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Digital Makings of the Cosmopolitan City? Young People’s Urban Imaginaries of London

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This article focuses on young Londoners’ everyday digital connectedness in the global city and examines the urban imaginaries their connections generate and regulate. Young people engage with many mobilities, networks, and technologies to find their places in a city that is only selectively hospitable to them. Offline and online connections also shape urban imaginaries that direct their moral and practical positions toward others living close by and at a distance. We draw from a two-year study with 84 young people of different class and racial backgrounds living in three London neighborhoods. The study reveals the divergence of youths’ urban imaginaries that result from uneven access to material and symbolic resources in the city. It also shows the convergence of their urban imaginaries, resulting especially from widespread practices of diversified connectedness. More often than not, young participants reveal a cosmopolitan and positive disposition toward difference. Cosmopolitanism becomes a common discursive tool urban youth differently use, to narrate and regulate belonging in an interconnected world and an unequal city.

Keywords: urban youth, imaginaries, cosmopolitanism, social media, transnationalism, cultural diversity

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Global cities are intensely connected and deeply diverse. As nodes in transnational flows of people, they bring strangers into close proximity and allow close encounters. As dense nodes in digital networks, they connect urban dwellers with what is close by but also with what is afar. For urban youth, or “digital native” (Shah & Abraham, 2009, p. 7) adolescents, such digitized urban diversity constitutes their ordinary condition in the global city—a way to live in and imagine it. This article focuses on London’s young inhabitants and examines how they engage with the diverse, connected, but also unequal city in their everyday lives. We approach this challenge through young people’s urban imaginaries, as we contend that imaginaries—which are increasingly anchored digitally—offer new insights into the reproduction and possible contestation of hierarchically ordered urban life.

The urban imaginary allows us to record and understand imagination, moral conduct, and action within a continuum as a set of mechanisms young people use to seek their places in the world. We argue that this is a particularly relevant analytical framework for the young urban dwellers of the global city, as both their subjectivities and their urban world are transient, not least through digital connectedness. Global cities and digital connectedness share a distinct dynamism and orientation toward what is yet to come. Not unlike young people and their coming-of-age. Seeking to relate to fundamentally interrelated processes of change, young people are constantly asked to reorient themselves. As adolescents, they find themselves in a state of becoming: beyond childhood, they have yet to reach the autonomy of adulthood that is often associated with increased mobility.

How do they manage the transience associated with age and life in the city? What tools do they use to (dis)connect with the city and beyond? Who do they connect with and disconnect from, and with what consequences? The discussion that follows maps young people’s various connections and demonstrates that the ability to engage with local and global diversity, especially through digital urban and global connectedness, gives rise to a widely shared cosmopolitan orientation that supersedes their differences. Yet, as young digital urbanites converge in their cosmopolitanism, the meanings of that cosmopolitanism diverge, reflecting their various experiences of race, class, and gender as well as mobility in the city.

The discussion below points to the internal divides of cosmopolitanism, which arise to affirm privilege or to challenge marginalization. Drawing from a two-year qualitative study of 84 young Londoners between the ages of 12 and 21, we analyze how they locate themselves in their own world with or against others. The qualitative data includes in-depth interviews, concept maps hand drawn by informants, and Facebook friendship network visualizations. The city in question is the global city of London, which is culturally diverse and digitally connected. Of course, global cities differ; the narratives of young Londoners represent situated knowledge in a city where 98.8% of those between 16 and 24 use the Internet (Office for National Statistics, 2014) and where more than half of the population is non-White British (Office for National Statistics, 2012).

The discussion starts with the conceptual framing of this article, especially in defining the urban imaginary as discursively constructed through digital connectedness and urban experience. This is followed by an introduction to the field of study and our multimethod approach. The main discussion unfolds through three subthemes that emerged out of the fieldwork. First, we focus on the ways youths

make sense of their city through their practices and the city's (mediated) representations. This provides the context for young people's imaginings of We-ness and Otherness in their urban world, which we discuss in the second part of the analysis. Finally, we examine how narrations of We-ness and Otherness feed into two cosmopolitan urban imaginaries—vernacular and elite—and conclude by raising some questions on the implications of these conflicting imaginaries for living in and sharing an urban world.

Literature Review: Urban Imaginaries, Digital Connectedness

Scholars have lamented the lack of a critical vocabulary to adequately “represent the complex interrelation of youth and youth cultures with social class and new scales of global change” (Dillabough & Kennelly, 2010, p. 1). In response, we turn to the urban imaginary as a conceptual tool to link action, morality, and imagination to understand how young Londoners relate to the city through everyday digital practices. So far little comparative work has been done on the urban imaginary as discursively constructed by its inhabitants (Aiello & Tosoni, 2016). In particular, little is known about the ways in which urban dwellers perceive themselves and others as parts of the urban world, especially in contexts of intense cultural diversity and digital connectedness (Christensen & Jansson, 2015; Dillabough & Kenelly, 2010; Leurs, 2014). We contribute to this area by conceptualizing and empirically demonstrating the ways in which imaginaries serve as classifications and boundary mechanisms for categories of class, race and ethnicity, religion, and locality.

Within this discussion, two interrelated conditions need to be analytically distinguished: the role of digital connectedness in organizing young people's worlds, and the ways in which such discourses inform their imaginings and practices of mobility vis-à-vis other occupants of the city. A succinct genealogy of the notion of the imaginary allows us to locate this particular discussion within wider interrogations of the imaginary, especially as these emerge at interdisciplinary junctures of media and communication studies, cultural geography, and urban studies.

