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# Digital throwntogetherness: young Londoners negotiating urban politics of difference and encounter on Facebook

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**Digital Throwntogetherness. Young Londoners negotiating urban politics of difference and encounter on Facebook**

**Abstract**

The question how we can live together with difference is more urgent than ever, now that more than half of the world's population live in cities. For example, the majority of London's inhabitants are ethnic minorities. Following Massey, city dwellers negotiate a situation of "throwntogetherness" (2005), as they live in the proximity of ethnic, racial and religious others. Shifting the dominant focus of media and migration scholarship from transnational communication towards local everyday practices, I develop the notion of digital throwntogetherness to chart relationships between geographically situated digital identifications and the urban politics of cultural difference and encounter. The argument draws from in-depth interviews with 38 young people living in Haringey, one of the most diverse areas in London, and builds on digital methods for network visualizations. Two Facebook user experiences are considered: transnational networking with loved ones scattered around the world and engagement with geographically proximate diverse digital identifications.

**Keywords**

Digital throwntogetherness

Young Londoners

Transnational communication

Digital identity performativity

Politics of difference

Digital methods

Facebook friendship network visualizations

## Introduction

[insert figure 1 here]

*Figure 1: Visualization Facebook friendship network Xavier*

> "Chinese, Nigerian, Caribbean, Nigerian, from Jamaica, he is from Somalia, Eritrea, she is from Wales, he is from Zimbabwe, all kind of different, she is from Colombia, he is the only English person that I know, there is more, but I just don't remember, he is from Ghana, Thailand, she is from Saudi-Arabia, there is a lot, Algeria, Kazakhstan, he is from there. There is just so much. In my school there is more like Muslim kind of, Bangladesh, kind of next to those countries, there is a lot of those people, Turkey over there, actually he is half Bangladesh, half from Algeria, yes there is much more, but I have to kind of like search, Nigeria, Ghana, they are more like the people I hang out with" - Xavier, 13-year-old London born Portuguese boy.

Figure 1 is a visualization of the contacts Xavier, a 13-year-old London born Portuguese boy, befriended on Facebook. The visualization was made during an in-depth interview in December 2013. I used the visualization to prompt Xavier's reflections on the racial, religious and geographical characteristics of his friendship network, and he described how he uses Facebook to connect with his friends and family living in Portugal, his Portuguese cousins living in London, but also with young people he knows from his school, his neighbourhood and those he met while playing football. The visualization provides insight in both Xavier's transnational networking with family and friends living in Portugal as well as his lived

experience of cultural difference. After making an inventory of the ethnic backgrounds of his contacts, Xavier discusses the dynamics of encountering different digital identification narratives on Facebook: “the thing is especially in a country like this. There can’t be like … There is [people from] so many different like countries. You can’t really discriminate. I prefer to learn than to like directly say something bad”. Facebook friendship networks of urban youth display present material evidence of how the co-presence of cultural, ethnic, religious ‘others’ – characteristic for everyday urban life – is digitally negotiated.

As the majority of the world’s population now lives in cities, more knowledge is needed on how people of diverse backgrounds (can learn to) live together, because “difference is undoubtly a sustained feature of urban spaces” (Jacobs & Fincher, 1998, p. 1). The city is the “place of our meeting with the other” (Barthes, 1981, p. 96). Urban dwellers in the contemporary global city are “people in the presence of otherness” (Sennett, 1990, p. 123). As global cities are key nodal points in transnational migrant flows, urban living increasingly entails being in the proximity of alterity, having to make do with pluralism and living in diversity. The majority of Londoners are people of ethnic minority backgrounds (Georgiou, 2013, p. 98). Being the most culturally diverse global city in the world, inhabitants experience a situation of “throwntogetherness” having to make do with a great variety of personal and communal trajectories (Massey, 2005). London is therefore a particularly apt location for studying the ways in which the co-presence and proximity of otherness is negotiated and felt.

City streets are increasingly mediated through what can be called “urban cultures of communication” such as graffiti, rap music, fashion, smart phones and digital media (Georgiou, 2013, p. 90). The question remains how everyday encounters with the other in the increasingly digitized urban space play out: “The fact that London is a multicultural and cosmopolitan city is now beyond question but this brings no guarantees” (Back, 2005, p. 20).

The choice to research urban young people, encounters of *we*-ness and *other*-ness and digital media is fuelled by a desire to achieve greater understanding in two entangled processes: living together with difference in urban environments and the socio-political relevance of everyday internet use among young people. Coming-of-age, the urban city and digital media all share a processual character: young people find themselves in a state of becoming, beyond childhood, they have yet to reach the autonomy of adulthood; whereas the city is always incomplete, subject to flows of people, ideas, money etc., much like communicative platforms whose existence depends on a constant flow of new input.

