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Bruss

FEMINIST SOLIDARITIES AFTER MODULATION

p.

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Fig. 1. Detail from Hieronymus Bosch, *Ship of Fools* (1490–1500)

punctumbooks

spontaneous acts of scholarly combustion

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Acknowledgments

Since each of us was several,
there was already a crowd
— Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari

This book is the result of an intense research phase with the DFG-funded RTG Minor Cosmopolitanisms at the University of Potsdam. I am grateful for the time and funding that enabled me to do the research that gradually developed into a manuscript and book. But material support, albeit the very foundational possibility for all that comes after, is not all. I remain in awe of my contemporaries, with whom I have conversed, argued, and learned in these years of conducting my research, of the students, co-workers, and conference interlocutors who knowingly and unknowingly shaped my thinking. As in any writing project, the so-called monograph is the result of many tongues, keyboards, technologies, and thoughts, of which I want to name but a few that have been central means of sustenance. Of course, and most centrally, I must extend my gratitude to my mentor Anja Schwarz for all the time and dedication in untangling my thoughts, and the warmth and patience that gave me the strength to articulate what I wanted to say coherently. Thank you for your continued guidance and support, even after our time in Potsdam has ended. I thank Satish Poduval and Dirk Wiemann for being correctives in disciplining my meandering thoughts and flippant tone, and Nishant Shah for teaching me through collaborative work and lived experience. Thank you

Digital Technologies as Globalization: A Universal Paradigm?

In 2015, Amazon deployed a recruiting algorithm that screened incoming applications for suitability for employment. The aim was to rationalize the process and remove human perception biases, so as to make hiring more efficient, inclusive, and standardized across location. Programmers fed the algorithm cvs of people already hired, so that the artificial intelligence would be able to indicate well-suited applicants from a much larger number of applications in the future. Scouring through the application documents, the algorithm could sort applicants according to a complex process of pattern recognition, identifying characteristics that had led to applicants being hired in the past and correlating these with other attributes to define successful combinations. And, indeed, the algorithm was able to produce suggestions that were well-suited hires. But the one thing it did not achieve was to increase diversity — in fact, none of the suggested hires were women* (Dastin 2018).[1] Basing its recognition of what

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1   The asterisk here and elsewhere refers to an acknowledgment of the ambiguities that come with gender terminology. It signals a gap between the algorithmic, biological, structural, and subjective definition of the term "women," which are all at play within this particular situation. More on this later.

would make a good applicant on previous hires, the algorithm scanned through relevant previous experience, educational certificates, and grades. But it also scanned existing employees, rated their vocabulary, their hobbies and names, all of which went into a value-grid definition of a good hire, thus basing the characteristics of a good hire on people already hired. It turns out that this algorithm was effectively downgrading women* and Black and brown folks, and also names, hobbies, and vocabulary associated with these and other groups that do not fit those already overrepresented in the tech sector, white men.

Viewed from a structural point of view, these white men as overrepresentations of — in this case — a good worker are individualized iterations symbolic of a larger liberal bourgeois infrastructure that the Afro-Caribbean philosopher Sylvia Wynter calls the "figure of man" (Wynter 2003). This figure, as Wynter writes, is overrepresented in most configurations and infrastructures that are supposed to address, envelop, or work with the human. The now much-cited example of the recruiting algorithm is but one of many, which shows that seemingly new digital infrastructures build upon and automatize inequalities rooted in historical moments of creating the normative human, which Wynter traces back to colonial conquest and its effects, including the developing of heteropatriarchal gender norms, such as those that become apparent within the division of labor. It is then not surprising that Amazon scrapped the algorithm only after intense reporting on its bias emerged. Rather, given this example and many examples after it, it is surprising that an almost mythical attachment to the certainty, accuracy, and objectivity of technology remains, and there seems to be little serious investment in a critical review of the very basis of the history of technological identification by even critical technologists.[2] Recent examples have shown that women* and queers,

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2   One of the few recent articulations of such a critique that has received attention has been Ramon Amaro's consideration of the "black technical object" (Amaro 2019, n.p.). Amaro reflects on a moment of algorithmic discrimination that resonated throughout the field: Joy Buolamwini's Aspire Mirror project, which made the Black coder notice that the com-

Black and brown people, and those "dysselected" (Wynter 2003) from the figure of the human are not helped by a seemingly more accurate definition of who they are. The Amazon example shows quite the contrary, namely, digital technologies articulate a clear vision of social norms and hierarchies, which define individuals in certain economic capacities, fixating them within these social hierarchies: from above, according to historical functions, and without the ability to change. Understanding these capacities as objective, as exact because of the amount of data that has gone into their creation, misreads the histories of oppression that have led to such power of identification. Technologies created with such an understanding of data thus also naturalize and fixate identities as separate and distant from each other, as inherently different according to ideals of race, class, and gender that can be traced back to the colonial order of the imperial settler state.

Coming from a media studies background that understands new technologies to be, if not determining, then definitely taking part in constructing social, political, and cultural imaginaries, I began this book project from a point of interest in the new grand narrative of the subject that dominant media theory was suggesting. Its presumedly universal applicability clashed with feminist theorizing on situated knowledges and partial perspectives. Meanwhile, examples such as the Amazon applications process suggested that algorithms, if programmed with positive biases, could again produce more egalitarian versions of the world, just as the imaginations preceding these technologies had promised. It was long before their material existence that new technologies like what would grow up to be the internet

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puter vision failed to "see" her if she did not wear a white mask. Fanon's haunting of this scene is almost too exaggerated, but Amaro picks it up nonetheless to describe how any computational recognition of a "black technical object" (Amaro does not capitalize Blackness) as subject will necessarily reduce Black individuals' "lived potentiality" (Amaro 2019, n.p.). The central argument in this book goes in a similar direction in positing a right to live without being identified or recognized by an outside that seeks to fixate "the who, and the what we are" (Wynter 2003, 264).

were imagined as the saviors of humankind, allowing humans to fulfil their modern capacities through unbiased, borderless, and inclusive knowledge production and distribution. Cyberspace, a sci-fi author's dream described as a "consensual hallucination" (Gibson 1984) of minds across location, would fulfil this imaginary by displacing embodied difference and drawing together all existing epistemologies under one global consciousness. Because electronic technologies promised exchange across location, a "global village" (McLuhan 2010), in the form of a relational and disembodied possibility of close connection and access to information, there seemed to be a surplus of hope that these determining technological imaginaries would end inequality (Turner 2008). Technologies such as the internet were repeatedly imagined to provide a "global consciousness" (Nayar 2010, 29), facilitated through easier access to other knowledges and to a cultural plane of disembodied equality, finally fulfilling the promises of modernity to make the world completely known. Underlying this promise was the teleology of universalized human rights, and the belief that technology might eventually transport them to every corner of the world in a stageist and sequential understanding of human development. The questions I take up in this book depart from a point where the internet is increasingly both "over" and ubiquitous — it is almost nostalgic to talk about "cyberspace" — when, de facto, most humans in hegemonic geographies are never offline. Interestingly enough, the language of hope has traveled from early cyberspace to other technologies and is of late in the mouths of AI enthusiasts. It will probably continue in whatever latest tech fad will be trending in the near future. As recent smart gadgets, cognitive networks, apps, and the hype around artificial intelligence suggest, the internet does not end at our screens, but has enveloped us, is all around, and is indistinguishable from a world shaped by historical inequalities. Therefore, this books looks to expand what is meant by "engaging with the digital" in the sense of the segregations it has — historically — brought about: a segregation into binary logics, which seems to make

it increasingly impossible for different social groups to attach themselves to a collective and truly global humanity.

Universal Technologies for a Universal Human?

Publications across the board are proving that the reality most people live in is generally very different from the promises, technological or otherwise, of globalization. It is strange that these imaginaries persist — not because but in spite of networked technologies and the fact that 99 percent of the world's population was and remains excluded from most decisions made around the future of technologies and their effect on the human. The virtual space of the internet had first been construed as something that exists in direct opposition to what is considered to be the offline world and its discriminatory practices, but its reality has instead produced more of the same, in the form of a covert displacement of categories of discrimination, both in practice and theoretical analysis. Instead of overcoming inequalities, digital technologies not only depend on but reproduce the hierarchies of race, class, caste, gender, sexuality, and so on, precisely the terms of discrimination humans were meant to overcome through this "new," globalized, and distinctively modern modality of being (Noble 2018; Benjamin 2019). The benefits of increased connection are predominantly granted to bodies of affluent elites throughout global geographies that assimilate to Western (and specifically Western bourgeois) modalities of living. Meanwhile, the peoples whose bodies often provided the labor power, under precarious conditions, in constructing these technological achievements (Sassen 2012; Nakamura 2014) are still struggling for acceptance within the realm of the human, and remain reduced to objects both online and off.

The focus of this book thus shifted to the relationship between solidarity and objectivity, between identity and those considered as worthy of sameness, or made to suffer because of difference. With Wynter (2003), I understand these conceptions to have failed mainly because the imagined generic human that hides behind the universal is actually quite particular — it

is the Western white cis-het-male bourgeoisie that comes to stand in for the wants and needs of all genres of humanity. New technologies are continuously being deployed to uphold rather than to question this status quo. The repeated newness that contemporary tech trends propose thus very often serves to dehistoricize, to naturalize, and to foreclose alternative visions of a more convivial technosocial future. The seeming objectivity of technology thus was and is a modality that detaches its own effects from the colonial construction of man as the prototypical human, a construction that has material, social, cultural, and epistemic effects on the languages, intelligibilities, and representations that enable individuals to access and participate in the world. In researching for this book, I have turned toward those persistent in creating a different, more diverse imaginary of the human, with and through digital technologies and the cultural opportunities for togetherness and relationality they can produce. Remembering that even this cis-het-male ideal is to some extent imagined means looking beyond the guilty paradigms that essentialize identities, because this merely repeats the colonial trick of certainty that has segregated communities into individual identities, a practice of division I will refer to as modulation.

"Modulation" describes a design decision central to the contemporary internet architecture (McPherson 2012). In Gilles Deleuze's "Postscript on Societies of Control" (1992), he argues that modulation ushers in a new modality of technological governance, where humans are no longer disciplined into intelligibility, but rather made intelligible via their actions and a computer that enumerates these actions into a segregated form. Deleuze exemplifies this via a train pass, which activates and deactivates according to a computational framework that decides when the carrier of the card may use the train. The card affects the user's mobility and access to resources, but does so not because a body has been disciplined, but because it is identified as the card-carrier. Deleuze describes modulation as a code, which shapes a (partial) body or identity into an intelligible form, so as to enable this form access to the social, political, and

public infrastructures of everyday life. Deleuze identifies this shift mainly because he sees the user participate more or less freely, because the options of participation necessitate a form of capture that identifies a user as a subject. He sees this paradigm as central in the computational age of "control" (Deleuze 1992). However, I question whether these forms of subjugation — not only coerced, but also bartered, negotiated, and sometimes agreed to under false pretenses — are not indicative of a form of identification that is not new, but historical.

Deleuze's writing on modulation can be contextualized via early practices of creating social identities as much as by internet architecture, which had been constructed according to rules of modularity at its center. Modulation becomes the primary organizing function within the UNIX operating system developed at midcentury, under which many other categories and processes of distinction are subsumed into the architecture's backend (McPherson 2012). As a result, the interface appears as clear and legible (or intelligible), but any messy entanglement or connection would be woven into backend code and become increasingly invisible. The internet represents a way of seeing and identifying that is itself influenced by a modular that produces whiteness and maleness as prototype, because the fluidity or multiplicity of racial and sexual terms of belonging cannot be accounted for in a space that consists of clear-cut categorizations. Even if the programmers at the time may not have understood their work to be tied to racial paradigms, their class-specificity as white males in the 1970s inscribed their code with a specific common sense, which catered to Cold War anxieties about security and decomplexified available data through modulation and filtering (McPherson 2012). McPherson argues that this new media architecture, which furthered the compartmentalization of knowledge under the paradigm of efficiency, effectively created simplified regimes of visibility. It is not that things really are compartmentalized, they just appear that way, because the constant connections that networked computers necessarily make are hidden, not cut.

Modulation, as central to the Deleuzian analysis of control societies, does not arise only in the late 1990s. Instead, the paradigm of control as enumeration and modulation needs to be expanded, as it informs and connects to the violence of the colonial state. It is here that notions of rationality, of modular identity as a form of control, and the inscription of whiteness as infrastructure and norm are formed. "Modulation" can therefore be expanded as a term that considers the scientific paradigm of data and categorization as the foundation of knowledge about social cohesion. This paradigm becomes evident within early scientific methods,[3] and the way they are connected to the emergence of identification and, by extension, to social, racial, and gendered identities. In this *longue durée* of modulation, the term can come to stand in for material infrastructures that categorize individuals into types, as algorithms do, but also in terms of identity politics and solidarity collectives as a grouping together through the acknowledgment of shared oppression. This opens up the terms of "technology" and "digitality" to more general practices of classification and identification, which always also produce the uncomputable, the uncategorical, the excess. An acknowledgment of these excesses also allows for something else to come into view. If, indeed, the categories

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3   As early as 1751, Denis Diderot pinned his hopes for changing and improving society on the dissemination of knowledge about the mechanical arts. Technology, he believed, would help to restructure society, and his writings level the previous hierarchization between *epistemé* (as philosophy, cognition, knowledge) and *techné* (as the mechanical arts and practiced skill), situating science, technology, and innovation as central to modernity and opposing religious rule. Diderot begins to conduct an endeavor that categorizes and classifies knowledge and learnings, and thus creates the first collectively sourced encyclopedia. Diderot's *Encyclopédie* came to be known as the first systematic, collective enterprise designed to organize all knowledge of the sciences, arts, and technology in a format accessible to the "educated everyman" (Wolfe 2013, n.p.), and with Diderot, the mechanical arts are uplifted into the realm of cognition and knowledge (Weibel 2012). In conjuncture with a modular ideology, this mechanical knowledge enables a deployment of sciences in the service of democracy, and Weibel describes the *Encyclopédie* as the initiating chapter of the (French) revolution (Weibel 2012).

and models that digital infrastructures are continuously fine-tuning produce ever-new excess, then the call for more data, more verifiability, more precise information will never lead to more clarity in any way that is valuable for the already marginalized individual, much less when that individual's identity corresponds with historical inequalities.

The acknowledgment of practices rather than essences of the human questions the boundaries humanity has constructed around itself, and the infrastructures that repeat, automatize, and normalize its boundedness. I see mechanical, artifactual, digital technologies as participating in the co-construction of what it means to be recognized as human. As I hope to show, race and gender *are* technologies, because they are what makes the human intelligible to the social, just as they are themselves categories defined and reworked *through* technologies and the social. In such an understanding, technology can no longer respond to universal panics and crises, but may reveal its ideological framings and enable an interrogation into the mono-humanistic ideals upon which these developments are often constructed. This also means that what makes an identity raced or gendered is not something an individual can decide solely for herself. Identity is not arbitrary, but the result of a complex array of histories of identification and the material organization of the social and constant resignifications and articulations of self. New technologies inherit and draw upon ideals of the past, which they identify, repeat, and automatize, but not without potential for resignification. These factors of identification evoke the histories of producing identity markers and by extension also the people that bear them (Hacking 2006), but it is not to say that there is nothing distinct about the present moment or the way informational systems are organized. However, the constant framing of emerging technological gadgets and systems as radically innovative and new, more often than not forces ruptures into a genealogical understanding of technology as an expression of science and modernity. Equally, the temporality of networked computing has unsettled a linear understanding of time, because immediacy, ephemerality, and simultaneity

seem to mark the experience of the internet (Chun 2008, 2016; Sharma 2014; Wark 2016).

Technologies, then, are more than tools, they are cultural and symbolic artifacts, immersive systems, and more-than-human practices. Further, they intervene into notions of the human from the start, constructing "the human" as a specific figure, against which lived reality is measured, at least since the nineteenth century, when imperial obsession with categorization was at its peak (Pugliese 2010). The suggestion in media theory predominantly seems to be that with new media and communication forms also come new modalities of capitalist subjugation, but I want to suggest that the categories and modalities of discrimination beyond this figure of man have largely remained the same, only dysselecting increasingly more people according to varying categories. Technology in its dominant framework is thus complicit in identifying more and more people as deviant, moralizing more and more practices as divergent. Instead of succumbing to the suggestion of radical newness, I thus search for digitality's historical precursors in their ability to create certain bodies as other against the foil of white maleness. In this, I follow those theorists who have worked to displace the logic of newness when talking about (digital) media (Arnold 2005; Balsamo 2011; Passig and Scholz 2015; Chun 2016), and have addressed dominant technological theories of globalization in their situatedness within geopolitical and historical contexts and as artifactual expressions of a whole range of practices of dominance and governance (da Costa and Philip 2010; Srinivasan 2019). This goes against the idea of technology as progress and especially big technology as equally relevant to all humans across the planet. The claim to a "globalization of consciousness" (Nayar 2010) that arrives with technological connectivity supposes that such global processes tend to uplift more traditional groups marginalized in their home locations to a more advanced global and universal state of being, framed in terms of solidarity becoming objec-

tivity.[4] But feminist and postcolonial theory has questioned the valence of this argument for decades, pointing instead toward the situatedness of these knowledges, the neocolonial thrust of such hegemonic assumptions, and arguing against the "view from nowhere" that Western science and media theory specifically seems to inhabit (Rich 1985; Minh-ha 1989; Haraway 1988; Mohanty 2003; Gajjala 2004).

It is in this seemingly objective way that Western hegemony continues to proliferate narratives of superiority over the parts of the world deemed less progressive, less technologically saturated, less prosperous, without interrogating the histories of colonialism that effected this disjuncture. In effect, the time/space compression attributed to new media is considered to homogenously produce emancipatory modalities of living and being together. Labor has been a central aspect of this seeming new equality, but the historical examples show that, for example, precarious migrant labor does not give the migrant access to the wealthier settler societies she travels to. However, digital platforms have begun picking up on this narrative to promote crowdworking and cloudworking, for example, through platform-based microtasks, such as teaching algorithms to recognize images in their content (Jones 2020). In addition to proposing such labor to be a new form of development aid, these programs buy into the notions that individuals can, indeed are supposed to, stay in their countries of origin to participate in the global distribution of wealth. The truth is oftentimes quite the opposite. I hope to show in this book how material, colonial, and identity-based regimes of oppression not only co-

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4 The question of "solidarity or objectivity?" was put forth by Richard Rorty in an eponymous article in 1989. Here, he argues for an ethnocentrism, which could be understood somewhat in the same vein as Donna Haraway's situated knowledges. But it is this idea of situatedness that I want to question as not only shifting and relational in the present moment, but always already. More importantly, what I find productive in Rorty's opposition is an understanding of solidarity as a framework of knowledge and recognition. Solidarity is epistemological as much as it is a practice with material effects.

constitute each other but are inscribed into technological infrastructures from the very beginning, in a socio-technological or even techno-political structuring of bodies and identities, in the opportunities they have to address the state, and each other.

For, despite the constant expansion of capitalist and neocolonial technological regimes (Couldry and Mejias 2018), more and more marginalized peoples find a voice via digital technologies and platforms that are often regarded merely under a lens of repression and data-panic. Of course, the theorists pointing out the exploitation of peoples through artificial intelligence and platforms gamified to harvest data are making a very important point. But it is not the only point. In order to fully grasp the potential of technologies and their use value, we need a perspective of technology and its imaginaries that focuses on local, situated, and politically grounded realities. This leads me to go beyond singular normative and hegemonic understandings so as to both recognize and critique the supposed spread of Western technology as is assumed through the model of "diffusion" criticized within postcolonial science studies (Anderson 2018), and reformulate technological imaginaries and practices as they actually exist in quotidian lives and for specific groups of marginalized populations. Taking up the challenge, this book turns toward the lived forms in which technology is appropriated and reimagined to serve marginalized bodies in spite of digital media's rationalizing and universalizing imaginaries of the human, materialized as Wynter's man. Arguably, it is precisely the overlap between digital networks and marginalized bodies — anonymous, multiple, and global (Steyerl 2012) — that allows for a recovering of relations and entanglements beyond the modular internet interface routed almost entirely through multinational corporations. Certainly, speaking out online will not end capitalism or produce a world in which all subalterns experience freedom. But given two certainties — one, that the subaltern must be involved in her own liberation, and the other, that what Wynter (2003) calls "dysselection" is an ever-expanding process — the internet can be a way of addressing inequalities, finding peers, and organizing in groups, for a user

to become the author of her own life, recognize herself standing on the outside, and find herself, as Audre Lorde observed, standing there with others. It is this recognition of the outside that posits solidarity as one of the effects of capitalism, when individuals recognize how they are thrown together in shared oppression (Lorde 2007).[5] A whole range of turned-global social movements have been able to share resources via digital space and have been able to work on a shared language of justice and human rights from below, where locally distinct communities may learn from each other and thus share a form of resistance that addresses infrastructures of inequality already long global (Jha and Kurian 2018). *Solidarity,* a concept that may seem overworked and meaningless in academic discourse, becomes a central theme of this book in the hopes of thinking of technologies that bring together instead of segregate — in refusal or opposition to the individualization and alienation brought forth by the neoliberal condition.

On an economic level, globalization has offered varied economic experiences, making some richer and the already poor poorer, but Fredric Jameson (2000) in the West and Kancha Ilaiah (2003) in the South have suggested that different levels of globalization may offer different channels of autonomy and subjugation. As this book will show, they also offer new modalities of engaging in minor-to-minor solidarity, always in response to the historical figurations that have placed these spaces as separate in the first place. What is flippantly referred to as "the digital" can be reformulated in terms of its effects, instead of its supposed immateriality, or the object fetish expressed by technological

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5   This book centers most on the promise that this recognition might create a shared space, in which difference can be renegotiated. I would like to acknowledge here that this renegotiation on the level of identity must be accompanied by material politics, class politics. The arguments made in this book are but a first step, in the hopes of a return to an understanding of how many people are actually finding themselves on this outside — not to claim that this outside is the same for everyone, but to argue for a discursive turn away from squabbling over representational scraps and toward a recognition of the modulated majority that has everything to gain.

determinism: quite often, the object itself is not the only place where effects of the digital materialize. This suggestion leads me to approach the material underlying this book in a "diffractive" (Barad 2007) manner. Taking the term from Donna Haraway, Karen Barad elaborates upon "diffraction" as, most simply, viewing something through something else to reveal its relations and differences. Barad argues for a change in frames of reference, to see what relational entanglements but also produced differences may occur between the two material fields. I thus read digital technologies in their lineages, as affecting sensation and creating embodiment beyond the notion of the spectacular in which the linkage of technology and newness often functions.

Such developments have rendered the initial imagination of a new space for free and open access to diverse knowledges from across the globe a chimera. But I hope to show that technologies, rather than being the determinants of our situations, as Friedrich Kittler (1986), the grand theorist and *enfant terrible* responsible for the contemporary centrality of media studies as grand narrative in the West, has prominently claimed, are shaped, appropriated, and reused in spite of their subjugating powers and intentions. This insight is central to the critique of a computational imagination that suggests only technological solutions for social change (Morozov 2013). It also offers a critique of Kittler's fetishization of ancient Greece as the root of technology, mathematics, and the alphabet, but it left me swimming in a hybrid space between media theory, postcolonial studies, critical race theory, and feminist epistemologies of science and technology. Borrowing from all of these disciplines, this book presents an attempt to look at both the effects of media ubiquity and its possibilities for a critical political subjectivity that is situated, historical, but also collective and multiple in ways that dominant strains of media theory continue to negate.

Science, Technology, Gender: A Situated Perspective

The two locations central to this book are Germany as one of the states claiming modernity and progress in the heart of

Europe, and India, the biggest democracy of the world and Britain's largest (post)colony. One might think that this is a rather volatile choice of situatedness, and of course, the two countries/cases touch upon various other spaces (Namibia, for one), just as there could have been others at this book's center. Germany and India have created distinct hegemonies of technological subjectivity, which have effected specific experiences of marginalization. But they also share historical and material ties in their identities, politics, and solidarities that are both minor and major. Germany's colony South West Africa bordered on one of the first trading posts of the East India Company at the Western Cape, and the British Empire saw an exchange of colonial subjects going back and forth between India and southern Africa. These countries and ex-colonies also have their own stories to tell on how technological imaginations shaped their respective cultural bodies, beyond a homogenous idea of top-down diffusion in times of inclusion and diversity. They both are locations that struggle with the exclusionary return of far-right national rhetoric of a racially homogenous people, thus in some way imagined as pure, among other things, either because of or despite technology.

But the history of colonization has also ambiguated notions of place, national identity, and belonging. Not only did Gandhi travel to South Africa from India in the initial period of German occupation of southern Africa's western coast, but South–South solidarities also existed across geographies from those early moments on. Despite Gandhi's expressed disdain for Indians being grouped as lesser together with Blacks in South Africa at the dawn of the twentieth century, Jawaharlal Nehru and what would become his postindependence cabinet strongly advocated for Namibian independence even before 1947. After independence, India was a strong advocate for Namibian independence and was the first country to take up relations with the South West Africa People's Organization (SWAPO), which established its first foreign embassy in New Delhi in 1986, when many countries, especially West Germany, still considered it a terrorist organization. Although southern Africa plays a somewhat mar-

ginal role in this book, the former colonies on the African continent are a vital part of *German* histories and sensibilities, and I invoke the history of German South West Africa as such.[6] For this reason, I attach my analyses to formal points in hegemonic narratives of history that may seem already rather well established to argue how these moments have segregated solidarity relations apart, and how certain framings of nation and identity are crafted with and through technology to the effect of either undermining or stabilizing the hegemonic narratives. In both contexts (settler cultures and the cultural space of colonized peoples), I see the disavowal of enfleshed materiality go hand in hand with a disavowal of a concrete marginal and multiple subjectivity, mostly in the name of better governance.

I elaborate upon these contexts through digital feminist movements that I incorporate as knowledge producers in the same way as one might academic books. The result lends itself to a somewhat interdisciplinary understanding of method and theory. But this interdisciplinarity is urgent for the point I hope to make, and it builds upon long years of theoretical questioning of the boundaries between objects of knowledge and the subjectivities that they produce. I understand the practices and infrastructures within these movements to be equally relevant to formations of digital subjectivity. They should thus inform experts in the fields of the digital as well as researchers interrogating media on a philosophical or artifactual level. I draw on interviews and conversations with feminist practitioners com-

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6   I do so, possibly, in too marginal a frame, just as I gloss over the difference in state reasons in postwar Germany, when calling upon merely the sensibilities of a united nation founded in 1871. These decisions are pragmatic, but they also base themselves in acknowledgments that hegemonic (state) narratives have in the past done little to acknowledge and politicize the experiences of minority groups in meaningful ways or without political pressure. To untangle all these relations through shifting states and national boundaries would take another book. South Africa and the German colonial settlement in South West Africa are thus spaces indicative of a Black presence within German state reason, a Black presence that has been forcefully occluded again and again, and which I think important to acknowledge.

fortable in the digital, as well as experiences of living and engaging with their practices and representations online. I have thus immersed myself into different settings of what has been called "cyberfeminism," "netfeminism," or "digital feminism," drawing upon representational forms, such as hashtags, websites, and blog posts, but also on the offline practices and realities surrounding the practitioners in a localized setting.

"Solidarity" seems a befitting term to guide my quest of finding minds and bodies that stand together through and with technological means of identification that have a history of inserting divisions. The term undermines the language of development and monohumanistic teleologies, to instead propose mutual learning, disagreement, and struggles with and through difference (Minh-Ha 1989; Mohanty 2003; Weis 2011). Minor–minor solidarities, such as between migrant women* from different countries, between Black and disabled women*, between queer folks of different locations, and so on, are central not only because one identity may be partially found in another, but because true liberation is only achieved through everyone's liberation. I will state again that marginalized groups across the world are showing up for each other *despite* of and *because of* the technological imaginary that is spelled out in terms of singular identities that undergo control, subjugation, and homogenization, proving that such an imaginary need not be overstated as the only avenue of thought. It was with these diverse and open communities that I learned about the political choices that made technological societies control societies. And in recognizing that such control was often exerted in the name of protection, I learned from those often deemed to require it most in national narratives across the globe — its women*. Following my first research stay in India more than a decade ago, the lens of feminism was still and more than ever pressing on my mind. I had interrogated the openness of my feminism, and the blind spots that my research in India confronted me with. This in turn made me interrogate my own standpoint and assumptions — because my culturally multilateral background gave me only a fuzzy sense of belonging, which had shifted according to the cultural

hegemony of the many places I have called home. If anything, I knew that racialization shifted, but also that these notions of identity were part of a material setup, one that was historical and global, just as it had contemporary and situated iterations that were discursively sedimented. In some ways, this book thus hopes to undo the certainty of place that colonial geographies have inserted into the world, but also to acknowledge that this is a dangerous undertaking that must be done with much care, so as not to override the specific importance of place within certain spaces opposing colonial violence. A central theme of this book is that identity expression is always a momentary and multiple thing, but that, in its collective mode, it becomes historical, material, and fixated, paradoxically, in a way that opens itself up to fluidity and excess. This is not opposed to the original thrust of identity politics as it stems from Black and brown feminism, but definitely in opposition to contemporary white nationalist frameworks of identity politics that either harness an essentialist ideal of whiteness or denote all minority rights claim as identity-driven cancel culture. Identity politics is a material struggle as much as it is a discursive or epistemic one. Quite frankly, this has been its impetus from the very beginning (hooks 1989; Minh-ha 1989; Mohanty 2003; The Combahee River Collective 2014; Haider 2018). As I hope to show, the transnational and hybrid form of digital space has served to establish feminist critique and solidarities, bringing together a seemingly global cultural formation of women* that addresses incidents of patriarchy within very localized and quotidian contexts, which are nonetheless structured by multiplicity and openness. I understand the terms in which their alterity informs their oppression as also being the basis for action — instead of fixating this alterity, throughout the book "otherness" as "dysselection" and "sameness" at the margins move and interact in and across asymmetrical power relations, complicating fixed notions of identity. Not only can these formations, accumulated here under the umbrella term "women*," express more radical demands than the concept and place nation-states provide for them, but subaltern women* may suddenly receive attention

from public-service and private-sector media alike, an attention that situates them firmly within conditions of modernity that subjugate and enable women* at the same time. I learned that many of these practices and narratives of solidarity, connectivity, and togetherness are rooted in the working ways of technological infrastructure, but are dismissed and made precarious politically through technological language of solutionism (Morozov 2013) that uncritically resides within and continues to normalize narratives of victimhood and protection through more technologies, more surveillance, more punitive measures (Kovacs and Ranganathan 2017; Brazzell 2018).

In this vein, my hopes of learning from and for feminism stem from a personal investment in feminist practice and theory. I have followed suggestions such as those of Kim TallBear, who states a feminist ethical imperative to study a community whose projects one can root for and be invested in (TallBear 2014). I therefore perform my research mindful of a feminism that "cares for the subject" (TallBear 2014, 5, citing Schuurman and Pratt 2002) — as TallBear notes, feminist theorists such as Donna Haraway do not just study certain worlds, they live in them. In this vein, I, too, see this endeavor as not only a theoretical questioning of knowledge and technological rationale, but also as a political choice to center on certain modalities that may displace other harmful ones. I began this research also in the hopes of making myself a stronger and more accountable feminist ally. The book is thus motivated and framed by the specificities of my own life and also the capacities that I may build upon for feminist political work, so as to one day not only give back to the feminist community but also "stand with" (TallBear 2014, 5) the possibility of intersectional feminist futures beyond the preemptive capacity of digital technologies and modular forms of categorizations. I turned to feminism(s) and their engagements with digital technologies and media in the hopes of finding forms of solidarity and community-building beyond the limitations of neoliberal globalization and the continuation of Western hegemony in narratives of control, but also in light of a returning neofascism and right-wing nationalism across

location. In part, I see these crises become legible very forcefully now, because the framing of technology in the language of newness has decontextualized the historicity of identity politics and hate speech, while amplifying the presentist sense of crisis of nation, economy, security. However, social media is also an example that allows for a multiplicity of voices, truths, and positionalities in the public sphere, which has amplified Black and brown communities, just as the old hegemony reacts to this perceived loss of power with reactionary terms, such as "cancel culture," "genderism," or "overemotionality."

What Women*?

Throughout the introduction, I have deployed categories of identity without much explanation, because the frameworks of identity are fraught, ambivalent, and intersubjective. And yet I do not want to repeat the overrepresentation I aim to criticize, for indeed the book might not speak to feminisms everywhere. The book focuses primarily on women* and their technological practices, and how these may alter an understanding of the stories being told about computers and new media technologies as carriers of cultural imagination. But the notion of women* should not be understood merely in terms of a biogenetic essentialism; indeed, the term "women*" (like other identity concepts) is considered an open term continuously being worked on and should be thought of as always carrying an asterisk to point toward its openness and cultural, material, technological, and subjective construction. The preceding sentences provide me with a perfect example of the way language and code ingrain themselves from technological to social perceptions, producing gender *as technology.* The category of "women*" is understood here to never fully exhaust itself through an exclusionary framing of what a woman is, the asterisk is an example of the way media logics have saturated everyday political contexts and frame identities. Before Google's search engine would suggest alternative spellings and things the user might have meant in their search query, the asterisk served to search

for content beyond the search word, for example, other words with the same prefix. In this way, typing "trans*" would give the searching user contexts to transsexualism, transgenderism, and so on, and allow for broader search results than just the mere prefix itself. The asterisk leaves a representational gap that can be filled with almost anything. In a similar vein, I use the term "woman*" to refer to nonwhite women*, femmes and queers, people who self-identify as women*, inter, trans, two-spirits, and hijras, basically anyone who does not consider themselves a cis-gendered male (a term to describe people whose assigned gender and lived gender and sexuality coincides with their bodies being read and understood as male, and therefore have privileged positions within their society). In the same vein, I refer to individuals with they/them pronouns, unless I know of specific desires to be addressed otherwise. The connotations of they/them and women* are not mutually exclusive. But even though the asterisk has been intended to gather irritation up until this point, I will drop it from now on, because the terms of sociotechnical constructions have now been established, and it should not appear gimmicky. The term "woman/women" (even without the asterisk) will be used interchangeably throughout with any of those positions that I read to not belong to a normative framework occupied predominantly by the male. However, in speaking of and to specific individuals, I will of course use their gender preferences.

