Guest Editorial Preface

Special Issue on E-Diaspora:
Living Digitally

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With the growth of international (im)migration and work through digital space across time zones and in the last decade, the Internet and related wireless and mobile technologies have become crucial for members of various diasporic communities seeking to connect with both their countries of origin and their host nations. Connections are established not only through social media and email, but also through money transfers, philanthropy and business, gaming and related virtual environments. For instance, Internet use facilitates information gathering efforts of (im)migrants searching for potential host countries, assist (im)migrants' acculturation practices after migration, and advance the socio-economic development of diasporic subjects and those they may have left behind. In addition, we also have new forms of digital diaspora that occur through offshore labor forces that have their bodies in their "home" nations but work in time zones and relational socio-financial and organizational spaces that exist "in diaspora."

In addition, with the Internet and subsequent digital and mobile formations, we see that an "outside" portal from physically bounded space has been offered up for use – if we are able to communicate – textually, visually, audio-digitally. Thus we continually live "out of body" and we negotiate digital embodiment and digital materiality on a daily basis. We also act out, fall out, and come out in this non-physical but very real socio-political environment. We find ourselves connected to and disconnected from interpersonal circuits tactically, strategically and unknowingly. We live digitally. We also live simultaneously in the global and in multiple locals.

With access to Wi-Fi, hardware and software being comparatively seamless in most middle class societies worldwide, the idea of mobility and diaspora through electronic devices takes on a disembodied form – where the body's affective and subjective experience of being immersed elsewhere activates and is activated through technological devices. Our social worlds potentially come packaged in smart-phones, game consoles, tablets and laptops. Our bodies are routed through the digital in a sense and global subjectivities form in encounters within niche formations online while sometimes being only partially acquainted with immediate neighbors and other people around us. As we follow particular twitter hashtags and Facebook algorithms begin to decide what feeds we should see based on the computations and quantification of everyday habits and cultures in turn based on our keystrokes and what we input online. E-diasporas are also invisibly shaped and oriented through the platforms we interact in giving rising to a techno-mediated negotiation of agency and identity. Interactions within this space are layered - national, cultural, diasporic social and political economic

reorientations of individual and community. Demonstrations of community belonging, loyalty and the verification of real identities shift into the textual, audio-visual, affective domains. Further, it is known and acknowledged that our offline interactions and negotiations of community are shaped through physical architectures, infrastructures and the placement of physical non-human actors. We encounter physical walls and objects and bounded spaces – we know when we are physically enclosed or when doors are open. In the digital however, the non-human actors are far more seamless and often invisible to us as we type, click or speak ourselves into digital existence. Biometrics authentication and algorithmic orientation among others place us under surveillance where the (mis)translation of machinic recognition and authentication is only a click away.

Thus, as many have pointed to we live in a "networked society" (Castells 2000), but also we live in many forms of e-diasporas, mobile gadget based diasporas, or digital diasporas (Everett 2009Brinkerhoff 2009, Gajjala 2011). In a sense, then, ediasporas are simultaneously the result and cause of a particular kind of displacement/replacement and disorientation/reorientation wherein "effects are indeed uncanny: what is familiar, what is passed over in the veil of its familiarity, becomes rather strange" (Ahmed, 2006). Thus as we put out the call for this special issue, we had no clear way of knowing what would be submitted to us. We were clear however in our minds, based on our engagements with this research, that unless the notion of ediaspora took into account several of these intersections, we could not consider the article to have addressed any part of the complexity we wanted addressed. Further, methodologically, we wanted essays that mapped the idea of ediaspora through qualitative evidence based themes and analysis – leading to critical inquiry and further questions. We are happy to note that the contributions included here take up some such critical intersections. The articles included in this issue bring out themes about ediasporas by contextualized them in contemporary bodily mobility of migrants and long term immigrant communities, specifically an Indian Indernet in Germany, immigrant youth diasporas in Europe, queer diasporas in Europe, Nigerian diasporas in the U.S. and finally digital humanities and ediasporas. In examining these ediasporas, the contributors - Urmila Goel, Koen Leurs. Alex Dhoest, Tori Arthur and Roopika Risam. We thank the anonymous reviewers for the time and care they took in reviewing and commenting so that we could make final choices of what must be included and also in ensuring that the articles that we did accept were bettered. Co-editor Gajjala takes full responsibility for any mistakes and misinterpretations in how this special issue was put together.