To what extent do diverse young Londoners network and identify with one another, across difference, using digital media? With this question in mind, I conducted fieldwork in Tottenham, which is one of the most culturally diverse areas in London. Tottenham is also where the 2011 "BBM"[1] London riots happened, after a peaceful protest following the police shooting of Mark Duggan, a local black youth, escalated. As news headlines such as *"Is technology to blame for the London riots"* (Mackenzie, 2011) and *"These riots were about race. Why ignore the fact?"* (Birbalsingh 2011) indicate, both issues of race and migration as well as digital technologies were singled out as key drivers of the riots. This article builds on empirical data drawn from 38 in-depth interviews conducted with young people living in or around Tottenham in or near the North-London borough of Haringey. The majority of the informants were born in the UK, but mirroring the great diversity of area, the interviewees voiced a variety of ethnic, racial and religious identifications.

As a conceptual starting point, I seek to expand Doreen Massey's notion of the "throwntogetherness" (Massey, 2005) to consider relational politics in the construction and experience of offline and online urban space. Throwntogetherness refers to contemporaneous intersecting multiplicities – such as ethnicity, religion and class – which are observable in

[1] "BBM" refers to Black Berry Messenger, the smartphone of choice at that time which purportedly fuelled the riots.

contemporary global cities. Throwntogetherness, according to Massey is constituted by the "contemporaneous existence of a plurality of trajectories" (2005, p. 11). I will argue that the conceptualization of throwntogetherness is particularly useful when transposed to the digital context to give an account of general online experience and in particular to better acknowledge the micro-politics of association. However, thus far, the ways in which the politics of cultural difference and encounter are played out across digital spaces have remained understudied. It is urgent to achieve greater insights in whether urban youth use of Internet applications corroborates pan-European sentiments of failed multiculturalism and ethnic encapsulation or whether their experiences rather showcase conviviality, cross-cultural exchange and cosmopolitanism.

This article is structured as follows. First I will synthesize prior scholarship on digital identity performativity, encountering otherness in urban space and migrants' media practices. In the second section, I will discuss the context of the study and consider methodology. Finally, the extended, empirical part of the article consists of two parts: in section three transnational communications are scrutinized while the final section considers the ways in which the digital co-presence of otherness is negotiated.

## Digital throwntogetherness: networks and identities

Digital throwntogetherness revolves around the politics of encounters: are individuals leading parallel lives in encapsulated communities, or are they networking and identifying across difference? In this section I chart the dynamics of digital throwntogetherness by taking stock of the interdisciplinary debates about transnational networks and digital identities.

Firstly, by and large, recent publications on transnational networking and communication practices present binary accounts. Does Internet use orient migrants towards their homeland or towards their country of arrival? Are social media great equalizers or do

they radicalize migrant populations epitomizing the failure of multicultural societies? There are no definite, clear-cut answers to these “digital dilemmas” (Franklin, 2013). On the pessimistic side of the spectrum, researchers argue that social networks sustained through digital media tend to become homogeneous, encapsulating “filter bubbles” (Pariser, 2011). danah boyd sums up her work on American teenage online social networking practices stating that “birds of a feather flock together, and personal social networks tend to be homogeneous, as people are more likely to befriend others like them” (boyd, 2014, pp. 155-156). This homophily argument – social networking analysis jargon used to describe people’s tendencies to maintain strong ties with people who are similar to themselves – is often used to problematize encapsulation resulting from transnational communication among migrants. Scholars like Scheffer (2007, p. 40) argue that in the past, upon departure, immigrants had to definitively bid farewell to their home country, while nowadays ties with their country of origin are more easily maintained through satellite television, long distance phone calls and digital media technologies such as Skype video-chat and online social networking sites like Facebook. Scheffer insists that maintaining transnational contact with their homeland and the diaspora results in closed off communities and alienated ethnic enclaves that in turn detriment integration and erode democratic culture (ibid). Similarly, it is argued that national identities are strengthened online (Erikson, 2007) and Conversi points out that Internet communication among diasporic subjects may promote “irresponsible radicalization” of ethnic conflicts (2011).

In contrast, on the other side of the spectrum scholars point out migrants and ethnic minorities exploit the affordances of digital media to maintain a “connected presence” (Diminescu, 2008, p. 572) meaning that Internet applications are used “to be here and there at the same time”. In *ICT for the Social and Economic Integration of Migrants into Europe* Codagnone and Kluzer note that digital technologies “provide no ‘magic bullet’ solution to

social exclusion" but more importantly, they provide empirical evidence for the "mixed embeddedness" of many ethnic minorities that suggest technologies are both used as "bonding" social capital to link up with "co-ethnics" across the host society and diaspora, as well as "bridging" social capital to connect across communities (2011, pp. 10-12). The technological infrastructure of networked environments accommodates "side-by-side-ness" (Barbrook & Cameron, cited in Rogers, 2013, p. 50). The question remains whether isolated bubbles or intercultural exchanges have the upper hand in post-riots London.