Indeed, paying close attention to the histories of technology and reading these against histories of marginalization can show how deeply ingrained the language and imagination of technology is with raced and sexed anxieties about identity and its place within a liberal-economic structure. In other words, how the West has come to know and understand technologies is deeply intertwined with how it understands and deploys categories of race, sex, gender, and so on, in a world made by slavery, colonialism, capitalist accumulation, and the enclosure of the commons (Federici 2014; Chude-Sokei 2015). As this book will show, technology becomes both a source and a consequence of gender and race relations: race, but also gender, must be read

"as/and technology" (Chun 2009), as artificial and produced, inscribed into materiality and distributed through technological infrastructures, but also the driving force behind technological advancement. But if technology is entangled with the human in such a way, then change is possible from both conceptual points of interrogation, since one influences the other. This system is not only reciprocal but also arguably open to additions and mutations. Framing technology in this multilateral way allows this book to focus on the capacity of marginalized people to appropriate and refunction technologies for means to critique precisely these existing systems they stem from, and through them become authors of their own lives.

The axis of solidarity, therefore, is a welcome trajectory that allows me to complicate the positing of Western imports versus Indigenous values, of authenticity within seemingly separate and incommensurable cultures, but these registers of questioning will reappear throughout this work at different stages. They do so, however, mainly through a critique of both cultural essentialism and any notion of authenticity, and without supposing that there is only the one true way of being an agent, a feminist, or a representative of a (cultural) community, or only one way of universalizing the wants and needs of one community to impose them on another. Therefore, the aim may also be to a certain extent to "provincialize"[7] Europe's narrative of technological progress and see it as always already in constant exchange with and appropriation of its colonial territories, even as these, too, have always harbored their own narratives

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7   Because this is a feminist project first, let me note that Dipesh Chakra-barty, the originator of the term "provincialize," has been accused of sexual violence several times and has yet to face any consequences. I believe these stories and do not want to set aside the effect that these women's experiences have had, not even for the duration it took me to use this term. Therefore, I will not be giving the term more currency, and it will not matter beyond its very obvious use at this point. The reason I do use it is because it is one of the central modalities of talking about decentering the West. Precisely this point also allows me to write this footnote, instead of simply invisibilizing the discussions around Chakrabarty by using another term.

and imaginations of technology as a place and source of Indigenous power and value (Arnold 2005). In this endeavor, I follow feminist writers such as Chandra Talpade Mohanty, Donna Haraway, Jodi Dean, and others, who think about solidarity in terms of mutuality, relationality, and accountability — the recognition of an extension of self across difference and toward a commoning and rebuilding of inhabitable worlds, especially for those that still suffer violence within these registers, violence that is often justified, articulated, even critiqued through ideals of rationality, belonging, and the package of modernity that remains contained within monohumanistic ideas of what it means to be human (Wynter 2003). In this vein, and following Wynter, the discussions and analyses brought forward within this book aim to destroy the generalizing thrust of Western bourgeois conceptions of gender and also concern themselves with the hope for new "genres" of being, within and beyond the human (Thomas 2006). Therefore, and again I follow Mohanty here, seeing technologies in the hands of feminist solidarities that are decolonial, anticapitalist, and internationalist may both produce new knowledge and offer "profound transformations of self, community, and governance structures" (Mohanty 2003, 7).

Given the array of questions the situation described just above offers, it was difficult to find a paradigm from which to explore the gathered materials. I was asking myself questions about which women, which bodies, which perspectives I was talking about, in a space that was so hybrid that it seemed impossible to make any statement that would hold true beyond the context in which it was made. The internet as infrastructure, communication, marketplace, self-expression platform, and many other things was offering so many varied ways to see women, while feminist concerns online seemed to be increasingly responding to an understanding of security that excluded certain women and queers, especially Black and brown women. And then #metoo happened. The movements I was already doing research on were also concerned with multiple facets of violence, but #metoo made it blatantly clear to me that the category I was researching was a convergence of spaces saturated by

media and claims to veracity and intelligibility, and these media ecologies had fervent critics within feminist activism against violence of all sorts and nuances and were also encouraging women to become political agents against this violence through simple methods, such as storytelling in public. This understanding led to a resolve of whether I was doing feminist research or research on women (I was afraid of implying heterosexual or biological essentialism with the latter, even with the asterisk), and I ground the result of this resolve in Angela Davis, who in the 1980s stated this "awesome fact":

> After ages of silence, suffering and misplaced guilt, sexual assault is explosively emerging as one of the telling dysfunctions of present-day capitalist society. The rising public concern about rape […] has inspired countless numbers of women to divulge their past encounters with actual or would-be assailants. As a result, an awesome fact has come to light: appallingly few women can claim that they have not been victims, at one time in their lives, of either attempted or accomplished sexual attacks. (Davis 1983, 101)

With Davis, I grasp women as those who have become victims, at one time or another, of gender-based violence, but also point out their marginalization through capitalism per se, which makes every feminized body vulnerable to potential assault, and assault an assertion of power to maintain monohumanism. I realize that with this comes the problematic of framing "woman" as a category of victimhood, just as this assumption runs the risk of essentializing heteronormativity as the only source of violence, or cis women's bodies as the only recipients of such violence. This is of course not the case. Women are the entry point into this analysis, but I have already mentioned, and want to accentuate again, that this category is ambivalent and can never truly exhaust itself and is vital for understanding the violence that stems from regimes of capitalist and modern heteropatriarchy. Gender-based violence is an individualized effect of violent structures that punishes people for the differ-

ence these very structures have created. It systemically targets women, but that does not mean that other people who become feminized within intelligible aspects of the political are not vulnerable to it. The conditions of identity are material, as are the violent means to keep them in check. "Woman" thus becomes a paradigmatic concept (rather than an identity) to describe the violent effects of the contemporary informational architectures on both individual embodied positionalities and the structural positioning of women as somehow outside of solidarity movements that classically addressed the worker as male. I speak of violence as environmental — violence that does not need to go as far as rape, or even sexual assault, to be understood as specifically gendered. Rather, the embodied reality of not being included in the framing of man is one of violence, for femininity is constantly misrecognized, belittled, excluded, invisibilized, addressed, and expected to behave in certain ways, just as structures of global capitalism subjugate women into free labor and precarious working conditions or self-exploitation under the guise of freedom to have it all. Like digital infrastructures, gender-based violence has become elusive, hard to pin down, environmental, and thus sometimes visible only in its effects.

At the same time, social networking technologies have developed to construct spaces where violence against women is as unchartered as in the clinics and decrees of colonial regimes. The internet has become a space in which nonwhite, non-European, and nonmale users are identified and targeted, especially if they attempt to take part in shaping public discourse in counterhegemonic ways. Women suffer disproportionally from such attacks, but are also made precarious by public institutions that have not only misrecognized gendered violence online (such as revenge porn, trolling, doxing, and hate campaigns that are, in overwhelming majority, aimed at women), but actually target (only) women and slut-shame them for internet usage that is considered improper, such as sending or posting images of their dishabille or nude selves (Chun and Friedland 2015). With Wynter, it is then necessary to revise the very way that knowledge about these realities is produced. These forms of violence

not only rest within but are also often supported by contemporary technological infrastructures that have occluded their own historical lineages. As a result, it seems much more likely that posts will be flagged as hate speech when the poster is Black, brown, queer, or female than if a white supremacist, while the mere mention of whiteness becomes hate speech before an algorithm that has only learned to identify expressions of difference. This has been reported across all major social media platforms, and continues to be a problem despite the companies' apologetic vows to curb spiteful and aggressive behavior. The independent LGBTQI+ magazine/newsletter *Salty* has asked its members to contribute to a survey on content policing of marginalized communities on Instagram and Facebook, with devastating results. Of all respondents, queer and trans people, plus-sized bodies, and body-positive advocates were more likely to have their content flagged as problematic and taken down, mostly with no further reasoning than that they had "violated community guidelines" (Salty 2019, n.p.). A TikTok scandal, where the visibility of user content was limited when these users were identified to be queer, fat, or disabled, made the company issue a statement that these so-called shadow bans had been deployed for these user's safety, in a paternalistic response to potential harassment that says a lot about hegemonic responses to marginalized notions of safe spaces. The Salty Mag survey shows how the same technological possibilities are clearly implemented with varying results, the concern seems to lie more with the visible terms of inclusion than with actual diversity. In the same vein, as anyone using the internet may know, white supremacist hate speech across platforms is rampant, and to have actual hate speech against marginalized communities deleted is a long and arduous process. This seems to be the case across the board, with incidents of critique against or references to white or bourgeois superiority being shut down or deleted as hate speech when coming from marginalized groups, such as Dalits, Jews, and Black and brown (and to a certain extent also neuroqueer or differently abled) women.

Road Map

This book identifies two moments of the digital, which can to a point be read against each other. The first delineates many of the critical aspects of, and perspectives on, technology and its simultaneous capture and exclusion of the marginalized body; the second builds on these same knowledges to center upon the aspects of relation. Both aspects produce race, gender, and caste as legible through, and as aspects of, technology. I understand the first to construct a genealogy of the digital in the sense of grounded theory, producing concepts out of historical and empirical data to argue for the practices of the digital in their political implications — something I will explore through Wynter's idea of "dysselection" read together with the Deleuzian concept of "modulation." Technology, here, becomes a lens through which to see the continuity of racial ideology and its practice of creating difference, sometimes through proposing sameness. But this difference is always in opposition to man, and so this creation of difference may create commonalities along the margins of the figure of man the dysselected differentiate from.

Chapter 1 will begin with a brief assessment of internet history in order to discuss cultural imaginaries inscribed into it and the framing of newness that allowed internet pioneers to sideline historical questions of race and gender in a "settler move to innocence" (Tuck and Yang 2012). I pick up on internet architecture and how the digital came to be understood as immaterial, which enables the ahistorical framing of technology as utopian to emerge within the Californian hacker ideology. This ideology, commonly referred to as "cyberlibertarianism," must be understood as a repetition of previous universalizing tendencies, just as it proposes a rupture with real-world problems. I argue that material artifacts functioning according to digital logics have assisted this cyberlibertarian figural subject's connection with objectivity and that this configuration invisibilizes its own conditions of creation. Chapter 2 shows how this practice can be traced back to the colonial setting, exemplified within German South West Africa, where the need to visibly

differentiate between colonizer and colonized first introduced the need for technologies of identification, creating race as/ and technology (Chun 2009). Chapter 3 rearticulates this perspective from the position of the Global South, attempting to criticize the problematic hegemony of a national identity that fails to recognize the lived reality of difference that has come to be a reality through colonial modalities of governance. I depart from the Gandhian invocation of technology as rigidifying the boundaries between India and the West to delineate its failures in addressing the diversity of Indian necessities after the violence of colonialism. I invoke both India and Germany not as a comparison of the West and the rest in binary opposition. Rather, I see the described instances as modular moments from two spaces so fundamentally different, and historically oppositional, that it was quite surprising at first to find similar repressive and marginalizing tendencies within them, given the argument above about the situatedness of knowledge and governance. But this emphasis on similarity stresses the weight of metanarratives that overrepresent the wants and needs only of specific communities under the guise of universal rights (Wynter 2003), and stresses how these translate into material distribution and forms of recognition. That both these histories are evocative within present negotiations of feminism in India and Germany will be explored in chapters 4 and 5.

The second strand of the book asks how solidarities are possible within these instances of transnational technological governance, constant demands for certainty, and the technological quick fixes these framings have resulted in. In spite of digital metanarratives, feminisms are finding their bearings and acting with transnational capacity, learning from each other as knowledge travels. In the remaining chapters, the internet offers itself as a space for community-building, a space that bleeds into offline realities and interrogates the rational knowledge economy through individual storytelling and collective inhabitations, which allow a transgression of so-called digital filter bubbles. The Interlude chapter pulls a multiplicity of solidarities together under the concepts of "vulnerability" and "intimacy,"

and chapters 6 and 7 unfold them again through hashtags that travel and movements that make ambiguous the segregation between online and offline worlds. These stories displace the hegemonic assertions of techno-determinism and make a case for political solutions, rather than technological quick fixes. They also do not rely on certainty of place or identity. It is in this reading and this reading only that these feminisms can also be seen to be making a statement against the economic and technological rationale of global capitalism, while stirring hopes of more communal and care-centered technological engagement and storytelling in spite of reckless datafications of the human. I do not mean to disregard the bleak and worrisome picture of technological metanarratives produced before, but I do want to despectacularize the notion of crisis that seems to consistently accompany each and every technological "innovation."

This endeavor then almost intuitively develops into a rethinking of categories of truth and knowledge production, and it gestures toward reciprocal appropriations between feminist solidarity movements and between political enemies. As Haraway (2016) has suggested, I wish to explore how these expressions are "both the same and not the same at all," thereby displacing the notion of one-sided diffusion and pointing rather toward the cultural exchange (always already present) and a multiplicity of location in specific contexts that this figure speaks to. Chapter 6 negotiates the violence of visibility through Blank Noise, the successful Indian feminist movement that has been combatting gender-based violence in a highly visible and arguably successful manner. Its most central intervention, #INeverAskForIt, deploys a template from which bodies may inhabit the digital in a shadowy presence, where surplus vulnerabilities imposed upon these bodies from the outside are managed through the protective infrastructure of the Blank Noise website. Chapter 7 sees an oppositional strategy implemented for digital solidarity. In turning to migrant communities in Germany, I see hashtags being deployed to create strategies of naming and networking in intimate connection. Here, intimacy is also the paradigm from which a recognition and relation becomes possible, because I

see what I understand as a lack of intimacy to lead to rejection of the relational entanglements that the networked hashtag can arguably make visible.

Finally, the Conclusion gives an outlook into a different political imaginary for the digital. I speculate on a number of ideas that give a positive outlook onto a future that may look less depressing than the technodeterministic logics of prediction and preemption that fixate identity. It is again feminist knowledge production that leads me to understand that what is required are new forms of accountability on a planetary scale. Taken from Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak and rethought through a number of more recent critical feminist interventions, I see planetary accountability as a reflection of place and positionality within increasingly complex and fluid cultural relations. It is also a refusal to partake in any form of exit fantasies, which presuppose that we can start afresh, potentially suggesting an innocence that feminist theorists are rightfully wary of. "To exit," in Sarah Sharma's (2016) terms, always means "to outsource precarity." "To exit" means to refuse the notion of making kin with those hovering at the margins, who have yet been allowed to enter. It means to refuse difficult engagement, refuse thinking about care work for the sake of boredom. It is this understanding that forms my notion of the planetary — specific and gendered in the way it addresses individuals, but transnational in terms of a call to accountability across location and positionality — that I use here to displace and demark the metanarrative of globalization, and offer instead situated and specific networks of care. In this formulation, objectivity and agency are bound up with responsibility and accountability — producers of knowledge are thus also bound to consider the possibilities, both enabling and violent, of interacting with the world by studying it.

It is at this point that I want to accentuate that this research and book would not have been possible without those feminists and activists who were so generous in contributing their knowledges, and that I see my work to be just as entangled with and produced in collaboration with the feminist knowledge producers and activists as it is bound to the inheritance I have from

studying in an environment that has been largely in line with Western and white knowledge economies, most of the time. I am therefore indebted to these economies, just as this book is an attempt to decenter and displace them, to focus more on political narratives and affective storytelling rather than supposed rational and research objectivity. I thank again the digital practitioners for their knowledges, which they have generously shared to inform this book. Most centrally, the discussion of Blank Noise in India and the *Lila Podcast* in Germany would not have been possible without the conversations to which Jasmeen Patheja and Katrin Rönicke, in particular, so generously gave their time and knowledge.

The Internet Imaginary
and Digital Modernity

It might seem counterintuitive to begin a story on solidarity with imaginaries of technology. "Solidarity" in its common usage suggests a relationship between individuals or groups, where technology might be a modality of expressing that solidarity, but is not — de facto — an involved actor. But given the recurring proclamations about reverse racism, cancel culture, or freedom of speech under threat, one might ask, How do technologies allow for, mediate, and are thus actively involved in the im/possibilities of solidarity across difference? If, as Richard Rorty (1989) has once claimed, solidarity is the opposite of an objective knowledge claim, then media technologies must be understood as central assemblages that construct certain knowledges as objective, and thus complicit in creating the differentiation Rorty proposes. Solidarity, understood here as an acknowledgment of interdependencies and a form of knowledge production,[1] is a capacity that emerges from material infrastruc-

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1   Let's take seriously Richard Rorty's (1989) claim that solidarity is the opposite of objectivity. Rorty frames both as points of reference, but states that objectivity appeals to universality, to something that reaches beyond the specific community within which a subject may find herself. However, given Wynter's intervention, it seems more than reasonable to assess that

tures, common spaces, and shared recognition of more-than-human interdependency. If there is something specific in the way new technologies describe, interpellate, or create subjects, then it is also involved in the construction of identities and differences, of knowledge about such differences and how they are related to other markers of recognition. If identity has been central to questions of solidarity, then I argue that we must come to terms with how technologies co-construct identities and thus mediate solidarity.

This chapter will develop a critique of the modern assumption of technology as objective, disembodied, and as the other to culture. This assumption situates technology as somewhat ahistorical, and has allowed technologists to perpetuate a reification of technology as newness, which detaches the infrastructure from the bodies it makes intelligible in certain ways. I want to begin by instead showing how technology is involved in the production of identity, collectivity, and regimes of recognition that allow for bodies to emerge in specific, gendered, and racialized ways. I will do so through two stories central to the early internet imaginary: John Perry Barlow's *A Declaration of Independence of Cyberspace* and Julian Dibbell's *A Rape in Cyberspace.* Both texts can be read as foundational for an ideology of community that expresses itself with and through the growing internet and could in first instance be seen as specific to that infrastructure. When we read these two narratives in parallel, however, these stories are indicative of a discourse that proclaims the internet a motor of a second Enlightenment and thus also draws upon the problematics of the first Enlightenment; of modernity and the infrastructural counterpart that made it all possible — colonial violence and the creation of racial hierarchies. In light of such

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Rorty was in fact talking about objectivity as a reformulation of the figure of man. If solidarity thus takes place either with regard to an unmarked male figure — the "objectivity" outside of the social group — or with regard to the chosen community/peer group, then solidarity is always present and expresses itself as a relationality that requires sustenance, infrastructure, and collectivity as much as it requires modalities of expression that can be considered embodied knowledge production.

a longer arc that influences the way early cyberculture came to frame the internet, the early discourses on internet governance develop a collective subjectivity that rearticulates white and male prototypicality in what Wynter has called "the figure of man" as the "overrepresentation of the human" (Wynter 2003). If solidarity relies on recognition of identity, these stories propose that the unmarking of whiteness and maleness can hinder solidarity relations, because the constructions of difference happen within a technological backend that fails to make itself public, known, situated, and specific.

In such an understanding, it becomes clear that the discourses on technology that have recently emerged around AI objectivity and superintelligence are in no way new, and weren't new at midcentury, when AI first became an aspirational quality of machine development, and not in the 1990s, when the internet became the utopian nonspace to break with all problems of the flesh. In the 1950s, cyberneticians and AI theorists in the United States (and perhaps less famously in Germany) — among them anthropologists, neuroscientists, philosophers, and mathematicians — situated technology as external yet parallel to the human brain and its capacities. Norbert Wiener is perhaps one of the most famous to suggest a computational similarity to the brain, and his Anti-Aircraft Predictor constructed this now infamous brain metaphor within what Peter Galison has called "the ontology of the enemy" (Galison 1994) — a notion that included not only identifying but actually predicting the enemy during World War II. From the specific calculation of flight routes for enemy airplanes, Wiener not only deduced a formula to predict enemy activity but actually derived an entire cognitive model that he and others would later project onto societal structures. The brain metaphor in cybernetics thus signaled toward early positions on what it meant to think and therefore be (with) in a computerized world, a metaphor that draws on the notions of rationality characterized by Enlightenment philosophy. That such metaphors are implicated in constructions of race and gender is perhaps most apparent in the famous Turing test, in which a human spectator needs to identify woman, man, or computer,

through their respective performances of intelligence (Genova 1994; Traiger 2000; Köppert 2020). Against this backdrop, the brain metaphor already suggests a form of gender and racial expression that I want to explicitly unravel throughout this chapter. Phrases such as "information wants to be free," commonly attributed to internet visionary Stewart Brand, came to signal the way information was attributed with its own agency that would make it travel, connecting people "from mind to mind," as an early internet advertisement claimed. But it was the rise of connectivity across distance that the early internet allowed for, which would make the superiority of the mind, already proposition within the brain metaphor, become explicit in all of its problematic facets. And so the cyberlibertarians who believed in the power of technology to bring the world together also created a discourse that segregated the virtual world of early cyberspace from real-life politics and constructed a new origin story that would reimagine the internet subject's relationship with real-world politics and histories. The story of questioning digital solidarities thus begins here (but it does not continue in a historical teleology) at the cyberutopian proposition of a new world that would arguably change the way humans encounter each other, merely because the flawed and problematic bodies were now irrelevant.

John Perry Barlow's *Declaration of Independence of Cyberspace* is a document that both exemplifies the cyberlibertarian vision of technological utopianism and shows how this vision was entangled in an articulation of "prototypical whiteness" (Browne 2015, 110), an unmarking of central features of what it meant to be a white male subject. Read through Eve Tuck and K. Wayne Yang, I present Barlow's *Declaration* — an exemplary document central to the whole ideological apparatus that comes to be known as "cyberlibertarianism" — as a "settler move to innocence" (Tuck and Yang 2012, 9) that connects internet universalism to a renewed whiteness not tainted by colonialism or indebted to the anticolonial liberation struggles. If the Declaration is exemplary of early internet culture's prototypical whiteness, its inherent gender-prototypicality becomes more explicit

when read through an early instantiation of gender-based violence in the tale of *A Rape in Cyberspace.* Julian Dibbell's famous account of disembodied acts of violence and misogyny must be seen as the undertones to Barlow's call to "enlightened self-interest" (Barlow 1996, n.p.). And the cybernetic privileging of mind over body reveals that the early internet pioneer's imaginaries of disembodiment, informational agency, and self-rule both appropriate and override decolonial and feminist notions of freedom and connectivity. In this sense, male fantasies of disembodiment and colonial fantasies of settler innocence are inscribed into and come to shape how the internet imaginary would spread across the globe as disembodied and delocalized community, as free speech and objective information. The juxtaposition of the two narratives by Barlow and Dibbell, the one of endless freedom and the other of gender-based violence regulated within a community seemingly without rules, presents an understanding of technology beyond its simplified delegation of being mere math or mere infrastructure. Instead, technology must be seen as a practice of instating certain parameters that allow for or undermine the terms and conditions of solidarity. Through these two case studies, a longer genealogy of the digital can emerge, which allows me to reconnect the central modalities of the digital (as categorization and differentiation) with modernity and the Enlightenment moment that Barlow calls upon, but also with the structures of violence that ground modernity within the realities of colonial violence. Once this line of development becomes clear as a modality of colonial governance, the final part of this chapter opens up to a questioning of Gilles Deleuze's claim that the "societies of control" (Deleuze 1992) he sees crystallizing in the early 1990s formulate a mode of oppression that is unique and new. The chapter closes with a discussion of modulation as a concept that describes a material agency to partition, (dis)identify, and normalize the interpellation of subjects in hierarchical form, something that comes to inform what we today understand as identity politics.

The Californian Ideology: A Historical Rupture?

The joining of universality, newness, and immateriality of information was prominently hailed by the hacker culture of the 1990s. As Fred Turner (2008) has shown, 1968 counterculture is directly linked to the technological utopianism of the 1990s and its belief in rationality, enlightenment, and factuality of technological infrastructures. This suggestion of continuities allows me to take a closer look at the ruptures proposed by its prominent figures. One of the central actors manifesting that continuity is John Perry Barlow, founder of the Electronic Frontier Foundation and proponent of a deregulated internet that would finally fulfil, as hopes were, the promises of "ethics, enlightened self-interest, and the commonwealth" (Barlow 1996, n.p.). This ideology, most pertinently illustrated in Barlow's *Declaration of Independence of Cyberspace,* rearticulates the modern divisions of body and mind and posits subjectivity in line with notions of rationality and common sense. It thus rearticulates white male fantasies of disembodiment and actively works toward discarding the situated, embodied realities from which identities, even Californian hacker identities, emerge as intelligible. [2]

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2   Barlow, involved in the 1960s band The Grateful Dead, Californian free speech activist, and internet pioneer, embodies one of the most obvious connections between 1968 counterculture and technological utopianism, and he must be read as just one of many protagonists that positioned themselves as political entities of the future, while employing language and propositions that very much drew upon problematic framings of the past. Barlow is considered an icon of the early net politics movement (Barbrook and Cameron 1995; Goldsmith and Wu 2006) and an important figure of internet history who enjoyed fame and popularity beyond the borders of the United States. The centrality of his persona is important in understanding the influence of his manifesto. As a young man, he was centrally involved in the events of the student revolt. In the early 2000s, notably after the publication of Declaration, he traveled to Brazil to assist the Green Party's minister of culture and popular musician Gilberto Gil in establishing an open-source government initiative. The campaign was considered a major success under leftist head of government Lula da Silva and was celebrated among net activists as a model project for a future-oriented, democratic, and transparent administrative shifts. His speeches were con-

The short manifesto was published in 1996 to protest against the Clinton administration's recent efforts to regulate online content as means of expression, and the tract spread rapidly. It is estimated that within three months, 5,000 websites carried copies of the *Declaration;* a short time later, this number was already estimated at 40,000 copies online. The publication was a reaction to the new Telecommunications Act of 1996, with which the Clinton administration attempted to regulate internet content and competition in the emerging market for the very first time. The manifesto itself articulates utopian promises of a world without discrimination, but it is quickly forgotten that it actually responds to an attempt to prevent the dissemination of obscene and indecent content, much of which is rampant in the form of hate speech and sexual violence today. The Telecommunications Act was propositioned to regulate internet space rather like any other public media outlet already was being monitored.[3] Barlow's proposition that this act was an attack on internet freedom — meaning, among other things, freedom of expression — seems less utopian considering today's online climate, where reports are piling up on how platforms thrive on hate speech, populism, and fake news. Most individuals lamenting the decline of freedom of expression and freedom of speech today seem to be conservatives and proponents of the New Right, where individuals and institutions alike see

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sidered highly influential for Aaron Swartz, another famous figure in the fight for internet freedom. Barlow was a role model for all these initiatives and people of great importance in the net world, and his funeral is said to have resembled a festival attended by close friends, companions of the movement, and masses of admirers.

3 In chapter 4, we will come to see how obscenity and indecency are also situated norms that regulate gender and racial expression. But for now, Barlow's text must be considered a curiosity all the more, when considering that the regulatory paradigms largely consisted of rules that had already been in place for television and newspapers, and which would theoretically also have been a mechanism to curb slurs and hate speech. Possibly, we can sense the effects of Barlow's intransigence to this day, when the internet is continuously imagined to be ungovernable, despite mounting evidence that platforms thrive off polemic or polarizing content and thus target and nudge individuals in quite influential ways.

the potential to speak freely under attack by a new type of (leftist) cancel culture that needs to be met with authoritarianism.[4] With these problematic propositions in mind, a close reading of Barlow's Declaration shows that free speech is a concept that is often deployed in service of the unmarked subject of prototypical whiteness/maleness. The fact that Barlow has been styled a countercultural hero thus proposes a questionable imaginary not only of technology but also of the terms of inclusion and freedom that arise within infrastructures of whiteness as they are mediated and (re)produced by technology, precisely in the aftermath of the central period of anticolonial struggle and its theoretical development into what is commonly termed "identity politics."

Written in the aftermath of 1968, it is then perhaps not surprising that the *Declaration* posits Barlow and his peers as a brave community that casts off the oppressor's shackles. It begins with the following, seemingly defiant claim:

> Governments of the Industrial World, you weary giants of flesh and steel, I come from Cyberspace, the new home of Mind. On behalf of the future, I ask you of the past to leave us alone. You are not welcome among us. You have no sovereignty where we gather.
>
> […] Cyberspace consists of transactions, relationships, and thought itself, arrayed like a standing wave in the web of our communications. Ours is a world that is both everywhere and nowhere, *but it is not where bodies live.*
>
> We are creating a world that all may enter without privilege or prejudice accorded by race, economic power, military force, or station of birth.

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4   This was more or less verbatim the response the right-wing media outlet Fox News had to news of Elon Musk becoming Twitter's largest shareholder and revealing his plans to continue to buy shares so as to take over the company in 2022.

> We are creating a world where anyone, anywhere may express his or her beliefs, no matter how singular, without fear of being coerced into silence or conformity.
>
> Your legal concepts of property, expression, identity, movement, and context do not apply to us. They are all based on matter, and there is no matter here. (Barlow 1996, n.p.; my emphasis)

Despite the grandeur of Barlow's rhetorical gesture, the significance of his persona might already suggest that the *Declaration* was more than the appeal to a forming community of ex-hippies. Barlow's vision became a hegemonic narrative that would serve, among other things, to make a technological infrastructure developed by the military-industrial complex available for general use. But from the start, it can be said that the *Declaration* was not a brave statement by a niche revolutionary. In fact, the early TV ad by the internet provider MCI during the Super Bowl in 1997 suggests that his declaration was not only heavily circulated, but actually became the dominant ideology through which the internet was made sense of.[5] The MCI commercial presented a vision of the internet where a wide variety of people testified that the internet would be a place where people can communicate "from mind to mind," in a place in which "there is no race" and "there is no gender." People in wheelchairs with computers, women, Black people, and a young person speaking in sign language, all attest to the new boundlessness of the internet, largely brought about by a liberation from embodied existence that is framed as constraining — in particular for people identified to be different.

As the quote above from Barlow illustrates, he, too, sees liberation in the removal of the body from the site of publicity. In Barlow's words, the disappearance of the body from com-

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5   The advertisement can still be viewed on YouTube, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ioVMoeCbrig. I give thanks to Wendy Chun, who has signaled toward this advertisement as the counterpart to Barlow's ideology in several of her lectures.

putational vision within early text-based computation enabled openness, freedom, and limitless information, which he relates directly to the "Golden Rule" of treating others in a way that you might want for this treatment to be universal law. In this reference to Kant's categorical imperative, Barlow positions the internet as the motor of a second Enlightenment. His "home of the mind" is framed as a solution that overcomes the real-world problems of nation-state orders, which he proclaims to be backward and discursively delegates to the past. Through his invocation of a new "frontier," where "all may enter without privilege" (Barlow 1996, n.p.), the internet is conceived as a real-world utopia that remains successful, among other things, because it is now populated by better subjects — subjects whose central difference is that they act merely as "minds" and are able to leave the fleshed materiality behind. In a mitigated form, this notion convinced early internet sociologists of the possibility that social problems based on forms of othering would disappear through immersion in virtual worlds.[6]

Through the power of hindsight, evidence to the contrary has accumulated. Trying out another identity does not necessarily lead to understanding it, and this notion might also have been validated by preceding forms of identity tourism as made available through video games, role-play, literature, and theater. However, Barlow's *Declaration* even goes one step further by actually saying that notions of difference will disappear, because the bodies do. Barlow demonstrates a biosocial belief that forms of discrimination, such as racism, sexism, and transphobia, are tied to the bodies biologically different, to aesthetic variety and deviation from a white, able-bodied, cis-representing male. Barlow propagates an understanding of racism (and misogyny,

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6   Prominently, Sherry Turkle (1997) explained that practices such as "identity tourism," the trying on of other identities in chat rooms or via avatars, would allow for the exploration of other forms of self and, by superimposing other identities — other attributions of race, gender, and so on — would provide for greater empathy as the experiential world of such "others" became accessible.

transphobia, etc.) that remains tied to a biological construction of race, one that constructs racial difference as emerging from within the body in genetic form. In doing so, he fails to account for the historical emergence of race as a material and discursive formation, and rearticulates a vision of the human as rational, as the Western colonial figure of man (Wynter 2001).

In this biogenetic order, an underlying belief remains that fundamental difference emerges from the biological material that makes people legible as darker and lighter skinned, or as women or men. Even if this belief may acknowledge that hierarchies between these bodies are wrong or constructed, it draws upon histories of racialization that have commonly proposed the raced body as less rational, as mere flesh, and biological differences as essential (Spillers 1987; Weheliye 2014). What Wynter calls the "biogenetic principle," the connection of race and gender with principles of biogenetic materiality, suggests an unchanging quality to what it means to have race or gender that is limiting if not understood in connection to the "sociogenic" (Wynter 2001). Mere biology, or biogenesis, would negate the several emergent qualities that understandings of race and gender have undergone since they first became categories of distinction. Indeed, the biogenetic principle has been adamantly deconstructed for gender dynamics through queer and trans activism, but holding onto it negates a deeper material concern that Cheryl Harris has discussed through the concept of "whiteness as property" (Harris 1993). With Harris, we can come to understand that whiteness not only occupies disembodied universality, but actually marks a division between the haves and have-nots. This is an inequality, which is eschewed by Barlow's optimistic turn to disembodiment. Effectively, whiteness disappears within Barlow's manifesto to reduce any form of online violence to a limited, ahistoric dispute over manners and the Golden Rule.