Toward a Working Definition of Imaginaries

Although Castoriadis (1998) defines imaginaries as large-scale, coherent structures, or central worldviews of societies, that are reaffirmed through repetition in multiple social contexts, he marginally addresses the question: “Whose imaginaries are these?” (Strauss, 2006, p. 339). For Benedict Anderson (1983), these imaginaries belong to the national community and can work in constructing and reproducing the nation through shared consumption of narratives of nationalism. Taylor (2004) builds on Anderson (1983) in describing the modern imaginary as the naturalized assemblage of meanings, ideas, and sensibilities people draw upon for self-affirmation and to make sense of social practices. Our analysis is grounded in Taylor's (2004) definition:

The ways in which people imagine their social existence, how they fit together with others, how things go on between them and their fellows, the expectations that are normally met, and the deeper normative notions and images that underlie these expectations. (p. 23)

These imaginaries are neither dictated from above nor entirely free-floating; they are situated in a grid of power relations operating, for example, around race, social class, gender, and age (Stoetzler & Yuval-Davis, 2002). We can infer from these theorizations that imaginaries concern the discursive production and communication of cultural meanings that are consumed and internalized by social groups and that subsequently materialize in social practices.

The Discursive Construction of Urban Imaginaries

A question that concerns us is how to acknowledge the urban specificity of imaginaries. The contemporary city cannot be defined solely by territoriality or attachment to the nation. Cities have historically grown through heterogeneous flows of people, ideas, media, technologies, and money (Appadurai, 1996). Therefore it is increasingly important to study the openness of cities through relations, experiences, and imagination (Amin & Thrift, 2002; Bloomfield, 2006; Cinar & Bender, 2007). The role of the imaginary in making the nation (B. Anderson, 1983), (national) societies (Taylor, 2004), and global publics (Chouliaraki, 2013) has been extensively studied. Within this literature, the role of imaginaries in summoning communities, directing collective action, and affirming social order have been central. How does this analysis apply if we move to the level of the city?

The production of the city through communication and spatial ordering has been more recently addressed in relation to competing imaginaries and spatialities (Bailly, 1993; Boudreau, 2007; Eade, 1997). Gender and postcolonial theorists have primarily focused on the spatial gender, class, or ethnic urban hierarchies (Fincher & Jacobs, 1998; King, 2016; McLeod, 2004). Urban scholars (Gordon, 2010; McQuire, 2008; Zukin, 2010) have shown that powerful imagery of urban landmarks and media representations feed into decisions for urban planning and selective investment, contributing to cities as segregated and hierarchically ordered. Also, naming urban places as "hip," "ghetto," or "dangerous" (Binnie & Skeggs, 2004; Jaffe, 2012; Latham, 2006) discursively and visually canonize urban stratification. Interacting with these categories, young people in particular have been noted as actively making the city from within through everyday routines (Slooter, 2015). This literature demonstrates the powerful and persistent discursive processes that make the city a space to live and imagine subjectivities. We focus on how digitally connected Londoners similarly (re-)make their city.

Cosmopolitanism and Urban Hierarchies of Social Class and Race

The global city is a space full of visual and discursive narratives of the global, not least as a result of its diversity resulting from long-standing migration flows. In heterogeneous societies, Kristeva (1993) notes, strangeness becomes a shared universal feature when we can all identify as foreigners and strangers. Urban strangers constantly encounter difference (Georgiou, 2013), in what Robbins (1998) calls "actual existing cosmopolitanism" (pp. 1–17). While this grounded cosmopolitanism can be observed across the city's territories—in its diversity of demographics and cultural practices—the meanings of the city's identity and its cultural diversity are constructed at the meeting of urban practices and representations. As urban dwellers construct these meanings from various subject positions, questions about the orientation of urban imaginaries become pertinent. Digital and physical encounters with difference impact the degree to which the lives of others are imaginable, the extent to which people

remain affectable by diversity, and whether a shared and open moral order is thinkable (Chouliaraki, 2013).

Realizing others' presence and imagining a shared world is subject to close encounters with difference, but those are always subject to urban order and history. The circulation of meanings of places in the popular imagination often resonates with class and race hierarchies (Shields, 1991), as these are expressed in the unequal distribution of the city's material and symbolic resources. In the case of minorities, this is often expressed as the emergence of collective imaginings of place through discourses that partly oppose and partly reify hegemonic representations of marginalization. Stuart Hall, Chas Critcher, Tony Jefferson, John Clarke and Brian Roberts (1978) explain the strong attachment of Black subjects to their inner city neighborhoods as a process of locating themselves in the city. This often occurs in dialogue and against the racialized iconography of place, which "fuses together ethnicity, location and the spatial imaginaries of danger" (Keith, 2009, p. 541). Imagining the city from the social margins is very different from elite discourses of detachment from the locale, often expressed among urban elites (Hannerz, 1996). Such expressions may revolve around a narrowly defined worldliness based on privileges such as the freedom to choose loyalties and freedom from subordination (Calhoun, 2003). Elite discourses usually serve to reaffirm distinction (Bourdieu, 1984; Said, 1984). But both instances demonstrate that imaginaries operate as boundary markers.

Digital Connectedness and Boundedness

Digital culture reaffirms those boundaries, as it is skewed toward a normative, male, middle-class, and Western-centric user base (Noble, 2016). This raises questions about its role in regulating urban imaginaries, as these are increasingly anchored digitally. For example, self-profiling options on social media platforms such as Facebook assume a male, White, heterosexual, and Western target audience, and video game culture is replete with sexism and racism (Gray, 2015). Also, the Internet's origin in the military-industrial complex has left traces—it is "cached"—in contemporary digital imaginaries, as evident from the C3I (command, control, communication, and intelligence) protocols that operate behind the screen (Ricker Schulte, 2015). This has diverging consequences for the plurality of urban dwellers' trajectories (Massey, 2005) and for top-down surveillance and bottom-up remaking of urban spaces of sameness and otherness (Leurs, 2014).