Secondly, in her elaboration of throwntogetherness, Massey notes that in urban space, sameness and otherness – in the form of identity narratives – are both present in a "simultaneity of stories-so-far" (2005, p 11). The same holds for the urban Facebook user, who upon logging in will be presented with circulating identification narratives on her profile page Timeline that signal the simultaneous co-presence and proximity of cultural difference. As the early utopian myths of cyberculture scholars envisioning a disembodied cyberspace where race and gender would cease to matter have long been punctuated, Internet scholars nowadays largely agree that online interactions reflect offline power relations. The ways in which differential racial, gender, religious and class identifications are digitally performed remains a pertinent question especially as young people increasingly face "the expectation" of seeking out their own rights and taking responsibility for communicating their biographical "project of the self" (Livingstone, 2002, p. 300). Social media platforms like Facebook, Twitter, Snapchat and Instagram play an increasing role in triggering and accommodating this recent responsibility to "participate in explicit discourses of identity and identity construction" (Livingstone, 2002, p. 301). In their attempt to attract user-generated content that can be marketed and monetized, the medium specific affordances of distinct platforms and their socio-cultural incorporation in everyday life lead to an unceasing "invitation to discourse" (Couldry, cited in Titley, 2014, p. 52).

Building on Couldry to discuss in particular how negotiations over race play out online, Titley notes that social media interactions present a “discourse laboratory” (2014, p. 52). “[R]ace and racism matter in what we do online” (Daniels, 2013, p. 696) not only on extremist websites but also especially in quotidian interaction. Opinions diverge how the ambivalent terrains between sameness and difference are navigated online. On the one hand, nuancing the promises of the levelling participatory potential of Web 2.0, researchers emphasize internet interaction is largely “anti-social” (Bartlett, Reffin, Rumball & Williamson, 2014) as user generated content is replete with “virtual and immaterial racism” (Gilroy, 2012, p. 382). As white, Western males remain the key target consumers, others are racialized (and sexualized) in many digital spaces of everyday socialization. This is done through everyday racial banter, hate speech, trolling, “griefing” as well as anti-racist contestations that result in a “racialized overload” (Sharma, 2013, p. 47).

This important body of work needs to be brought in dialogue with research from the opposite side of the spectrum assessing the Internet’s pluralizing potential, which is largely overlooked in recent theoretical and empirical literature on race and the digital. With the concept of “hypertext aesthetic” the postcolonial theorist Odin for example theorizes the potential of “non-linear” and “multivocal” interaction “involving active encounters that are marked by repetition of the same with and in difference” (cited in Landow, 2006, pp. 356-357). Zuckerman argues that the pluralizing side-by-sideness of internet infrastructures as a form of “engineered serendipity” could facilitate cosmopolitan chance encounters: “the Internet is special in that it makes it trivially easy to encounter people and information from other parts of the world, if we choose to” (2013, pp. 197, 131). The infrastructure facilitating digital encounters with otherness may potentially be used to generate “cosmopolitan capital” (Jansson, 2011; Christensen, 2012; Nessi and Bailey, 2014). Nessi and Bailey for example explored “cosmopolitan identities” constructed on social networking sites by relatively

privileged Mexican migrants living in Europe. They read the digital identity representations their participants post on Facebook as forms of “cosmopolitan capital” but emphasize that “the power relations of class” clearly shape these practices (2014, p. 13). Christensen found that Turkish migrant women in Stockholm engaged in cosmopolitan communicative practices on Facebook that allowed them “to see the world from a variety of Others’ perspectives” (2012, p. 902). The notion of “cosmopolitan capital”, a particular form of cultural capital, is useful to explore “the fundamental question of socio-cultural reproduction”, as it seeks to acknowledge both structural inequalities as well as “prospects for cultural mobility and learning” (Jansson, 2011, p. 254).

Cultural difference, following Bhabha, is performatively produced through processes of signification; as a form of “culture-as-political-struggle” it questions self-other dualisms, homogeneous and unitary understandings of cultural identification (Bhabha, 2006, pp. 155-156). In the context of Facebook, by befriending someone, composing a nickname, posting a status update or uploading a profile photo, people use digital artefacts to perform intersecting cultural identifications such as racial, gendered and religious positionings. Digital identity performativity therefore refers not only to how identities are visible online but more specifically foregrounds the process of how they are executed (Leurs & Ponzanesi, 2014). Through interactions such as accepting a friend request a networked process is triggered that building on Ahmed can be seen to function as an “identity alignment” which leads to the “transformation of some others into unlikeness (‘not like me’) and other others into likeness (‘like me’) (Ahmed, 2004, p. 355). When accepting the feminist adagium *the personal is political,* the personal cosmopolitan choice to digitally align across cultural difference – or making the choice not to do so – can be seen as a political act.