Barlow seems oblivious to the fact that, as the manifesto was spreading like wildfire, the first conferences on the digital divide were being held in parallel, discussing concerns about the lack of connection for women and for people in the Global

South (Chun 2018). Internet distribution is still a mirror image of problematics discussed in critiques of global aid and development work — the adaption to a certain framework of information and discourse is often a requirement for people of the Global South to gain access to the often paternalistically distributed technological and digital commons. This paternalism expresses itself in the form of reduced content or prescribed modes of use through programs such as Facebook's Free Basics[7] or One Laptop per Child. These initiatives often fail to recognize what is really needed in families, communities, and countries because generic use of devices and platforms is assumed (Srinivasan 2019). The fact that only a very limited number of people across the globe were enabled to inhabit these infrastructures in 1996 — almost all of whom resided in hegemonic geographies usually summarized within the term "Global North" — does little to curb Barlow's enthusiasm for global borderlessness, intercultural exchange, and unlimited freedom. Nor does Barlow mention that labor and natural resources have been and are being extracted from precisely the excluded places in order to construct the digital infrastructures. Of late, this has been explicitly termed "digital" or "data colonialism" (Couldry and Mejias 2019; Kwet 2019), suggesting that neocolonial expansions of Western infrastructures and economic influence are once again employing a form of imperialism that materially appropriates resources and invades sovereign communities. Whether intentional or not, a problematic construction of white innocence can be gleaned from the manifesto against this backdrop, which seeks to portray internet pioneers as new subjects of radical transformational struggles, breaking with the historicity of their own material privileges built on the same inequalities that were established through colonial extraction. Images such as "the internet as the final frontier" ultimately enable the narrative

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7   Facebook's Free Basics program limits access to the internet — it offers free services only via its in-house apps, which then also later tie new users to its platforms, giving the company privileged access to the data stream of trillions of new users in the Global South.

of the white subject of progress as the central actor in the writing of history, without addressing the repressions and dispossessions that accompany this historical construction of privilege.

Thus, Barlow's *Declaration of Independence* must be understood as part of a forming dispositif that posited information and thus, to some extent, knowledge itself as objective, disembodied, and yet as agential, albeit with its own volitional power of dissemination without containment or container. In such an understanding, information can be free, because it detaches itself from the bodies necessary to make data into knowledge. Information paves its way like water, a naturalization of knowledge and its equation with information, which would come to inform the technosolutionism of today, equal to sayings such as "data is the new oil" that expropriate data from the bodies it emerges from. Barlow's manifesto is thus a first document that codifies the conflation of data, information, and knowledge as objective and universal, thus spearheading a shift that would propagate technologies as determinant and as superior to ideological, situated dispositions, rearticulating an objective technological "view from nowhere" or "God trick" that had been criticized in feminist epistemologies of science and technology in a prominent manner just years before (Haraway 1988).

In this way, Barlow's manifesto can maintain its egalitarian ambition only as long as it does not restrict a certain position that is believed to be universal. This is not only the case because internet pioneers around him were largely white men from the US middle classes, even though, certainly, this overrepresentation is already somewhat problematic. The model of Western progressivist economics evolving at the time inscribed itself into the internet infrastructure as norm. It told a story of enlightenment and rationality, overrepresented in the figure of man as the aspirational human. It also cut ties with all the problematic notions that had positioned this figure as the agent of progress, with the violence and exploitation that was inherent to past and ongoing accumulation and infrastructure-building; the bodies needed to build and legitimize the internet were effectively negated access to its benefits.

The Internet as the "Final Frontier": Barlow's Constructions of White Innocence

These early internet "pioneers" — note the colonial evocation in their self-positioning as explorers of a virtual *terra nullius* — claimed to be the revolutionary opposition to a violent regime that cyberlibertarianism declared temporally obsolete and morally corrupt. They were referring to the nation-state model with its regulations and top-down hierarchies, which was proclaimed as the enemy, in an evocation of anticolonial pushes toward independence that had been central struggles across the globe in the long years preceding Barlow's manifesto.

Barlow's language in the manifesto appeals to motifs that can thus be understood as both anti- and neocolonial. He criticizes the Telecommunications Act for "declar[ing] ideas to be another industrial product, no more noble than pig iron" (Barlow 1996, n.p.), addressing and potentially critiquing an extractivist understanding of data that processes information only for capitalist value creation. In doing so, however, he undercuts the material realities that were already necessary at the time to allow the internet to appear at all as a boundless and dematerialized hyperreality. These were by no means unknown. As early as 1985, Donna Haraway speaks of the "nimble finger[s] of 'oriental' women" (Haraway 2016, 14) in her famous *Cyborg Manifesto,* referring to the predominantly feminized and racialized composition of early tech workers assembling the first microchips and semiconductors. Lisa Nakamura (2014) has traced how this labor was constructed as naturally feminine, so that semiconductor manufacturer Fairchild could position its factories within the land of Indigenous populations and thus be subject to favorable tax regulations, leading to the employment of predominantly Indigenous women who would go on to work under dangerous conditions. Nakamura concludes that the tech infrastructure was predominantly constructed by Black and Indigenous women from the 1950s until well into the 1990s. These demographics, too, correspond to those who to this day are least able to benefit from these technologies because they

are denied access by material conditions or repressive policies, sometimes within their own families. To date, the landscape of tech workers is precarious and highly racialized. Women and queers, predominantly located on the Asian continent,[8] assemble computers and smartphones and also take on the work of maintenance and upkeep, for example, as content moderators, who often spend hours exposed to traumatizing depictions of violence. That the increasing ubiquity of server farms and personal devices requires extractivist mining infrastructures to obtain the expensive precious metals processed in these devices and infrastructures shows that the internet cannot depart from the necessities of the material world, but is dependent on its infrastructure and based on its exploitation (Gabrys 2011; Parikka 2015). The networking of the world via the supposedly immaterial internet serves the same trade routes that were once used by slave ships to transport Black bodies across the Atlantic; here, too, raw materials flow from the once colonized countries to the West, where profit margins then grow exponentially, without returns flowing back to the countries of origin.[9]

Barlow's manifesto thus withholds that raw and precious metals are part of the infrastructure of his new virtual world. Freedom of expression and the circulation of ideas under capitalism has always been characterized by a skew in which piracy

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8   This geography, too, is bound to change if we consider recent research that has pointed out the role refugees are increasingly playing within data training and microwork (Jones 2020).

9   On the user side, too, the internet is a Western-centric place that contains mainly English-language content, even if the number of consumers is steadily rising, especially in Russia and Asia. The fact that women and queers, in particular, suffer from internet censorship and even withdraw from this space in the face of great hatred — often unfounded and disproportionate — is proven not only by journalistic reports and activist reports but also by studies such as that of the American *Salty Mag.* In two large-scale surveys in 2017 and 2019, *Salty Mag* found that content about femme, nonbinary, queer, and trans presenting people is perceived as transgressive significantly more often than content about white men. Images and videos are more often deleted for "violations of community guidelines" if they are identified as depicting such bodies, while hate speech explicitly directed at these people can often persist longer than the posts that trigger it.

(as the wrongful dissemination of intellectual property deemed private) is predominantly punished within the same infrastructures and logics that criminalize individuals from postcolonial states (Eckstein and Schwarz 2014), it has a racializing dimension.[10] Returning to Barlow's proposition of the mind as the location of free and universal rationale ignores the epistemic violence inherent to capitalizing on ideas and the notion of progress as a Western teleology. In his emphasis on thought as something that cannot be captured, he effectively posits ideas as the new form of currency that will lead to a land of plenty, and he sees sharing them — whatever their content — as inherently beneficial to the world. Implicit to this line of argument is a belief in objective and universal truths, which merely need to be known for equality to emerge. A central aspect is to get rid of the body, with all its problematic ails and weaknesses. As Barlow sees it, now that subjects can leave their problematic bodies behind, they are truly free, free of corporeality and thus free of "race, economic power, military force or station of birth" (Barlow 1996, n.p.). This freedom, through which they can join the Western world, Barlow posits as the plain of informational factuality as knowledge. These statements might seem merely naïve, were it not for the constant invocation of the internet pioneers, predominantly white middle-class men, as the new Indigenous people of a transnational, yet decidedly not global internet:

> We have no elected government, nor are we likely to have one, so I address you with no greater authority than that with which liberty itself always speaks. I declare the global social space we are building to be naturally independent of the tyrannies you seek to impose on us. You have no moral right to

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10 Meanwhile "hackers" and "free speech activists" have increasingly become figureheads of the alt-right (FACTLiverpool 2017), a continuity that can be considered somewhat programmatic, because the failure to encounter difference is inherent to internet culture from the start.

rule us nor do you possess any methods of enforcement we have true reason to fear.

Governments derive their just powers from the consent of the governed. You have neither solicited nor received ours. We did not invite you. You do not know us, nor do you know our world. Cyberspace does not lie within your borders[.…] You have not engaged in our great and gathering conversation, nor did you create the wealth of our marketplaces. You do not know our culture, our ethics, or the unwritten codes that already provide our society more order than could be obtained by any of your impositions.

[…] These increasingly hostile and colonial measures place us in the same position as those previous lovers of freedom and self-determination who had to reject the authorities of distant, uninformed powers. (Barlow 1996, n.p.)

Barlow's language thus mimics the demands of decolonization movements, articulated in part through similar imagery — the illegitimacy of colonial rulers, the imposition of an alien culture, and "civilizing missions" as hostile invasion — evoking centuries of imperial rule. In doing so, he omits that Silicon Valley, from which Barlow did his writing, was itself once home to a wide variety of populations, now grouped under the name of the Muwekma Ohlone. These groups were Christianized by the Spanish in the eighteenth century, and many died from the novel smallpox diseases that came to them from Europe. During the California gold rush, many of the Indigenous peoples were forced into slave-like labor conditions, and their social structures were broken down until the social model of divide-and-rule typical of settler colonialism emerged. Barlow's dematerialized utopia is thus only possibly because of previous colonial wars, which led to the dispossession and murder of the actual natives, whose land Barlow now effectively claims as the material infrastructure for himself and his contemporaries to become mind (Morais dos Santos Bruss 2021). He, too, did not create the wealth of the marketplaces he is now claiming as his own.

With Tuck and Yang, I read the omission of these historical and ongoing relations of exploitation as "settler moves to innocence" (Tuck and Yang 2012, 9). Such moves to innocence can take the form of shifting the narrative of colonial violence, for example, through the omission of certain historical events, so as to proclaim new origin stories that encourage the white subject to describe itself as the agent of progress. Tuck and Yang describe in detail how certain performative acts level colonialism, transport it into the past, downplay its violence through equations of white suffering with the genocidal effects of imperial takeover, or negate it altogether. Barlow makes use of several such displacements at once. By breaking with the offline world, Barlow is able to free himself and the new "natives" of the internet from the burdens of colonialism without actually making material reparations or contemplating the restitution of land and goods. The internet has nothing to do, the manifesto argues, with these real-world problems, and material scarcity does not exist because of the possibility of digital multiplicability. In this vision, access is no longer a problem of distribution, but becomes equated with mere presence. By claiming that the regulations brought about by the Telecommunications Act of 1996 were not democratically legitimized, Barlow indirectly draws parallels to the colonial dispossession of land, which was also carried out without the consent or consultation of the Indigenous populations. Barlow styles himself and his community as an authentic knower, part of a new "Indigenous" population that can both assess the experience of suffering and overcome it by shedding the flawed body. Barlow thus exercises a colonial strategy that first establishes notions of rationality, of universalism, and of the mind that evoke whiteness as the norm and the liberal subject embodied by Silicon Valley archetypes as the subject of progress, democracy, and liberation.

Rather than reading these simultaneities as accidental, Tara McPherson (2012) has suggested that the postracial ideology of Californian hacker culture must be considered as interdependent with the infrastructural decisions to focus on certain technologies and infrastructures in a certain way. McPherson

also notes the emergence of an insistence on strategic essentialism and the rise of identity politics from the budding civil rights movement happening in parallel, suggesting that there are relations between these developments. In such a reading, digital technologies co-constituted the cordoning off of questions of inequality during the pressing period of 1960s and 70s, precisely at a moment where minority rights are at the center of political struggles. Barlow's claim to unmarked disembodiment must be contextualized through a lack of sensibilities for what made up difference within racialized and embodied public spheres as they were being heavily negotiated at the time. Read through McPherson's claims, Barlow's manifesto attaches itself to historically grown processes that automate whiteness by making difference hypervisible; the people protesting in the streets in embodied form become radically segregated from Barlow's home of the mind, which he frames as superior. As Wynter puts it, this instance creates a dysselection of the embodied claims on the street, cordoning off these individuals from very framework of the human as progress. In this light, Barlow's *Declaration* contributes to the postracial ideology at the time that propagated new technologies as historical breaking points, as new origin stories that could return whiteness to innocence, disembodiment to universalism, and expressions of white masculinity as objective representations of the human. This already problematic promise, which negates the privileged conditions under which people are even able to become users of cyberspace, becomes even more questionable in light of a second story that precedes Barlow's manifesto. The documentation of the very first rape in cyberspace exemplifies how not having a body neither protected nor universalized difference. Documenting this case via *A Rape in Cyberspace,* the journalist Julian Dibbell shows how gender-based violence is existent in the internet from early on, despite mere text-based descriptors of identities. In the report, I see sexual violence delegated to the margins, viewed as accidental and individualized through a pathology of the perpetrator and an emphasis on solutionism. Although Dibbell's account is not uncritical of the problematics

inherent to technological solutionism, the story suggests sexual misconduct signals toward an exceptional bug in a young community still finding its ground, instead of as part and parcel of an infrastructure that might be new but is populated by racialized and gendered ideas that manifest not merely in biology or flesh. This narrative sheds light on the masculinity of fantasies of disembodiment in very literal ways. It shows that propositions of the Golden Rule would lead to a rearticulation of gender and race as paradigms of individuation that stand in the way of feminist solidarity and transformative appeals to justice.

Masculinist Fantasies of Disembodiment

In 1993, three years before Barlow's declaration, a story came to public attention that could give clues, if not prove, that women and nonbinary folx could by no means expect the freedom and equality Barlow propagated in his manifesto. In a so-called MUD ("multiuser dungeon") called LambdaMOO — a then still text-based but already networked digital space — a very public incident occurred, which journalist Julian Dibbell would later call "the first rape in cyberspace" (Dibbell 1993; Shah 2015b). His report, *A Rape in Cyberspace,* was first told in *The Village Voice.*

MUDS were text-based virtual chat and gaming rooms that first emerged in US university networks. With the spread of the internet, the spaces could also open up to people outside the university network, and so LambdaMOO gained a large number of users, which diversified from the disproportionately large number of young white men in elite universities. Despite Barlow's propositions of borderless freedom some years later, the initial MUDS did not allow everyone to have a say, nor were they set up democratically. So-called wizards acted as administrators who had complete control over who had access to the space and what was possible in it. They acted not only as technical but also as social and moral authority. However, with the growing numbers of users, this form of control became increasingly complex, and after the wizards shifted parts of their duties to more and more users they found trustworthy or experienced, they gave up

completely in late 1992 and retreated to the position of technical administrators. Despite this narrative, which suggests that moral feuds were too many for the wizards to take on, a statement by LambdaMOO founder Pavel Curtis mirrors Barlow's language of self-rule and enlightened decision-making, stating that this was an exciting social experiment that only fools would want to end.[11] Curtis thus also imagines that rational reason leads all users to behave with respect and tolerance, despite mounting evidence that the well-meaning, yet potentially authoritarian wizards were overwhelmed by the many cases of moral and social inequality that seemed to occur in these spaces.

The famous transgression that would come to be known as the internet's first instance of rape was perpetrated by an avatar called "Mr. Bungle." The previously unknown avatar Mr. Bungle appeared in LambdaMOO's "living room," a communal and rather public meeting space, in March 1993. Dibbell describes Mr. Bungle as an obscene apparition, unusually explicit in his description, which consisted of lewd comments and sexual innuendo. Deploying a "voodoo doll script," an early variation of the computer virus, Mr. Bungle took control of a female avatar named "legba" — "a Haitian trickster spirit of indeterminable gender, brown-skinned and wearing an expensive pearl gray suit, top hat and dark glasses" (Dibbell 1993, n.p.) — and forced legba to perform sexual acts on Mr. Bungle, and on other avatars named "Starsinger" ("a rather pointedly nondescript female character, tall, stout, and brown-haired"), "Bakunin" ("the well-known radical"), and "Juniper" ("the squirrel"). During these acts, the affected users had lost all control over their avatars, and Dibbell describes explicitly the horror these individuals expressed as they saw transgression after transgression happen on their screens, with their virtual selves, unable to intervene. At some point, Mr. Bungle was forcefully removed from the room. However, this still did not reinstate control to the users

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11   The story of LambdaMOO is documented on an archived Stanford blog by Pavel Curtis and others: https://cs.stanford.edu/people/eroberts/cs181/projects/controlling-the-virtual-world/history/mud.html.

over their avatars, nor did it stop the acts already taking place. Because of the rule of noninterference, a room full of users was unable to make a decision on what to do because the control that the wizards had was now theoretically up for grabs, since trespassing the Golden Rule was not accounted for in the community guidelines. It was only when a character named "Zippy" showed up with a weapon that stripped Mr. Bungle of his script and banished him to a neutral location that the spell was lifted and the avatars freed.

Dibbell's report clearly states that, as Barlow also suggests, real-world, carnal jurisprudence is not applicable here, and the reaction of the parties involved shows the gravity of what happened in a still-forming space understood by many to be a utopian retreat. The publicity of the incident led other femme avatars to speak out about having suffered in similar, less public cases, and legba named the case as "rape" a few days after the incident. In Dibbell's account, he documents that the user had "post-traumatic tears" (Dibbell 1993, n.p.) running down her face as she called for Mr. Bungle's continued imprisonment and his erasure, or at least his "virtual castration." And even as many others agreed that such a thing should never happen again, nobody knew what to do with a crime in a space where no regulations existed because of the firm belief in the Golden Rule. It was only after an hour-long online meeting that Mr. Bungle was "toaded," which means his character was deleted from the forum. This did not happen through the "Golden Rule" or common agreement, but because someone with administrative rights went rogue, so to speak, deleting Mr. Bungle's account without general consent of the community.

Carceral demands of a hurt and humiliated victim aside, the case illustrates how the proposition of a Golden Rule, enlightened self-interest, and supposed disembodiment neglect the way gender expression manifests beyond mere body and also how avenues of solidarity are navigated by the infrastructures of communication and the sense-making practices that inform horizons of intelligibility and identity. Based on this case, the community deemed it necessary to negotiate the governmen-

tality of the space, which drew upon three real-world political models that Dibbell classifies as "parliamentarist," "autocratic," and "cyberlibertarian." These models may differ in strategy, but in the end they all rearticulated biased norms that failed to account for a transformative negotiation of a case clearly driven by patriarchal and colonial structures violence. The "parliamentarists," as Dibbell referred to them, argued that there was no explicit prohibition against rape in their society, and so it would have to be established before such actions as Mr. Bungle's could be sanctioned, in direct opposition of Barlow's suggestion that everyone would "naturally" know the Golden Rule. In this position, which is potentially most referent of the offline world, harm can only be addressed after the fact of harm has been established. This could potentially mark a grassroots attempt at democratic organizing, but the first solution expresses a deeply masculinist view on the availability of nonmale existence for male consumption and pleasure, translated into positive freedom only for the transgressing, male avatar. The parliamentarist view, expressed in relation to a nonconsensual sexual performance, effectively naturalizes the event and puts its transgression up for debate, violently leveling the victim's pain and negating avenues of solidarity.

The "authoritarians" wished for a return of the wizards and thus proposed a solution through the relinquishment of responsibility to an elite class, again consisting of white men. Theoretically this class might change to include women and other genders, but the suggestion does not tackle the problem itself but, in a reversal of parliamentarist claims, negates community agency in negotiating what is or is not possible within a collective space according to preestablished norms not collectively put to question. The "cyberlibertarians," which correspond most with today's technosolutionsists, argued that such cases merely needed the introduction of a "gag" command that could block the potential assaults on the individuals involved. They argued that this would maintain freedom of speech (note the conflation of nonconsensual sexual transgressions with freedom of expression) while also considering that there might be things

an individual might have the right of refusing—as long as it doesn't affect the larger community. This last proposition effectively builds on the idea that things done without consent to the avatar should be blocked only *for* that avatar. It failed to recognize that the text-based humiliations in this case would still be visible to the public, and that gender-based violence is not only about effectively harming the sense of self and bodily integrity of an individual, but also about establishing a right to material, physical, and psychological transgressions in toxic and violent ways. Dibbell seems to be somewhat aware of the power dynamics inherent to gender-based abuse, as he compares the technosolutionist proposition of the gag to sexually assaulting a passed-out or sleeping person (Dibbell 1993). And indeed, the technosolutionist proposition encounters sexual assault as one legitimate form of expression over others. This last position might be the one that most obviously reveals the situatedness of how normative values such as freedom of expression come to be. However, all three positions articulate rather deficient and monohumanistic solutions that clearly do not refer to the analyses of structural violence, the knowledge about perpetrators of sexualized violence, or the modalities of healing continuously being worked on by feminists, for example, through concepts such as transformative justice. Instead, all three strategies propose a one-size-fits-all resolution for future harms, which either directly disavow the Golden Rule so central to Barlow or reinstate the white liberal subject as the central referent of cultural normativity to whom that rule applies selectively. They also all misrecognize sexual, racial, and gender-based violence as historically ingrained in and unacknowledged by structures that organize publicity both infrastructurally and sociopolitically.

The suggested resolutions to the first rape in cyberspace all speak to a continued male dominance within internet utopianism, which is rearticulated even by Dibbell, who speculates that Mr. Bungle was reformed through the instance and that this conflict was what really made the community come together. This framing presents Mr. Bungle as a troubled individual, an exception to an otherwise humanitarian space with a flour-

ishing democracy. Sexual assault is framed as a bug, when in today's internet, like racism, we must come to understand it as a feature (Noble 2018). It later turned out that the user behind Mr. Bungle was a NYU college student, a young man who had been cheered on by a room full of friends shouting suggestions on what the hypersexual avatar should do next. Mr. Bungle was termed a sociopath. But the example shows that there was more at play than a confused individual or lone assailant. It is quite telling that the central victims of Mr. Bungle's voodoo-doll script were "a gender-ambiguous Haitian trickster spirit" (Dibbell 1993, n.p.) and a "rather pointedly non-descript female" avatar. And though the gender-ambiguous and racialized Haitian became the site in which the sexual transgression manifested, channeling the Indigenous queer avatar to violate a nondescript and thus probably white female figure rearticulates colonial fantasies of a hypersexual violent other that, as my later chapters will show, is commonly evoked to protect whiteness as property and man as its proprietor. The mere presence of such distinctive and embodied characteristics thus led to the colonial imaginaries of the way things supposedly are to be imposed, or, might I say, superimposed onto the unsuspecting avatars and their fleshy subjectivities.

The example shows the real-world relevance of political dispositions on the internet, that is, that race, class, and gender do play a role, and that sexism, misogyny, and transphobia have little to do with the biological bodies of difference and a lot more with genealogical representations of a biased and violent imaginary of the human universal and its others. Thus, as was noted by Dibbell, the veracity with which the sexual assaults were perceived would prove that gender-based violence infringed on bodily integrity and on a subjective sense of integrity that is articulated psychologically and not physically. The way the example negotiates gendered violence is thus telling of the avenues of solidarity that write and articulate a referent-we, opens itself up to regimes of intelligibility, and is a negotiation of freedom of expression across identities as much as it is a negotiation of bodily harm. As this example shows, the perpetrator could

not have had bodily desires fulfilled by the assault, but rather gained pleasure from the humiliation and degradation his victims suffered and from the frat party that confirmed his masculinity by cheering him on. The bodies themselves and their appearance are thus not the origins of hate or the triggers of violence, but instead become enveloped into a harmful, material struggle over the centrality of liberal subjectivity as the universal norm. In this sense, an insistence on difference in a space supposedly universal begets violence not because of anything these characters did or made themselves to be, but because they can be read as symbolic of a structural hierarchy, and potentially of its transgression. Because their vulnerability has historically been asserted through material, political, and technological instalments of hierarchy via concepts of mind over body, the insistence on references to that body seem enough cause for attack. The case of Mr. Bungle illustrates that subjective realities rely upon and are always connected to material, social, biological, and, centrally, technological infrastructures. Further, these strata all are not only mediated by technological infrastructures, but technology produces regimes of visibility that allow for, or make impossible, the acknowledgment of social cohesion and collective forms of solidarity across difference. Because the *Declaration,* a document that cemented the cyberlibertarian ideology, was published after the very public reckoning with Mr. Bungle, it must be seen as a framework that radically dismisses difference for the sake of a community, proposing all must come to terms with and assimilate to the unmarked norm of Western white masculinity.

In the same way, the internet activism that informs the political failed to overcome its pragmatic monohumanism, which was also inscribed into the discourse on efficacy and clarity of code (Barbrook and Cameron 1995). As a result, the problem of discrimination is rejected, to be dealt with by those suffering from it — it is framed as a *consequence* of their bodies (rather than the consequence of centuries of oppression, the framing of difference as a hierarchy, and the normalization of this violence), and leaving these problematic bodies behind in

cyberspace is, for Barlow, the solution for discriminatory practice. The internet thus cordons off embodied specificity in a masculinist and ahistorical trope of Western universalism and expansion, as Barlow presumes that marked bodies want to be unmarked, and LambdaMOO suggests governance via assimilation to a global (white) standard of rationality, objectivity, freedom. This ignores how technology has been complicit in a long line of apparatuses that attempted to record and measure difference, thus producing the body as a racialized unitary entity to be contained and controlled.[12] It is thus no surprise that in these first decades, prominent figures of internet advocacy took for granted and effectively normalized and obscured the implications of race, gender, and other factors of bodily difference written into digital infrastructures. The two narratives explored above show how these ideologies of disembodiment were disrupted early on but did not play into the utopian proposition of cyberlibertarianism because they did not affect the subjectivity its constructions catered to.

Both the deployment of anticolonial language to cordon off problematic histories and the negotiations of sexual assault in the archives of early internet history articulate a need for regarding the digital beyond its contemporary material form in computation. As the discussion above shows, what we understand as the digital and what histories and imaginaries become central within it has automated a bias much older than computation, and is obscured through the constructions of newness, immateriality, and objectivity. Despite mounting evidence that internet infrastructures repeat — even amplify — offline realities, the perception of radical difference has both fostered hopes

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12 The colonial experience was what created the necessity to fixate bodies according to hierarchized ideals, where white masculinity became the hegemon. Instances of racialization thus begin through the technological fixation of bodies through identification markers, such as identity papers, pass tags, and the flattening of bodies through technologies, such as photography (Pugliese 2010; STUDIUM GENERALE RIETVELD ACADEMIE, 2016). Chapters 2 and 3 will return to this historical aspect of technology as subjugation.

of a transcendental perspective on the human and given rise to a "technological solutionism" (Morozov 2013). Technological solutionism is problematic, not because it implies the need for constantly more technology, but because it negates any opportunity to interrogate the cost of that technology when it is deployed on communities that differentiate from the liberal status quo, or even to interrogate the question to which technology seems to be the answer. The "more" does not, for example, encompass ancestral knowledges, historical analysis, or material redistribution. Technosolutionism is an endemic ideology that vastly simplifies complex social fields, such as education, security and law enforcement, as compartmentalized problems with definitive solutions and forecloses any possibility of systemic change by suggesting a simple increase in terms of scale or density. For, the way internet infrastructures are built, they very much rely on modalities of identification and intelligibility that draw upon and (re)produce older forms and modalities of identity. In light of these historical continuities, I suggest reading the contemporary paradigm of modulation as control, which has supposedly ushered in the internet age, as a paradigm of sense-making that begins with colonial modernity.

Modulation and Control in a Globalized Perspective

Barlow then negates what is beginning to take center stage within critical digital studies: identities are not only identified and made intelligible, but actually produced through technological, and, today, digital infrastructures. Instead of difference disappearing, capturing identities is the central modality in which digital infrastructures gain profits today. Within algorithmic infrastructures, recommendation systems and digital modalities of capturing individuals, practices, and attachments are racialized and gendered in order to address individuals as consumers in generalizing specificity that creates the user as a "type," thus creating a singular/plural interpellation of the digital subject (Chun 2016). Online practices, such as preferences on social media, "liking" certain pages, or engaging with certain

people, are documented and refer back to digital typification, allowing algorithms to construct a profile of the user that on the surface is based on practices, but is codified to correspond to stereotypical assumptions about race, class, and gender. Indeed, as Chun has argued, the very idea of "code" as the architecture of biology anticipates the way code is understood as the architecture of the virtual (Chun 2011), thus continuing a biogenetic regime of recognition and intelligibility that simply transposes ideas of race and gender onto new materialities. A modular internet architecture delegitimizes the historical construction of group identities through an overemphasis on individualization (in the form of targeted content and personalized experiences) on the interface as a space that enables a form of public/visual encounter with strangers/others. Meanwhile, the backend collects precisely the type of data that enables these individually appearing users to be grouped together according to practices. These collectivities enable a typification that allows for stereotypes to be recoded with regard to gender or racial identities. Quotidian practices invisibilized in their historical lineages, such as living in a certain neighborhood, liking certain music, or going to certain events, translate into racialized and gendered categories that algorithms can call upon to produce digital identities they address as consumers (Chun 2018).

As a "social operating system" (Keeling 2014, 154) the technological function of modulation describes the spread of information across the globe, which counts and distinguishes (and thus creates as separate) individual bits of categorized information, scripted onto the body as knowledge. Once digital infrastructures are deployed, the body is reinscribed into the preexisting scripts that modulate identities according to predefined categories, which racialize, gender, and classify according to an infrastructure catering to the habits of living of man2.0. As Chun has shown, being identified as male and without a high school diploma gives rise to assumptions about race and class, and being interested in care networks will gender the user female — self-identification is no longer necessary to group a body into categories of the outsider (Chun 2016). Of course, one

may argue that these stereotypes are slowly being overhauled, that brown people can be rich, that women can be violent. The problem is not so much that algorithmic recommendation systems might get it wrong, but rather that they increasingly categorize traits that reestablish the body as a naturalized unity, with an unchanging and flattened-out identity that serves as means of public recognition without considering bodily and subjective changes, ambivalences, or multitudes. The flesh itself thus disappears, and the only relation of the self to the public is through the image that consumer-oriented algorithms produce of the body. The logic is circular — a body is hypervisible through its difference when it encounters the archive, because an algorithm or other technological infrastructure will base its terms of identification on the likelihood of being like others that are already identified as different. It is important to note that the classification of bodies organizes itself around a central iteration of man2.0 as acceptable and normative, one that resonates with prototypical whiteness, but also the patriarchal bourgeois society per se. Man2.0 thus reiterates himself/itself through a homogeneity, which is expressed through all those that are different — as different from the figure of man.

Reconfiguring modulation as a social operating system then means that early internet architectures normalized a way of understanding identity as reessentialized, even if what matters are practices more than biogenetic or epidermal appearances. This leads to an imaginary of the "postracial," which in fact merely allowed for racialized ascriptions to reconfigure certain practices and habits, while the white majority could believe that markers of race have disappeared. I propose a conflation of modulation — understood as categorizations that compute social identities — with the digital as it is etymologically understood, as a modality of rupture, which cordons off fluidity into modular, compartmentalized bits.[13] Indeed, digital signals are

13 Digital signals are created through a modulation of waves, the continuity of, for example, audio waves is broken up into particles, to produce formats we understand as digital. A digital signal, too, is made up of a series

categorical reductions, where the reductive function, modulation, disappears behind the reductive signal. In a world where everything is categorized, fuzzy concepts and ideological continuities are contained within the digital — as unitary, discrete data. In this understanding, the digital is itself a form of categorization and counting, and therefore part of cultural production and meaning-making itself. This suggests that the digital always appears as less than the sum of its parts, and necessarily creates excess. This is a form of discipline and control, but it also allows for cracks that can be made inhabitable. More on that later.