Media and communication make encounters between people of various backgrounds more prominent in the city (Georgiou, 2013). The omnipresence of media discourses about the city, its legitimate owners, and its Others informs the ways city dwellers imagine their social existence and how they fit together, or interact with or against others. Urban imaginaries, shaped at the meeting of experience and mediated narratives of the city—especially of no-go areas: spaces of fear, inclusion, exclusion, and opportunity—present frames of orientation and action. For example, as part of an intimidating October 2013 UK government campaign against "illegal" immigrants, vans emblazoned with the billboard slogan "Go home or face arrest. Text Home to 78070" drove around ethnically diverse London boroughs. Simultaneously, the UK Home Office sent text messages to 60,000 supposed illegal immigrants living around London, demanding them to "Go home." The Home Office claimed this pilot aimed to make illegal migrants aware "there was a near and present danger of their being arrested" and that it resulted in

60 “voluntary departures” (2013, p. 2). Such digitized surveillance practices render the city a space of fear and exclusion: Not only illegal immigrants received the text messages; ethnic minorities with resident permits were also wrongfully targeted because of glitches in the sorting system (Jones, Jackson, & Rhys-Taylor, 2014).

In addition, social media—alongside the street—have become everyday moral laboratories for banal interpersonal bonding, urban encounters, and other forms of social “connectedness” (Van Dijck, 2013) where certain imaginings of the self, the Other, the city, and the world are enabled, foreclosed, and negotiated. They are also used as platforms for resistance. Consider, for example, the Twitter hashtag #myracisttramexperience, used to document and scrutinize everyday racist abuse in public transport in London (Gilroy, 2012). Digital interactions complicate the formation of urban imaginaries, which are neither bounded in place nor exclusively dependent on experience. Instead, and as will be shown below, at the juncture of digital connectedness and everyday practice, mobilities between spaces and between familiarity and strangeness are negotiated to imagine belonging in the uneven urban realm.

Context of Study

London, like other cities in the global North, is increasingly characterized by ordinary and domesticated difference (S. M. Hall, 2015; James, 2015). London is also a young city; the 2011 Census showed a 24% increase in children under five years compared to 2001 (Office for National Statistics, 2012), with a higher growth of children and youth in its territory compared to other parts of the country. It’s also a city with rich communication infrastructures. Inner London has the highest percentage of Internet users of any region in the UK (91.8%; Office for National Statistics, 2014). Our fieldwork confirms London’s vibrant diversity among its young people and the extensive systems of digital connectedness that characterize their everyday lives.

With the aim of comparing a range of young people’s urban imaginaries, especially as these relate to spatialized expressions of ethnicity and social class, we conducted research with young people across three socially and racially diverse areas of the city: Haringey, Hammersmith-Fulham (HF), and the Royal Borough of Kensington-Chelsea (RBKC). These three boroughs respectively reflect working-class, middle-class, and upper-middle-class environments (see Table 1).

To face the “challenge of studying openness towards other people” (Skey, 2012, p. 417), we combined a range of methods, with interviews as the main method. We conducted 84 in-depth interviews with young Londoners (41 young men and 43 young women aged 12 to 21) between fall 2013 and winter 2014. These took place in libraries, youth centers, cultural centers, churches, and informants’ homes. Interviews lasted between 25 and 120 minutes. During the interviews, we made innovative use of collaborative and digital methods. First, each informant was invited to draw a concept map by hand showing what his or her view of the Internet looked like. These maps were used to structure the interviews. Second, together with the informants, we created and analyzed visualizations of personal Facebook friendship networks. Aiming to develop an ethical and reflexive alternative to impersonal (big) data-driven research, this collaborative digital mapping exercise allowed informants to direct the course of the interviews as discussions focused on their observations (Leurs, forthcoming 2017).

Table 1. Characterization of the Three Fieldwork Locations.

	Haringey	Hammersmith-Fulham (HF)	The Royal Borough of Kensington-Chelsea (RBKC)
Geography	Northeast London	West London	Central London
Size (mi. ²)	11.4	6.33	4.68 (smallest London borough)
No. of inhabitants	263,386	178,685	156,000
Social class	Working class: -Median income £23,300 ^a -28.5% eligible and claiming free school meals at state-maintained secondary schools ^b -Among worst 4 London boroughs in the London Poverty Profile with indicators including "landlord repossessions" and pay "below London Living Wage" ^d	Middle class: -Median income £27,600 ^a -21.7% eligible and claiming free school meals at state-maintained secondary schools ^b	Upper middle class: -Median income £37,800 ^a -Highest life expectancy rate in the country and highest proportion of workers in finance ^c -20% eligible and claiming free school meals at state-maintained secondary schools ^b -Largest income polarity of all London boroughs ^d
Racial composition	-34.7% "White British" -23% "White Other" -9% "Black British: African" -7.1% "Black British: Caribbean" -6.5% "Mixed race" ^e	-44.9% "White British" -19.6% "White Other" -3.9% "Black British: Caribbean" -5.5% "Mixed race" ^e	-39.3% "White British" -16.5% "White Other" (including a substantial French community) -5.8% "Black-British: African" -5.7% "Mixed race" -4.1% "Arab" ^e
Characterization	-Shopping and restaurant areas often labeled as undiscovered multicultural hotspots -History of riots and media representations of criminality	-Residential Victorian and Edwardian housing alongside the river Thames	-Important global tourist destination with world-renowned museums and parks -Exclusive and gated residential areas

^aHM Revenue & Customs, 2015. ^bDepartment of Education, 2015. ^cRoyal Borough of Kensington-Chelsea, 2010. ^dAldridge, Born, Tinson, & MacInnes, 2015, p. 11. ^eOffice for National Statistics, 2012.