**Methodological considerations and context of the study**

Scholars are grappling with how to best empirically study urbanity and digital media use, as interactions in the city and online are fleeting and elusive. Fifteen years ago, Jacobs and Fincher already stated, "there is no predetermined or prescribed approach for contemporary urban geographies of difference" (1998, p. 3), and nowadays researchers are still searching for adequate ways to empirically grounded studies on cultural difference. The urgent need to explore diversity as an "empirical phenomenon" remains (Berg & Sigona, 2013, p. 348). Secondly, our understanding of digital practices is limited because until recently they have mostly been studied using methodologies that predate the Internet. Advocating the use of natively digital methods specifically conceived for the study of internet practices, Rogers argues we can do more than study *"just* online culture", instead he notes, we can "diagnose cultural change and societal conditions by means of the Internet" (2013, p. 5).

To begin empirically unpacking the multi-sidedness of throwntogetherness in a digitally grounded context, I focus on Facebook communicative practices in particular because this was most commonly used platform among the informants. In this article, in-depth interview data on online and offline experiences of urbanity and cultural difference are analysed in tandem with hand-drawn concept maps and Facebook friendship visualizations. The audio recordings of the interviews were transcribed ad verbatim. These transcripts were analysed using NVivo 10 for Mac Beta, a qualitative data analysis software package. Following a grounded theory approach to data analysis, I inductively looked for structures, categories and themes in the interview data rather than superimposing a pre-formed framework.

From December 2013-June 2014 I have conducted 3 piloting and 35 in-depth interviews with young people living in or near Tottenham, a part of the North London borough of Haringey. The interviews, aimed at eliciting narratives on the use of digital media for identification and belonging, lasted between 35 minutes to 2 hours. They were conducted

in a local library and youth centres, while the pilot interviews were conducted in the homes of the informants. The majority of the interviews were conducted one-on-one, in 5 cases informants preferred to be interviewed in duos. In total, 21 young men and 17 young women participated. They are aged between 12 and 21 years old: the average age is 14.5 years. Haringey is one of the most densely populated London suburbs, around one third of its residents are from a "White British" ethnic background, followed by "White-Other" (23%), "Caribbean" (7.1%) and "African" (9%) (Trust for London and New Policy Institute, 2014). Reflecting this diverse composition, interviewees range from white "British", "Welsh" or "Scottish" to youth whose parents or who themselves migrated from former colonies like Pakistan and Jamaica, to (descendants of) Eastern European labour migrants as well as refugees.

In line with Stuart Hall who noted, "when I ask people where they are from, I expect nowadays an extremely long story" (Akomfrah, Gopaul & Lawson, 2013), the informants shared elaborate narratives when asked about their cultural backgrounds. For example 15-year-old Connor[2] stated "I was born here, in Middlesex to be precise, but like I've got quite a mixed background, part of my family comes from Turkey, the other part comes from Ireland, so I'm quite a mixture" and 17-year-old Sarah mentioned "I wouldn't say I'm British, like English British, because I'm coming from somewhere, I come from Pakistan originally, though I wasn't born there, I originally come from there, my nationality is British but my ethnicity is different". Religious affiliations among the informants include Protestantism, Pentecostal Christianity, 7th day Adventist Church, Hinduism, Islam and Atheism.

The informants predominantly come from lower middle class families. A great number mentioned living in council estate housing, having parents who are dependent on benefits, being brought up by a single-parent, living in crowded housing with a large number of

[2] All names are pseudonyms chosen by the informants

siblings. This reflects the wider dynamics of the borough, statistically; Haringey is listed among the four most challenged London boroughs when considering indicators such as "overcrowding", "under age pregnancies" and "out of work benefits" (London's Poverty Profile, 2013). All informants have Internet access, mostly connecting via handheld devices uses 3G or 4G or Wi-Fi at home or on-the-go, tablets, laptops and desktop computers at home or at school. However, it must be noted that Internet access at home is not a given, several interviewees experienced losing access resulting from the recent financial crisis, for example the 12-year-old London born Congolese twins Kevin and Justin shared their internet connection at home got cut off after their father was laid off from his postman job. When quoting from the interviews in the analysis below, I include the labels interviewees used to describe themselves. Seeking to acknowledge that cultural difference is performatively constructed, this decision also allows the informants to be in charge over their own positioning. It also illustrates I take the interviewees seriously as experts over their own lives.

During the pilot interviews I noted that talking in abstract terms about identities and aligning with 'others' on the Internet is difficult for younger teens. For this purpose, informants were invited to draw a map on a piece of paper to visualize the spaces they visit on the Internet. This task is an example of "image based concept mapping", a participatory research technique which has been recognized as a successful way to capture the conceptions of networked information and communication technologies (Clark, Logan, Luckin, Mee & Oliver, 2009). The websites and applications included in the maps were used to structure the remainder of the interview to elicit platform specific narratives of self-positioning. In total, 34 informants included Facebook in their map of the Internet.