I want to situate this argument as one that, with Wynter's (2003) understanding of generic humanism, has currency across locations and reaches beyond the discourse on digital cultures back to the logics of historical colonialism. Most importantly, it is possible to deconstruct the seemingly new techno-social globalized anxieties through technology's contingencies with histories of discrimination and oppression that Wynter bases yet again in what she terms the process of "dysselection" (Wynter 2003). Wynter describes the emergence of first physical and biological sciences as going hand in hand with the overrepresentation of Western bourgeois masculinity, and how it became a stand-in of what is understood to be the human. What Wynter describes as a twofold process of creating man1 (in religious superiority) and man2 (in scientific and secular superiority) is a process that first legitimates the project of colonial expansion,

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of digital values: it consists of 0's and 1's, or variations of the same. A 1 can become an 8, a 6, a 2, and so on (Passig and Scholz 2015). As a digital process, modulation amplifies a certain signal, such as music, language, data, in the process of which the carrier or transmitter of the signal is altered, but also retreats from cognition, as the signal becomes more present. On the other hand, analog data-processing means targeting a spectrum of meaning — a frequency on grandmother's radio, for example, or waves of sound. An analog signal is continuous, unbounded, vast, it is not reducible to a foundational singular unit or entity. The values themselves are thus either variations represented in a discrete numerical form, or representations of a more complex and continuous flow. How does one enumerate the ocean, how can one make dirt countable, how to count mush, how bits?

where the practices, affinities, and habits of living of a specific group — the Western male bourgeois — becomes the point of departure for all rewards, practices, laws of being human, while other variations of life and living are disregarded or subjugated for their deviation. Wynter's concept of articulating the generic human as he is produced and renaturalized within digital cultures — man2.0, so to speak[14] — reappears within computational infrastructures before, through, and after the internet as facticity and disembodied objectivity. Man2.0 thus describes the systemic privilege awarded to those who succumb to its logics, just as it gestures toward the making-invisible of these systems that benefit white liberal masculinity from the moment of colonization. Here, race (and gender) emerges as technology, in the sense of a practice or skill that is applied and is replicated over time, written into infrastructures, and distributed into the world (Coleman 2009). Instead of these ascriptions disappearing in line with more knowledge, they seep into the most minuscule categorizations and identifiers today, thus becoming hidden in the backend of the techno-political. In this way, any form of sociality is preempted, meaning that the outcome of datafied knowledge queries is already preinscribed into any automated negotiation of identities and spaces, thereby naturalizing and detaching discrimination from its historical roots.

Chapters 2 and 3 will explore fingerprinting, identification papers, and/or biological categorization of bodies, which serve to govern and control these bodies as divergent and performatively produce this divergence as essential, discrete, unitary — as digital and modular. This can only be the case as a result of technologies that produce such knowledge as factual, unchangeable, despite variance, and excesses in archives and on the ground. I explore three central theses in these first three chapters that

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14 When I speak of Wynter's figure of man, I will make use of the term "man2.0" to differentiate from actually existing male bodies and accentuate that Wynter's concept sees man as a figure, a hegemonic positionality, rather than a precise individual body. It is the aspirational imagined self, which remains unattainable to a certain extent, but privileges those who reach toward it, sometimes even including gendered and raced bodies.

will guide the remaining chapters. First, although material objects — identified here as technological, or indeed digital artifacts — are awarded a false sense of objectivity, material history shows how these objects are complicit in categorizations that hierarchize human difference, in fact, they are constructed for that precise reason. Second, such instances may be mapped on modes of othering that Sylvia Wynter identifies as a "dysselection" — a strategy of revoking human attributes from certain peoples according to the creation of these categories, but that such dysselection may "leak" across time and space, effecting other types of dysselections in other places. With these two theses, "modulation" becomes a concept through which to grasp the historical othering of peoples according to digital logics, which can attach to certain material forms and thus reappear across time to come to inform computation and virtual space. Third, this forced categorization always leads to excess, to fleeting existences that may come to recognize their shared vulnerability in the face of dysselection or, as Audre Lorde (2007) has suggested, being stranded on the outside of sociality and finding oneself there with others.

Modulating Relations for Germany: Race, Class, Gender in Modular Circulation

It has been said that the myths of our times are shaped by the technologies of myth-making. But what if this constant remediation of myths makes us forgetful of the nature of their constructions? In chapter 1, I sought to show how modulation builds upon the unmarking of white maleness, by making those dysselected from that framework hypervisible through acts of violence. However, positing the question of racism and racialization as one of visibility can flatten race to a seemingly natural, biological, and effectively epidermal question in a way that continues to rely on an imagined authenticity of racial representation. Following Wynter's acknowledgment of *mythoi* as a human-making-practice, I will explore an entanglement of technology with *mythoi* to argue for "race as/and technology,"[1]

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1   Beth Coleman and later Wendy Chun suggest that technology is constitutive of racial representation, but also of its very construction. Part of Chun's (2009) subtitle, "How to Do Things to Race," suggests that race is not only an inherent property of a body, but something that things can be done to, and thus something with its own material properties that can be altered. Following Chun's initial impetus, the following chapters do not address race merely in conjuncture with technology, but as technology,

a constellation that begins long before the internet and its infrastructures that justify material distribution and labor relations as ahistorical. I seek out one starting point in this chapter through the colonial history of the German settler colony in South West Africa. This will be the first of two moments exploring the question of visibility, identification, and targeting in a historical arc, which demonstrates how modulation is fundamental to the compound of race as/and technology, but also extends to constructions of gender, class, and caste. The tools of media theory to describe predigital phenomena might seem anachronistic, but the language of contemporary media can illuminate the material forms that have coproduced oppressions and how present modulation as control is rooted in race- and gender-based systems of identification and categorization. This accentuates the urgency of the lens that terms such as "digital" or "data colonialism" (Couldry and Mejias 2018; Kwet 2019) propose, for internet governance and for governance in general that increasingly works through ubiquitous and increasingly invisible media environments. Considering material agency in the doublet of race as/and technology might then lead to a deconstruction of the factuality of racial representation inherent to, for example, algorithmic identification. At the same time, considering material technologies as agential witnesses might point to spaces and gaps in the archives that could suggest stories yet to be told. I here will discuss objects that were developed in line with racial and, as I argue, allowed these ideologies to circulate across time and space, becoming constructed as factual through an objecthood that is conflated with objectivity. I address three moments of modulation that leak racial codification across time and space. First, I discuss the pass disc, an enumerated identifier in the form of a bronze medal that distinguished Africans from Germans. The disc is material witness and creator of an initial moment of racial codification that modulates the settler's society in what is today's Namibia. This modular form of identifica-

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which implies a crafted, material, and distributed constitution that, to speak with Wynter (2001), is not just biogenic, but sociogenic.

tion enabled the bureaucratic state to develop, justify, and (in part) deploy its imaginaries of complete control onto the resisting Indigenous communities in the land. The historical lineage I will propose posits technology as an apparatus of power by telling its story via the context of the German settler colony in South West Africa, instead of in the limited sense of high technology or mechanical apparatus. In telling this tale of control as modulation, little room is given to the resistance of the Herero, Damara, Nama, Ovambo, or San, not because there was none, but because the point is to draw attention to the constructedness of divisions via technological and/as racial markers, and to serve as a reminder that identity politics was once a tool of the hegemon to divide peoples, that the very thing that allows individuals to stand together is that which the oppressor has constructed as the root of their oppression.[2] This chapter thus

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2   The resistance clearly also showed awareness of the processes of racialization taking place, as Werner Hillenbrecht in particular points out through a close reading of the Nama leader Witbooi's and the Herero leader Samuel Maherero's correspondence (Hillenbrecht 2015). In fact, Hillenbrecht records the two leaders coming to a truce in 1892, in the face of the danger the Germans were identified as. The wars thus continued on several fronts. The colonial administration's census and registration project with the Bondelswart Nama in Warmbad in October 1903 developed into a fierce military confrontation that dragged on through the end of the year and could only be ended with a German victory on January 27, 1904, after reinforcements were deployed from the north of the country. This was but one occurrence of a number of armed conflicts against the Nama, a conflict that has been titled the "first partisan war" (Nuhn 2000) and had been ongoing since the Germans intensified their attacks in 1893 against a conjoined front under the leadership of Maherero and Witbooi. On other fronts, the Nama tactics of emerging and withdrawing quickly, never staying in one place too long, earned leader Jakob Morenga the title of "first modern guerilla warrior" (Drechsler 1980). Some argue that they had learned from the Herero, who had openly attacked German farms and infrastructures after the call to unite in resistance against the German settler men (Gewald 1999; Zimmerer and Zeller 2003). Hendrik Witbooi, Nama leader, fiercely defied German patronage from the very early years of settlement and insisted on Nama independence until his death in 1905 (Menzel 2000; Witbooi 1982). After the war had taken its genocidal course, resistance did not cede but took on more quotidian and symbolic forms of resistance, at least toward Germans and African headmen who had

focuses on the German *Herrschaftsutopie,* the establishment of a German bureaucratic system of rule and the necessary technological development to follow through with that rule, with hopes of enforcing a governmental and administrative utopia, which arguably reverberates within technocratic visions today.

The rest of the chapter offers an understanding of how the modular allows for, even builds upon, what I call "ideological leakages." Leakages enable instances of racialization to reverberate within specific historical moments that I read perhaps not as deterministically causal, but as contingent practices that echo and invoke, reformulate or recenter instances of modulation within other contexts. This first instance is essentially racialized, but the effects of the modular come to structure gender and class. These leakages show how the modular logics of division and conquest can become the self-deforming casts of modulation, which enumerate bodies to sort them into processes of belonging and dysselection. They also provide a vision that takes into account intersectional modes of resistance as necessary to overcome racial, classed, and gendered material divisions. The argument proposes a circular logic. Although the material objects of identification were inscribed with a colonial ideology that required a pass disc as means of control to Indigenous people in South West Africa, this disc targeted and, in fact, created Indigenous Africans as a group homogenous to the colonizer, distinguishable mainly on the level of intensity in which individuals needed to be controlled. Through this regime of visibility, the connotation of pass disc wearers with deviance became naturalized over time and enabled "context collapse"[3]

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fallen in line (Prein 1994). However, wars continued against South African troops after German rule ended in 1915 and up until the realization of full independence in 1990.

3   danah boyd had developed this concept originally to describe the overwhelming sense of having multiple audiences for which to perform one authentic identity on social media. According to boyd, because users no longer have a grasp of their audience, the facets of identity represented online run the risk of being considered as essential, unitary, unchanging. I use the term "context collapse" a little differently, but perhaps to similar effects, to indicate that the detachment of processes of racialization from

(boyd and Marwick 2011) that detaches material and meaning to a point that allows race to detach itself from the human body and indexically work through the visuality of the pass disc or medallion. I see this context collapse rearticulated through the *Not- und Schmachtaler,* a version of emergency money appearing in 1920s Germany that allowed for racialized ideologies to leak back to the German national public. Another instance follows with the then clearly computational dysselection according to fantasies of racial purity, which effectively befell Jews and a whole range of people historically marked as deviant during the Third Reich. I do not want to propose a direct continuity, be it political, technological, or otherwise. Instead, the concept of leakage is employed to explore the modern function of modulation as social sorting, and how dysselection according to markers of race is naturalized and self-deforms as it is transported to other contexts within and through sociotechnical systems and objects. These varied historical instances might seem eclectic, but they argue for the technological—indeed digital—function of identification as always already addressing, and thereby creating, types according to a logic that ultimately rearticulates Wynter's figure of man in a moment-specific version.

The Pass Disc: Modulation as Informational Dysselection

Across geographies, colonial conquest is commonly told as a narrative of military force, superior machinery, and military tactics. Certainly, this is not untrue for German settlement in southwestern coastal Africa, but the colony that settled in today's Namibia has a historically different framing because Germany has been posited as a short-lived and (as a result?) more benevolent colonizer.[4] But official German settlement occurred at a

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the racialized body itself produces a type of circulation that can reach far beyond the mobility of individual bodies. This is in itself not necessarily a bad thing, but is dependent on the ideologies and representations reductively represented and on the literacy of those engaging with it.

4   The narrative that Germany was a benevolent colonizer, that colonization only took place during a short period of time in comparison to other

time when Namibia was already the frontier zone of colonial wars in southern Africa, where white settlers had entered into oftentimes violent and forced trade relations, pitting Indigenous groups against each other (Lau 1995). This already fraught situation gave arriving Germans the context through which they could settle under the pretenses of protection and assert themselves as better suited for rule of the land. Once the colony had been established, very similar ideas of racial hierarchies according to bioscientific standards of the time were articulated to legitimize the division of land, people, and communities—and to justify violence and, later, genocide.[5] Here, I see the enumerative categorization as a specific iteration of neutrality that pro-

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European empires, or that colonial desires were less strong in Germany are highly contested claims. Jürgen Zimmerer (2001, 2011, 2021) has shown repeatedly that colonial desires occupied Germans under Bismarck and that he finally agreed to support the protectorate because of recurring demands he could no longer ignore. This despite the settlement's minimal profitability, which would turn against the Germans as they continued to pour money into the military operations in Namibia. In a research project currently being finalized for publication, Yann Le Gall discusses colonial occupation in southern Africa as the violent epitome of several hundred years of exploitative trade relations.

5 A lot has been said about the social Darwinism taking hold of Europe during their colonial endeavors, most prominently about Francis Galton, the birth of eugenics, and his theory of intelligence that relied on overinterpreting specific forms of standardization according to racial and gendered hierarchies. And these theories hover in the background of these very material instances that codify Germany's history of modular dysselection. Legitimized by a scientific discourse on categorization and difference, the need to document that difference led to racial theories of hierarchy that surely were necessary for the development of the technological rule in South West Africa. I can only name very few in an excessive and constantly growing list of people concerned with the materiality involved in producing race and gender after eugenicist logics became normalized throughout the early modern period. Londa Schiebinger (1993), Kimberly Hamlin (2014), and Melissa N. Stein (2015) have produced exemplary analyses of how natural sciences developed to negotiate women's place according to political desires and moral norms. Kathryn Yusoff (2019) and Kalindi Vora and Neda Atanasoski (2020) have shown how racialized bodies were turned into objects and infrastructures that service the figure of man, and Beth Coleman (2009) has been central in arguing that race and technology can in fact be conflated as coproducing each other. These are just a few of

duces material modulation as something apart from cultural production and has enabled the racializing impetus of technological mechanisms to be perpetuated up until the present.

In such a vision, the historical division of colonial periods (landing and establishing of German rule until 1904, genocidal war 1904–8, postwar period, and the "peace of the graveyard," as Drechsler (1980) called it, has been called out for portraying an image of shifting colonial attitudes toward the locals (Zimmerer and Zeller 2003). These temporal divisions propose that German violence was a consequence of anticolonial protest against a previously benevolent government, and thus makes Indigenous groups the origin of violence. The periodical divisions also neglect the various and interrelated exchanges—sometimes violent—in which different Indigenous groups (beyond the Nama and Herero) participated in before and after the war, along with other forms of resistance, protest, and solidarity that were articulated in other ways than straightforward rebellion, attacks on farms, or collective flight across Indigenous affiliations. In the same way, German violence toward Indigenous populations not only happened in military form and by brutal force, but also functioned through a restructuring of society, a modulation of social bonds, and a bureaucratic incision in terms of identification, surveillance, and regulation of mobility.[6] The pass disc is

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the more recent theorists, and surely there are many more, some of whom appear and are cited throughout this book.

6   This is interesting because, as Zimmerer has argued, the notion of planability, efficiency, and complete resource management based on racial exploitation would find its almost totalitarian realization within Nazi ideology. Across his texts, Zimmerer goes to great pains to point out that he does not intend to address the question, whether or not the Shoah was an exceptional occurrence in history. Instead, he hopes to point out continuities that I harness here to argue for different situations in which moments of modulation have paved the way for, or been installed in the name of, control. Another central aspect of Zimmerer's line of argument is the lens of bureaucracy leading to subjugation, how administrative identification can turn into violence, and how seemingly innocuous forms of targeting may lead to cultural segregation and social upheavals, and how societies are divided via markers of identity that reverberate within social media infrastructures. Later I will address how these modular categorizations,

thus the material point of accumulation referring to an entire archive of informational data on the colonial subject, which shows the continuity of racial fantasies of control and its co-creation of seemingly objective racial factors as deviance and criminality. The social reality did not immediately correspond with the binary code the colonial ideology and racial sciences demanded, and so the difference needed to be overemphasized.[7]

The pass disc was accompanied by a material and social modulation, which began with the land. Once the German Reich staked its claims on German South West Africa, it quickly and violently began reorganizing the terrain according to a bureaucratic logic of segregation that broke social relations and disrupted cultural flows. In the early years of formal German settlement, the head of the southern regional police district

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expressed mostly in the language of fear and neglect, are still informing contemporary racializations, albeit in very different form. Although today's modalities of violence may seem to be verbal most of the time, reading violence on social media as iterative of histories of racialization and social sorting might enable a reevaluation of questions of regulation, identification, and automated recommendation systems.

7   As in other colonies, the hope was that the superiority the Germans claimed for themselves would be enough to segregate Germans and Africans in all aspects of social life. But the administrative officers could not curb the enthusiasm with which Germans cohabited with Africans and even adapted some of their cultural traits (Grosse 2000). It is important to note the need to visibly mark Africans as Africans, which contradicts the idea of rigid racialization as a biological fact. The need for rigid identifications of Africans gained urgency with the steadiness of African resistance, which surprised German colonizers, who thought their superiority would "naturally" allow their proposed social order to fall into place (Giesebrecht 1898). The variations of identity, racial uncertainties, and increased differentiation between colonial subjects legitimated an apparatus that could separate individuals according to markers that were yet again derived from the racial sciences of colonial scientists. As Zimmerer notes, resistance to the practices of racialization and control stemmed from the African population, and settlers, too, were resistant to the rigid segregation the colonial order proposed (Zimmerer 2011, 28). This speaks to an entangled social life in the colonies: African populations and Europeans were not always visibly distinguishable, just as the assimilation between cultural practices made an identification according to tradition and lifestyle range from difficult to impossible.

advocated a police registry in charge of collecting data of all working Africans (Zimmerer and Zeller 2003). The divisive form of rule extended from German mapping endeavors to become implicated in division of people from their early arrival in the colony.[8] Soon, the land in German South West Africa became divided into three districts overseen by individual administrative offices. The number increased to six in 1903, and the further division of African populations during the war expressed itself in the sixteen districts established by 1914, each with its own police office and inhabitant registry. Predominantly, the police districts regulated African labor relations and had the effect of enforcing compulsory labor and locative settling for the African communities, many of which had previously lived more nomadic lives.[9] Ideologically, these police districts show that surveillance and capture were part and parcel of the colonial state and its informational rule from the beginning, as they were the basis upon which the pass discs could then be deployed and managed.

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8 It has been argued that German colonial ideology precedes the formation of the nation-state (Smith 1974; Rash 2016; Grosse 2000; Zimmerer 2011). My point of departure is thus not necessarily the beginning of Germany's colonial endeavors in general, but despite changing regimes and totalitarian rule, this starting point lends itself to a history of the German nation. So even though I am certain that colonial thought precedes the German nation, the argument I make is about the German nation and thus begins after its establishment in 1871.

9 German South West Africa was not incredibly profitable, which evoked many a discussion back in Germany. Perhaps this added a layer of pressure to increase efficiency and gain an oversight into the vast lands of the colony. Indeed, it explains Bismarck's hesitations to deploy militia to secure colonial territory. But it was already in 1893, as Helmut Bley argues, that the attachment to the protectorate was both emotional and political (Bley 1968). I mention this because very often colonization is argued to base itself on economic attachment and capitalist expansion only, but German South West Africa proves that a variety of competing discourses legitimated the colonial encounter. The rigid force with which modulation was inscribed into the everyday suggests the need to prove German superiority, something that reappears in German ideology after World War I, where the French occupation of the Rhineland seems to have led to a German inferiority complex.

The late distribution of the pass disc, according to Zimmerer (2002, 2011), was only because it seemed counterproductive to employ what was already considered a forceful subjugation at the time, as Germans worried that the nomadic Herero and seminomadic Nama that made up the largest groups in the territory would become fearful of registration and try to avoid it by seeking out the vastness of the land. This vastness was itself an ideological construction, both overstated and a matter of scale, but it was congruent with the spatial logics of German expansion and colonial tropes of found land. It is thus not surprising that these ideologies inscribed themselves into the way settlers dealt with the inhabitants they found within that space. In the aftermath of the war, the plans could come to fruition easily with the colonial decrees of 1907, seemingly legitimated by the violent colonial wars in which the Nama and Herero fought for their liberation again and again. However, many high-ranking colonial officers supported the identification systems long before their actual realization within the Native Ordinances (Steinmetz 2007). The genocidal war was seen as a justification of the rigid containment of Africans, but it—and the consequential deployment of the pass disc—marks the epitome of decades of struggle with resistant groups, and the colonizers attempts to construct the invaded land as largely there for the taking. This pass disc (or "pass tag," sometimes "pass token"),[10] which allows me to set one starting point for racial modulation, posits race as/and technology, and its subsequent effects for class and gender.

The pass disc imposed on African bodies was innocuous enough: it consisted of a round disc with raised edgings and a hole, through which it could be bound to the body with a string

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10 There has been very little research that centers on the pass disc, but its centrality to establishing a visible trajectory of governance in the colonial setting is referenced across literature on German South West Africa (McGregor 1991; Steinmetz 2007; Zimmerer 2002, 2011). In this context, I would like to emphasize the work of Anouk Madörin, who, like me, analyzes the pass disc's (or tag's) specific function as a socio-technical object that created a regime of visibility and containment along racialized markers.

or chain. It was made out of brass for durability, having replaced previous forms of identity papers that quickly became illegible and tattered (McGregor 1991). The front of the pass disc—its interface—carried an inscription of the imperial crown, the name of the police district the wearer was allotted to, and a unique number of identification. This number referred to data stored in the administrative office of the district that carried all information on that person's social and labor relations. An individual's Indigenous affiliations and place of residence were registered, as was social conduct, such as work ethics, loyalty to the employer or lack thereof, social and familial relations, and travel behavior (McGregor 1991). Free movement was allowed only within the district the wearer belonged to; any venturing outside the territory needed to be legitimated through additional documentation. The enumerated allocation of each Black body to a specific police district greatly affected the formerly nomadic populations in their freedom and mobility, thus exerting itself through an informational grid of identification and not merely by discipline or force. As the colonial ordinances state, it was introduced to "maintain the peace" (Zimmerer 2001, 190; my translation) and thus illustrates at least in part the threat freely moving Black bodies were already considered to be by German settlers from the start.[11] Any divergence from the colonial decrees (or loss of the pass disc) would be fined a high fee, a brutal punishment, considering that Africans worked for menial and sometimes even no pay (McGregor 1991; Zimmerer 2001). Documentation of any transgression, including information on fees and labor misdemeanors (previously issued fines were seen as reason for harsher punishment), was stored in one of the many police districts sprouting during the initial years of colonial settlement. The disc thus connected the body to an archive of information on more and more Africans, which corresponded with and legitimated the principles of racial other-

11 The formulation also shows that peace, much like freedom, has nothing to do with equal rights or justice in a system that is constructed upon racial inequalities.

ness that had previously been introduced through colonial sciences and eugenicist principles (Grosse 2000).

First introduced in 1904, the pass disc finally became mandatory in 1907–8 for every man, woman, and child over the age of eight identified as nonwhite.[12] Because it allowed the Indigenous population a formal sense of freedom, the pass disc was worn rather consistently and thus inserted a visible regime of differentiation into the social order of South West Africa. This visibility effectively lent the pass disc its material ability to conflate deviance and racial belonging. Because the pass disc was first placed upon the rebellious workers, whose whereabouts worried the Germans, African deviance became normalized through the pass disc, as it slowly circulated as a material technology of identification, replacing the informational archive with a mere symbol of deviance. Such productions of difference necessarily leaked into quotidian spaces and cultural imaginaries once the pass discs were distributed and circulated visibly in the everyday. Segregation was then important for differentiating between white and nonwhite populations, and for dividing the Indigenous populations on the ground, who greatly outnumbered German settlers.

Central here is that the ideology of racial othering in a modular mode preceded the violent reaction that immobilized African peoples after the war (Zimmerer 2011). The response to the racial anxieties upon encountering a nonsubservient other anticipates the idea of "technological solutionism" (Morozov 2013), the idea that more technology, in this case envisioned

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12 German settlers dreamed of registering every single Indigenous person. And yet, the informational apparatus was incomplete because of logistical issues. The first versions of passes were paper and quickly tattered, illegible, or lost, but the metal plates required more resources, and the settlers had difficulties getting enough materials for the discs into the colonies. The governors expected a tight regiment with regular reports, which police officials were unwilling or incapable of completing (Zimmerer 2001). There is no documentation of such cases, but it is not improbable that some officials faked reports or were unwilling to comply with the tightly knit surveillance systems because of solidarity with Indigenous populations and because of their own working conditions.

through the pass disc as a mechanism of identification, surveillance, regulation, and containment, will solve problems that were orchestrated through racial dehumanization in the first place. Considering race as/and technology means that race is codified through technology, but also that technology is actually developed so as to navigate and assist the production of race—the two co-constitute each other (Coleman 2009). I read the pass disc as a racializing technology, in which a whole apparatus of seemingly objective data collection accumulates to a material form that effects dysselection. The discs functioned indexically, meaning broadly dependent on context, but their materiality allowed them to circulate without context, thus naturalizing their symbolic functions as common sense. The connotation of pass disc wearers with deviance, even danger, circulated without any insight into why the wearer carried it, and so the disc was a key element that normalized the conflation of Blackness with criminality in quotidian public space.

Objects of identification that circulate visibly upon the Indigenous body thus reference not only information on the individual's status but also the archive of police photography that accompanied the introduction of the pass disc (Rizzo 2013). The disc normalized and codified the racial categories introduced by racial scientists and therefore served to produce distinct knowledge of racial deviance in the quest for racial segregation. Although the German bureaucratic state was nowhere as totalitarian and organized as it imagined itself, the pass disc is symbolic of the colonial information-gathering apparatus, which cemented the assumption that rational organizing and data-collection would govern the bodies of Indigenous populations as model subjects.

Thus, the narrative of accuracy that drives the form of governance seems to foreshadow contemporary iterations of data and information. The native ordinances stated that the archives registering the information on the pass disc should be updated regularly, thus underlining paranoid data-hoarding as a means of control by the Germans. Anxious visits to remote farms after the war attest to the deviance that had been inscribed into the

African body during that time, and to the notion that accuracy might contain that deviance: Colonial subjects were visited as often as once a week, an almost paranoid amount considering the long distances and the slow modes of travel (Zimmerer 2001). At the same time, the imperfections and ambiguities inherent to data-collection made complete knowability impossible, even in a state where the settler-knower could override the evidence of the racist archive. The discs could be revoked by any white person at any time, effectively leaving Africans immobile and vulnerable to imprisonment at the whim of any European (Zimmerer 2011). But this also allowed for some leeway, as it was possible to exchange pass discs or request new ones upon entering a new police district. This gave some freedom and, to me, is proof of solidarity between individuals with different affiliations. Together with German bureaucratic unwillingness to document all movement, be it out of laziness or solidarity, workers who had fled their employers could take on new names rather easily and thus disappear before the state (Grosse 2000).

But this situation was also often willfully misconstrued, because the shortage of labor was a pressing issue after the genocidal war. Many Germans lamented that their workers were lured into employment by other Europeans with false promises, or by force, when they weren't wearing the discs. Indigenous women were abducted, disappeared, or received new identities when pass discs were exchanged in secret or by force. When these people were found, the legal situation was often volatile. Because pass discs were not reliable in these situations, police were often left incapable of actually acting in anyone's interest and assigned ownership and tribal affiliations according to subjective judgment (Zimmerer 2001), an example of how technologically constructed objectivity merely served to justify already existing hegemony. Despite the formal existence of African courts, Germans had the last word on many issues, and white defendants were often pardoned on the basis of the judicial language they employed, a symbolic order that made little sense within local vocabulary (Zimmerer 2002). This produced first instances of kin liability, as German superficiality in regarding

these objects often led to wrongful accusations and arbitrary court decisions—criminality convicted on the charge of race (Steinmetz 2007). Such instances of misidentification show that the German colonial state was not as successfully bureaucratic as suggested, nor did its aspirations of complete plannability become realized with the pass disc. Instead, this situation gives testimony to the leakages produced by the modern informational form of governance, which, I will argue, reverberates within present-day algorithmic systems of recognition.

Much like contemporary modes of identification, the pass disc must therefore be understood as promoting a connection between racialization and modulation as control. Because the pass disc was a central marker of racial visibility, it did not as such mark individuals, but was instead involved in typification—it visibly distinguished otherness in a settler community that could now see prevailing fantasies of otherness legitimated symbolically and visibly. The pass disc materialized race as/and technology, and it was involved in the production of race, just as racial fantasies were the reason behind the development of the pass disc. As Allen Feldman (2016) describes, the force of technology in creating these modulations according to types has been rendered secondary. But the interest in developing identity papers, photographs, and punch card systems must be understood as stemming from an interest in creating and codifying humans, or, more specifically, to "dysselect" (Wynter 2003) the African body from that definition of humanity so that its extraction and thingification would be naturalized. Serialization through the numbers on the pass disc served not as modalities of producing the individual, or singular human, but of a type— "singular plural" (Chun 2016, 46)—whose central markers were made to overlap with the regimes of social hierarchization introduced by the colonial ideology. The visible circulation of such a material difference was a necessary result of the colonial ideology that created Africans in binary opposition to European superiority. Imagined as a continuation of informational rule from the late nineteenth century until the forced transfer of colonial powers after World War I, German South West Africa is

an exemplary location that describes the process of modulation, where technology and ideology together set up the bureaucratic control of social relations. The physiognomic codification of colonized bodies served to ascertain their deviance, a deviance not always immediately visible. It was thus produced to simultaneously assess but also circulate that deviance as factuality, a codification of the relevance for racial hierarchies in the colony. In its indexical circulation that referenced a whole archive of data that would come to signify race, the pass disc was a central technology that coproduced the regime of colonial subjugation, which would have further effects on populations in the colony and beyond. With this typification come other specificities that today are well-known concepts central to feminist critique: the reductive portrayal of the colonial body (as the criminal body) in photography translates into the granting of interiority and awards the right to privacy only to whiteness (Osucha 2009); the accompanying notion of the body as unitary, natural, and as a result unchangeable reduces women and colonized peoples to resources (Federici 2014) and creates the imaginary of radical ontological difference based on incommensurable and authentic cultures (Mohanty 2003), or biologically determined bodies (Wynter 2001).

Therefore, it is the case that technology plays a central role in these acts of identification and control, but also that these technologies could only function in that way because an ideological system had already prescribed a dichotomy in a digital sense—unitary, binary, reductive—and scientific rationale and numerical materiality had declared this dichotomous differentiation as objective. The idea of race necessitated technology, and technology was created within the context of an ideological necessity to codify race. With the material circulation of objects that carried these symbolic functions in them, social and public space in the colonies became modular. Theoretically, African people had a certain freedom of movement and temporal self-management, but they were constantly limited by the pass discs that produced them as laborers when carrying them, or as deviants and criminals when they were missing (a differentiation

that became increasingly void after the war—from then on, all Africans were considered dangerous and criminal). Over time, the pass disc performatively soothed the contradictions of lived reality, of which there were many, be it marriage and cohabitation, "mixed" children, or the assimilation of (especially) lower-class Germans into African traditions and quotidian practices (Mamozai 1989; Grosse 2000; Wildenthal 2001). Writings on population governance were initially marked in their ideological implications, but the nontextual quality of objects from the colonies attributed an unquestioned "factuality" to them. It is such a perspective that lends itself to an understanding of how the German state could come to see mere Black presences and the cohabitation of nonwhite and white bodies as an "attack on the biopolitical substance of Germans" (Zimmerer 2001, 49; my translation), because the ideologies of Western superiority and irrevocable difference were tied into a socio-technological materiality that was yet again imagined as objective. Technological artifacts of identification then legitimated the preexisting ideological categorizations, but also served to rearticulate the need for technologies of surveillance, capture, and control that were central to the colonial imaginary even prior to the war.

But the effects of identification, capture, and control of Indigenous populations did not stop at the boundaries of what was called the "protectorate."[13] Experiences in the colonies affected social relations back in Germany. Absolute control over the colonized was argued to secure social welfare within German territorial boundaries in Europe (Grosse 2000). German colonial politics was also seen as a way to integrate the German worker into the bourgeois nation-state—and divide notions of international solidarity. The transition into a welfare state in Europe

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13 I am wary of the term, because it can be considered to support the claim that Germans came to South West Africa as the benevolent colonizer that brought peace and protected communities from each other. I do not want to invisibilize this narrative, since it illustrates the stark contrast to the realities on the ground. But my trouble with uncritically taking on the concept of the protectorate as a colonial term has mostly led to me refraining from using the term in the text, but it does appear in footnotes.

thus necessitated the exploitation of colonized laborers in South West Africa and other colonial territories, and resulted in the ideological segregation of the German working class from colonized workers, who up until that point had been considered as part of the international proletariat, at least by socialist segments within Europe (Kautsky 1907; Grosse 2000). The mandate to divide and conquer, so common within colonies across empires, also influenced the division of the working class, as colonial reformers foresaw that a war based on racial modulation provided a viable alternative to a socialist revolution on a global scale, and would thus keep the ethno-state intact (Grosse 2000). Modulation in the colonies, the creation of race as/and technology, thus not only separated Nama from Herero and Damara from San, the colonial apparatus also divided African from European workers and hindered international solidarity. Further, the attempt to secure social welfare in Germany radically affected gender politics in the state and its protectorate.