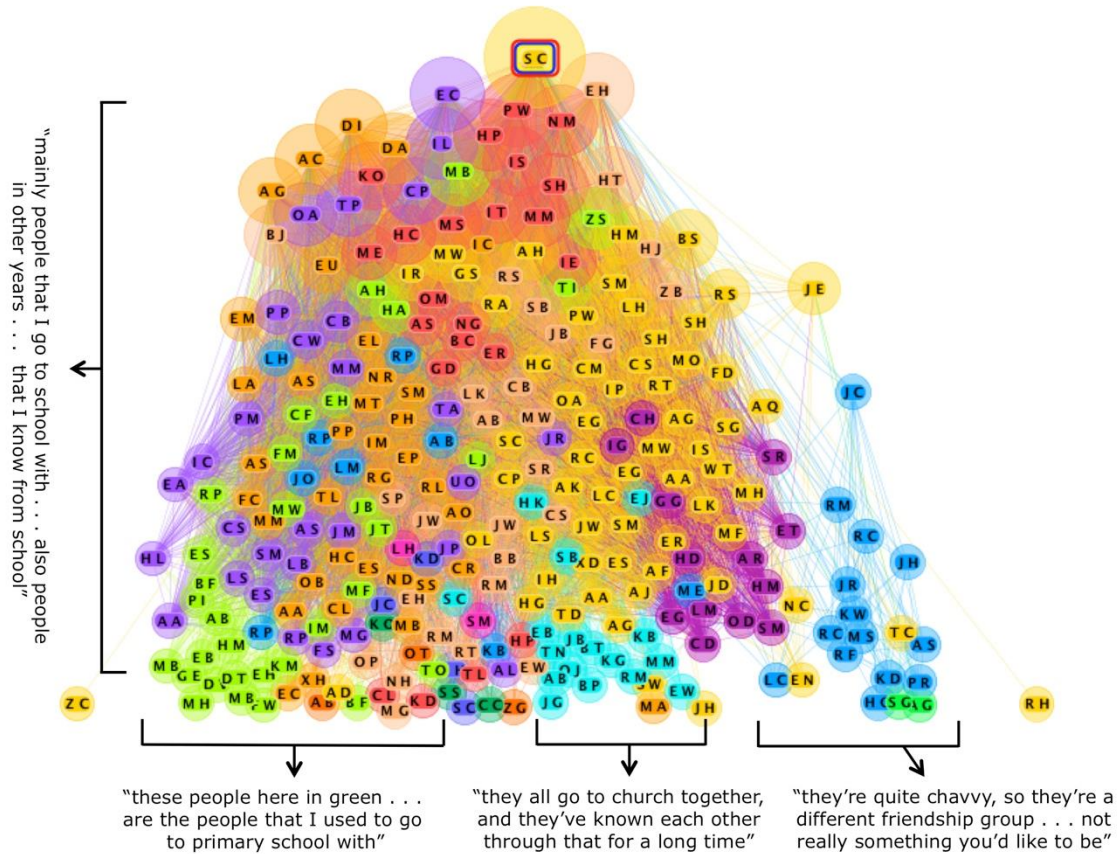


Figure 1. TouchGraph Facebook friendship network visualization for Claire, a 14-year-old girl who self-identifies as "White British."

The commercial but freely accessible Facebook application TouchGraph was chosen to generate a visualization of the informants' networks. After each informant logged into his or her account and opened TouchGraph, the algorithm processed the account's complete network and grouped mutual Facebook contacts into color-coded clusters.³ Clusters often reflected schools and sport clubs, but also transnational family networks. The informants were prompted to reflect on racial, gender, age, class, religious and geographic dynamics of these clusters. For example, Figure 1 shows the visualization of Claire's Facebook friendship network. She distinguishes between groups, including Christian friends she knows from church

³ In April 2015, shortly after we completed fieldwork, Facebook changed its application programming interface (API) and data-retrieval policy, and TouchGraph was no longer able to access and process individual user data.

and “chavs”—a derogatory term for urban underclass. With an us-versus-them narrative, she distances herself from the latter group: “They don’t really have much ambition, they don’t take things seriously, like school. I know they all kind of hang around in packs together and we hang around in different groups.” Furthermore, she quickly adds this was not a racialized labeling: “That group, it wasn’t only Black people, there was also some White people hanging out, like the chavvy groups, because they all come from the same sort of background.” This example is indicative for the complexity and richness of the data collected in this study, revealing patterns in digital practices but also continuities and fractures in the ways young people locate themselves in their city and next to or against proximate and distant others.

Physical and Digital Mobilities: Remaking the City

The city is a space of experience, but it is also a space of imagination. Imagining the city, its people, and its promising or frightening geography is a process not only of navigation but also of making sense of the self and the proximate and distant world. The young people we spoke to repeatedly used narratives about the urban world as symbolic resources for interpreting realities and racial, class, and sociospatial order and for imagining their places in the world (Bourdieu, 1986). As such, these narratives are not mere descriptions; they reveal young urban dwellers’ discursive constructions of collective imaginaries and act as templates of urban action. For example, Skye, 16, who says she is “half French” and “half Japanese” and lives in RBKC, describes London as “quite nice . . . It’s kind of full of surprises . . . Yeah, I mean in terms of culturally, it’s very cosmopolitan.” Although occupying different classed positions, informants repeatedly made explicit reference to cosmopolitanism, which is revealing of the framing discourses of locating oneself in the world and global connectedness that young people draw on to imagine their diverse world. At the same time, the divergent ways in which they discursively construct these cosmopolitan imaginaries reflects the asymmetrical and unequal access young people have to symbolic and material resources.

