasporic space. In targeting a transnational and global audience, the project’s organizers feared neglecting “the local,” because the online circulation of information promoting the existence of the digital platform would only reach those already networked digitally. To counter this, as well as placing announcements on various digital platforms, the artists and activists posted promotional stickers on lampposts and the walls of buildings of certain neighbourhoods in Berlin and Istanbul. This shows how multiple strategies are required in order for migrant digital media to build bridges between the local and translocal without risking causing fragmentation of the diaspora within the local context. During the podcast discussions, Gülây, another activist who took part in the project, expressed her concern that digital spaces are not easily accessible for all,
pointing out that “not everyone has a smartphone or laptop,” and even those who do might not be well informed about how and where queer diaspora and migrants come together digitally. The stickers were a very “old school” response to the challenge of how to invite local people to join a digital space. Moreover, the stickers also served to queer heteronormative public space. Evoking Muñoz’ (2009) poetic writings, the stickers were fragile and ephemeral, often only visible for a couple of hours or days before someone tore at them or covered them with new pastings. Briefly glimpsed, they may or may not have passed on their message to a glad viewer before being defaced, displaced or erased.

9.5 Further Directions

There are several possible directions that queer digital migration research can now take. The crucial critique expressed by trans scholars and activists that queer scholarship often produces knowledge that renders trans lives invisible, is pertinent for anyone conducting queer digital migration research. To date, queer digital migration research has tended to focus on gay men, so future exploration of how digital media technologies, communication and culture entangle with gender identities and cisnormativity should be prioritized. We need more research on how trans, non-binary and intersex migrants interact with digital media as well as how digital media and intersectional inequalities can be thought together with a focus on these groups (e.g., Camminga, 2020). Furthermore, many existing studies of queer digital migration have engaged with migrants in just one national context, failing to reflect the interconnectivity between different national contexts in an increasingly digitalized world. Myria Georgiou (2012)—without a focus on queer sexualities and/or gender identities—has proposed employing a triangular spatial matrix spanning the local/urban, national and the transnational, as a strategy for researching the transnationalization of everyday life with and through media. Such an undertaking requires multi-sited research with attention to different spatial realms. Multi-sited and multi-spatial research can enable scholars of queer digital migration to develop better understandings of how digital media entangle with migration trajectories at different stages in different localities, as well as of how digital communication interweaves different migrant and diasporic spaces with one another. Such a comparative approach spanning local and national contexts can overcome “methodological nationalism” (Wimmer & Schiller, 2002). To this end, queer comparative research (Binnie & Klesse, 2018), inspired by
relational comparison in human geography, might offer an inspiring new methodological direction.

For example, by focusing on queer film festivals in different local and national contexts, Jon Binnie and Christian Klesse have explored how queer comparative research can generate understandings of how activist strategies in one local context productively inform and influence activists, communities and localities across national borders. Scholars of digital media and migration would do well to harness such innovative comparative methodologies to explore and compare how digital media practices of queer migrant activism, community building and solidarity in different localities shape the creation of transnational connectivity. Furthermore, we need to shift away from Euro-American-centric approaches, stories and representations. Much research to date has focused on migration trajectories from the Global South to the North, from East to West. It is high time for other migration routes to be studied: routes within the Global South. Countries such as Turkey or the Gulf states, despite being known for state homophobia and transphobia, are increasingly being chosen as destinations by migrants. How queer migrants use digital media practices to help them cope with intersectional inequalities and the repression of human rights in such places is a highly significant field that is just waiting to be explored.

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