The bodies of African women were the continuous providers of new labor material through reproduction, and their reproductive health was later increasingly monitored by German women. The hopes of ending the cohabitation of white soldiers with African women led to an increase of white women being shipped to the colonies after the decree against "mixed" marriages. This also increased the control of white female sexuality, just as it had inserted a chasm between German and Indigenous women in the colonies, setting them up as hierarchically placed competitors for the attention of men (Mamozai 1989).[14] The

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14   Many colonial officers cohabited with Indigenous women in informal concubine-like arrangements, but sometimes also in marriage (Mamozai 1989; Wildenthal 2001). Marriages between African women and German men questioned the racial aspects of the colonial hierarchy, as they were legitimated by the ideologies of the bourgeois family, thus proposing a complicated negotiation of competing discourses in the colonial experience (Wildenthal 2001). These marriages were lucrative to some extent because they secured the support of the African women's families, which of course were chosen carefully and according to social status. Further, dowries were often generously gifted, e.g., in the form of land and property (Zimmerer 2011). But African women became eligible for German

colonial encounter always included gendered and sexed phantasies of discovery and domination. But in German South West Africa, the tensions in the colonies that effected the rigid regulations foresaw static social positions for each individual according to raced, sexed, and, perhaps less obviously, classed logics. From the beginning of the war in 1904, more and more soldiers were deployed in support of German troops. Since male settlers were no longer allowed to marry their African companions after the decree illegalizing mixed marriages from 1905, the effect was merely one of illegalizing the African women's status, making it all the more precarious. Back in the homeland, the colonial setting was presented as aspirational: lower-class women were addressed as potential wives to officers and higher-ranking military men they would never have had access to in the social order back home (Mamozai 1989). The prohibition of interracial marriages effectively enabled poor white women to climb up the social ladder as lower-class women were increasingly sent to the war-torn colony, which was considered too unattractive for upper-class women (Wildenthal 2001). Again, instrumental and solutionist qualities of colonialism with respect to race, class, and gender emerge—white women were considered a solution to the problem of the continuous increase of mixed-race populations, which was imagined to simply result from the lack of white women in the colonies. This imagination negated

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citizenship after marriage, something the colonial administration under Leutwein resented and considered a threat to the "German character of the protectorate" (Zimmerer 2011, 228; my translation) and to the society back home. Once identified as a problem, it thus became a central necessity of the Kolonialzentralverwaltung (Colonial Central Administrations Office) to statistically assess the largest of this population group, which was increasingly considered a threat to the racial hierarchy in the colonies, which had painfully been established to divide Indigenous populations and make workers especially out of African men. The violent encounters, in which Africans held the upper hand at first, had already left the image of the German racial superiority over rebelling Africans shaken, and some officials in the colonies worried about the threat they posed to the image of an exclusionary German citizenship, as the aspects of marriage as "sacred" would enable "mixed" populations entry into German Europe (Wildenthal 2001).

the lived reality on the ground—Lora Wildenthal, for example, describes that white women had to go to great efforts, despite the supposed lack of competition, to draw male attention toward them and away from Indigenous women (Wildenthal 2001). In addition, German men did not appreciate a regulation of their sexuality, and it was seen to be counterproductive to the masculinist fantasy of domination to regulate the sexuality of male settlers. The pass disc rigidified these constructions in meaningful ways, and this was indeed its intended use, but it further enabled a referral of responsibility to naturalized racial hierarchies. Because the pass disc was the referent object of racialization, the deviance of Africans did not need to be constantly articulated, but it circulated, arguably, without speech and thus became common sense.

This section has described the effects of the need for modular objects of identification to soothe race anxieties of the colonial administration. In the homeland, these racial anxieties affected white women in their sexuality to an extent German men were not subject to, despite the decrees that forbade interracial marriages between Germans and Africans. The aftermath of German occupation in South West Africa sees modular racializations rearticulated within German home territory. The *Not- und Schmachtaler,* a version of emergency money that circulated throughout Germany after the end of World War I, expands the racial ideology onto the colonial soldiers who were installed in the Rhineland during its occupation by the French. The colonial setting had modulated African and German women, but the circulation of the coins enabled a process of framing Black individuals as threatening and violent, with the intention of modulating sexuality and cohabitation on German territory.

Colonial Modulation and the German Bourgeoisie

When Germany lost World War I, the Treaty of Versailles passed the colonial administration of South West Africa onto South Africa, which ignored the mandate to prepare Namibians for self-determination and continued along the path of violence and

segregation. In Germany, Allied forces controlled German territory and stationed troops along German borders to the west. The French, who provided a majority of the troops, employed Black colonial soldiers from Tunisia, Algeria, Morocco, Madagascar, and Senegal, which came to be read as an intended humiliation, first only within conservative and right-wing political circles, and later within society at large (Wigger 2017). This seemed to shame the German sense of pride after having arguably been unsuccessful both in its colonial endeavors and in World War I, and the occupation of the Rhineland came to be known as the "black horror on the Rhine" (Wigger 2017).[15] This term was inscribed and distributed into the public via a set of medallions that functioned as emergency money after the war. These medallions, which circulated throughout Germany during the financial crisis of the 1920s, were imprinted with strong racial messaging that would go on to circulate within German society. All objects conveyed a visual similarity and indexically evoked the colonial anxieties of German South West Africa. The medallions, made of bronze, brass, or porcelain, either portrayed a kneeling soldier being stabbed in the back by another soldier with a broken sword, or they showed a monstrous ape-like figure possessively cradling the limp figure of a naked female figure. Both variants carried the inscription *Deutscher Not- und Schmachtaler* on one side, and *Schwarze Schmach und Kulturschande am Rhein* on the other, thus specifically connecting the imagery with the preemptive fear and humiliation (*Schmach* and *Kulturschande* translate as "shame" and "cultural disgrace") of being occupied by African soldiers. The specific depictions on the *Not- und Schmachtaler* played a substantial part in normalizing and circulating the connotation of Black men with vio-

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15 Fatima El-Tayeb (2001) sees the shame Germans felt in part stemming from the fact that, having lost their colonies after World War I, they were unable to deploy colonial soldiers themselves. Another reading proposed by Iris Wigger (2017) is that the German feeling of racial and national superiority suffered, because the Germans were now occupied by foreign forces—the colonizers were being colonized, and, above all, were colonized by those they had previously identified as subhuman.

lence and sexual deviance, which led to hateful attitudes toward the colonial soldiers and their offspring and increasingly toward Afro-Germans and "mixed-raced" descendants. Legitimized by rumors involving fantasms of Black hypersexual masculinity, the medallions were seen as evidence of Black sexual predators preying upon innocent, passive white women (Wigger 2017).

These stories circulated independently of any actual evidence of increased violence on the ground. The "black horror on the Rhine" must be said to have largely been a fake news story, in which the occupation by a small number of colonial soldiers was believed to have led to a massive increase of sexual violence. Although colonial soldiers made up not even half of the troops and there seem to be no records of an imbalance of misconduct between soldiers of different ethnicities, their presence in the Rhineland gave rise to stories of violent sexual exploits of African men who victimized white women (El-Tayeb 2001; Wigger 2017). In the years after the war, but even when French occupation was already on the decline, the tale of the "black horror" and "German shame" seemed ubiquitous, and French colonial soldiers were ubiquitously depicted through racist narratives and imagery. Such gossip received factual objectivity when it materialized through the emergency money, which firmly grounded racist ideology circulating innocuously in everyday German life. The colonial setting had predominantly regulated male sexuality toward African women, but this coin negotiated white women's desire for the colonial other as dangerous and deviant. The doubling of the ape-like figure and the depiction of a backstabbing soldier mapped onto the racialized subjects in the colonial army and extended to any Black male person, and it addressed white German men as much as German women as a referent-we that dysselected Black presences as monstrous or treacherous others.

The colonial setting required a body upon which to attach racial fantasies, and this emergency medallion represents an instance in which racialization is completely detached from an embodied being. The "black horror" required no evidence, because the medallion is evidence enough for its reality. In

this instance, race becomes sociogenic (Wynter 2001): it relies not on any form of evidence or attachment to sciences, but is embedded within social phenomena materialized through the medallions. However, Wynter describes sociogenic phenomena as the potential to create an affective collective experience of what it means to be Black, but the objectification that takes place through the materiality of the coins is one that addresses and rearticulates hegemonic society as white and male. It is thus an object that functions in the service of man, one that, through Wynter, we can read as operating in the sense of autopoiesis—it emphasizes a system "already presupposed" (Wynter 2003, 26) that figures Blackness as danger to white subjectivity. The theoretical conflation Wynter supposes is interesting for this context, because "autopoiesis" was a term first implemented by Humberto Maturana and Francesco Varela, two central thinkers of cybernetics as the theory of computational/informational control.[16] This suggests that such cybernetic language sheds light on colonial ideologies and shows that colonialism informs cybernetics in its racial implications. Read through the language of cybernetics, the emergency medallions' explicit interpellation, directed toward a white audience that finds itself represented either as a soldier betrayed by the strange occupants (stabbed in the back) or as limp and lifeless figures at the mercy of the

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16 Cybernetics is the science of control mechanisms in which information plays a central role. This crossover between computational theory and critical race theory is a central intersection upon which this book builds, thinking through what computer theories that have sought to overthrow human fallibilities have potentially opened up, yet failed to see. Through autopoiesis, Maturana and Varela conflate practices of being and ways of knowing to suggest that consciousness circumvents modalities of representationalism as they potentially play a role within the political. Despite the proposed conflation of knowing and being, Maturana and Varela remain silent on the implications of this concept, which could precisely inform political gaps between knowing and doing—because some actions would require a different modality of being. Wynter has picked up on the term to give an account of how people continue to invest in a way of life, despite it being potentially harmful to one's own idealized ways of living (Maturana and Varela 1980; McKittrick 2003; Wynter 2003; Hantel 2018).

monstrous other served to modulate white men and women into very specific roles that would maintain racial segregation.

In this reading, the *Schmachtaler* take on a similar function as the pass disc—both circulated within quotidian spaces to subtly produce an image of Blackness as other, often in a way that went unnoticed by its German recipients as they validated an already present ideological status quo, thus rigidifying it. The literature on the medallions specifically is rather limited, and Wigger, too, has little more to say about them. But what is central for the argument here, perhaps, is the aesthetic and functional similarity to the pass discs described above—round medallions, which could circulate within everyday contexts and created regimes of racial visibility. But it is rather the differences between the two artifacts that speak to the leakages of modulation—the pass discs still necessitated backing by data in the colonial administrative offices, but the ideological force of the emergency medallions depicting the "black horror" already built upon a common sense that placed sexual deviance and irrational violence as inherently characteristic ascribed to the Black body. On the surface, these two objects thus differ in their function and content—one is an object of identification, and the other a representation of otherness that does not necessitate any sort of embodied reference, not anymore. The medallions speak to instances of normalization, where the modular leaks into quotidian spaces and alters the perceptions of social reality through the visible-yet-commonsensical circulation of indexical objects—objects that can, in this sense, be read as informational media (Keeling 2011). Again, it did not matter whether Blackness really represented the occupation, because increasingly Afro-German men were also implicated in the imagery of the Black savage unable to control its sexual urges. This suggests the rhizomatic quality assigned to technological assemblages, which I describe as "leakage," meaning that the relational and indexical function of technologies (to point toward a variety of truth-making practices by connecting and relating things previously not necessarily related) enables these material objects to draw in more and more people according to ideological para-

digms. The medallions thus suggest an expansion of modular modes of dysselection onto people, where a predefined intimacy of Blackness with violence is projected and circulated beyond its point of origin.

Wigger (2017) makes a point to state that, certainly, there were instances of sexual assault perpetrated by colonial soldiers, but she seems to come to the conclusion that the imaginary of sexual violence stemming from African perpetrators had more to do with the circulation of the narratives that inscribed the image of Black deviance into everyday society, and the ubiquity with which these narratives were shared made them a part of culture. Contextualizing this claim for my argument, it seems that the *Not- und Schmachtaler* specifically played a role in this early twentieth-century version of fake news, for the distribution and popularity both of the small coin and the racialized narrative continued all the way through to 1930, despite the continuously reduced presence of French colonial soldiers in the Rhineland, and their complete disappearance a year earlier, in 1929.[17] Already in 1927, the Pfalz Commissariat and other proponents of the propaganda campaign were issuing complaints to the German National Health Office, inquiring whether it was devising a solution to guarantee the racial purity of Germans, supposedly under threat by the children emerging out of sexual relations between white women and colonial soldiers (Wigger 2017). The solution that was agreed upon can be seen as techno-scientific: it was agreed that the sterilization of these children

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17　The framing of African sexuality as dangerous was a big success. First only circulated among the political Right, it led to large waves of protest against and appeals to the Allied forces, petitioning European (read, white) solidarity against the forces depicted as foreign and violent (Wigger 2017). It is important that this solidarity evoked a white European identity, as the appeal to remove colonial soldiers was also made to the French and others occupying German territory. The readiness with which this narrative was picked up and circulated indicates the commonsensical nature of it—Germans, from political institutions to the media, from the ministry of foreign affairs to a joint plea by almost all member parties of the Reichstag (only the communists, the USPD, and KPD opposed the plea), united under the protest against the deployment of the "black horror."

was the only way to guarantee a continuation of white purity (El-Tayeb 2011). Since no other measurements were employed that protected women, the trajectory of violence against women with which the situation in the Rhineland was constructed as a problem seemed arbitrary at this point. The solutionist imperative of sterilization reveals the ethnic codification of difference and racist assumptions that drove the question of violence against women from the start—the issue was never safety, but the maintenance of racial purity and the hold of white man on the figure of the human.

Tabulating Race, Automating Modulation

The enumerated quality of the pass disc lent itself to the myth of simple fact (meaning that the assumption was that numbers don't lie) and the *Schmachtaler* circulated seemingly without origin. As a result, the indexicality of these objects naturalized the narrative of Blackness as deviance, danger, and threat. The objects and their narratives also influenced normative German sexualities and gender expressions. By the 1930s, statistics had become a central aspect of the bureaucratic state and was acknowledged as a modality of governance among ruling elites (Aly and Roth 2005; Supik 2014; Wietog 2001). It served to establish notions of difference, which were remapped onto German territory and increasingly fueled nationalist fantasies of totalitarian expansion and informational rule. Leading up to what would become the Third Reich, statistics and effectively modulation became central to the debate around the necessity for German territory. Friedrich Zahn, head of the statistical office since 1907, reintroduced the debate around the German *Lebensraum* into the management of population data by reasserting the importance that each kinship group should have its sovereign territory. Zahn was central in propagating the Lebensraum philosophy of the NSDAP, and devised an extensive program to "nurture the health of the German race" (Gutberger 2007), which grounded itself in intricate assessments of populations and divergence. Zahn attests to the closeness of statistics with the National Socialist

movement, where individuality and subjective contradictions were treated as flies in the ointment of an increasingly centralized regime. It is quite clear that enumeration was recognized as a powerful mode of rigidifying racial segregation. After 1933, the statistical office informed police, social, and health administrations standardizing and hierarchizing populations, the basis of which were the two censuses of 1933 and 1939, that led to documentation and identification of those who would later die in the camps (Aly and Roth 2005). The "antisocial" files came in 1934, so did the registration of genetic or hereditary diseases, in 1935 the special registration of Jews, Sinti, Roma, and other preidentified deviants followed, and 1939 could thus produce a census that enabled an expedited identification, capture, and deportation of a variety of enemies of the Nazi regime.

Again, the automation of these codified census documents, enabled and automatized through the Hollerith machine, was a central aspect through which the Shoah could be orchestrated with such efficacy (Black and Farkas 2012). But the Hollerith machine connects the totalitarianism of the Nazi regime to a broader and globalized tendency to rigidify modalities of governance and identify deviance. Already in 1890, the son of German emigrants to the United States had developed a tabular counting machine that enabled the census to function more efficiently. In the same year it had been employed for the US census, as early as 1890, Hollerith took his census machine to Europe and Germany, where he quickly managed to establish great profit margins that tripled evenly over the years of 1911–14. I could not find any record of the machine being specifically implemented in the German settler colonies,[18] but the German occupation of Belgium in 1914 included the distribution of identification documents processed with Hollerith machines and

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18 However, the function of colonial census to divide and categorize communities in the British colonization of India are well documented, as are the origins of biometrics placed within these contexts (Pugliese 2010; Feldman 2016).

mirrored the pass discs in their function of limiting mobility for Belgians (van Brakel and van Kerckhoven 2014).

The Hollerith machine thus takes on a central governmental function in Europe at a time that necessitates a reading of colonial entanglements, the period of German colonial activity in Africa. On home territory, the machine was first employed to organize welfare, register mental disabilities, and regulate social security, but it also monitored women's reproductive capacity, before it horrendously came to streamline the genocidal killings in the concentration camps (Petzold 1992). The machine became automated in 1906 and could sort populations according to predefined categories without further human assistance. The tabulator deployed a punch card system that read holes to produce quick assessments of variation in high numbers. This punch card system would later be replicated for the first digital computers to process large amounts of data. The insertion of a punch card with specific identification markers was all the human assistance the machine needed to perform its rapid sorting mechanisms. Holes were punched at certain points within a card, making the pattern on the card readable to a machine that could then calculate identity correlations much faster than humans could. The points located on the punch cards became the basis of constructing deviant identities. Because of the limitation of the card size, difference needed to be formalized, producing a catalogue of numbers, which would come to stand in for different degrees of dysselection. If, for example, a category was made up of three identifiers, there was the possibility of thousands of modular identities being recorded through variations of three-digit numbers (000–999). The individual cards could then be sorted according to one dominant paradigm, for example, nation or religion. All individuals with the same nationality could then be sorted together, creating, within a short period of time, a registry of all individuals who had been assigned that particular quality. Already in 1913, the *Hollerith News* issued a statement on the *Absonderung der Abnormalen,* the "separation of the abnormal" (Aly and Roth 2005, 23; my translation), celebrating how it enabled identification within

a third of the time period required for previous surveys. The seemingly benevolent qualifier *Sonderbehandlung* that signified special treatment would later come to signify the death sentence for any deviance within the Nazi regime, beginning with the now-racialized Jews.

In this way, the census conducted in 1933 could already be evaluated within a few months instead of several years—thereby also greatly expediting the bureaucratic apparatus that then enabled the mass murder of Jewish, nonwhite and homosexual Germans, communists, and others identified as deviants. The Tabulating Machine Company (TMC), as it was called at the time, enabled a registration of 150 identity cards per minute, which registered difference according to twenty-one bodily markers at first. The number of variations was limited by the capacity of the card on which information was registered, but later grew to encompass more and more markers according to the wishes of the Nazi government (Aly and Roth 2005). In 1933, the Dehomag, the German arm of Hollerith's company (which later became the powerful computer hardware company IBM), issued a statement that the sixty-row punch cards would be used (instead of the forty-five-row cards that could carry less information) because the company could not foresee if the German government would require "further information" to be registered on the cards.[19] I do not mean to say that the genocidal practices of the Nazi regime would not have taken place without the tabulator, nor do I want to suggest that the registration of people happened in such a totalitarian manner as Aly and Roth suggest. Indeed, before 1933 there was great resistance to the census registrations (Wietog 2001). But as members of the NSDAP occupied the central statistics and census offices, enumeration became a central aspect of the planned totalitarian state.

The numbers were generally tilted in favor of the planned procedures. For example, before the 1933 census it was decided

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19 As Götz Aly declares, this suggests knowledge of the German considerations to create a special census that would mean a death sentence for Jews (Aly and Roth 2005, 23).

that women and girls without work should be registered differently if they had never been employed, thus reducing the perception of high unemployment rates while also statistically obscuring and thus naturalizing domesticity for women. Wietog (2017) describes that the 1933 census showed receding numbers with regard to the Jewish population. But this only showed religious affiliations of practicing Jews, while what the Nazi regime truly wanted to identify was what they considered to be non-Aryans, according to a one-drop rule. After 1933, the calls for a Juden-kartei, a "Jewish index," that would register Jews by a principle of origin and kinship, not religion, spread across the country to finally be granted in the census of 1939.[20] New identity markers, such as religion, but also place of birth (especially when outside of Germany), would make the tracking and identification of dysselected populations possible, even if a German citizen's family had married out of the religion, had never practiced it actively, or if conversions had taken place in previous generations. With the help of the tabulators, the race laws of 1935 could be deployed with more precision, and a greater range. The censuses of 1933 (focusing on religion) and 1939 (focusing on race) were the most intricate ones to date, and thanks to IBM, which had equipped every German train and concentration camp with new and improved tabulators by then, the Shoah could take place as the bureaucratically organized genocide that it came to be known for (Black and Farkas 2012).

The promise of complete planability, of predictable bureaucracy, and identity codification have, in each instance, produced racial categories with harrowing effects. Technology is central to this assemblage, but the deliberate misinterpretation and misrepresentation of statistics shows the ideological force that drove the means of technological enumeration and the irrationality inherent to supposed objectivity. Because of the pre-

20 By 1930, IBM was the only patent holder for the tabulating machines, and hence needs to be seen as directly implicated in the differentiation of suspicious peoples—its inbuilt categories of distinction offered minute differentiations according to the demands of the Third Reich.

dominantly racializing practices inherent to these ideologies, the Hollerith machine must be read before the backdrop of the practices of modulation in the colonies—it is necessary to include the paradigms both of technology as dysselecting and dysselection as technology into the way the Nazi regime dealt with deviants, and also the innocence that not only Eichmann but several others claimed in reference to their executive function during the Holocaust—the statements made during the Nuremberg trials that incited Hannah Arendt to compile her writings on the "banality of evil" (Arendt 2006). The fact that such a justification, seemingly driven by objectivity (following the rules, reinforcing the status quo) was even on the table must be understood through the ideological ascriptions to technology, the objectivity it supposedly portrayed and is continuously argued to portray. It could be carefully suggested that technology and its connotations with neutrality and objectivity may have strengthened the imagination that such a line of argument could be true, while the mediated quality of totalitarian governance made it all too unquestionable, easily believed. The production of facts through enumeration, the ideological grounding of the colonial production of difference as a danger for society in Germany, and the strategic implementation of statistics by the Nazi regime arguably eased the readiness with which a large majority of Germans followed the NSDAP into war and genocide, until the very end. For, in the last years of World War II, modulation once more reared its head as the regime pulled all registers to draw in labor power. Driven by the necessities of the war, the fact that civil populations such as women and children had not been registered took its toll (Aly and Roth 2005). From 1944 onward, all Germans were asked to register so that they could take on different functions in the last attempts to harness the strained biopower of the regime. The complete enumeration of the population was attempted, so as to harness every inch of labor power—the previously racialized system became all-encompassing in the face of looming defeat. Registration also ensured that no one could commit treason, for example, by surrendering to the enemy. The line of command was externalized

to a nonhuman system, which facilitated even more the character of unquestionability that had developed throughout the Nazi regime. The bureaucratic, informational way in which deviance is inscribed into the technological, the deferral to the machine as the agent of truth, and the circulation of that created truth within the public through a visual and enumerated regime all speak to the leakages of modulation as racializing ideologies cross temporal and spatial boundaries. But the practices of the Nazi regime and the way Hollerith registration was expedited to include previously unregistered Germans at the end of World War II shows that initial racializations can come to encompass previously unmarked others. Of course, these Germans did not have the same fate as the millions in the death camps, but they were registered as a final attempt at control and extraction of labor power.

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This concludes the first part of my argument on the functions and temporalities of modulation as a digital and binary paradigm that has created imaginaries of complete control. I have argued, first, for the ideological and material leakages that grounded and invisibilized the constructedness of racial and gender hierarchies through the circulation of technological objects in everyday life. I have situated the emergence of such objects within the colonial encounter in German South West Africa, exemplified through the pass disc. Through the *Not- und Schmachtaler* and the punch card system of the Hollerith machine, I have shown how the modular may leak across time and space, mutating to dysselect different group identities according to the same racialized logics that frame the figure of Western man as a stand-in for the human. But how did postcolonial societies react to this modulation after and during their struggles for independence? I want to propose that modulation was a tool so forceful that the postcolonial response to it required an overstating of sameness, which mapped itself onto the hegemonic class. The case of the Indian liberation movement is exemplary here, as the debates

between its leading nationalists center on what can be identified as its own digital history, the creation of a national identity through the *charkha,* the renowned Indigenous technology that became a central framework with which the nationalists under Gandhi hoped to lead the nation into a prosperous future under self-rule.

Unity after Modulation:
Indigenous Technologies and
the Greater Common Good

Chapter 2 ended with the punch card system of the Hollerith machine and how it enabled an automatized modality of targeting and identifying deviants, to deathly effects, in Nazi Germany. The Hollerith machine is one central instance that connects precomputational modalities of identification with early computer history; it shows a continuity instead of a rupture in the notion of high-tech. This continuity posits race as technology and modulation as a central function of tech infrastructure and of what Wynter has called "dysselection." This chapter will explore a second lineage tied to computational histories and imaginaries, which begins with the Jacquard loom. Or, not quite. The story begins with the *charkha,* a mobile spinning device that animated the Indian nationalist movement under Gandhi.

The *charkha's* popularity undoubtedly stems from the opposition to the British loom that it symbolized. Like the census machines, the Jacquard loom required punch cards to function. It had served as an inspiration to the analytical engine, the first computational machine that Charles Babbage and Ada Lovelace created sometime around 1837 (Computer History Museum

2015; Dutta 2007; Hollings, Martin, and Rice 2018).[1] This loom also became a motor of industrialization and represented a symbol of foreign rule during the British Raj.[2] As India became a site from which the British extracted the materials and labor power for mass-scale cloth production, the cloth industry was a central avenue of exploitation.[3] The loom as the motor of industrializa-

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1   This punch card system also mirrors that of the Hollerith machine. The history of digital modulation as identification thus has several alleys that do not come undone in a simplified narrative of progress or identification. Instead, these instances illustrate the mythological place of technological objectivity at the exact time the technological artifacts were being employed in modular and thus political modes.

2   The Raj refers to the direct rule of the British Crown, as opposed to the preceding rule mediated through the East India Company. It does not include the princely states that remained largely independent, but they were under British paramountcy nonetheless, meaning that there was a dependency under the guise of formal freedom — India had itself been modulated through British arrival (Roy 1999)

3   We can thus connect the two colonial contexts from this chapter and chapter 2 via an expanded understanding of technology. There are other lines of connection to explore. For one, southern Africa became a nodal point where the East India Company first established a trading post under Jan van Riebeck; the company thus had monetary interests in southern Africa even before the German established settlements there. Viewed through the biographies of the colonized, another paramount aspect that should not be ignored is that Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi himself lived in South Africa from 1893 to 1914 after having arrived there as a young lawyer in the service of an Indian tradesman. From 1888, Indians were forced to wear passes, as were Africans and other nonwhite populations. But the Indians displaced to southern Africa were not necessarily allies. Indeed, Gandhi's time in South Africa is marked by various troubling comments directed toward segregation of Indians from Black Africans that he, too, called by derogative terms common at the time (Desai and Vahed 2015; Kambon 2018). As Tuck and Yang (2012) have argued, instances like these show that simply not being white does not make one stand on the side of anticolonialism, and this note gives me pause. Read through Tuck and Yang, Gandhi's time in South Africa, although certainly not pleasant or free of racial violence, imposes upon him, at least in part, a settler genealogy that he arguably carries back to his home country. Gandhi returned to India more than once during those years, but he did develop his philosophy of *satyagraha* ("holding onto truth") in South Africa and for the Indian diaspora. As such, the figure of Gandhi is still enveloped in complicated relationalities that cannot be addressed fully here.

tion and extractivism thus came into focus by the efforts of anti-colonial and nationalist groups, and the independence movement often debated what technologies would serve to rebuild the looted country. The *charkha* became the central counter-technology believed to hold economic, spiritual, and moral qualities. In their desire to formulate a contingent national identity, the Indian national liberation movement appropriated marginalized worker identities — positing activities commonly associated with women and Dalits at the forefront of struggle — only to position the Indian elite as ideal versions of the same. Viewed in such a lens, the question of solidarity reveals the centrality of political struggles as class/worker struggles and their inherent ties to the technological.

Extending upon Wynter's concept of autopoiesis, I argue that the construction of an Indian subjectivity during the early twentieth century rearticulated the social and spiritual hierarchies codified by the British, one that carved out hegemony for Brahmins who often acted as native informants. I argue that the *charkha* played a central role in the process that would come to stabilize *savarna* ("upper caste") rule after independence. The *charkha* becomes a tool that the Indian elites imagine might counter the modular thrusts of colonization. As an Indigenous weaving technology that symbolized resistance to the Jacquard loom, the *charkha* is entangled with, and stands in opposition to, the punch card system that undergirds the mechanisms of the Hollerith machine and the first computers. It shows again the ambivalences and constructedness of technological visions, and their embeddedness in preexisting, modular notions of identity and separability. The *charkha* illustrates how technology has political agencies that were in this case appropriated by an elite seeking to animate unity and solidarity after the experienced modulation of their society. Read through Wynter's understanding of autopoiesis, Gandhi's hopes of self-rule become a self-*fashioning,* which effectively leaves the Indian independence movement investing into a modality of rule that rearticulates the colonial hierarchies from within — marginalized populations are asked to attach themselves to the Gandhian

and later Nehruvian ideals of rule, which effectively did little to alleviate the ideological and material position of subaltern communities. Gandhi's proposition does not articulate, as he would come to claim, a general truth, but a "genre-specific (and/or culture specific) order of truth through which [to] know reality [in this case, Indian, postcolonial reality], from the perspectives of the no less genre specific who that [they/an independent Indian subject] already are" (Wynter 2003, 31). Wynter claims that knowledge-making practices elaborate the identity of those enveloped in the knowledge-making. In Gandhi's vision of the *charkha* as self-rule, this becomes an autopoietic investment in ways of knowing and being that rearticulate the Indian subject as homogenous according to a *savarna* ideal. This homogeneity effectively leaves the bodies of women and Dalits in a state of aporetic impurity, by overrepresenting Indian subjectivity as *savarna*, while at the same time proposing an idealized representation of the peasantry as pure only when attaching to the *charkha*.

The concept of "nation" — conceived as "a well-developed critique of colonialism in its economic aspects and on an economic program leading to independent economic development" (Chandra 1999, 17) — excavated an Indian subjectivity in relationship to an imagination of Indigenous technology as pristine and morally superior, drafted in opposition to the West. In a public exchange across a series of Op-Eds and letters, Gandhi debates the role of technology, finding an formidable sparring partner in the poet Rabindranath Tagore. The two friends articulate opposite views on technology, economy, and Indian subjectivity that develop around the question of Western versus Indigenous technology — the one framing technologies as imperially violent, the other as harbinger of material prosperity through the inclusion in the global market, if used correctly. Both these positions rely on assumptions of technology as apart from culture, but also as a deterministic force that alters the material body or the religious mind. What I draw from these debates is a hybrid picture of the postcolonial nation-state, modeled on ambivalent needs for identity. The debates on tech-

nology are stand-ins for the difficult process of coming to terms with new modalities of governance after centuries of modular oppression. The debates also foreclose the notion of embodied solidarity, as both the Gandhian call to unite under the *charkha* and Tagore's ambivalent relationship to big and small technology omit the fact that, on the ground, the ones already living with and through these technologies were women and Scheduled Caste populations unable to participate in the promises of prosperity offered by both.

The *charkha:* Between Indigenous and Monumental Technologies

Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi (better known as Mahatma Gandhi or, simply, Gandhi) hinged a central parameter of his protest against the settlers on the cloth industry that had exploited the Indian subcontinent and turned its peoples into objects of labor. Gandhi's intentions were directed toward freeing India from British economic hold, but his *charkha* program arguably rearticulated the man/machine divide in other ways. The *charkha* represents how "indigenous technology" (Achuthan 2011) becomes a stand-in for a model of political subjectivity, and it was deemed as a marker of unity and anticolonial solidarity during India's struggle for independence. The *charkha* is a small mobile spinning wheel used by the rural population of India. Because it offered the opportunity to earn a small additional income, women in rural communities were urged to spin: they would be able to take to the *charkha* in between chores (Hempson 2018). The wheel could be spun for shorter periods without having to account for time in terms of complicated set up or travel, and thus was not only a mode of small-scale labor production, but could carve out a space in which women were unavailable to others. But most of all, it was promoted to provide the colonized with a method to counter the exploitation and market dominance of the British Raj, which extracted raw cotton from India, only to reimport expensive garments to the colonized population. Within the nationalist movement, the

charkha became the symbol of an anticolonial Indian national-ist identity and also of an alternative economy, and a spiritual futurism that embodied a distinct Indian path to independence as early as 1905.[4] Throughout the 1920s, Gandhi promoted the *charkha* in the newspaper *Young India* where he presented it as a perfect material expression of *satyagraha,* the "philosophy of truth" he developed during his time in South Africa. He said in 1921:

> I may deserve the curses of posterity for many mistakes of omission and commission, but I am confident of earning its blessing for suggesting a revival of the Charkha. I stake my all on it. For every revolution of the wheel spins peace, good-will and love. And with all that, inasmuch as the loss of it brought about India's slavery. Its voluntary revival with all its implications must mean India's freedom. (cited in Hempson 2018, 147)

Gandhi argued that if all Indians would use the spinning wheel every day, it would counter the hold that British industries had on the budding nation-state. Gandhi imagined that spinning without British infrastructure might counter the British hold on the Indian cloth industry. In the Gandhian vision, the *charkha* stood for the rejection of commodity culture and large-scale industrialization, and it symbolized an appeal to reconnect with native modalities of production that were framed as precolo-

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4   Gandhi has been credited with the development of the *charkha* program, and I mirror this accrediting to some extent by focusing solely on his interpretation here. It is important to note that there was a whole range of actors involved in the distribution of the *charkha* and the cloth it pro-duced, the *kadhi.* Leslie Hempson's (2018) study is insightful here, as are various articles in the field of information and communication studies that largely draw upon the *charkha* as a communicative tool. Arvind Singhal (2010) proposes Gandhian communication and practice to have been centralized through the *charkha*, and Nishant Shah (2017a) draws a direct lineage to the internet–state relation in contemporary India. Gandhi seems central to these stories, and though other actors were vital to his success, I follow this reading of the *charkha* as Gandhian here.

nial and thus pure. Spinning the *charkha*, Gandhi argued, would provide spiritual salvation and enough resources for rural workers, and with the additional prosperity it would effectively benefit all Indians. First and foremost, the *charkha* was devised as India's own development program. But spinning would also invite spiritual salvation, because it rejected the colonial system of consumptive desires and acted on a local, communal level along epistemologies presumed to be authentically Indian (Achuthan 2011). Centrally, peasants should spin, but also scientists, artists, and poets, to ensure the spiritual impetus of self-rule would reach all corners of Indian life, uniting Indians in some fundamental version of the truth:

> I have asked no one to abandon his calling, but on the contrary to adorn it by giving every day only 30 minutes to spinning as sacrifice for the whole nation[. …] The truth is that the *charkha* is intended to realise the essential and living oneness of interest among India's myriads[. …] All I say is that there is a sameness, identity or oneness behind the multiplicity and variety. And so do I hold that behind a variety of occupations there is an indispensable sameness also of occupation. (Gandhi in 1925, cited in Bhattacharya 2005, 124)

Gandhi hoped the *charkha* would unite Indians through an experience of sameness, decidedly acting against the modular mode that divided them. However, it is important to stress that his drafted identity was a counterfoil and it necessarily oversimplified issues related to the diversity of Indians, proposing that acting in concert might create a shared experience and counter the economic hegemony of the British.

