BOOK REVIEW

Digital passages: Migrant youth 2.0. Diaspora, Gender and Youth Cultural Intersections

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As young people now grow up with digital media, digital media seem to grow with them; an increasing number of platforms and applications are an integral part of young people's everyday lives and cultures. Precisely in such contexts of 'digitization', Koen Leurs' book Digital Passages: Migrant Youth 2.0 explores Moroccan-Dutch diaspora youth's navigations though all kinds of digital spaces. The book takes gendered power dynamics as a central category of analysis, while also employing 'an everyday feminist research praxis', by which the author emphasises his 'transparency' and 'reflectivity' by situating the produced knowledge on power relations 'at play at the different stages of research' (p. 51) (see also Leurs & Olivieri, 2014). The book is rooted in a commitment to political engagement and social justice, in times where loud voices in European politics are making 'claims over the failure of multiculturalism' and circulate 'anti-immigration sentiments' and 'Islamphobia' (p. 14). In such times, Moroccan-Dutch youth may be marginalized even in online spaces. For example, the book describes incidents in which the youth's embodied online presence is treated by others as transgressive of online norms, as when a user picture featuring a headscarf is negatively commented upon. As such, they are constructed as 'out of place' and become 'digital space invaders' (p. 16). Focussing on the 'tactics' through which these young people subvert moments in which they are constructed as 'out of place', the books shows how

young Moroccan-Dutch youth creatively and skilfully make online spaces, in which they are thrown together with many others like and unlike them, their own (see also Leurs, 2014).

Digital Passages: Migrant Youth 2.0 explores meaning making processes and appropriations of four Internet platforms, in four separate chapters, introducing the reader to different socio-technological contexts in which diasporic young people thrive and providing in-depth theoretical contextualisation. Interestingly, these four 'field sites' (an instant messaging application (MSN); a video sharing website (YouTube); social networking sites (Hyves and Facebook); an online discussion forum (Marokko.nl)) were selected inductively by Leurs, based on what the informants considered their most popular spaces to 'hang out'; during face to face interviews, participants were asked to draw 'Internet maps' to explore where they are going when online (p. 79). The voices of the young people that inform Leurs' account are continuously combined with comprehensive data and theory.

The third empirical chapter has a particular emphasis on gendered power dynamics. Titled 'Selfies and hypertextual selves on social networking sites', it focuses on social media self-representations and gendered values, showing how, particularly for young Moroccan-Dutch girls, selfies demand a careful balancing act between responding to the 'male gaze' while at the same time not being too 'sexy'. Leurs shows how girls being in charge of their 'to-be-looked-at-ness' can feel empowered, gaining romantic and social successes. However, at the same time, popularity and attractiveness come at a cost; meeting the expectations of the heterosexual male gaze entails hard labour, and sometimes even a loss of 'self-worth' (p. 212). Furthermore, these girls are often harshly judged and victimized for not respecting the 'appropriate' ethnic and religious moral values.

The methodology throughout the book is exceptionally rigorous. Moroccan-Dutch youth's identity processes are explored intersectionally, as the chapters reflect seriously on issues of gender, ethnicity, religion, youth and digital media culture. The methods are also

interdisciplinary, as the book combines social sciences research practices and more critical humanities approaches, including a quantitative survey study, in-depth interviews, and virtual ethnography. Finally, the account is also genuinely reflexive: Leurs is very attentive to power relations and the way multiple identity threats interact when he is engaging with the informants. Thereby the 'value ladenness' and 'situatedness' of the researcher's 'knowledge production' is continuously explored throughout the book (p. 101). Although feminist theory's attention to intersectionality and reflexivity have been considered 'buzzwords' that are rather 'vague' and 'open-ended' in many feminist research accounts (see Davis, 2008), Leurs clearly shows that intersectionality and reflexivity can be taken seriously – without being reduced to mere disclaimers.

The book's methodological rigour, the way it combines a wealth of data, and its balancing between the social sciences and the critical humanities, make it an exemplary study in the field of feminist media research. That said, the book remains (too) silent about two key issues. The first, from a media studies perspective, relates to the 'digitization' context, which is explored insufficiently in my opinion. The book reflects on numerous practices in the everyday lives of diaspora youth that have always been vital, even outside of mediation dynamics (presenting the self, making sense of religion, the homeland, etc.), and Leurs shows how these practices have now become more mediated. However, rather than exploring what this change means, the mediated contexts are explored as structural oppositions. Structural oppositions refer to taking a middle ground position; Leurs carefully illustrates how structural powers (such as gender restrictions), are renegotiated and resisted by describing individual uses, sense makings, and micro-political contexts. However, I am missing some thoughts about the broader causes, mechanisms and consequences of these changes related to digitization (see Hartley, 2012). For example, the book explores how 'reputation' is a central moral order ('hchouma' in the words of the informants). It would have been interesting to

explore if 'reputation' has now become more important for young people in online settings; this question could be related to particular mechanism of digital media. Such mechanisms could be that digital media organise people in networks, allowing people to closely watch and comment each other. How young people are feeling pressured to maintain 'good online reputations' in online environments is central to digitization processes. It would have been interesting to discuss such changing dynamics, theoretically and empirically. Second, it would have been very thought-provoking to read some moral and ethical reflections of the author concerning some of the findings throughout the book. For example, it is shown that, mainly girls', internet practices are policed (by family members like brothers or nephews), as well as how girls sometimes become the victim of severe violence (e.g. harsh comments or even physical abuse offline). I think, again, the digitization context has a role to play here. How power is negotiated within such mediated contexts transcends far beyond these individual examples, but there may be gendered, ethnic, religious dynamics in young people's digitized cultures that deserve to be addressed ethically and morally, while carefully balancing an relativism and absolutism.

Leurs' book should be seen as a benchmark in feminist media studies and in scholarship on diaspora and the digital lives of young people. In particular, the serious exploration of intersectionality and incorporation of reflexivity make this a strong contribution to feminist research and theory.

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