In addition, digital methods were used to produce friendship network visualizations during the interviews. The commercial but freely accessible Facebook application TouchGraph was chosen to generate a visualization of friendship clusters of all the

friendships of those individual interviewees active on Facebook. This digital mapping exercise offered innovative opportunities for social network analysis, as I used the visualization to prompt informants to reflect on different clusters of friends and grounded dynamics including gender, race, religion and youth cultures within these groups. Using digital methods during qualitative interviews also has its challenges: first, internet access proved to be difficult as access to social networking sites was for example blocked in one of the youth centres where I held my interviews. As an alternative I used my tablet's 3G Internet connection. Secondly, due to the instability of 3G the tool did not always run as smoothly or quickly, testing the patience of the informants further. Thirdly, informants need to be able to make the visualizations meaningful through their reflection, which proved difficult for some who enjoyed the high-tech, colourful image but had difficulties interpreting what they saw.

Before empirically grounding experiences of digital throwntogetherness, the section below first explores the dynamics of digital scatteredness and togetherness.

**Transnational networking: scatteredness and digital togetherness**

Having family members living in an overseas 'homeland' or elsewhere in the world is common among the majority of the informants. Illustratively, Connor shared "I have like family members living scattered around the globe". Bob, a 17-year-old Jamaican boy who "came up to this country [meaning England] when I was 5" mentioned "I've got family all around the world, Norway, Sweden, Jamaica, Carribean, everywhere". Scatteredness is nothing out of the ordinary, as the London born 18-year-old Jack "from Ghana" explains his family lives in countries overseas like "Ghana, America, Italy". For him and his peers it is common to keep in touch using applications like Skype and Facebook "it's normal, there is nothing special". As discussed in the introduction, the small second cluster of friends from the left in the visualization of Xavier's Facebook friendship network (figure 1) refers to a

group of contacts that currently live in Portugal. Xavier mentions many people have migrated away from “his” village Bagueixe in northern Portugal, but he gets to meet up with those who live outside of Portugal during the summer, when most families return. During the year however, while living in London, he remains in touch with his cousins living in Portugal and those living elsewhere using Facebook. One key space for doing so is the closed Bagueixe Facebook group (598 members) that both people living in the village as well as those living overseas have joined.[3] Especially for younger (descendants of) migrants, part of the ordinariness resides in access to transnational travel and especially the widespread availability and everyday use of digital media technologies to sustain transnational networks.

The experiences of Connor, Bob, Jack and Xavier’s are useful to further flesh out Diminescu’s theorization of the “connected migrant” (2008, p. 67), for whom it is increasingly common to use internet applications to “maintain remote relations typical of relations of proximity and to activate them on a daily basis” (ibid.). The descriptions informants gave of their transnational networking resonate strongly with the interrelated dynamics of feelings of proximity and high frequency of use Diminescu recognizes as important. When considering Xavier’s narrative on his experiences watching both those local and those in the diaspora post pictures, videos and status updates on the Bagueixe Facebook group it seems the group page generates an affective sense of proximity for him: “it’s kind of like being there, without actually being there. So it’s kind of like a virtual world, but you are basically there, but not. Just by looking at pictures”. The intensity of contact is important as it increases the quality of the transnational bond. Speaking about his family living “everywhere”, Bob similarly shared using Facebook, What’s App and Snapchat to be in contact: “I don’t wanna be that person that can only fly out and see them for a couple of

[3] Interestingly, the Bagueixe Facebook group seems to be more densely populated as there are four times as many people group members than actual registered inhabitants living in the village, local government statistics show the number of inhabitants has decreased from 465 in 1970, to 156 in 2011 (Instituto Nacional de Estatística, 2011).

weeks and fly back. I like to be in contact with them constantly. I like to see what's new with them, instead of waiting for years or months to see them".

As Bob hints at besides Facebook, a myriad of applications – all with their own medium-specific affordances – are used for transnational networking. For example the 17-year-old London born Elf who "originated from Jamaica" described how a visit her sister recently paid to her grandma who had moved houses in Miami was mediated through Skype: "she took the laptop around the house and like showed us all the rooms and stuff. I saw all the bedrooms… so it's like we are going to visit her maybe this year or next year, so we saw all her garden, so my sister went on her bike and then rode around the whole neighbourhood with her laptop in her hand, so we saw everything".