Gandhi's call for the whole nation to spin did not provide the envisioned unity. In calling all Indians to spin, Gandhi conflated the necessities of some — women and Dalits living in rural areas hoping to gain additional income — with all Indians, effectively drafting the *charkha* as what produced the desirable postcolonial Indian subject. Since the *charkha* promised spiritual salvation for *all* Indians, it conflated the lived reality of the peasant

weavers with the representational communicative strategy of *savarna* weavers spinning in public. The way Gandhi saw it in 1921, "[a] plea for the spinning wheel is a plea for recognising the dignity of labour" (cited in Bhattacharya 2005, 88–89). But effectively, in stressing the simplicity of spinning, and arguing that all could do it, Gandhi rather devalued the master weaver's work (McGowan 2009). The *charkha* thus rearticulates what the British Raj had put in place, that is, a strange hierarchy that proposed an aspirational figure of the noble savage. Effectively, this vision materialized mostly in the form of male *savarna* elites weaving in symbolic solidarity, while the weavers that relied on the material profitability of the *charkha*, more often than not, effectively naturalized their own position of precarity. Dalits, women, and peasants were promised nobility and spiritual salvation, but received invisibility and elitist representation under the guise of self-rule. The *charkha* thus is at the center of an assemblage that effects a form of autopoiesis — for some, the new nation would promise a vision of the heroic national, but the masses had to once again adapt to a form of rule that subjugated them. Only now the proposition was that they should like serving this new nation, because it held the promise of belonging through purity of spirit and embodied humility. But this promise could always be broken by the aporia the *charkha* represented. If too many peasants were to make claims to economic prosperity, the elites could question the morale, the faith, the duty of these groups, since these qualities were framed to emerge from using the *charkha* sufficiently.

Weaving, in this narrative, becomes more than a stand-in for a practice caught in the process of industrialization that thwarts small-scale manual labor. Indeed, weaving itself can be seen as a countertechnological practice that ambiguates dualisms, such as that of big and small. The correlations of weaving and contemporary infrastructure span beyond the simple analogy of *networks* and the internet as the World Wide *Web,* arguably informed by the weaving origins of computation through the industrial looms. But through Gandhi, the technologies of weaving — by hand or industrial — become enthralled in a bat-

tle for the soul of the Indian nation itself, effectively producing technology as something outside of culture. For Gandhi imagined a pure Indian subject, unchanged by the corruptions of the West, which would illustrate its dignity through labor and humility, an ideal that Gandhi himself was not able to live up to (Desai and Vahed 2015). The nationalist imaginary expressed a need to distinguish Western technologies from what was considered local, and thus central to the construction of a postcolonial position, but it rearticulated a notion of authentic technologies according to the measurement of scale and an equally problematic assumption of a natural social order, one that the British had to a large part put in place with their own codification of myth-making practices and through their own deployment of modulation.[5] Despite the existing connections between

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5   A whole range of theorists have spoken to the informational and numerical forms of governance that assuaged colonial hierarchies on the ground in India. Indian politician Shashi Tharoor (2017) has spoken to the Brahmin native informants that he deems culpable, or at least complicit, in the British codification of the caste system, which overemphasized the difference that native informants proposed with regard to caste hierarchies. Many others have identified the census as central to Britain's strategy of "divide and rule" (Appadurai 1993; Bayly 1996; Cohn 1987; Samarendra 2011), but Tharoor points out especially the pandit (Brahmin scholars) complicity with British informational rule, which ended up rearticulating a male Brahmin position at the top of the Indian social order, even above kings and warriors. Historian Christopher Bayly (1996) has argued that Brahmins saw textual preservation as an inferior mode of circulating sacred knowledge, suggesting that the Brahmins simply underestimated the codifying quality of modulation via text. Whatever the case may be, this resulted in the simplified blueprint of Indian society laid out for the British, which became prescriptive to a certain extent as it produced the reality of the people on the ground with astonishing success. Brahmin complicity in creating this (seemingly objective) census aided the narrative of British noninterference, because the common assumption was that the British were not changing India, only describing it for better extraction of profit (Bayly 1996, 221). Effectively, this renowned belief in objectivity of numbers and texts and the Western narrative of singular truths instated Brahmin superiority into the colonial bureaucratic apparatuses. Despite the continuous and repeated rebellions and uprisings by different stages and movements aspiring to Indian independence, the complicity of the elites with British rule paved the way for a modulation that would sedi-

the question of liberation and the creation of technology, Gandhi discursively created the ideal liberated Indian subject in a condition of overarching technological determinism that segregated the body, politics, and technology into distinct fields of cultural production. Despite his fervent desire to take a path in opposition to the British, he thus somewhat echoed the colonizers ideals of unchanging peasantry and homogenic desires. This narration of — and subsequent investment in — the unchanging is what Wynter refers to as "autopoiesis." The investment in and narration of a certain present normative mode of being influence each other to a point that the normative mode of being is actualized materially and epistemologically. The centrality of the *charkha* enforced the position of *savarna* elites at the representational forefront of the anticolonial struggle, while at the same time effectively devaluing the craft of the professionalized master weavers and making invisible (and potentially competing with) the rural and Dalit women who spun in informal settings to make some extra money. The *charkha* is then but a new version of an old narration of India — where *savarna* male elites are the mouthpieces for a performative feminized and Dalit, Adivasi, Bahujan (DAB)[6] representation of the spinner and weaver. Autopoiesis describes not only this falling together of doing and being, but how this creates the appearance of a single narrative, and an unalterable common sense.

But the potential limitations of the *charkha* were not lost on the poet Rabindranath Tagore, and it would be too easy to say that the narrative was entirely uncontested. Tagore saw the need of including the rationale of science and technology beyond the Gandhian framework, but he did see the danger of dehumanizing technologies that displaced communities and lent them-

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ment itself within the Indian constitution in the years before independence, despite efforts to create another mode of nationhood.

6   DAB is the most common collective abbreviation for non-*savarna* subaltern communities. It refers to different Dalit communities, to the Indigenous peasantry, and the Buddhist term *bahujan,* meaning "the majority," which includes Muslims, other religious minorities, and the so-called tribal and backward castes and classes.

selves to magical thinking, when ideologically posited in the place of gods. His famous play *Muktadhara* ("The Waterfall"), written in 1922 and thus coinciding and in solidarity with "the world's first anti-dam movement" (Vora 2009), can be read as a critique of the extractivist logics of scientific imperialism and the misuse of technology as dehumanizing subjugation.

Muktadhara articulates a vehement critique of the monumental dam projects — referred to only as "The Machine." Tagore tells a critical story of displacement, but also warns of the arrogance with which technologies are employed, to cold and dehumanizing effects. Tagore saw the political impetus in technological distribution and socialist internationalism, but this is in part what may have given him reason to voice his critique against Gandhi, whom he otherwise cherished. After all, the *charkha* not only demanded repetition, it also restrained the potential distribution of wealth to smaller amounts and circulations. Instead of gaining spiritual salvation through a specific technological materiality (the Indigenous technology of the *charkha*), Tagore considered morality to be central to employing technology. I see a more relational approach in Tagore, one that acknowledges the way technology and science can be *instrumentalized,* but one that also sees the situatedness of technology as part of an ideological apparatus. In 1922, he said:

> If the cultivation of science by Europe has any moral significance, it is in its rescue of man from outrage by nature, not its use of man as a machine but its use of the machine to harness the forces of nature in man's service. One thing is certain, that the all-embracing poverty which has overwhelmed our country cannot be removed by working with our hands to the neglect of science. (cited in Bhattacharya 2012, 89)

Tagore saw science and technology as central avenues that would allow the country to develop out of its poverty-stricken state. This adheres to a somewhat universal belief in knowledge, while also critical of its implementation by what he called the "material civilization of the West." Although Tagore, too,

believed in the centrality of the disembodied, spiritual self, he feared "the destruction of the physical body and the ignoring of the material necessities of life" (1921, cited in Bhattacharya 2005, 54). For Tagore, the truth of Indian subjectivity thus hinged itself on the morally correct implementation of science and technology, which might be considered just as normative as a Gandhian position, but posited technological mechanisms as inherent to culture, practice, and lived reality. Understanding the history of technology not only as emerging from, but as actually *being* the history of culture, sheds renewed light on the Gandhian perspective, just as it reveals technological apparatuses as central to the leakages of these ideologies across time. Tagore feared that Gandhi's notions of purity of the soul through repetitive spinning would rearticulate caste-based assumptions of purity and impurity as social hierarchy (Bhattacharya 2005). Understanding Gandhian politics as first and foremost embodied labor, Tagore urged Gandhi to think of what the *charkha* would do to the mind. The call to spin was suspicious to him, since it demanded the same obedience as the colonial state, and authority without reason would create a subject that could not distinguish despotism from freedom (Chatterjee 1993). In 1921, Tagore writes,

> Swaraj […] is not concerned with our apparel only — it cannot be established on cheap clothing; its foundation is in the mind […] in no country in the world is the building up of swaraj completed […] the root of such bondage is always within the mind[. …] A mere statement, in lieu of argument, will never do[. …] We have enough of magic in the country[. …] That is exactly why I am so anxious to re-instate reason on its throne. (cited in Bhattacharya 2005, 82)

Tagore feared the cold and mundane practices of the *charkha* or any technology that would opiate the people into passivity and individualism, because it merely hinged itself on moral acceptance and not on a clearly political strategy or an expanding

economy that would enable a rise from the ruined state colonialism had left the country in. Tagore worried in 1925 that

> by turning its wheel man merely becomes an appendage of the *charkha*; that is to say, he does himself what a machine might have done: he converts his living energy into a dead turning movement[. …] The machine is solitary […] likewise alone is the man […] for the thread produced by his *charkha* is not for him a thread of necessary relationship with others[. …] He becomes a machine, isolated, companionless. (cited in Achuthan 2011, 59)

Although Tagore agreed on the aims of self-rule, the raising of the *charkha* seemed to merely distract from that goal, as those fighting for a united and liberated India would be caught up in menial work and pay less attention to the entirety of Indian necessities. Tagore speaks out in favor of a collective movement that moves beyond what could be read as Gandhian anti-intellectualism or antimodernism. Collective action, according to Tagore, requires thought, abstraction, and material sustenance:

> One thing is certain, that the all-embracing poverty which has overwhelmed our country cannot be removed by working with our hands to the neglect of science[. …] If a great union is to be achieved, its field must be great likewise […] the religion of economics is where we should above all try to bring about this union of ours. (1921, cited in Bhattacharya 2005, 104–7)

Tagore stressed that the field of science and technological development would enable the participation in the global spread of wealth, but he saw the monotony and repetition that would come from heavy use of the *charkha* to compromise the flexibility of the mind. Through Tagore, Gandhi's utopian India opens itself up to the image of a reactionary romanticism, which nonetheless attempts to overcome modulation by the mere force of will and embodied repetition. However, in both approaches, the

state is imagined as the central entity that may claim "monopoly over identity formation, citizenship and national representation" (Sundaram 2000, 11), effectively creating an imaginary ideal that the fleshed reality must strive for. The state/technology nexus effects imaginaries of an Indian body of citizens but does not take into account the empirical realities of actual Indian bodies. Gandhi interrogated the modes of production that had led to India's economic subjugation to the extractive logics of the British, but his praise of the *charkha* as an anticolonial technology seemed negligent to India's own plurality, and remains a violent abstraction of peasant life. The small-scale production the *charkha* enabled, and the performative quality with which Gandhi was implying everyone spun every day, seemed shortsighted and finally displaced the very subjectivities it was meant to dignify — the village population, peasants, and women who made up a large part of weavers, but were now represented by India's spiritual and intellectual elites (Kumar 2001). Gandhian logics omit the fact that Indian engineers had in the past been able to produce their own scales of modernity, arguing instead for the spiritual qualities inherent to his antimodern stance, hinging the question of technology to morality instead of to politics. The *charkha* becomes a metaphor for human and rural labor, but in Gandhi's stance I see the Indian subject produced in moral ideals, instead of a lived and embodied form.

With these framings, an imagined revolutionary subject was produced, which for Tagore was located in the intellectual elites of the city, but Gandhi found it in the rural villages of India (Achuthan 2011). Rather than fearing technology in itself, Tagore feared the dehumanizing tendencies of technologies, where in the case of the *charkha*, the human body would simply be annexed to the cottage machine, enslaved to its ritualistic and repetitive movements. Instead of the physical violence of monumental technologies, Tagore seemed to imply the *charkha*'s repetitive stance would dumb down the senses of the people as another form of epistemic violence. Against Gandhi, Tagore in 1921 held the passivity he saw within claims to nonviolence as violence in itself:

> The idea of non-cooperation is political asceticism[. …] It has at its back a fierce joy of annihilation which at best is asceticism, and at its worst is that orgy of frightfulness in which the human nature, losing faith in the basic reality of normal life, finds a disinterested delight in an unmeaning devastation […] [non-cooperation] in its passive moral form is asceticism and in its active moral form is violence[. …] The desert is as much a form of *himsa* [malignance or violence] as is the raging sea in storms, they both are against life. (cited in Bhattacharya 2005, 57–58)

The *charkha* represents a function of autopoiesis, as a self-fashioning materiality underlying cultural storytellings (*mythoi*) that engage in the very "who and what we are" (Wynter 2003) — adapted here to an idealism constructed around morality and spirituality. The *charkha*'s spoke-and-wheel system, initially imagined to ensure decentralization (Kumar 2001) has been said to stand for the centralization of power — as a sociality that is engineered by the center (Shah 2017a), instead of the pluriversal nationalist fantasy for which India is rhetorically often celebrated. Identifying the diversity of Indian modalities of living as a colonial modulation, Gandhi in particular returned to a singular narrative that resorted to an antimodern and, I would argue, antiemancipatory model of Indianness in terms of technology as a stand-in for economics and culture. Gandhi therefore puts forward a critique of Western modernity and its thrust toward city life, the subjugation of nature, and scientific rationale. But instead of developing its own concept of modern emergence, the *charkha* becomes a conservative model of containment that relies on a universal Indian subjectivity materializing through *savarna* morality. The division seems merely a matter of scale, too unconvincing for a country as large and diverse as India — another component that Gandhi seems to completely ignore in these debates, as he focuses merely on the performative production of an Indian peasantry that is hardworking and pure at heart. Gandhi's lauding of the *charkha* thus inscribes an image of idealized subjectivity through a techno-

logical form. It is not modular in the sense that it segregates, but instead produces a universal imaginary of morality and spirituality that mirrors the *savarna* sense of purity and caste hierarchy.

Gandhi proposes an autopoietic whole, and he imagines that the spinners become like the ideal because they spin. This Gandhian line of argument misunderstands or pretends to misunderstand the hybridity of cultural phenomena — after all, both his and Tagore's education was just as influenced by "native" knowledge as by the elite institutions they visited through the colonial bonds established with institutions in the West. In the same way, technologies and cultural artifacts and practices have always had different modalities of traveling, influenced by economic and political decision-making. However, by imagining Indigenous technology as outside of cultural production in a static space of truth (the village), the Indian subject is constructed in a state of aporia — needing to aspire to technological standards instead of developing according to inner desires and practices. The body, which Gandhi constructed as flawed and in need of the pristine *charkha*, must either spin or, if not, it deteriorates into a potential enemy. Here, caste becomes enveloped in technology, as lower-caste and tribal bodies come to simultaneously stand-in for a traditional India that is constructed as morally pure, while in fact excluded from the decisions that come to draft the modern Indian state in a way true to its own image. As Indian elites became the faces of the spinning activities, rural, DAB populations, and the category of "woman" became subcategories in need of adapting to this altered universal. The focus on purity leaves India up for grabs for a moralistic and traditionalist upper class that feeds on the *savarna*-Hindu populations' feeling of neglect and righteousness in carving out their identity against the colonizer.[7]

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7   Such sentiments of righteousness may be what animates the Hindu Right today and has led to a reappropriation of the *charkha* by the Hindunationalist prime minister Narendra Modi. This is not to say that the Gandhian ideology overlaps with Hindu-nationalist thought, but the symbolic

Contextualized as such, it may come as no surprise that ideas about belonging and political agency are inscribed into debates on industrialization, economics, and technological artifacts and circulation, nor that they are carried forward, leaking across moments in time through the material and ideological remains that carry them. Read as a digital object in the sense that it, first, precedes computation and, second, modulates identity, the *charkha* exemplifies how the technological imaginaries transport dysselections. It was imagined to deterministically influence society from an unspecified and spiritually pure outside, a new and imagined universal that was at the center of Gandhi's spiritual journey of satyagraha, "a universal force that holds onto truth" (Majmudar 2005, 138). Interestingly enough, the *charkha* can be read in its economic, symbolic, and spiritual capacity, but it shares many of the qualities of digital media today in that it was endowed with truth-making capacities and materialized imaginaries of collective embodiment and political solidarity in an early modern sense of societal dependence upon one another (Puntambekar and Varadachari 1926).

However, as a first instance of Indigenous technology, the *charkha* comes to stand in for the Indian dysselection of bodies marginalized under the concept of "nation," and it rearticulates a binary opposition between Western and non-Western technologies, and thus glosses over the entangled and messy cultural relations that produced this distinction in the first place. Taking this moment as exemplary of Gandhi's views perhaps makes my argument equally culpable of such oversimplification, since Gandhi had been more moderate in his rejection of British rule in the preceding years, and has even been called the "stretcher-bearer of empire" (Desai and Vahed 2015) for the many times his moderate views were read as support for the British. Gandhi's political beliefs where thus certainly more complicated than the *charkha* can show, but I read the *charkha* as a central conflation of technology, caste, and gender, pressed together to

language adopted by the nationalist Right in contemporary India has laid claims to these initial debates around unity and purity.

construct an ideal Indian as subservient, modest, and spiritually pure in a way that is morally and materially fixating a poverty-stricken rural population. With it came ambivalent benefits to rural women, who could, on the one hand, remove themselves from other tasks within the household, but, on the other hand, would effectively tie themselves more to domesticity with the increasing popularity of the *charkha*. This was the ambivalent situation that prepared for Indian self-rule, but the question of identity was not resolved with Indian independence and its self-fashioning of a Hindu-majority nation.

"The Greater Common Good": Autopoiesis and Unity

When the desired nation finally came, a third person asserted what Indian subjectivity would look like, and strangely echoed and reconfigured the discussions of Tagore and Gandhi. Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru (1947–64) had no issue with monumental technologies, and planned to use them to advance the Indian economy. Turning from the *charkha* to the great dams already mentioned as a focus of Tagore's criticism, I see an equally hegemonic stance toward Indian nationalism, this time explored through precisely the technological artifacts criticized as monumental by the Mahatma and the poet. Expressing an enthusiasm for technology, Prime Minister Nehru mapped out the dams as technological motors driving India's introduction into world markets. Nehru envisioned the dam projects as enabling a reconstruction of independent India and an Indian identity that turned away from a demonization of the monumental, but did not lose the impetus of the Gandhian *charkha* program that, as I argue above, ignored the modular divisions that had left their mark on Indian society. Nehru's disregard for those displaced by the dams was contextualized further in his approach toward Dalit leader Bhimrao Ramji Ambedkar and the Hindu Code Bill, which illustrated a further leakage of the modular in the early years of the Nehru administration.

Nehru, the self-proclaimed revolutionary, saw a central paradigm of Indian prosperity to come from participation in the

global circulation of wealth. To Gandhi, who was otherwise a friend and collaborator, he once issued his famous quote about the rivers of change being unstoppable, by which he meant that there was no turning back from the path of the industrialization the British had begun (Chowdhry 1989). Perhaps this indicates that he saw the flaws within industrialization, but had no way of turning back the taste for industrial production the British had given and instead hoped to reinterpret them in an Indian way, articulating an empiricist realism that mirrored Marxist aspirations to evolve from scarcity. Drawing upon the engineering achievements of local intelligentsia, Nehruvian India was envisioned as prospering under a rational identity. Nehru stood for a secular path to nationhood, but his worldview lent itself to uncritical appropriations of the Western progressivist path, which was arguably problematic in light of a predominantly spiritually motivated society, the large-scale displacement his politics caused, and his unwillingness to truly redistribute material privileges from the elites of Indian Brahmins to the people (Williams 2006; Vora 2009). It has been argued that this caused Nehru's disconnect to some extent, and his position was perhaps as equally oblivious to religious specificities as some British had been — at the very least, his relationship with religious communities has been framed in terms of neglect (Seth 1993; Williams 2006). More than anything, Nehru saw caste as an expression of the working class — and treated it as such — thus neglecting the ideological quality of religion and spiritual purity that had been inscribed into the system as a social order. As he arguably continued the British attitude of "non-interference" (Williams 2006) regarding issues of caste and religion, its implications are sedimented within postindependence India. Tagore serves as a reminder here of how passivity could itself be framed as a form of violence. Nehru thus failed to address the necessities of those populations not immediately understood *as* working-class, like the Indigenous and peasant communities displaced by the large dam projects Nehru himself implemented (Vora 2009). Driven by the focus on industrialization, on the one hand, and a continuation of modular caste distinctions, on the other, Nehru's gov-

ernment problematically enacted the Brahmin centrism carved out by the British elites through native informants.

Indeed, the many dam projects were a continuation of British planning, rather than a rupture of it, as protests such as those against the Mulshi dam show as early as the 1920s.[8] The continuity of these projects and protests against them after independence are indicative of the disregard that Indian elites had for the nonurban, nonelite, non-*savarna* population, epitomized in Nehru's often critiqued response to the displacement of the Indigenous people[9] living in the areas where the dam was erected: "If you are to suffer, you should suffer in the interest of country," said Nehru in 1948 (cited in Vora 2009, 17). Nehru rejected Gandhian suffering as a modality of spiritual upkeep, but he had few qualms with suffering for a predefined greater common good. Of course, this suffering was not projected onto the elites who profited from the electricity brought forth by the dams, but onto those displaced from its land, who, if anything else, could not profit from the infrastructure the dam brought on account of having lost their housing and land. Although in opposition to Gandhi's stance on technology, this evidences an equally elitist approach that demarcates the aims of nation to be larger than the people inhabiting it. India's government developed into a truly monumental elite through the numerous dam projects that emerged during and after the period of nationalist struggle. India built a total of 900 dams in the first thirty years of its national economic development according to plans mapped

8   Ravindra Vora (2009) finds fascinating similarities between the Mulshi dam protests and the Narmada Bachao Andolan, an Indian social movement led by Adivasis, farmers, and human rights activists in the mid-1980s, a struggle that began with decisions made by Nehru during his term in office and continues to this day.

9   In India, the term "Indigenous" does not carry the same associations as elsewhere. Indian indigeneity is highly contested and being reconstructed to put in place Hindu-nationalist claims to the country by Prime Minister Modi (2014–) throughout his term in office. Again, Indigeneity is proposed as counterfoil to the colonizer, irrespective of the rural communities whose habits of living and attachment to place perhaps resonate more with what is usually understood to be indigeneity.

out by Nehru (Vora 2009). The prime minister had based his ideas of the postcolonial nation-state on the analysis that economic growth and world markets would allow surpassing the state of necessities, all the more so for budding nations in the Global South. In doing so, he repeated some of the simplistic ideals of system theory that informed cybernetics as a theory of self-actualization, which largely was bent on the system surviving as a whole, rather than a particular diversity, individual communities, or statistical outliers.

Nehru saw a need for the acceleration of economic flows through a national economy participating in the world market (Gupta 1993; Seth 1993; Achuthan 2011). Focusing predominantly on planning, Nehru envisioned the nation as the pragmatic task of allocating goods and investing in development, in which access would be equally distributed, thus resolving any need for class struggle through an enclosed system of economics, attesting to cybernetic rule just as such systems were being explored in the West. But his lack of empathy toward the thousands displaced by the dam projects suggests a problematic elitism that favors economic prosperity over bodily suffering and displacement (Vora 2009). Rather than merely understanding these plans as the continuation of British ideas, the debates on technology at the time of nation-building show the aporetic situation within which the postcolonial nation establishes itself — one that arguably goes to the very core of identity politics still today. The nation needs unity as much as separation from the oppressor — in this case the colonizer — but drawing this distinct line not only oversimplifies one's own material-epistemic positionality but also opens itself up to an essentialism that draws exclusionary lines, often against those who make up a central core of the group the elites are trying to represent and draw together. Both Gandhian moralistic and Nehruvian progressive intents of building a self-sustained India did not account for the lived realities of the majority of the peoples their plans were supposed to provide for.

The urgency with which they explored their own ideas showed that they believed in their righteousness. Perhaps it is

precisely this righteousness that becomes problematic, given that the aspiration behind both Gandhian and Nehruvian thought was an underlying universal idealism, to which its citizens were required to adapt, in which they must have faith that their suffering was in some way in the name of a "greater common good," as Arundathi Roy's (1999) polemic has phrased it in reference to Nehruvian politics of the dams. Roy does not argue along a simple dichotomy of Gandhi versus Nehru, antidevelopment versus progressivist modernizing, but argues against the great heroes, who, perhaps much like the great technologies they envisioned as their stand-ins, saw only a nation but not the people living in it. Roy states:

> The Nehru vs. Gandhi argument pushes this very contemporary issue back into an old bottle. Nehru and Gandhi were generous men. Their paradigms for development are based on assumptions of inherent morality. Nehru's on the paternal, protective morality of the soviet-style centralised state. Gandhi's on the nurturing, maternal morality of romanticised village republics. Both would work perfectly, if only we were better human beings. If only we all wore khadi and suppressed our base urges — sex, shopping, dodging spinning lessons and being unkind to the less fortunate. Fifty years down the line, it's safe to say that we haven't made the grade. We haven't even come close. We need an updated insurance plan against our own basic natures. (Roy 1999, 4)

Understanding the tiredness with which India encounters its national heroes, Roy argues instead for a nation of the small people, the overlooked, the actual bodies that make up the diversity of the Indian nation. I appropriate her argument for an understanding of how technologies relate to *specific* bodies, rather than an imagined Indian, and how large-scale implementations of them must account for the different aspects of their use, which diverge from intention. Roy sees the opportunities embedded in big debates that capture the popular imagination, but she argues passionately for a complication of the simple,

unambiguous, and, as she says, "bitter, brutal ways" in which these big debates are held and responded to. According to Roy, big debates, such as about the nation, democracy, the entire political and economic system, have slighted the necessities of the people suffering from displacement that Roy encounters at the dam sites. Technology thus lends itself to a discussion of the big questions, but the individual necessities and lived realities find no place in such narratives that arguably render the *charkha* as monumental as the dams. Instead of accounting for a true subjectivity (in this case with regard to nation) that is engineered by and with technology, Roy's polemic can be abstracted to differentiate between different and sometimes contradictory understandings of technological implementations for political aims.

Arguably, these initial moments of nation-building hinge upon a framework that does little to concern itself with identity and multiplicity, but only with the technical aspects of nation. Hinging upon these entanglements, I want to argue that what was produced can very much be seen as the marriage of technology with the human, only that the human was produced as a figurative man2.0, overrepresented in the specificities of Brahmin masculinity. As a result, women, but also lower-caste Hindus, Adivasi, and non-Hindu Indians are situated to some extent as apart from both technology and the nationalist's iterations of Indian humanness, the new man.[10] The superficial engagement with technology continues to construct the body of independent India's citizen in a state of aporia — either too contaminated for pristine Indian (Indigenous) technologies or incapable of

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10 This is actualized in horrific ways as the Citizenship Amendment Act has made especially the Muslim population vulnerable because the asylum and emigration laws have changed to enable legal immigration for illegal migrants who are non-Muslim. Critics fear that it is a first step to leaving Muslims stateless, in the case that they are unable to meet proof of identity requirements. In combination with the heavy surveillance of the Muslim population of Jammu and Kashmir, this evokes an almost colonial — indeed modular — image of control through identification.

throwing off any form of technological governance arriving from ongoing colonial tendencies in the West (Achuthan 2011).

Contrary to these *savarna* iterations of Indianness stood one central figure who has just begun to regain acknowledgment in recent years, B. R. Ambedkar.[11] A central figure in crafting the Constitution of India (1950), Ambedkar had high hopes of constructing laws that would do away with religious morality that lived reality would arguably never be able to fulfill. In 1956, he revoked Hinduism, became Buddhist, and advocated Dalits to do the same. Against the monolithic imaginary of nation, Ambedkar was one of Gandhi's most fervent critics, and also fell out with the Nehru administration. It was Ambedkar who coined the term "Dalit," a framing that included a slight to Gandhi, who had proposed and familiarized the term harijan, an ancient Hindi word for "God's children," which Ambedkar considered passive and complacent (Ambedkar and Rege 2013). Ambedkar's strong claim that "Gandhi is the greatest enemy the untouchables have ever had in India" (Ambedkar 1991) has been picked up by contemporary decolonial movements, especially in southern Africa, where Gandhi's disdain for Black people had become apparent during his own stay there (Kambon 2018). Focusing instead on material oppression across identities, Ambedkar's legacy should thus find a place because of his efforts at the time and the fervent development of an intersectional position that still resonates today. Born Dalit himself, Ambedkar strongly advocated for the cause of the Dalits and was in constant debate with national heroes, critiquing especially Gandhi for not centering India's struggle on the Dalit experience and, in Ambedkar's eyes, explicitly sidelining their needs under the guise of a unified postcolonial India that effectively introduced

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11 In 2013, Sharmila Rege published a collection of Ambedkar's essays in an edited volume with writings connecting Ambedkar's work to an Indian feminist lineage. Rege's work is central, perhaps, to not only a renewed interest in Ambedkar as a central architect of an India that never was, but also to feminist demands based in the specificities of "Brahminical Patriarchy" and a materialist politics of equality that does not carry the taint of foreign import.

a religious state and hardened caste hierarchies. Ambedkar was a materialist and thus had no truck with Gandhi's spiritual politics. Instead, he became the driving force behind a materialist strain of Dalit activism, as he drafted an Indian subjectivity that did not, in stark contrast to many other political heroes of India, require any foundational "Hindustan" as homeland (Ganguly 2002). Ambedkar — India's first antinationalist, even before the fact of nationalism had reached Indian territory — criticized the nationalist's negotiations with the British, especially as Gandhi and Congress were opposed to giving Dalits their own electorates (Ambedkar 1991). Gandhi fervently wrote against the segregation of Dalits, fearing that the large number of Dalits in India would flock to vote there, rather than in the Hindu-centric electorates that secured Congress's rule in the case of independence. To achieve his united electorate, Gandhi vowed to fast to death should the British administration not follow his suggestions. According to Ambedkar, he did so because he feared that the lower castes together with the Muslim population might become a majority that would overcome the Hindu-centric thrust of the state Gandhi envisioned. And indeed, this may not have been far off, since Dalit movements sometimes sided with the British in attempts to displace the importance of upper-caste Hinduism in the country.[12]

This story is evocative of the technocratic form of governance that pervaded even in a state that had avowed to be different from the West. Having found the education in the West that was denied to him in his homeland, it is perhaps not surprising that Ambedkar advocated for an uncompromising nation-state

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12 According to Ambedkar, Gandhi was not satisfied and continued to pressure the state with his fast. In a letter from Ramsay MacDonald, then prime minister of the UK, Ambedkar finds proof of numerous appeals the British government had received from representatives and organizations advocating for Dalits that demanded special rights of representation, which Gandhi seemed to either have ignored or was not connected to. From this, Ambedkar deduced that Gandhi did not want to overcome the caste system and questioned Gandhi's commitment to swaraj as real self-rule.

model that intermingled Western values with Indian tradition. His aversion to local elites becomes most visible in the clash between Ambedkar and Nehru over the Hindu Code Bill, a document that regulates what today can be called "identity politics" through personal law. Ambedkar was so disappointed with the lack of interest the Nehru government showed in passing the reforms that he hoped would abolish the practice of caste that he resigned from India's first parliament in 1951 (Williams 2006). He had been asked to redraft Hindu personal law, but his changes were never actually realized. This meant that he, too, advocated for the development of science and technology, for he believed that machinery would again be what functioned in a democratizing way, if only implemented in certain ways (Pathak 2006, 51). But Ambedkar was not a Nehruvian — in fact, the Hindu Code Bill that was supposed to reform private law after unification shows the extent of his disappointment. Ambedkar devised a plan according to a secular and internationalist agenda, which would displace central religious rights. Repeatedly, this draft was either ignored or requested to be rewritten, as Nehru feared angering Hindu-Brahmins and preferred to continue the path of noninterference that the British administration had proposedly supported. Instead, Nehru selectively privileged elite Hindu's opinions on the Hindu Code Bill, suggesting to them that the reform had been accomplished accordingly. The reality of the Hindu Code Bill thus greatly diverged from Ambedkar's draft, and fell short of achieving any meaningful change (Williams 2006, 119). The drawn-out process, ambivalent promises, and eventual reevaluation of the Code Bill thus led to Ambedkar's resignation in 1951 — after declaring that he saw "no purpose in [...] continuing to be a member of [Nehru's] cabinet" (Keer 1971, 435). Although Nehru expressed regret over this decision, he did not prevent Ambedkar's last humiliation in the cabinet. When Ambedkar wanted to address the parliament to pronounce his resignation, his speech was pushed back, and he left without his giving his final address (Williams 2006). According to Williams, Nehru did not ask about the needs of, for example, Muslim populations, and he also overstated the

progressivist's influence on the Hindu Code Bill, while in reality reframing it to only bring about minimal change, perhaps fearing the backlash of conservative Brahmin elites. The language of nation-building thus diverged from Gandhian universalism, but it has served to foster resentment by Hindus, while at the same time it rearticulated caste Hinduism as a special identity of Indian subjectivity (Williams 2006).