One of the co-editors (Gajjala 2004) of this special issue has been engaged in research on cyborg-diasporas, digital diasporas, ediasporas, mobile diasporas – call it what you will – since the 1990s. She has watched the shifting terrain of how textual, visual and interactive subjectivities are produced and represented in these environments through a techno-mediated continuum of offline every day to online immersion. This has resulted in her having to revisit the definition such an Internet mediated diaspora repeatedly, in moments of discovery of where how practices of technomediation, immersion and everyday embodied movement take us both online and offline. Thus when we proposed this issue we were clear that our understanding of the term ediaspora would have to be nuanced, open and inclusive – but based in clear evidence of how various modes interconnectivity shape and produce socio political and economic hierarchies. Negotiated agency of individuals and the communities formed would be examined and theorized by contributors. The finally accepted contributions did not disappoint.

Urmila Goel takes on the channel of mapping a non-resident Indian (NRI) Indernet (not Internet) – a German Internet portal – across time. She does an "archaeological analysis of natio-ethno-cultural community building" drawing on several years of ethnographic engagement both in the online setting as well as in the physical space through which members of the NRI community in Germany accessed this space. She notes how "Indernet in the year 2016" is different from the Indernet of year 2000, even as it carries within it – in its cracks and crevices and links – archives of the older Indernet. Her

work thus is historical connecting up to the presence. By using an archealogical lens to look at the digital space, she is able to review how the structure permits and restricts the flow and reception of community affect, information and the ways in which the archives function in present day Indernet based NRI communities. This sort of linking up of Internet histories to our digital present is important. Further the focus of non-Anglo contexts of Internet use and of South Asian diasporas across time also makes this contribution very valuable to both diaspora studies and to Internet research.

In tune with discoveries through research and ethnographic engagement with varied contexts of diasporas and use of electronic media, the second article in this issue, by Koen Leurs, describes a "ye-diasporas" in Europe. Drawing on studies about "young connected migrants that are variably situated geo-politically" and bringing them together in one very interesting article Leurs implicitly questions the ways in which scholars have traditionally separated out studies of ediaspora along discrete self-contained identifiers of nation-based diasporas. Leurs looks at Moroccan-Dutch in Netherlands, Somalis in Addis Ababa and Ethiopia as well as young people from varied class and ethnic backgrounds in London. He notes through his careful research and analysis, that "[n]arratives shared by members of all three groups indicate meta-categories of the 'migrant,' 'user,' and 'e-diaspora' urgently need to be de-flattened." The politics of affect and identity are examined in relation to these issues.

Alexander Dhoest on the other hand asks us to look at queer ediasporas in Europe in the context of voluntary and forced migrants to Belgium and other European locations. Through semi-structured interviews with these migrants from places like Nigeria, Morocco, Senegal, Iraq and so on, who were forced to migrate because of their sexuality, Dhoest contests a thus far mostly heteronormative focus visible in much of the existing literature on e-diaspora. While it is true that work on queer online, queer diasporas and digital queer (such as Riordan and Phillips, 2007, Mitra and Gajjala, 2008, Dasgupta, 2016) do exist – the connections that Dhoest bring together further nuances in issues related migrants to Europe and LGBTQ ediasporas.

In her work examining viewers of Nollywood, Tori Arthur defines ediaspora around YouTube viewer communities and confronts her own assumptions about Nigerian diasporas and how media both from the US and from Nigeria is received. Her work is informed by her own journeys to and from Nigeria and based in in depth interviews of Nollywood viewers in the US and in Nigeria.

Finally, in the last essay – which is by no means the least important – Roopika Risam moves us into an examination of the neo-colonial framing of "digital humanities" and how this field is being institutionalized. She maps the connections between logics of diaspora and digital humanities, while extending the notion to what Qiu has described as the 'knowledge diaspora'" (Qiu, 2003, p. 148). Further, arguing for a sustained local and global understanding of community, she looks closely at the GO::DH organization and its efforts at building a global, international and inclusive digital humanities community.

Thus we see that several interwoven themes are taken up this special issue while complex theoretical frames are drawn on by each of the contributors. These themes and theoretical frameworks connect to postcolonial theory, queer theory, affect theory, race theory and diaspora studies. Reviewers read and commented with great care, having understood the goal of this project. The contributors to this issue have patiently and diligently revised several versions of their submissions as we all together struggled through the process of bringing together these complex and difficult intersections – but they have dared to begin them. They have dared to connect from various bodies of literature – sometimes seeming to reveal gaps in their own work and in the work of those they cite but more often they extend the existing frameworks through evidence collected ethnographically and through in person engagement with the people in the various contexts examined.

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