Through constant digital exchanges a sense of cross-national presence is activated which may affectively sustain feelings of "ontological security", a stable sense of continuous everyday being. Giddens defined ontological security as a "confidence" in "self-identity" as well as the "constancy of the surrounding social and material environments of action" (1990, p. 92). Georgiou, in her study of transnational television viewing among Arab speakers in Europe, similarly noted that migrant "individuals have increasingly grounded their sense of ontological security on relational networks, which are often dislocated from the immediate locality" (2012, p. 307). This way, everyday forms of digital connectivity may become an emotional resource accruing value as a form of "transnational affective capital" (Leurs, 2014). It should be noted that this form of networking is appreciated mostly as a way of making do with the situation of scatteredness, it does however not completely miraculously solve the myriad material difficulties involved in this way of living. Several informants for example mentioned the distance is forcibly felt when family members abroad are struggling with serious illnesses or when mourning a death in the family. Having explored transnational networking that enables users to presence themselves beyond their material settings, the next

section unravels further the more prominent local networking practices with those living in proximity.

**Local networking practices and the co-presence of difference**

Xavier's visualization is indicative for friendship networks the majority of the informants shared: the number of Facebook friendships with local people consistently heavily outnumbers contacts living overseas. Xavier's summing up of the variety of cultural backgrounds in his heterogeneous friendship network is illustrative for the ways in which the majority of interviewees described the digital throwntogetherness of their networks. His description was not an exception, all interviewees who had Facebook similarly networked across differences. As Alex, a 12-year-old London-born "Pakistani" boy, put it "the list can go on for ever… everyone is like from a different background". Heterogeneous Facebook friendship networks largely reflect the day-to-day spaces young people navigate where difference is co-present. Discussing her friendship network visualization, the 14-year-old mixed race girl Sammy, "I say I'm British" explained "I just have a lot of ethnicities, cos that's just like my school is a mixed public school, so there are just lots of different people, with different backgrounds there, because I think Tottenham is really like diverse and multicultural". She added that there are not many who are "like 'pure British'". 17-year-old "UK born" Sarah "from Kashmir" agreed, "most of my friends are like, they are not from the same ethnicity or same background, they are from different backgrounds, it depends again on what school environment you are exposed to".

As a day-to-day practice, negotiating cultural difference has become normalized. As Lee, a 13-year-old "Scottish" boy described, "I don't care, I have a friend who is Somalian, big deal, wow, it's cool he goes to a mosque and I go to a church, there is no reason for us not to be friends". In her reflection on her network, 21-year-old "mixed-race" Chenise who was

"born in Montserrat" also attests to the taken-for-granted urban feature of difference "I don't usually sit down and think about it, my friend is from here, my friend is from here. I know a lot of people from all these different countries and stuff, it actually surprises you as a good thing." These widely shared feelings resonate with Gilroy's description of convivial multiculturalism and the "liberating ordinariness" of "heteroculture" (2005, p. 119). Encountering cultural difference was positively evaluated; 14-year-old Carmen who mentioned she was "born here but India is always my homeland" for example shared "it's also really cool, cos you have so many friends from many different places, it's just a really nice environment". The difference between throwntogetherness in the built environment of the city and online is that on Facebook, users are free to chose whether to network across difference in order to sustain homogenous or heterogeneous networks.

As Facebook presents its users with a continuous invitation to discourse, having friends of a variety of cultural backgrounds will expose individual users to a wide variety of self-positionings. Differential digital identities published on Facebook present users with a "discourse laboratory" (Titley, 2014, p. 52) where narratives of same-ness and we-ness circulate. Cultural difference may be made co-present through the uploading of status updates, pictures and videos. Jack gave the example he puts up "music videos of Ghanaian artists" on his page as a way of "showing love for my roots". 17-year-old David, who was "born here in the UK, my parents were born in Nigeria" described how he goes about expressing love for his country, which also he hopes informs his friends: "I love my country, say when my mum is cooking like really nice food, from my country, I might take a picture of it and put it up, and then people will see like your national food and delicacies". He does so for two reasons, "to show like you are happy and proud of it, and like inform people, cos people might stereotype it". 13-year-old Tammy ("my parents were born in Nigeria") shared she values highly getting likes and responses to her performative acts of Nigerianness through jokes,

food and dance: “it makes me feel happy... because it shows that someone is taking an interest in your culture, in your background”. Besides peer verification, the fact that those viewing the posts can gain a better insight was also repeatedly voiced.

Therefore, there are strong socio-cultural and political implications of a positive stance towards intercultural networking. Chenise explained the learning potential of encountering difference on one’s personal Facebook wall: “you can learn from it in ways, because, its, if you’re from this country, and someone else is from that country… someone can put up something about another country and, it’s just, what do we have today, we have a multicultural society, so sometimes Facebook can be good, cos you can learn each others culture, other religions and stuff like that, from it”. These experiences illustrate how multicultural urban life is also produced through voluntary digital interactions. Such unspectacular everyday encounters empirically sustain abstract theories on “vernacular cosmopolitanism” (Werbner, 2006) and “cosmopolitanism from below” (Gilroy, 2005).