Ambedkar's position seemed to take into account the specificity of difference, while at the same time seeking to address the material politics that would codify this difference. Indeed, Ambedkar produced the central insight that the caste system thrives by its control of women and that caste is a product of sustained endogamy and therefore always implicated in gender relations. Instead of fetishizing origin stories that distinguish between Western and non-Western authenticity, Ambedkar provided the sharp analysis that the caste system was essentially brought forth and maintained through the regulation of female sexuality in practices such as endogamy, sati, child marriage, and enforced widowhood (Ambedkar and Rege 2013). All but the first (in which he sees the origin of caste and the initial moment of subjugation) were implemented to regulate female "surplus" sexuality.[13] Ambedkar's analysis thus speaks

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13 First, child marriage would be an offer to a man whose wife had died. Men would in this way be able to reenter society with a yet-to-be-adult wife (where her innocence would — in this way — be secured), but women whose husbands had died would be burned on their husband's pyre for the same sake of purity. If this was for some reason not possible, the third option was that they were forced to live segregated lives as degraded widows. Men were not awarded that special fate, because the war with the colonizers and other invaders required both labor power and large group numbers, so it was thus India's own battle with colonialism (but also other enemies in precolonial times) that brought forth many of the plights women still face today. Ambedkar negates the distinction of a pristine precolonial India to instead focus on the amelioration of bodily realities. He was also not particularly interested in assigning spiritual binaries to the West and the rest of the world. Instead, he was well aware of global entanglements and the search for improvements that addressed lived realities beyond notions of authenticity, rather than spiritual affordances and origin stories.

to the analysis of modulation I proposed in chapter 2: global technological systems of capitalism could only advance in such a successful manner because it cordoned off specific bodies to perform menial (meaning undervalued) tasks that nonetheless sustained and sustain business as usual at the cost of becoming intelligible only in a fixated form. The caste system, and with it Brahminical patriarchy (Ambedkar and Rege 2013), much like heteropatriarchy in the West, gains power through the subjugation and precarization of women and their reproductive labor capacities (Federici 2014). What free labor in the domestic home is to Western capitalism, the notion of purity and religious social order is to Brahminical patriarchy.

The political movements that were not engaged in the nationalist agenda, but more against caste, were intersectional and diverse in ways that the national cause of Gandhi and Nehru never could be. Ambedkar's movement not only became a political home for women, especially of the lower classes and castes, but was also sidelined precisely because it did not shun Western ideologies and technologies as resources (Rege 1998). But his interrogations into Western thought were also not merely defined by acceptance. Ambedkar saw structural and subjective matters to be highly interlinked, and their shape and effects thus alterable on several levels, like a mobile that was kept in constant equilibrium through its individual objects, surmounting to more than a mere addition of parts. It is this attention to detail and to relation that Sharmila Rege picks up on in her development of a Dalit feminist standpoint. Instead of merely paying attention to difference, Rege pinpoints the "social relations that convert difference into oppression" (Rege 1998, 41) as essentially the point of departure for an understanding of solidarity, diversity, and unity.

These debates to some extent offer a response to India's need of proving it was a unity instead of a "congeries of (warring) religions, castes, and princely states" (Seth 1993). In pursuing this endeavor, the elites did little — too little — for the cause of the Dalit community and in effect also greatly disregarded lower-caste women by privileging upper-caste (*savarna*) life — much

like the colonizers privileged their own bourgeoisie and the Brahmin elites who served as their informants and collaborators. It is not my intention to monolithically criticize India's biggest heroes, but I hope that in basing my analysis in readings of Dalit/Bahujan writings and feminist articulations in the field of science and technology, I can attune myself to their claims and critique an India where the prevalence of community has merely become a way of invisibilizing caste as a dominant mode of oppression. With the writings of B. R. Ambedkar, I can identify this process as beginning within discourses on Indian liberation and technology, as formulated by Gandhi, Nehru, and perhaps, to a lesser extent, Tagore. Their assumptions not only articulate a paternalistic relationship of the state to its subjects, but also largely negate the question of difference so central to India's political struggles. I follow Achuthan's analysis of a deterministic imaginary, but also interrogate the implications of Gandhi's and Tagore's Brahminism and Nehruvian socialist universalisms through the critiques of Ambedkar, as the technological imaginary becomes a breeding ground for Brahminical patriarchy that produces its own version of man2.0 (Wynter 2003). The blind spots both Nehru and Gandhi deployed into Indian society remain largely unaddressed and have — as a result of the same techno-social thrust toward modulation — led to renaturalized categories that push already subaltern individuals all the more to the margins, to invisibility and dispossession. In a way, these debates respond to the logics of modulation with a call to unity, but neglect how deeply the Indian people, and their own positionality, had adapted to British colonial modulation. It is precisely this perspective that both Gandhi and Tagore attempted to surpass, as India was in dire need of producing a viable political subject for Indian independence to succeed. Thus, the anxieties that come with the representation of unity in a modular world make for a lack of problematization of difference that perpetuates the neglect of Dalit and subaltern communities, especially to its DAB women.

Gandhi's omission of women in weaving could thus be read as all the more problematic, excluding Dalits and also very

clearly not invested in making a space for women within the Indigenous technology that he had taken from them to place them in the hands of male intellectuals. As Chaudhuri (2017) has convincingly claimed, because India entered modernity and capitalism through colonialism, it took on many of the structural qualities of colonial modernity for granted to some extent. Women were recast within middle-class domesticity, while the socialist perception of working-class and lower-caste groups was that of women as warrior and complicated the division between private and public space that colonial gender norms presupposed. Explored as autopoiesis, the storylines discussed here show an investment in the established structures of power, which can become overemphasized in the name of larger unity. Because of such division, the advancement of policies that emerged after the end of the Nehruvian era could disqualify some of the specific demands of the women's movement by once again reacting problematically to the question of interference into personal law (Williams 2006). Counterfoiling the *charkha* as a development program, the example of the big dams built after independence shows that the investment in India's poor population only went so far, focusing on urban modernity and neglecting the vast majority of India's poor located precisely in the spaces that Gandhi had claimed to be the centers of authentic Indianness. At the same time, although women have been at the forefront of many of the dam-protests throughout the years and up until today, the figure of the Dalit becomes masculinized throughout the years, effectively leading to an ungendering of Dalit women and a "savarnization" of femininity, which seeps into technology, infrastructure, labor, and also political solidarities (Rege 2013; Rao 2018).

Despite being constructed in opposition to British identity, the subjectivity that the *charkha* enabled and privileged carried forth elements of colonial rule, in that it did not account for any differentiation of what spinning meant for the various communities within India. But the nationalists and especially Gandhi's movement framed his *charkha* as the object of self-rule, both on a material and moral trajectory. The materiality of the *charkha*

thus carries the Indian nationalist imaginary in attempts to counter British modulation, but its proponents neglect the ample diversity in political positionalities and desires inherent to the budding nation-state. Instead of a focus on the British colonial project that supposedly "diffused" technology into the subcontinent, the *charkha* as an Indigenous technology creates its own history of India and development that, though engaged in an antagonistic relationship with the West, does not require its logics to propagate a vision of postcolonial subjectivity. At the same time, the lived reality of the *charkha* as a modality that unifies India under an umbrella concept decenters Indian politics from those of marginalized communities by demanding they adapt to the disembodied qualities of the spinning wheel in an uncritical differentiation between the self and the other that is itself modular.

Making the Past Present: Leakages of the Modular

In chapter 3, I argued that modulation is not just a characteristic of contemporary (digital, platform, neoliberal, communicative, immaterial) forms of capitalist governance and control, but has been central in creating racialized and gendered differences from at least the late nineteenth century. The technological materiality of objects of enumeration and identification allowed for these differences to circulate and become indexical — the objects refer to an archive of deviance, which is represented through the material technologies in symbolic and reductive form. In countering the segregation these deviances have produced in the cultural sphere, postcolonial nation-states iterate their own reductive mechanisms of identification so as to unite under a national identity. This chapter turns to the hegemonic pushes toward modulation in the present. I will argue that there is a renewed attachment to femininity modulated into an embodiment of white nationhood, which exerts itself in the emerging fields of social media. The phenomenon of attachment to women's rights in the name of nation has been called "Femonationalism" (Farris 2017). But whereas Farris observes the nationalist Right superficially turning to white femininity in the name of nation, I argue that Femonationalism is a return

of modulation-as-dysselection rather than a new form of adaption that appropriates the language of feminism. As chapter 3 and the example of the "black horror on the Rhine" suggest, the invocation of women's rights in the name of national security is distinctly part of an ethno-nationalist construction of Germany at least since the early twentieth century and can be traced back to the aftermath of settler colonialism in German South West Africa. I will tease out how the interlacing of Femonationalism and modular dysselection informs digital information infrastructures provided by the state, thereby adding to modalities of neglect and discrimination that Black and brown people face before recurring proclamations of an ethnic Femonationalism. After New Year's Eve 2015/16, almost exactly one hundred years after the phantasm of the "black horror" became a modality of politics in postwar Germany, the public was once again confronted with reports about a large number of North African men sexually harassing white women. This time, these reports were brought forth by an internet discourse that actualized imaginaries of the "black horror" to reposition feminism as supposedly at the center of German security paradigms. The case of Cologne must be read as a leakage that brings the racial dysselection of the past, the "black horror" of the 1920s, into the present. But this event cannot be contextualized without a consideration of the digital infrastructures that have been put in place to produce this event in such a way: centrally, the predictive modalities of governance function to make dysselections of the past present in modular, reductive, and normalized ways. Here, the digital infrastructure functions without direct targeting, but still effects modular dysselections, as it draws upon models of identification first created within the colonies to produce difference as essential and unchanging. Like in colonial Namibia, these identification systems rearticulate colonial governance within the restructuring of police mechanisms according to technological systems of identification. However, the experiences in the Third Reich have somewhat shifted the modalities in which data is collected, but the perception of incoming migrants as crisis has

arguably reintroduced the rigid forms of identification to the debate.[1]

In contemporary Germany, policing practices have taken on technological, algorithmic, and in part automatized methodologies less than in other places, and yet the events of Cologne have marked a turning point in which "women's rights" were harnessed to enforce higher security measures against people perceived as migrants. Police work is thus not only becoming increasingly technological but also predictive in ways that evoke colonial modulation of otherness based upon a visual and technological regime of identification. This problematically calls upon the images and representations delineated in previous chapters, but does so in an automatized manner, seemingly without human intervention. Quotidian and communal German police practice to date merely employs location-based services, but framings of a threat to national security would allow for person-based implementations (Bröckling and Hanschmann 2019). Further, considering the conflation of location data and personal identity discussed in chapter 3, the distinction between person-based and location-based data can be deployed in vague ways. Within a system that seeks to stop criminals before they perform any criminal activity, the criminal cannot be identified on the basis of crime, but must be essentialized as an identity that then comes to stand in for recommendations regarding governance and security.

After a brief overview of the contemporary discourse on predictive policing, the incident(s) in Cologne, which I will mark as #Cologne, will be described and contextualized through two digital initiatives to combat sexual violence — one, the *Hilfetelefon*, a state initiative, and the other, an activist campaign estab-

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1   The German state's digitization mandate has been slow and somewhat wary of its own history of datified abuse that arguably animated the Nazi project. However, moments of perceived threat have continuously led to an increased intrusion of the state, collecting datasets previously identified as particularly sensitive. These moments can usually be traced back to incidents regarding migration, effectively leading to a "securitization of migration" (Banai and Kreide 2017).

lished with the hashtag *#ausnahmslos*. Read through each other, these instances show how the state draws upon Femonationalist concepts of women's rights that are reductive and exclusionary, and how an intersectional feminist approach becomes read as itself reductive and exclusionary because of modular thinking and reductive identity politics that cannot see beyond the digital as a place of supposed privilege.

Objective Policing?

In the years leading up to the 2015/16 debate, news media attention had identified a phenomenal increase of burglaries throughout Germany's affluent cities and neighborhoods. Such reporting provided a central mechanism upon which predictive policing could hinge its legitimacy (Egbert and Leese 2020). However, in combination with the increasing perception of threats to national security, mechanisms of prediction can interact with databases documenting an individual's data points in a way that makes these distinctions irrelevant. This marks a new chapter of what has been called the "scientification" (Ericson and Shearing 1986) of police work, a term that suggests an increase in objectivity and a more distanced or nonideological approach to crime. However, I shall suggest that these objectivity claims merely rearticulate a normalized dysselection that comes to play a role within the cultural sphere as it developed already preceding the Cologne incident. The predictive technology RADAR-iTE is central here. It was introduced to monitor potential Islamic radicals across Germany, bundling information on individuals within a centralized data framework. RADAR-iTE builds upon the myth of "raw" data, suggesting nonideological collection of information through a centralized network with objective data points. However, these data points are collected by individual police officers within quite individual contexts. These individuals and their potential biases are not questioned — trusting police judgment in a form that is and has been problematic,

not just in the histories evoked above.[2] As the revelations of incomprehensive and biased police work, for example, within the NSU trials[3], are not the latest to suggest, the assumption of Germanness-as-whiteness leaves nonwhite individuals particularly vulnerable to both scrutiny and suspicion — even when they themselves become victims. The RADAR-iTE software glosses over the human data engineers and the biases they potentially include in submitting information, because the conditions of these entries — for example, the erroneous search for the NSU-murderers within nonwhite communities, when it later turned out the terrorist attacks and murders were committed by fascists — are neither interrogated nor documented and thus cannot be revised after new information comes to light. Central to the software's implementation is the terminology of the *Gefährder* ("endangerer"), which theoretically is an open concept, but since 9/11 has come to refer to Islamic terror only (Bröckling and Hanschmann 2019).[4] Thus, the search for

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2   During the time this manuscript was under revision, abolitionism of police in total has become a discursive possibility once more. A reader was published that contextualized abolitionism from within the European context and against the backdrop of rising demands to defund the police. In light of movements such as Black Lives Matter and the murder of George Floyd in the United States in 2020, in particular, a wave of solidarity has swept over Europe that has increasingly turned toward abolitionism, and as the editors write in the introduction, the reader hopes to contextualize these movements and bind them to the Black radical tradition that first made these movements possible (Loick and Thompson 2022)

3   The National Socialist Underground (NSU) was a far-right terrorist group that exposed itself in 2011 after having committed at least ten murders in at least a decade of activity. When the last surviving member of the core trio was put on trial, the investigation revealed a series of failures on the part of the German government and its officials, and pointed to a heavily biased investigation, and possible collaboration with the terrorist group by the investigating bodies. For further reading on the NSU and its relations to German government organizations see, for example, Bernhardt 2012 or Karakayali et al. 2017.

4   After a range of fascist WhatsApp groups emerged within police institutions, a fascist terrorist murdered nine nonwhite people in Hanau in Germany, and another fascist killed a white politician for speaking out in the name of refugees and several subsequent cases were made public in 2020

possible endangerers allows for silent algorithmic encroachments into a person's privacy that echo the eugenic imperative of racial sciences: RADAR-iTE monitors individuals who visit (certain) mosques or travel to Muslim majority countries — the technology thus increases surveillance based on the observation of practices that carry notions of racialization through religion and ethnicity (Bröckling and Hanschmann 2019). Markers of religion or ethnicity become conflated with the notion of danger, justifying a whole range of practices that withhold arriving migrants' right to privacy in the name of national security: state and border police may search an undocumented person's digital devices to verify their identity, often referring to data on social media and networking platforms as they do (Biselli and Beckmann 2017).

Police data thus relies on social media practices like other technologies of identification in problematic ways. Algorithms that recommend friends, commodities, and jobs to internet users according to who they are do not produce knowledge on the individual. Instead, the internet functions as the interface upon which individuals are identified in collective types, and each type may have certain attributes not overtly racial, but racially codified, and thus the process of racialization is less obvious, subtler, and sometimes even inviting (Chun 2016; Feldman 2016). These typifications leak and reiterate race as/and technology, as deployed in German South West Africa. Typification is inscribed into an informational infrastructure, through which race is produced as a model, a user's online practices approximated and sorted into that model, and that model translated yet again into an identity in a reductive manner. When a user's Facebook profile or internet browsing habits suggest racially codified behavior, the algorithm will mark the data bodies with all the attributes of the type that behavior is ascribed to, mirror-

and 2021, police officials have started to consider expanding this definition to nonwhite radicals. The biases inherent to judicial and executive state institutions became a central aspect of discussion in the year 2020 and remained so during the Covid-19 pandemic, thus expediting the concerns I address in the following pages to a certain extent.

ing the colonial archive that provided information only that fit predefined scripts. This typology, determined through activities such as "liking" things on Facebook, creates what Chun (2016) has called "digital neighborhoods," where people are grouped into a category, because they have the same or similar traits.[5] Digital network analysis thus corresponds with the creation of types in racial sciences — a conjuring of racial biometrics and the creation of visible parameters of identities in the colonies that not only render but overstate certain cultural attributes and differences as biological (codified) fact. This typification dismisses data that does not confirm the initially produced type and uses it to preempt incoming data, meaning that those being added to the database at a later point are added because they conform to the (now abstracted) type, not because of the deviant or criminal behavior that the type was created for. These types are contained within fictitious boundaries — they do not turn away from fixed identity markers such as race, gender, and sex, but actually fixate them all the more through cultural assumptions, derived from *and* ascribed to these markers. This posits homophily as a central assumption of network theory: "sameness-breeds-connection" (Chun 2016). Homophily constructs sameness through the same historical, biocentric categories of the human, which recenter whiteness and masculinity as its main iterations from which other things need to be distinguished in sameness.

Within the social media economy, such information is handed over willingly and framed as individuation, for example, when social media users are constantly asked to personalize their profiles. But police and border agents are increasingly asking to access this data so as to better identify perpetrators, and are actively using their rights to scour arriving refugees' hardware devices for such information, supposedly to verify

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5 These neighborhoods are not only metaphorical. Indeed, Randi Heinrichs (2021) has researched the correspondence of neighborhood postal codes with racial stratification and also noted how certain privileges allow for more, other, different forms of anonymity.

their identity, often against their will. As social media's YOU is always collective, meaning that the YOU is recognizable, because you are *like* others (Chun 2016); personalization means nothing more than the willing or unwilling flattening of the self to a type that can be harnessed for data extraction and use value. The data a user inserts into her profile is aligned with available information, and past realities codify how a new user is to be categorized. This means that algorithms draw on the past to categorize for the future. The assumption that the future will mirror the past is problematic — it does not leave room for questioning the underlying and historical functions of racism and racialization and the profiling (and with it the creation) of criminal bodies that I have explored above.[6] Especially because of the constant framing of digital media as radically new, the histories of differentiation disappear under the paradigm of innovation and the branding of the internet as a space of radical newness. As a result, the user is left with only a presentist understanding of discrimination and difference. And yet, the following discussion will show how within digital spaces the automatized functions of social sorting produce racializations in the same ambivalent interpellation of science that arguably continues in eugenicist logics, now framed as "behavioral" or "networked" in affective computing (Wilson 2017). The United States has seen law-making practices draw upon these digital nontruths in problematic ways, but Germany is beginning to utilize similar logics in identifying and dysselecting individuals according to their digital representations. The RADAR-iTE software has been strategi-

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6   Since finishing my own research, publications on the topic have exploded, centrally featuring Black and brown women from the United States. Because the major players in Big Tech are predominantly located there, and since Black Lives Matter has gained an overwhelming and continuous standing within the social movements landscape, it is central that the works of researchers such as Safiya Noble (2018), Ruha Benjamin (2019), and Katherine McKittrick (2021) (to name merely three central authors, there are many more) are mentioned as having emerged since a large part of this research had been written, but not yet published. Their work thus features only marginally here, but without a doubt it has influenced the reworking of this manuscript for publication.

cally employed since 2016 (Federal Academy for Security Policy 2018), and has since been the basis on which individuals deemed dangerous may be detained without reason for several months at a time, sometimes even without being allowed to consult a lawyer (Bröckling and Hanschmann 2019). Although a direct connection is not documented, the software's implementation across Germany in the year 2016 effectively ties it to the case of Cologne, where reports abounded that migrant mobs had sexually harassed hundreds of women on the night of New Year's Eve 2015/16. *Focus* magazine and several others after it referenced the night as *Die Nacht der Schande* ("The night of shame"), eerily letting the "black shame and horror of the Rhineland" leak into the present.

#Cologne: The "Black Horror" Returned

In the first week of the year 2016, several of the relevant news media across the political spectrum reported that gangs of asylum seekers had sexually harassed hundreds of German women on New Year's Eve. Although investigations into many of the crimes had reached no conclusions, and it later turned out that the crimes ranged from pickpocketing to variations of non-sexual and sexual activities from criminal to morally frowned upon, the weeks after the event were marked by a banding together of various media outlets, social commentators, and politicians to demand large-scale deportations. A conversation between feminist theorist Sabine Hark and lawyer Christina Clemm commented on this sudden turn to the question of sexual violence. It was published under the title translated as "Sexism: Have We Become a Feminist Nation over Night?" (Clemm and Hark 2016, n.p.).

This provocative title was a response to recent reports that the perpetrators were mostly North African young men who held refugee status. The general tone in public discourse turned sour fast, as more and more public voices demanded an end of what was read as benign neglect of insurmountable cultural differences to arriving refugees. This incident is not only a central

moment in the (re)turn toward more open sentiments of what was at the time referred to as "Islamophobia,"[7] it also marks a strategic engagement with politics that can only be called "pseudofeminist," as the trope of "stranger danger" — a trope that has repeatedly been criticized as unrealistic by feminist practitioners (Clemm and Hark 2016; Hacker and Gümüşay 2016) — was discursively filled with racial attributes and projected onto young male migrants. The case of Cologne bundled antirefugee sentiments, which could now be legitimated in the name of women's rights and national safety to expedite deportations, ending a discursive period of what had optimistically been termed the "long summer of migration" (Farris 2017; Hess et al. 2017), where Europe and Germany in particular had followed a public portrayal of its refugee politics as open, tolerant, and welcoming.[8]

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7   The problematic terminology of "phobia," which suggests that such sentiments have an inexplicable origin, has now been replaced by the more accurate term "anti-Islamic racism." Although, of course, Islam is not a race, the term is important because it addresses the conjunctures of "cultural" and thus chosen traits — such as religion — with markers of ethnicity that feed into anti-Islamic sentiments; they are there, whether the person actually is of Muslim faith or not. Racism has always relied on a plethora of mechanisms of justification (one of which has always been technology), and never merely on biological factors.

8   Of course, this optimism was not shared by all, and anti-Islamic sentiments had been boiling under the surface nonetheless. Further, the European "welcome culture" has arguably been a lot more about German and European self-fashioning than really about helping Black people. As Ida Danewid (2017) has written, the European welcoming of Black refugees serves to rearticulate a form of white innocence, where Black suffering becomes once again disconnected from the histories of colonialism that had created the conditions of suffering in the first place. Economic dependencies, climate change, and Western intervention into social conflicts remain largely unaddressed within discourses on refugee and migration politics, which results in a naturalization of Black suffering that can also be identified in discourses on humanitarian aid, the monolithical depiction of "Africa" as a place of poverty, and so on. In rescuing a certain predefined number of refugees, Europe can posit itself as "savior," without engaging in these histories.

After Cologne, daily newspapers reporting on the incident overwhelmingly employed racialized aesthetics to accompany the reports. *Focus* and *Süddeutsche Zeitung* both decided to illustrate the events in striking similarity: a white female body (able-bodied, slim, and, in the case of *Focus,* blond) covered with black hand prints, accompanied by taglines labeling the until then unidentified incidents as "sex-attacks" and asking whether this was "still tolerance, or already blindness" (*Focus* 2016, n.p.; my translations). The "sex-attack" is just one example that evokes the German past almost as schematically as the invocation of "shame" on the front page of Focus magazine, which carried the title "The Night of Shame." With such a framework, *Focus* seamlessly calls upon the "black shame" of the 1920s, and the imagery of a monstrous and uncontrollable other that was overpowering docile white femininity. Because the *Focus* cover was the more explicit one, its analysis is presented as exemplary to a larger discourse that carried elements of all that *Focus* represented in a variety of tones. Other newspapers and magazines had decided to represent the events in abstract imagery or sketches, but *Focus* depicted a photographic image of a naked white female body with blond, tussled hair covered by black hand prints, suggesting a recent past of being groped and dirtied by Black hands. The figure's mouth is slightly open, an ambivalent gesture that can be read as shock or lust, while a bold red and white lettering stamped across the woman's chest spells out "women accuse" (Focus 2016, n.p.; my translation) — whom they are accusing does not become apparent.

The image and text combination evokes the red tape used to shut off a crime scene, and another subtitle placed to the left of the image proclaiming to know "what really happened" (Focus 2016, n.p.) suggests a truthful and objective account of the occurrences, sourced from the proverbial horse's mouth. But the promise of letting women speak seems to be sufficiently fulfilled in the article with a total number of one. After this single woman's account, who is quoted as saying only that the harassers spoke Arabic to each other, the article turns to a generic description of other occurrences to then, without further differentia-

tion, turn to a discussion of the one million refugees said to have come to Germany in 2015. The two events become semantically linked, as do later events where the perpetrators nationalities are not mentioned. The initial framing has already posited them as North African refugees. Sexual harassment and violence against women is not addressed as a problem all women are potentially confronted with on a daily basis, but externalized and projected onto the nonwhite arriving other. Declaring the "long summer of migration" as a moment of naïve benevolence, the discursive structure of the argument cordons off colonial genealogies to represent the question of refugees and migration as merely questions of white benevolence, of white people graciously allowing these dysselected bodies to participate in the wealth Europeans have acquired all on their own. The question of the refugee becomes a question about European values — where European humanism had in the past benevolently allowed refugees in, but could now stop doing so, because the arrivals were framed as incapable of acting according to a preconfigured script of supposed German values.

This storyline was prominently circulated in news media and became a central point of discussions within online spaces, despite, as later research showed, only six cases of alleged sexual assault being brought to court (*Zeit Online* 2019). I shall refer to the night of New Year's Eve 2015/16 as #Cologne. In doing so, I build upon a suggestion by Sabine Hark and Paula-Irene Villa, who have defined it as a discursive cypher just as much as a description of the place(ing) of the event (Hark and Villa 2017).[9] According to Hark and Villa, this placing describes a turning point: after #Cologne, women's rights are not only harnessed in the name of xenophobia and racism, but sexual harassment becomes externalized and argued to not have been a problem before the arrival of large number of people who came to be monolithically positioned as Muslim male migrants. Sara Far-

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9   Hark and Villa (2017) do not implement the hashtag, but in line with the conversations that took place predominantly on Twitter, I found this addition to demarcate Cologne as cypher more than fitting.

ris has referred to this phenomenon, where women's rights are appropriated in a pseudofeminist stance to rearticulate nation on the basis of ethnicity, as "Femonationalism" (Farris 2017). But whereas Farris argues that women read as Muslima are constructed as passive victims of their own culture — as cis women who need the prosaic white man to save them — I argue that what happened with #Cologne is a form of racism that modulates subjects across gender and race — a violent appropriation of feminism as a white nationalist project, which inadvertently leads to the dysselection of nonwhite women and does not even grant them the space of docile victims needing white saviors, as Black and brown women were not addressed in the public discourses at all. The images of white femininity in need of protection thus rearticulate Black and brown women's disappearance and dysselection just as much as it delegates Black and brown men to the position of outsider and danger once more.

Social media navigates such political occurrences and perpetuates the inequality that Cologne-as-cypher (#Cologne) suggests through algorithmic code. The *Hilfetelefon*, a helpline for women who have become victims of sexual harassment or domestic violence, is illustrative of the neglect that infrastructures of care can cause, when relying on automatized identifiers. The helpline arguably is in line with feminist demands to invest in public infrastructure and social services, instead of merely engaging in carceral solutions. But in light of the preceding years of antimigrant and increasingly anti-Muslim rhetoric in Germany, the allocation of funds and distribution of knowledge infrastructures, such as the helpline, have increasingly neglected to address Black and brown women, conflated them to the position of the outsider, and thus dysselected them in both their visibility as victims and their need for protection. A careful consideration of state social media budgeting, the politics of "nudging" — identifying and creating consumer desires according to data analytics — and the Femonationalist (re)turn of the German public identified above, all serve to contextualize the distribution of the helpline as a project that articulates refusal and neglect of nonwhite women.

The Influencer State: Social Media Narratives of Dysselection

Social media advertising has become a central modality of creating and addressing specific consumer groups across contexts and according to their data profiles. These profiling strategies have been problematized because small-scale "nudging" practices have been argued to have led to election interference in several countries across the globe (Nosthoff and Maschewski 2017). In what is referred to as "nudging," or more innocuously "microtargeting," certain users only get to see certain content, with the hopes that it will influence these users in a specific way. The 2017 public service media documentary "Infokrieg Im Netz" ("Internet Infowars") (Darklord Dachshund 2017) documented how problematic microtargeting can be: CDU politician Jens Spahn used such dark ads in 2017 to target Facebook users between the ages of twenty-two and forty-eight who were interested in or had chosen to subscribe to and follow the German far-right party, AFD. The post these users received showed a map of Germany and Spahn's profile picture, with a caption that emphasized the politician's investment in securing the European and German borders.

The xenophobic undertones are addressed in the documentary, and they are secondary to my argument. However, a second campaign ran simultaneously, which was only shown to users between the ages of twenty and fifty, identified to be living in larger metropolitan areas, and which seemingly has a quite contradictory message. In this second segment, Spahn is seen walking down a sunny street, accompanied by five young adults of diverse ethnicities. In this post that conveys a distinctively more positive tone, the caption reads, as translated, "Germany is great." Clearly, the two messages are an attempt to make the politician more appealing to as many users as possible without losing conservative and right-wing votes. But reading them together is also telling, in that the different audiences are also addressed in different ways. Notably, the first message directly addresses the voter's need for security, but the positive messaging in the second example is framed in vague terms without

actually promising anything to the implied outsider, nor to the probable (nonwhite) voter, but lending the attribute of greatness to Germany, and effectively to Spahn.

It could be argued that to a certain extent, political parties have always strived for polysemy within their campaigns, for example, through different messaging on campaign advertisements in different regions or cities, or different forms of address, depending on the audience of a certain place or event. But these instances were in the past all delivered publicly and can easily be comprehended without any special skills or research. This is no longer the case. Besides, microtargeting can become even more problematic, for example, when advertisements for housing, jobs, or other infrastructural capacities are shown only to white users, to people identified as Germans, or people already in positions that are materially privileged. Of course, people are not targeted as white, but in their practical specificities, which, as I showed in chapter 1, codify race and gender into more innocuous terms that belie racial capitalism. It is not that white life is codified, but whatever is not white is codified. Checking GPS in an area considered to be working-class or poor, listening to rap music, buying foreign-language items — all of these practices may codify a body as raced online — and with real-life consequences. Microtargeting therefore lends itself to subtly normalize a number of past modulations. The very formation of violence that had signified certain cultural traits as unattainable according to racial logics, now punishes bodies for their attachment to the traits and habits of living that had developed out of that very unavailability. Such forms of exclusion are not new: be it the dysselection of racialized individuals, or the infamous old boys network that naturalizes the dysselection of women from panels, promotions, or other material opportunities because discussions on these topics happen after hours or in private spaces. But now the terms are no longer negotiated in secluded bars after hours, but in the public privacy of digital space, and are hence both invisibilized and hypervisible. Microtargeting can harmfully keep information from those who need it the most, from those most precarious or already dysselected

by society. This is not necessarily a targeted dysselection, but shows how normalized raced, sexed, gender, and labor divisions have become, and how they are affecting the distribution of information in a highly problematic manner. Misinformation and neglect are thus central parameters, with which digital and modular dysselection affects more and more people today. Read through the statements issued after #Cologne as a mass-scale iteration of Germanness-as-whiteness, the distributive strategies of the *Hilfetelefon* seem to echo that iteration through misrecognition and neglect.