Experiences and Representations of Spatial Order

Tottenham “is a cool place to be, because I think it’s a fact that everyone knows everyone,” notes David, 18, who was “born in Jamaica, came to London age five,” revealing the strong connection between imagined communities and spatial identification (Kim & Ball-Rokeach, 2006). Sammi, 14, shares the same view of a “very community-like feel,” in an equally positive affective place narrative. While celebrating their locale and feeling strongly attached to their imagined local community, these young people are also well aware of the marginalization of Tottenham in the socioeconomic and racial order of the city. Indeed, narratives of informants from working-class families provide glimpses at their everyday struggles for voice, recognition, and agency. David highlights the lack of options for young people, and Sammi is anxiously aware of the powerful symbolic meanings associated with her neighborhood, especially its bad reputation: “I think that people think, like if I go for a job interview or something, and they heard I was from Tottenham they’ll probably have a bad impression of me and think like I was not capable of learning stuff.” Stuart Hall has emphasized the “arbitrary closure” (1987, p. 45) that emerges at the meeting of representation and reality in the city that feeds into identity and its politics. This is captured in David’s words:

There is another thing with London as well, it's very segregated. So when like for example when you go to central London, you have to be different in a certain way, you have to come in a suit probably, all sort of that stuff. Say if you would get a job in central London, you would have to be different than what you really are. Down here you feel more comfortable in the way you dress.

Although in theory David has a "right to the city," as he can enter central London, he is made to feel like a "space invader" (Puwar, 2004, p. 8). His uncomfortable feeling lays bare how intersecting cultural mediations of race, gender and social class impact mobility and "how both spaces and bodies are imagined" (Puwar, 2004, p. 8), segregating the city as some bodies are rendered as neutral occupants who rightfully belong there and others as "out of place" (p. 8). David's neighborhood, Tottenham, is ghettoized in the urban unconscious, and it is often represented in the mainstream media as an urban dystopia, not least as a result of national racial politics, urban alienation, and hegemonic politics of representation of race and class. Yet, for David, who is habituated in the local "code of the street" (E. Anderson, 2000, p. 316), Tottenham feels more like a safe haven (Ilan, 2012). He blends in with his hoodie, baggy clothes, and trainers, which provide him "street social capital" (Ilan, 2012, p. 18). A strong sense of belonging to the urban locale also functions as a way to deal with the overwhelming inequalities of the city, almost an internal justification of a spatial order he knows is more powerful than he.

Illustrating the complex relationship between online and offline experiences, informants project hopes, fantasies, and limitations associated with their abilities to move or to not move in their digital and physical city. Unlike his restricted physical mobility, David regularly surpasses other boundaries digitally. Twitter "shines a brightness," he says, explaining how he finds it a "good way to socialize with people you haven't met" but also a tool to gain a voice, as he did during the London riots: "I wrote something about Mark Duggan, my opinion on why it all started in the first place." Most informants from Haringey live in the district of Tottenham, where the 2011 Blackberry Messenger (BBM) riots started following the escalation of a peaceful protest in response to the police shooting of Mark Duggan, a local mixed-race youth. David adds that the looting was just "pure greed," but the riots were "based on young people and what grudge they held against the police" and especially their "power hunger." David imagines Twitter as a powerful way to engage a wider international audience, and as happened in recent urban riots in the United States, he also used social media to contribute to alternative narratives of urban revolt:

Well, a couple of people responded in a negative way, but when I explained my opinion further they said they understand and agreed with me, so yeah it was pretty cool. . . .
When you are on Twitter . . . it opens your mind a bit more.

Besides, he also uses social media to digitally distribute his music and art: "I've sent out my work . . . I think that actually helped me." Although such narratives can be critiqued for echoing corporate marketing rhetoric of the utopian potential of social media, Tottenham interviewees' investments in digital imaginaries of mobility and visibility also show how they may seek to symbolically contest and overcome constraining materialities of place. Digitally seeking legitimacy, presence, and recognition, David struggles against being the object of representation (S. Hall, 1987).

Against the strong attachment to the neighborhood observed among the socially marginal urban subjects, participants from upper-middle-class families narrate their highly mobile lifestyle, which is generally more detached from their own neighborhood. Reflecting their sense of entitlement, through their narratives of the city they imagine London as an accessible, unbounded, and connected metropolis ready for them to explore. The urban imaginaries of Desire, 15, and Harry, 15, are shared with others in similar social contexts. Desire, who lives in RBKC, said that she was born in London and "all of my family are from here I think." Revealing an instrumental relation with the city, she enjoys London because "you can use it however you want." Similarly, Harry, who lives in HF, says his "parents are both British" and he comes "from like a middle class, White background really." He feels "London is a great place to live in, I mean especially with like transport. . . like I've been like everywhere to go skateboarding," he notes. In his view, "you can get everywhere by direct route, so everyone is connected sort of." The sense of mobility between spaces here is infinite, and it does not necessarily depend on mediated mobilities, as in David's case.

Moreover, the informants from upper-middle-class families often present themselves as global travelers. For example, Skye describes transcontinental air travel as an ordinary routine: "Yeah, we go to Japan sometimes in the summer"; "we go a lot to America as well, that's probably where I got my American accent." While traversing the globe, Skye and other privileged informants use digital connectivities not to expand to new directions but mostly to reaffirm existing connections. After interacting with her TouchGraph Facebook friendship visualization, she notes that she combines video chat and social networking to stay in touch with loved ones overseas: "My family was in France at some point, so we used Skype to keep in touch, which is, I suppose, fun . . . When I am back in America or when I was in India, I used Facebook to contact the family." This is unlike informants from Tottenham, who—as we learned from discussions about transnational connectivity emerging from their Facebook friendship visualization exercises—largely have to rely on digital mediation instead of physical travel for mobility.