Additionally, the ways in which cosmopolitan capital may function becomes clear from the interviewees’ narratives on encountering differential identifications. Aaliyah, a 17-year-old “English” girl “born here, my mum was born in Jamaica” recently moved from Essex to London. She mentioned postings on her wall assisted her in relating to cultural difference that was new to her: “I am interested in it, because it’s different. I didn’t even know about Nigeria or Ghana when I was in primary school, because I went to a primary school up in Essex, so I didn’t really have much of a connection with that, but as soon as I got to secondary school, it was like ‘Oh, I didn’t know about this, ok’. It has really taught me a lot”. Tammy for example learned about the differences and dissimilarities in the ways in which people performed Nigeriannes and Asiannes “I thought all Nigerians are the same and all Asian people are the same and this and that, but I realized many sorts of difference, and that kind of changed my mind-set”. Discussing the different posts, photos and videos she had

seen, Sarah concludes she finds it important to see how her friends variously position themselves: “I like to kind of engage with people from different backgrounds cos it makes you open-minded”. These transformative digital experiences, which are both material and affectively felt, trigger cosmopolitan reflexivity, a form of imagination that “occurs when and wherever new relations between self, other and world develop in moments of openness” (Delanty, 2006, p. 27).

Informants emphasized the positive dynamics of digital throwntogetherness but it should be added that racism and discrimination was experienced among most informants as well, mostly they stumbled upon it on Facebook pages they liked made by people they did not personally know. 12-year-old London born Kevin “from Romania” mentioned she came across posts calling people of Romanian descent “gypsies” who “get clothes from the rubbish”. Jack recalls seeing a right-wing extremist page where blacks were racially abused with statements such as “you are all like gorilla’s”. For the interviewees, this however did not overshadow the progressive potential. Engaging with cultural difference on Facebook is indicative of how situated digital practices can become acts of cultural citizenship that sustain cosmopolitan capital.

It should be noted that isolating race and ethnicity as the main analytical parameters of cultural difference is limited. Questions related to gender, social economic status, generation, geographic origin should also be considered. Space limits the scope of this article, but the following examples demonstrate the urgency for additional intersectional analysis. First, using the word lifestyle to denote a particular social class Xander (a 17-year old “half Turkish-Cypriot half English” young man) describes his Facebook friends as follows: “the majority are just people that live around my sort of area, and they have that same sort of lifestyle if you like, like it’s not a posh area, it’s not a rubbish area”. Because the studied Facebook friendship networks typically revolve especially around geographical proximity, friendship

networks reflect the composition of Tottenham, which is racially diverse but relatively homogeneous in terms of socio class. As London is recognized as a class-divided city (Butler and Robson, 2003), the question arises to what extent such geographical divisions are reinforced or contested online? Second, the co-presence of intergenerational difference was rare. Indicative for adolescents' desire for an autonomous space, friendship networks were quite strongly policed against parents and older siblings. According to Tammy, "it's just awkward having your mum on Facebook", and she added, "you just don't have your parents". Chenise mentioned she "tried to keep my sister off my Facebook" explaining that her sister "reports everything back" to her mum. For those informants who mentioned befriending parents was a prerequisite for setting up an account, different strategies were used such as coding messages through slang and altering publication settings so that parents would not see certain postings or pictures.

**Conclusions**

As more than half of the world's population live in cities, and urban areas are key nodal points in the transnational flow of migrants, the question how we can (learn) to live together with difference is more urgent than ever. London is an illustrative case in point, where more than half of the population exists of ethnic minorities. Following Massey, city dwellers constantly negotiate a situation of "throwntogetherness" – living in the co-presence of ethnic, racial and religious others – that she sees as the "challenge of our constitutive interrelatedness" (2005, p. 195). Conceptualizing and empirically grounding digital throwntogetherness, this article untangled the relationships between young Londoners, urban space and digital mediation by charting whether young Londoners' Facebook use enhances cosmopolitanism or results in encapsulation.

Facebook and other digital spaces, like the physical city, too result from a constellation of trajectories. As Nakamura and Chow-White argue, "digitized media texts, have become an increasingly important channel for discourse about our differences" (2012, p. 5). Digital throwntogetherness was shown to be useful to account for general online experiences in urban settings, as young urban dwellers do choose to digitally negotiate being in the proximity of others through publishing and engaging with Facebook posts and other acts of digital identity performativity. Empirically, this study drew from 38 in-depth interviews conducted with young people living in or around the densely populated and diverse area of Tottenham in or near the North-London borough of Haringey. Digital throwntogetherness was unpacked in particular by considering two specific dynamics of Facebook use: transnational communication with family members scattered around the world and local networking and the co-presence of difference.

Firstly, previous research was argued to be torn about the implications of transnational communication; on the one hand as relationships across geographical distance can be maintained there is worry that birds of a feather flock together resulting in encapsulated bubbles, others emphasize the "connected presence" (Diminescu, 2008) of migrants and ethnic minorities allowing them to be digitally together with locals and contacts abroad. The narratives of the informants, largely descendants of migrants born in London, provide empirical evidence of the latter argument. They discussed various ways in which they sustain frequent contact with loved ones living abroad, which made them feel closer sustaining an affective sense of "ontological security" (Giddens, 1990), but they especially also engaged with those living in close proximity.

Secondly, previous research on digital identities is in disagreement between those who emphasize the ways in which offline power relations impact upon internet practices and between scholars who emphasize the pluralizing potential of medium-specific platform

architectures. The notion of "discourse laboratory" (Titley, 2014, p. 52) was used to carve out a middle-ground position to explore the ways in which the informants experience cultural difference. Prompting the informants to reflect on their experiences on the basis of visualizations of their Facebook friendship network, I found they habitually engage with multicultural urban life online, as friendships are maintained that result in encountering other racial and ethnic performances. Furthermore, interviewees expressed cosmopolitan sensibilities when explaining how they learned and affectively felt their mind-sets transformed resulting from their being receptive to cultural difference. Such interactions generate cosmopolitan capital and are indicative for a new form of cultural citizenship because they show how young people in contemporary urban societies learn to live with being thrown together with difference. Recognition of this form of capital is important as it demonstrated to allow the young informants in post-riots London "to resist and counterbalance the forces of encapsulation" that are oftentimes attributed to digital media (Jansson, 2011, p. 249). As such, this study also highlights studies of migrants and ethnic minorities should not single out transnational communication as it obscures other more dominant local practices such as relating to ethnic and racial others living in close proximity.

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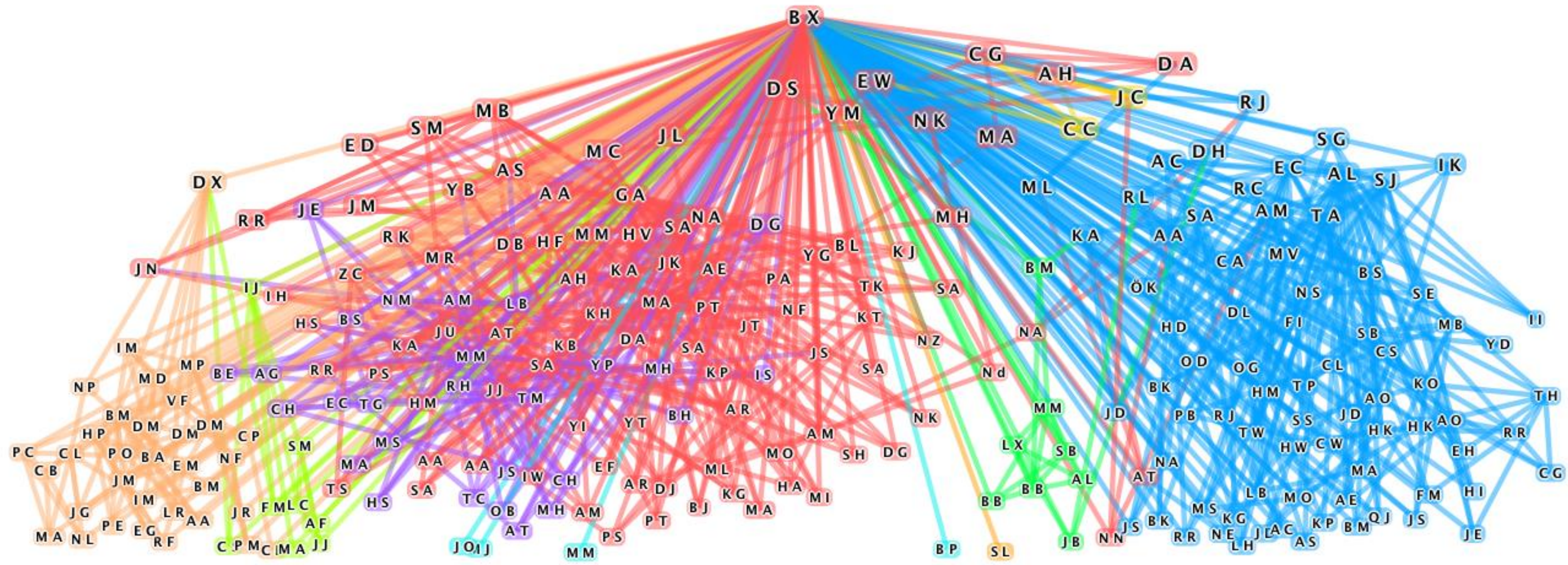

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