For example, Bob, who "came up to this country [England] when I was five," is a 17-year-old Jamaican-born young man who says, "I don't wanna lose contact with my family" overseas. Therefore, he relies on Facebook, WhatsApp, Instagram, and Snapchat to keep in touch with family members living in Jamaica, Canada, and America: "It can generate contact that I want with them. And I just get used to that really, it makes me happy that I can do that, instead of just waiting for years." For Bob and fellow working-class interviewees, transnational air travel is not a given. In contrast, the upper-middle-class informants live a hypermobile lifestyle, as they have the resources to travel widely. Their transnational mobility evokes images of a transcendence of stationary, insular, parochial local life; however, the politics of such privileged frequent-flyer cosmopolitanism might reproduce a privileged globally transferable parochialism.

Who Does the City Belong To? Imagining Urban Moralities

Informants draw on distinct narratives of We-ness and Otherness to differently imagine who the rightful and alien occupiers of urban and digital environments are. Those from working-class environments mostly take for granted living among others whose histories and cultural heritages differ from theirs. Both their physical environment and their digital networks reflect the ordinariness of their proximity to

difference. This is expressed in the ways they talk about their neighborhoods, friends, and schools. Lee, 13, states he is "Scottish," "born here" in London. His narrative reflects the common practical engagement with the local copresence of cultural difference: "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." Similarly, their Facebook friendship networks are extremely heterogeneous. Sammy, 14, "British," describes her friendship network: "I just have a lot of ethnicities, 'cause that's just, like, my school is a mixed public school . . . because I think Tottenham is really like diverse and multicultural." In her view, not many are "like 'pure' British." The banality of exposure to difference is expressed in working-class urban imaginaries, which are primarily driven by direct experience.

The informants from working-class families constantly negotiate sameness and otherness offline and online. Lee, for example, says of going to the mosque with his Somalian friend: "Once, yeah, I'm not even joking, I went to a mosque, just to see how they are praying, done, it's not like I'm disrespecting my God. I just want to learn about other religions." We can infer from Bruno, 17, London-born, who "is, like, Portuguese," that these youth also use social media to engage in informal intercultural learning: He realizes seeing different upbringings in videos on Facebook videos and photographs on Instagram allow him to accommodate other moral registers: "The fact that you're not just locked in what you were brought up in, you can see other things." Tammy, 13, "born here" in London with "parents born in Nigeria," explains that selfies, videos, music, and status updates can give "you an insight into people's lives, and many people might think, Why would you want to know about other people's lives? But it just makes you feel more aware of other people around you." Living in the copresence of difference, young people develop subliminal habits and unconscious reflexes of "seeing the strange as familiar" (Amin, 2012, p. 73). The shared socioeconomic challenges they face feed into an ordinary sense of solidarity incorporated into the juxtaposed experience and imagination of difference and its respect. Visiting a local mosque or learning about cultural practices through Facebook is indicative of a pragmatic politics of difference that is not devoid of moral obligation toward Otherness. Informants' shared attachments to their diverse neighborhoods offers a sense of belonging paired with a common-sense commitment to hospitality through moral gestures such as becoming aware of various local, diverse cultural heritages.

In sharp contrast, those who occupy upper-middle-class settings in RBKC and HF strategically build their imaginaries around ideals such as worldliness, cosmopolitan ethos, and tolerance. Ideological narratives drive their imaginary more than the direct and ordinary exposure to many different experiences of class, religion, ethnicity, and origin. Skye, the frequent flyer we quoted above, says that London's diversity "kind of matches me, because I'm open-minded . . . Londoners are much more informed about when it comes to different cultures . . . they are all very accepting. I don't think there is really that much race issues, or anything." These interviewees' discourses, more than those of their working-class counterparts, focus on diversity as an asset and articulate it more. Jackson, 13, "British," feels London "brings loads of cultures together so you could build on your opinions of what life is, what you should be doing." Henry, 18, who is "half French half Japanese," considers being worldly an important aspect of self-development. He values gleaning information about religion and race from his Facebook friends: "Basically it's all like one click away . . . it kind of, it helps me to be more of an all-round person." What can be observed here is the reflexive awareness of values of tolerance and cultural openness and celebration of the city's diversity.

Yet the expression of such narratives raises the question of whether the recognition of difference has any links to an inclusive politics of solidarity. As Derrida (2001) argued, tolerance is exclusionary; it does not allow for solidarity, as it lacks the ability for empathy and engagement with difference. We see these limits of tolerance, for example, in Billy's narrative. Billy, 18, "British," "born here, raised by British parents," says: "I haven't got anything against anyone . . . You get people from all different races, religions, backgrounds. Yeah I don't mind; they don't affect me in any way." The particular "moral imagination" dominant in his setting legitimize particular "ways of feeling and acting" (Chouliaraki, 2013, pp. 34-44). He tolerates the presence of difference, but he is not "affectable" (Chouliaraki, 2013, p. 44) toward them and cannot imagine their life worlds. Facebook friendship networks of (upper-)middle-class informants show a homogeneous group of especially White, upper-middle-class British peers.

Across all groups of interviewees, friendships reflect the demographics of their educational institutions. Katie explains that her Facebook friendship network mirrors the composition of her Church of England School: "I probably have more White British friends, more than anything else." Similarly, "half French and half English" Namy, 13, says that his Facebook network consists mainly of "European people" because he attends a French school. Importantly, articulations of cosmopolitan narratives often lack reflexivity about privileged youth's own experiences, their class-bounded worlds, and the exclusionary and hierarchical systems these reproduce. In their online and offline everyday lives, upper-middle-class interviewees' social circles tend to be "encapsulated" (Christensen & Jansson, 2015) and dependent on the reproduction of the familiar, which raises questions about the incorporation of parochialism in their worldliness.

In the urban imaginaries of upper-middle-class informants, powerful symbolic systems of class and racial order are reproduced, especially in the use of stereotypes such as "poshies," "chavs," "Black teenagers using Blackberry," and the "White Starbucks girl." These stereotypes, together with youths' digital habitus, discursively reproduce classifications and distinctions (Bourdieu, 1984) and reaffirm boundaries around a particular collective imaginary—which includes some and excludes others and which lacks codes of solidarity but focuses on the boundedness of particularities. For example, hooded Afro-Caribbean young men are stereotypically othered as a danger. Jay, 18, "an ordinary White English guy" states, "We do stereotype them, Black teenagers, they get a lot of the media on them. Which is true, but it can be unsafe at times . . . you do get scared sometimes. Everyone does, because of the stories you hear."

Digital mediation also revolves around moral registers of classification. The poshies define themselves against others, mainly chavs. Claire, 14, who stated "we're all just from England, Wales" describes switching to an iPhone because of the connotations of her previous smartphone: "Blackberry was kind of quite a chavvy thing." She identifies with the digital imaginary of Instagram as shaped by the "classic White girl, so lots of them like Starbucks and Californian lifestyle and that kind of thing. The kind of Instagram of that." This way, she distinguishes herself from working-class young Londoners' social media use: "Quite a certain type of person has that, not more of the chavvy people, they don't really go on Instagram as much in the way that we would use Instagram." Claire took the TouchGraph Facebook friendship visualization exercise (see Figure 1) as an opportunity to stake out her distinctive digital

habitus. At length, she goes on to add that her Facebook posting practices differ widely from chavvy friends:

The things that they post are definitely not what I would be doing, like lots of selfies with tons and tons of makeup and looking pretty fake . . . And it just gives you a really bad impression, because one of the girls, who is really quite chavvy, I sat next to her in a lesson and she turned out to be really nice and me and my friends were chatting with her, but before that we didn't really, we would never have thought of talking to her, 'cause of the things that she posts on Facebook, she comes up as a very different character, you know, trying to be much tougher, but she's just a nice, regular girl.

A recognizable digital disposition functions as an ordering mechanism; it seems to be another way to distinguish oneself and marginalize other, unimaginable lives. This way, digital practices exercise power: they reflect and generate moral templates of action that sustain hierarchical classifications and boundaries between groups of young Londoners.

Exoticizing stereotypes appear as part of many young (upper-)middle-class people's imaginaries of urban subjectivity. Peter, 16, describes himself as being "100% English." He sees himself as "a broad-range person" because for him, "it's not just all Central London." He explains: "I think London is good, because there is a huge mix of landscapes, areas, religions, cultures, and stuff." The richer informants sense London's cultural difference is at their disposal to be consumed. "White British" Katie, 16, desires to meet "people who aren't just like you, otherwise it would just be boring. You want to talk and find about other people's lifestyles." Desires for individual development explain fascinations for the "new and different"; however, being able to transcend the "dull security of sameness" is a privileged form of distinguishing oneself (Nava, 2002, p. 91). Huggan (2001) and May (1996) highlight the exploitative dynamic of privileged White urbanites that exoticize minorities and their cultural practices while using cross-cultural trajectories to distinguish themselves and accumulate cultural capital. Similarly, informants especially in RBKC considered exploring the world during a gap highly favorable. Gap-year backpacking and volunteerism is surrounded by myths of ethical "global citizenship" and of self-making, for those who can afford it (Lyons, Hanley, Wearing, & Neil, 2012). Thus, the question arises whether their embrace of a "global sense of place" (May, 1996, p. 196) is a commitment to a locally situated politics of difference or an excursion to "liven up the dish that is mainstream white culture" (hooks, 1992, p. 21). What kinds of politics of difference emerge in the contrasting cosmopolitan imaginaries of young Londoners?

Urban Politics of Difference: Vernacular and Elite Cosmopolitan Imaginaries

Digital practices and urban narratives reveal the contradictory character of young Londoners' imaginaries of their city and the world. Their ordinary engagements with difference, both through physical encounters and through representations, feed into their urban cosmopolitan imaginaries in extraordinary ways: in their awareness of difference, of other (rightful or invading) urban subjects, of the challenges that physical and mediated proximity to difference present. On the one hand, many of them demonstrate their engagements both with the city of difference and with the values associated with local and global

difference across class and location. On the other hand, they show that cosmopolitanism in the global city is always plural and cannot disguise urban inequalities.

In our research, (upper-)middle-class informants often used discourses of outspoken ideological, liberal cosmopolitanism. Calhoun (2003) describes such cosmopolitanism as making claims to "humanity as a whole" as a "universal good" (p. 538). Abstract, normative imaginaries pertain mainly to resourceful elites. Universalist narratives assume individual freedoms often seen among those in power, who are "able to choose all their 'identifications'" (Calhoun, 2003, p. 536). In general, these informants articulate a politically correct and self-centered project that resonates with postracial discourses of self-improvement. Jonathan, 14, who lives in HF, is half Belgic, and his "mother comes from a North African country." He sees London as a "very accepting city" and feels "we've gotten over racism." Similarly, Nicole, 18, who lives in RBKC and who describes her mother as "English" and her father as "born in the Caribbean, in Trinidad," powerfully says: "There, like, you see a pink person and it wouldn't matter." Such narratives reflect a contemporary liberal upbringing in which race is almost irrelevant and the individual carries responsibility for self-making as part of a privileged and color-blind imaginary of "generalised social equality of opportunities" (Goldberg, 2013, p. 18). A decontextualized cosmopolitan imaginary of "idealized multicultural harmony" (Calhoun, 2003, p. 545) emphasizes individual autonomy and freedom to select belongingness.

This elite cosmopolitan imaginary, based on seemingly deterritorialized, postracial, individual choice and singular personhood is the one that is the most universalistic and most decontextualized, based in insularity and exclusivity. Such a stance reflects early utopian appraisals of the privileged with the intellectual disposition to develop reflexive cultural competencies needed for an orientation of worldly openness for informants who hold it. However, this ideological commitment to cosmopolitanism was reflected neither in their Facebook friendship networks, which primarily reproduced Eurocentric networks of primarily White, upper-middle-class, secular, or Christian contacts, nor in their narrations of fear and offline and online incompatibility with local others.

In contrast, vernacular cosmopolitanism (Werbner, 2008) is more prominent in the case of working-class participants. Without access to an elective, free-floating, nomadic lifestyle, working-class interviewees are exposed to others through their experiences, their urbanity, and their digital connectedness. They construct meanings of cultural diversity that are usually grounded in everyday life and that draw upon their close proximity to difference. As Stuart Hall (2008) puts it in his definition of closely related "cosmopolitanism from below" (p. 345), working-class and migrant subjects have no choice: "culturally, they're living 'in translation' every day of their lives" (p. 347). Participants from working-class families engage in vernacular cosmopolitanism most frequently through their banal, unspoken, and experiential everyday practices. Their tacit and pragmatic engagement with difference is a naturalized lived reality that is less about choice than about survival and the inevitability of urban encounters. As David's use of Twitter to reframe the London riots discussed above illustrates, they try to remake the city from below, online and offline. Instead of detached, their particular solidarities sustain intercultural communication and support networks. In this sense, a diverse context of living enhances an unstable yet realistic urban sense of belonging.

Unfortunately, this stark contrast we emphasized between working- and upper-class cosmopolitan imaginaries is not a simplified rhetorical gesture, but a painful empirical reality. Meanings of urban diversity and of being global and worldly are mythologized in discourses that surround connectivity and that are internalized at the meeting of interviewees' practices and mediated representations of what it means to be young, to live in the global city, and to be online. The contradicting cosmopolitan imaginaries reveal the limits of the mythologized openness of the digitally interconnected world and its stratified order.

Conclusions

As observed across London's territories, the global city's cultural diversity becomes the platform for imagining oneself in the world, and digital connectedness becomes a tool for making worldliness manageable. Urban imaginaries are collective, discursively constructed processes that involve mental mappings of city spaces as sites of opportunity or exclusion. As internalized meaning-making mechanisms for understanding the city, its opportunities, and its limits, they resound stratified physical and digital urban mobilities. When analyzed through the prism of urban imaginaries, young Londoners' digital practices reveal paradoxical engagements with online and offline hierarchical urban life. Functioning as moral registers of classification, their imaginaries revolve around dominant exclusionary narratives, resistance, transnational communication and travel, perceptions of (im)mobility, banal encounters with difference, and global orientations.

Informants from working-class environments are deeply aware of their limited physical mobility and the symbolic and material marginality of their neighborhoods. Their sedentary experiences contrast starkly with the perceptions of nomadic unboundedness and limitless opportunities of those living in (upper-)middle-class settings. The engagement of informants from working-class environments with difference is a naturalized lived reality coupled with an ordinary sense of solidarity that is inevitable and less about choice than about pragmatic coexistence, intercultural learning, and inevitable cultural translation. Against that practice-driven cosmopolitanism, those from (upper-)middle-class families assert a discursive, ideological, postracial cosmopolitan imaginary. Their taken-for-granted mobility enables them to explore difference in London and abroad, but their digital connections enable them to retreat and sustain familiarities, an indication of a globally transferable parochialism. Largely disengaged from the local diverse spatial context they perceived as hostile, they are sheltered and feel at home in elective global and digitally networked bubbles of similarly privileged subjects. Ambiguities do surface among some informants who voice guilt and regret when realizing that their narrow social media friendship networks contradict their cosmopolitan ideals and that their dominant narrative is one of elite, individualistic, unemphatic tolerance and unobstructed mobility.

Increasingly, it is inside and not between and against cosmopolitan discourses that the global city's youths try to find their places in the world. Why does this matter for media and communication studies? In its various incarnations, cosmopolitanism plays a dual role. On the one hand, cosmopolitan discourses turn into shared symbolic tools for narrating urban (digital) experiences and for imagining a world of possibilities that occasionally surpass bounded differences and hierarchies. Cosmopolitanism feeds into imaginaries, in which mythologized and internalized meanings of (digital and physical) mobility open up new avenues for individual and collective identities and professional and social achievement and

occasionally, and when grounded in practice, feed into sensibilities for a politics of solidarity. On the other hand, cosmopolitanism links young people's imaginaries with skills to navigate the city's cultural diversity, its global interconnections, but also its spatial inequalities: As David's words reveal, his vision is to have a voice from the margins heard locally and globally and to achieve a global musical career, all through digital connectivity. In this imaginary, navigating the urban landscape, developing political and professional skills within it, and being digitally connected are necessary ingredients for finding a place in an urban and globalized world.

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