The *Hilfetelefon* is a twenty-four-hour helpline initiated by the Federal Office of Family Affairs and Civil Society Functions (Bundesamt für Familie und zivilgesellschaftliche Aufgaben/ BAFzA), which offers advice for women in seventeen languages and across a diverse spectrum of various positionalities (Hilfetelefon — Gewalt gegen Frauen 2019). The website offers a divergence from the constant trope of "stranger danger," and its resources are presented in simple and encouraging vocabulary. It provides numerous alleyways of access, including consultation in sign language or through an anonymous and encrypted chat function. It seemingly addresses a number of requirements that do not presuppose or limit access according to positionality. However, the viral advertising initiative that was deployed on a large scale in early 2016 suggests terms of dysselection that are congruent with #Cologne as a Femonationalist cypher, and its target audience rearticulates a specific representation of Germanness as white and middle-class. The social media campaign that ran in the year 2016 across Facebook appeared only to users whom the platform had identified as female, and here only those who had clicked on interests related to the Social Democratic Party (SPD) in Germany's government.[10] Cis women, where explicit ties to the party were not established, and other women and gender-non-conforming people were not targeted as audi-

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10 This is the result of an investigative query into the mechanisms of the state's social media funding done by the online research platform *motherboard* (Hoppenstedt and Biselli 2018).

ences and therefore could not see the advertising to access the infrastructure.

According to a set of responses issued publicly in April 2018 (Deutscher Bundestag 2018), the German government's budget for social media campaigns has continuously risen since 2011, but it exploded in 2016, where an increase was recorded from around €860,000 in 2015 to almost €4 million in 2016. The largest amount was allocated to the German armed forces, in line with other continuously rising expenditures in that field of national security. But the *Hilfetelefon* was also a recipient of social media expenditures and thus is part of a larger package expanding on the capacities of the digital state. The large budget was justified with the information mandate the state had (Hoppenstedt and Biselli 2018), which means that in the state's logic, it was meeting its duty of care by distributing information. However, this declaration contrasts the gathering of information that necessarily accompanies the state's digitization endeavors and how data collection translates into racial, gendered, and other dysselections. The distribution of advertising on the *Hilfetelefon* must be understood in continuity with #Cologne, but it also exemplifies how such dysselections take place in forms of neglect and carelessness, which translates into a technical error when automatized.

The choices to advertise the *Hilfetelefon* only to some (white and left-liberal) Facebook users illustrates and rearticulates how normalized modular modes of identity have become. In addressing certain groups of individuals, the social media campaign potentially wants to address voters likely to vote for the spd, but deploys their message of safety from harassment only to those who might be in favor of such measures, not to those who might need them. This effectively dysselects a large majority of people potentially in need of the same infrastructures — in this case, those most likely to become victims of sexual harassment and gender-based violence — and turns the measures into mere cosmetics and political communication. The effect is that the spd is positioned, mainly to their own clientele, as a party invested in women's rights. Looking at the typical elector-

ate of the SPD, the flipside of such targeted advertising seems to suggest that gendered violence happens only in heterosexual middle-class relationships, and that the body of victims is made up predominantly of white cis women. Reading these distributions in direct continuity with the assumptions of #Cologne that had posited male asylum seekers as the dominant source of sexual violence would mean that a deliberate decision was made, which would fail to protect female and nonbinary asylum seekers as those people most likely to be at the receiving end of sexual violence, because they are not addressed within parameters that appeal only to German citizens with an inclination to vote for their party. If I were to extend this paradigm even further, one could argue that it promotes the assumption that sexual violence only happens on a left-liberal scope. Cis women supporting other parties and those further right or left on the political spectrum were not addressed, nor were people who do not show interest in party politics shown the advertisement. This may include undocumented individuals and asylum seekers, or, in fact, anyone who does not hold a German passport or is interested in party politics enough to openly support a certain party on Facebook.[11]

The *Hilfetelefon* illustrates the disconnect between the attention sexual violence received from the state and in public discourse after #Cologne and the small number of initiatives that actually supported women, especially Black and brown women and queer folx. Addressing this disconnect, Shaheen Wacker, the Afro-German initiator of Black Lives Matter Berlin, points out that racism in Germany predominantly takes on the form of psychological violence (Mayen et al. 2017) — and the lack of infrastructures, or the inability to make existing infrastructures available to those who require them the most, should be read as an extension of that violence, even when it is not intentional.

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11 Women are underrepresented in this group (Transferstelle politische Bildung 2016), even if the aftermath of the debates of 2016 there was a continuous rise of feminist engagement with state politics, albeit not necessarily on a party level.

Following #Cologne, Wacker illustrated such forms of neglect and selective attention by sharing a case of sexual harassment she and another Black person experienced on the train. However, their experience predominantly evoked name-calling and death threats, and Wacker was suspended from Facebook with all documentation of the case deleted. Of course, it was not the German state that suspended them, but given the attention that gendered violence was receiving post-#Cologne, Wacker's experience proved how the question of sexual harassment was as much a question of cultural and social distributions of affect as it was about notions of belonging that expressed themselves either as solidarity or as victim blaming. It shows the readiness with which Black and brown women are excluded in narratives that do not fit preexisting regimes of visibility.

Responding to these and other experiences after #Cologne, a group of about twenty feminists of various backgrounds formed a collective to critique the Femonationalist approaches to gender-based violence under the collective name #*ausnahmslos*, translated as "#noexcuses" on the website (#ausnahmslos 2016, n.p.). The hashtag #ausnahmslos became one of the main avenues of critique that addressed #Cologne beyond calls for deportation and harsher punishments. Therefore, I shall address #ausnahmslos as one of the more visible articulations of an emerging netfeminism that inserted itself into the hegemonic discussions with some success. Although the movement has fallen from grace and many of its initiators have had to admit to its flaws, I do not see it as failure, but rather argue for its success in centering on intersectionality and creating a point of departure that illustrates the processual quality of digital feminist thought.

#noexcuses: Against Modular Segregation

As media attention continued to grow in early January 2016, a collective formed to critique the portrayal of #Cologne in its racialized implications. The collective gathered under the hashtag #*ausnahmslos* (#noexcuses) after the debate representing the events of New Year's 2016 resorted to repressive and car-

ceral discourses of protection and safety. The translation of the German *ausnahmslos* into "no excuses" is not literal — a literal translation might be "with no exception." The German-language statement created by the collective argued more along the lines of not wanting to exclude anyone from victimhood, and addressed harassment and sexual violence in every account, and not just when migrants were seemingly involved. Meanwhile, the English choice to make the hashtag "no excuses" is more suggestive of a condition in which people make excuses for why sexual violence happens in general. The incongruent translation is suggestive of a certain context and may itself read as a form of microtargeting, albeit in the older sense of polysemy and public targeting of certain groups. However, this translation does not necessarily capture the initial impetus to address sexual violence "without exception," which seems to be more in line with the Black Lives Matter movement and the state of exception Black women live in. Just as the statement that "Black Lives Matter" is only necessary before a lived reality that negates such mattering, the call to address sexual violence with "no exception" becomes necessary before a societal backdrop that continues to create states of exception, in this case for undocumented migrants who are deported for things not considered a crime for Germans, or Black and brown women who seemingly cannot exist as victims. The exception, de facto, from the realm of the human that is identified within liberal discourse, #noexception rather than #noexcuses potentially addresses Black and brown people as much as it addresses those contributing to that state of exception. But settling on #noexcuses, the collective directed its critique toward a white public, and (perhaps deliberately) deepened the void between a minoritized unseen victimhood and the hegemonic voice of white society.

In its manifesto, the #ausnahmslos collective criticized the sudden fetishism of a strong, carceral state in the name of feminism, arguing that such moves were motivated by underlying structural racism, which further objectified white women as property of the German white male. #ausnahmslos as a collective not only saw its mission as feminist, but ascribed it to

intersectionality and stressed the need for a recognition of the complex entanglements of categories of discrimination and inequality with a previously unmatched visibility. Arguably, the collective's manifesto marks a moment from which German society has since seen many others depart. Conversations about race, sex, and class usually confined to academic or activist spaces have since again and again leaked into depoliticized public spaces and become firmly situated as part of pop-cultural discussions, with the concept of intersectionality leaking from activist spaces to the larger public via Twitter and Instagram. At least tangentially, #ausnahmslos must be read to have played a part in these processes. It was a well-received hashtag campaign that inserted itself into a feminist lineage of digital activism and became a central intervention into media discourse. I thus read #ausnahmslos as an early attempt to circumvent the modular and insert a multiplicity of feminisms into mediatized spaces.

The individuals who formed the collective are still bound to and associated with a number of other feminist organization that I understand as inherently part of the digital #ausnahmslos network, even if the collective itself no longer exists in this form. To mention just a few of the initiatives, the contributors also publish feminist magazines, blogs, and journalism, such as *Mädchenmannschaft, Missy Magazin,* or individual feminist blogs and columns in larger newspapers. The contributors to ausnahmslos are and have been involved in a number of political activities, such as hashtag campaigns (#*aufschrei*, #*schauhin*), or initiatives such as Black and brown university groups, *Stop-BildSexism* and Black Lives Matter Berlin, and speak at events as experts on a variety of themes in the realm of social justice and equality. In looking at #ausnahmslos, I am to a certain extent brushing up against the existence of all these interconnected activities and practices as they merge to form a counterhegemonic public space, proving that entangled into visible networks there are several less visible or invisible ones. These people and their work have existed before #ausnahmslos, and continue to do so even after the collective stopped being active. The collective and the hashtag do, however, mark a moment where digital

discourses believed to happen in filter bubbles markedly leaked into the offline world, strongly connecting the reality of the two at a time when the German state negated such entanglements.

#ausnahmslos was a central intervention that managed to conjoin white and nonwhite voices and counternarratives, showing that racism and sexism must be seen as part and parcel of a colonial axis of modular identification. It showed how the dominant narratives on these issues negate fluidity and make difference into an absolute. The ausnahmslos manifesto, signed more than 11,000 times within the first week, was a direct response to the intersection of racism and misogyny that was prevalent in the aftermath of #Cologne:

> The sustained fight against sexualised violence of any kind is of highest priority. It is harmful for all of us if feminism is exploited by extremists to incite against certain ethnicities, as is currently being done in the discussion surrounding the incidents in Cologne.
>
> It is wrong to highlight sexualised violence only when the perpetrators are allegedly the perceived "others": Muslim, Arab, black or North-African men, i.e., those who are regarded as "non-Germans" by extremists. Furthermore, sexualised violence must not only be taken seriously if white cis women are the alleged victims. (#ausnahmslos 2016, n.p.)

White state narratives and the German majority, in this line of arguing, were merely instrumentalizing feminism to justify racism and externalize sexism: in this narrative, it was the immigrants that were the problem, not the modern and enlightened German (read, white) man. As a leakage of the "black shame" of the 1920s, #Cologne developed in a way that effectively made all Black and brown people into suspicious outsiders, and white Germany illustrated its oblivion to the diversity of cultures let alone appearances, traits, and traditions within and between these communities.

This was not the first time that hashtag feminism had instigated a discussion on sexism on a national scale. The instances

of everyday sexism collected under the hashtag #*aufschrei* three years earlier actively prepared the public to discuss questions of gendered violence in various ways, but lacked aspects of intersectionality that became central to #ausnahmslos. One of the events that led to the high visibility of #aufschrei involved the frontrunner of the Free Democratic Party (FDP), Rainer Brüderle.[12] The politician was interviewed by a young female journalist during Octoberfest,[13] where he went on to comment on the woman's looks and engage in the flirtatious leering of an elderly man at a younger women he considers attractive. As Brüderle gave little actual responses to her questions, the journalist in question decided to spin her article around Brüderle's ongoing comments on her appearance. After the article was published (Himmelreich 2013), the comment about how well the journalist Himmelreich filled out the traditional Dirndl dress she was wearing became a catch phrase and Brüderle the unwilling poster child for everyday sexism. Anne Wizorek, a feminist blogger at the time, suggested collecting forms of everyday sexism under the hashtag #aufschrei. Years before #metoo, people across Germany began sharing stories of sexual misdemeanors and gender-based violence that did not spark the outcry (which is what *Aufschrei* translates into) that these incidents, according to Wizorek, should cause. The initial post effectively catapulted #aufschrei into talk shows and made Wizorek a digital public persona overnight. In an interview, Wizorek describes her experiences not only of people sharing intimate stories online, but also of

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12 This story probably was the most visible one, but it was accompanied by a second one: another female journalist had accompanied the German Pirate Party (*Piratenpartei Deutschland*) for about a year, when rumors peppered with sexual innuendo were spread online: that the journalist had exchanged sexual intercourse for information, which the journalist said went on to affect her career even outside of Twitter and the Pirate Party (Meiritz 2013).

13 A German festival deemed "traditionally" German, where sexual violence happens in broad daylight and on a large scale — precisely for this reason, the festival has been consulted as a comparison to the events of Cologne, in an attempt to prove that mass harassment not only exists in white spaces, but actually exists as part and parcel of a German tradition.

an increase in reporting cases of gender discrimination, and the conversations people began having with friends and families on the topic as the hashtag's great successes (Wizorek 2018).

The hashtag #aufschrei received the Grimme online award, marking the first time ever that a hashtag and the discourse behind it received this prestigious TV award that usually honors quality multimedia and entertainment content (Grimme Institut, n.d.). On the one hand, this certainly is suggestive of how hashtag publics have grasped the German socio-political landscape — certainly, the years since the Twitter revolution have enabled the public to read hashtags in a way that made #aufschrei visible and legible (Rambukkana 2015). In light of the experiences of Black Lives Matter Berlin founder Wacker, it seems like the hashtag was figurative of white women's inclusion into the monohumanistic notion of the human. However, the hashtag was also criticized and belittled by central figures of the German public. Joachim Gauck, president of Germany (2012– 17) at the time spoke of a "Tugendfuror," "a furor of virtue." This image evokes a vision of femininity as hysterical, overtly fragile, and hypersensitive. Connoting women's behavior merely with "virtue" (Rietzschel 2013) further called upon images of usually docile women who needed to be reminded of their place as pleasant and passive company. But Gauck's remarks also carried Femonationalist inflections, as he referenced events he deemed more important, such as the political situation in Mali — insinuating once again that this was where sexism and violence against women took place, that it was Black and brown women who needed to be saved from their own men by white prototypicality, and thus constructed a violent other that lay elsewhere. As the open letter noted, Gauck's statement suggested that to insist on singular incidents would obstruct a view of the structural dimensions with which women were constantly confronted, even in Germany, insinuating that #aufschrei was actually obscuring structural aspects of women's inequality by individualizing their oppression via case-by-case stories. Negating that the accumulation of these many stories potentially point to aspects that could indeed be read as structural, very prominent

politicians beyond Gauck worked to marginalize the vast spectrum of stories as either anecdotal hyperbole or unimportant in comparison to other political tragedies (such as women's situation in Mali), and thus already suggesting what #ausnahmslos would later spell out: German (read, white) masculinity was situated as less patriarchal and sexist than what women in other (read, brown) countries have to suffer, where misogyny is supposedly atrocious in comparison. The second conservative reading that was central to responses to #aufschrei was to blame the victim for objectifying and sexist responses. According to the conservative publicist Birgit Kelle (2013), these were natural repercussions to the way a woman had behaved prior to the incident she was describing or sharing, or natural reactions to the clothes she was wearing. Gauck's remark is particularly interesting because he, like others participating in the discursive placing of #Cologne, deployed a form of virtue-signaling *avant la lettre,* which effectively deepened the wound inflicted by cases of daily sexual harassment in the first place. The incidents were proclaimed irrelevant when put in a global perspective. Moreover, Gauck engages with situations elsewhere as ahistorical atrocities that occlude historical readings of misogyny as a Western import and part of the colonial parcel, and that hide material exploitation as the potential reason for rigid cultural divisions. In his statement, Gauck managed to belittle women's experiences, attested to by hundreds of women, who, apparently did see a problem, and position the liberal white subject (man2.0, as I have called him/it) as an iteration of progress all in one go.

The Grimme award, Gauck's disparaging remark, the discussions in talk shows, discussion pages in newspapers, manifestos, and media commentaries — they were all part of this first event, where suddenly online discourse was shaping offline concerns. Although reactions to the hashtag were not all positive, I see this as a moment that has allowed for discussions on gender-based violence and harassment to take on a new form, in which individuals could participate without the repercussions that come with, for example, reporting to the police. #aufschrei was

a forceful moment in the sense that it allowed for individuals to self-advocate and at the same time was part of a collective form. The strength of the hashtag did not stem from its individual anecdotes, but in the sheer number of them, revealing the systemic and structural realities that allowed men to encounter women's bodies on patriarchal terms, to later dismiss claims of encroachment and sexism if these women chose to speak up.

For better or for worse, #aufschrei thus enabled #Cologne as a discursive cypher, and also strengthened #ausnahmslos as an intervention into its hegemonic interpretation. If we compare the two discursive events, the German public's refusal of solidarity and of acknowledging the events' intelligibilities in the name of a seemingly objective whole, they represent two reifications of colonial dysselection. The first directed itself toward the women gathering to articulate their stories through the hashtag #aufschrei. In this instance, the reporting individuals were framed as incapable of rationalizing their own subjective experiences and were scolded like privileged children wanting more while their sisters had not even had a first helping of basic human rights. #Cologne as a second event then allowed German hegemonic society to turn toward nonwhite refugees as outsiders, in the name of the very women the public had previously sidelined. The same people who had previously issued statements blaming the victims for dressing "provocatively" now demanded that feminists position themselves against the alleged migrant attacks. Conjoined with the racist imagery through which #Cologne was circulating within mainstream media discourses, and the immediacy with which the public opinion condemned the representations of #Cologne, the comparison between the two events allows me to read both instances of national responses as iterations of Femonationalism that evoke the modulation prepared in colonial narratives. In the first instance of #aufschrei, the discursive terrain moved along the more traditional and patriarchal axis of one man's reputation, despite thousands of testimonies that mentioned everyday acts of sexism and belittlement beyond Brüderle and without naming perpetrators, very much like the #metoo movement did

a little while later. In the second instance, the case of #Cologne and the subsequent feminist critique that was bundled through #ausnahmslos, Femonationalism was transported through the essentializing reports of white women as victims of brown men, who, instead of humbly accepting their fate as refugees dared to encroach on German (read, white) women. In this dimension, white women were deemed worthy of protection, but only as property and against the foreigner, the barbarian, embodied by a stereotypical imaginary of a North African man — the "black horror on the Rhine" had returned.

Instead of learning from, adding to, or engaging with the discussions, critics demanded a positioning of feminists with regard to the occurrences of #Cologne and the same publicists dismissing #aufschrei were now asking why the "netfeminists" (Kelle 2016, n.p.) remained silent after Cologne. Such an iteration points to the centrality that #aufschrei had had in the previous year — the "netfeminists" could only be addressed as a public figure, because the previous hashtag had modulated these individuals into a group. However, the conservative publicist Kelle's remark — the same woman who had suggested buttoned-up clothing as a quick fix to harassment — was suggestive of a monolithic group that may never have existed in such a way, but set a range of responses in motion that were mainly negotiated by the #ausnahmslos initiators. Yasmina Banaszczuk (@laser-sushi 2018), for example, describes this demand for feminist positioning as the demand for female social reproduction in a society unwilling to contribute to the same group's well-being, suggesting a framework evocative of labor. Banaszczuk criticized how women were being asked to perform such free labor in the form of awareness training or the performative placing and contextualizing of events such as #Cologne, while the state would continuously leave these women vulnerable when faced with criticism such as Kelle's. Banaszczuk read the demand for positioning as an attempt to draw out feminists, only to subsequently attack them. Loosely translating from her Twitter feed, I read Banaszczuk to claim that those asking for feminists to position themselves have failed to engage with the feminist scene

(because feminists are positioning themselves all the time), have thus also no knowledge of feminist achievements and activism, and, third, have a sense of entitlement that sees the needs of women attended only when they are "adequately" promoted by women, meaning that they should line up with the logics of the state.

Banaszczuk's Twitter thread represents an affective form of belonging that marks engagements within social media today. It was just one statement contributing to the many voices suggesting that the general public tends to ignore feminized and feminist labor, only to critique the lack of it when it serves hegemonic purposes, or critique its tone when it does not meet the hegemonic view. In fact, the juxtaposition of #aufschrei and #ausnahmslos shows that public stakeholders had gained little awareness of feminist positioning, which indeed had been happening, as Banaszczuk says, constantly. But the public framings also suggested either an unwillingness to engage with feminist demands in general or a targeted dysselection of Black and brown people despite any legal precedent or proof of culpability. A large number of the acts recorded to have happened in #Cologne were completely legal under the contemporary German penal code, something that at the very least publicists and politicians should have been aware of. Especially politicians were chorusing populist opinion about harsh punishment and quick deportations, politicians who, according to feminist lawyer Christina Clemm, should know better: "If politicians now speak of harsher punishments and quick deportation, they are either acting without any knowledge of the law, or simply being dishonest, and are overtly misusing the events of Cologne for other interests" (Clemm and Hark 2016, n.p.; my translation).[14]

The reactions to the alleged perpetrators, that they were framed as homogenously North African and that this was the only

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14 "Wenn Politiker*innen daher jetzt von harten Strafen und rascher Abschiebung sprechen, handeln sie entweder bar jeder rechtlichen Kenntnis oder schlicht verlogen und missbrauchen die Kölner Vorfälle für andere Interessen."

fact to reconcile, when considering sexism, had gained cultural currency over the preceding years and decades, but is traceable to the construction of Germanness as ethnically homogenous that produces the dysselection I describe throughout this chapter and historically in chapter 3. #ausnahmslos was one of the central agents in advocating a change in the law on sexual misconduct, but those endeavors only materialized within harsher laws regarding deportation and thus led to harsher punishment only for non-Germans. Further, there was no real change that benefited women's negotiation of trauma — no assistance for victims, no increase in psychological or medical supervision or aftercare, no increase in funding to support existing institutions, no money for schoolings or education for the supposedly and uniformly misogynist migrants (Clemm and Hark 2016).

Social media use in the so-called Twitter revolutions had seemingly inscribed difference into the digital public space in 2011, but masculinity that became legible merely as "Muslim" (regardless of actual religious, cultural, or ethnic affiliations) within the German context was continuously and increasingly constructed as dangerous in the years preceding #Cologne, in line with the historical imaginaries of Germanness as whiteness and invocations of the dangerous North African. Religion thus becomes a placeholder for race, as it is inscribed with the same logics of inherent otherness, brutality, and violence, now "cultural" instead of biological. Contrary to the persistent framing of Germany as secular, Schirin Amir-Moazami observes a "sacralization of the German constitution" (2007, 103), by which she refers to a seemingly objective constitution enforced via a universalization of liberal Christian ideas of freedom and righteousness.[15] These same normative universals play a role in negotiations of #Cologne and the voices that would come

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15 What Amir-Moazami reads as "sacralization" conflates the rationale of the Enlightenment with Christian/Occidental culture, thereby firmly producing Islam as a category of otherness and ignoring any histories of Islamic rule in Europe, or the fact of European colonialism. Amir-Moazami mends the ties between these histories that created and fostered the othering of Muslima women through the headscarf, which received a symbolic

to contest its dominant framings. When seen in such a teleology, #Cologne becomes an event in which the leakages of such modular framings become visible, as the process of modulation detaches itself from any technological materiality circulating in the moment, to instead produce a framing of nonwhite presences as problematic per se.

Only in light of the histories described above, innocuously leaking into the present via seemingly objective occurrences, was it possible for #Cologne to even have become the event that it became, despite the ambivalence of surveillance footage, which could not evidence the "sex-mobs" that mainstream media was proclaiming (Dietze 2016).[16] #Cologne would arguably not have become intelligible as an event had it not been considered as the expression of a fundamental truth, and had preexisting discourse not already framed Germany's modalities of othering in terms of sexual politics and "black shame." For the depictions of the anonymized women in newspaper articles were themselves extremely sexist: women's bodies were depicted as naked, white, vulnerable; the white female body was fetishized as pure and sexualized through its nakedness. Returning to the Focus editorial team in particular, it is apparent that media outlets struggled to make coherent their antisexist stance in light of the cover displaying the voyeuristic image of a naked woman, whose hands evocatively tried to protect her naked body from the black prints that were already all over it, while her mouth remained slightly opened in sexualized innuendo. Dietze quotes the *Focus* explanation from 2016 for the cover photograph, as it was portrayed on Twitter: "We had decided to symbolically represent the events of Cologne. For this reason, we depict the

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function signifying monolithic oppression more or less since the 1900s — a timeline that echoes the dysselection processes I have described above.

16 I am reminded here of Judith Butler's discussion of the Rodney King beatings, where visual evidence of severe police brutality was read quite contrary to what the visuals were giving testimony to: King's Black beaten body was read as deserving of the harm and torture, because this is how Black bodies usually behave and because he was a danger to the police attempting to restrain him (Butler 1993).

degraded and objectified woman as a representative for the many female victims, who are nonetheless determined to resist" (quoted in Dietze 2016, 97; my translation).[17]

This particular instance suggests an awareness the editorial team may have had of the implications of depicting female bodies as naked objects, but this feminist awakening does not go beyond a position of opposition to the (imaginary) occurrences of #Cologne and continues to imagine a victim that is blond, with an able body that is hairless, white, and slim. According to the *Focus* tweet, it was not the magazine itself that was objectifying women, but the image should be read as coherent with the objectification that German women have had to endure through the outsider. The statement thus distances itself from sexist objectification through an image that repeats sexist objectification. Meanwhile, the all-too- common practice of depicting naked women in daily and weekly newspapers and magazines is not addressed. Because white female self-determination was being proclaimed as opposite to Muslim or migrant women and men (intersex or nonbinary people, in this imaginary, do not exist), Dietze (2016) reads the imagery to require the framework of empowerment, before proclaiming the looming threat of disempowerment by black hands reaching for the white body . This is how one might explain the red font proclaiming "women accuse" stamped across the *Focus* cover, which is supposed to assert self-authorship and agency. But the red font is just as encroaching as the black hands on the body of the image, which directly mirrors the scathing misogyny of mainstream media that is just as omnipresent, but continuously ignored. A quick survey of *Focus* cover pages in recent years substantiates Dietze's reading, as *Focus* almost never uses images of women on their covers, unless they are famous or politicians. Most of the time, the covers show images of men. The covers that did depict femi-

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17 "Wir hatten uns dazu entschieden, symbolisch darzustellen, was in Köln geschah. Deshalb zeigen wir, stellvertretend für die vielen weiblichen Opfer, eine zum Sex-Objekt degradierte entwürdigte Frau, die aber dennoch entschlossen ist, sich zu wehren."

nized bodies not only did so in reference to health issues, but these health topics had specific reference to body shapes (two covers focused on weight loss, one on the intestinal system) and were all aestheticized through nude images of conventionally attractive feminized bodies.

This conjuncture of categories of race and gender must again be read as technology — it is an aestheticization, infrastructuralization, and circulation of precisely what #ausnahmslos was setting out to critique: the Femonationalist deflation of feminist arguments in the name of statehood, traditional gender norms, and ethnocentricity. A year later, the carceral and preemptive form of these dysselections became as autopoietic as the modular and self-sustaining logics that had informed digital infrastructures. Again, the media landscape was filled with new stories about "mobs" of North African men, derogatively referred to as "Nafris" (short for *Nordafrikanischer Intensivtäter,* "North African habitual offenders"), which already suggests the essentialism inherent to this concept — understood as habitual sexual offenders *because of* their (assumed) countries of origin. Hundreds of people were held in police custody, every male the police read as Muslim checked for identity papers and segregated from the crowds, merely for projecting the image of the prototypical "endangerer" into the streets of Cologne. Meanwhile, social media exploded with responses ranging from racist typification to worried sociologists pathologizing the presence of these young men as sexual frustration and a lack of knowledge on how to interact with women (Kayserilioğlu 2017).

In line with the methodologies of predictive policing, the police reported screening social media for any indication of planned mobilization — meaning that public invites to hang out together on New Year's Eve became suspicious when extended by or to Black and brown people. The iconic German feminist Alice Schwarzer suggested that the recurring event was an intentional demonstration of toxic masculinity, a systematic attempt to introduce sharia law in Germany (Schwarzer 2017). These narratives washed over the German public, but they had next to no relationship to the real events of that night. Several

hundred North African and read-as-Muslim people had their identity documents checked, despite the fact that racial profiling is illegal in Germany. Some were taken into preventive police custody for being drunk on New Year's Eve. And when no evidence could be found of planned gatherings on social media, Schwarzer celebrated this as the carceral state taking action to full effect. What was celebrated as effective police work was in fact nothing more than a populist harnessing of the myth of the "black shame" and the mechanisms of dysselection that animate predictive policing — the fact that no crime had happened was attributed to the success of preemptive policing, not to the actual or potential (non)existence of perpetrators.

#Cologne was thus a turning point in which a central avenue of critique came from well-established feminists (spearheaded by Schwarzer) that argued against the identitarian politics of "netfeminists" — deployed as a derogatory term to describe this emerging group of online-savvy intersectional feminists. The turf wars that played out through the events of #Cologne and subsequent formation of #ausnahmslos would dominate the year of 2016, but they also altered the feminist agenda significantly for the years to come in a way that has created some and made impossible other avenues of solidarity via the digital as form. I therefore posit #ausnahmslos at the forefront of a paradigmatic turn that has just begun to shape new strands of feminism in more intersectional, participatory, and sometimes humorous ways — much to the resistance of older generations. Although many of the initiators both of #aufschrei and #ausnahmslos were not new to the scene, they were dubbed "unknowing newcomers," "self-sufficient career girls," "blazing hypocrites," and "anti-Semites," among others, and quite prominently by feminist *Urgestalt* Alice Schwarzer and her magazine (EMMA 2017). The magazine, where Schwarzer still carries the title of editor in chief, has dedicated several articles to critiquing the politics of netfeminism, mostly by attributing it to popular culture and insinuating a neoliberal impetus vis-à-vis the previous, seemingly nonpopulist iteration of feminism. In the articles, the practices of #ausnahmslos were framed as antifeminist,

because of their agenda being pro-porn, pro-child-care-subsidy, pro-burka, pro-sexwork, pro-political-correctness, the list of what Schwarzer and the EMMA team critique goes on to epitomize netfeminism as being "pro-personal-success" (EMMA 2017, n.p.).[18] #Cologne and the #ausnahmslos discourse that resulted from it thus marks a period of struggle after which netfeminism had to a certain extent gained its place in the discourse, paving the way for a sheer mass of new and diverse expressions of feminism — seemingly much to the distaste of Schwarzer and her peers. These seemed to critique the formats of feminism that were emerging from a new focus on the individual proclaimed by social media. #ausnahmslos did and does still have an account on Twitter, which allows for initiators to post without revealing their real names, but many of the initiators also used the hashtag on their personal profiles and were featured on the @ausnahmslosorg profile through retweets and received publicity through the interconnections of their online lives. The collective thus became a visible counterpublic, whose networked visibility was supported by the hashtag. Identifying as women, as feminists, but more importantly as queer, white, nonwhite, Muslim, migrant, and Afro-German people speaking out in solidarity of migrants, left the initiators of #ausnahmslos vulnerable to slurs, doxing attacks,[19] verbal and technologi-

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18 This formulation, that Black and brown women writing or speaking publicly about racism do so only to advance their careers, not only vastly dismisses racism in Germany but has played out again and again in the years after #ausnahmslos. Several Black women writing about racism have had to leave their homes because they and their families continued to receive death threats for what is colloquially called "tweeting while Black."

19 A doxing attack is when a person's private information is leaked publicly. Doxing happens disproportionately often to internet users read as female, who, when bringing such occurrences to the police in the past have often merely been told to "get offline." The executive arm of the state has hence failed women in need of protection and disregarded the danger of information disclosures, such as addresses and telephone numbers, suggesting the problem would be solved if women simply stay out of public space and keep their heads down. The state is hence at the very least complicit in these forms of violence, even for the white women it was proclaiming to care for.

cal abuse, and rape and death threats in a way not unusual for feminist visibility online. However, the group received an added layer of attention from Germany's institutionalized critical and intellectual sphere because of the omission of anti-Semitism as an explicit discriminatory form. The Amadeu Antonio Foundation, a leading organization in "promoting pluralism and human rights while opposing right-wing extremism, racism and anti-Semitism" (Amadeu Antonio Stiftung, n.d.), issued a statement that initiated the discussion about first signees of the ausnahmslos manifesto, where the presence of names such as Linda Sarsour, Angela Davis, and Laurie Penny were seen as evidence of at least a blindness toward anti-Semitism within the movement.[20] The foundation demanded anti-Semitism be

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20 These feminist authors and activists have at one point or another been criticized for their statements against the Israeli settlements, the Zionist expansion, or for speaking out in solidarity with Palestine. But these statements are often, and especially in Germany, also reduced to a supposed "universal," where the nuances of criticism, for example, against the settlements, are seen as monolithic critique against Jews everywhere. The Amadeu Antonio Foundation has proposed a method to differentiate between legitimate critique of Israel and anti-Semitism that looks at three factors: demonization, double standards, and delegitimization. These factors are themselves problematic because their evaluation belies subjective evaluation. For example, polemic style and emotional words against Israel are quickly denoted as anti-Semitism (demonization), while the negation of the existence of a Palestinian people in German public discourse is viable when accompanied by an observation that statehood has not been established. A focus on human rights violations in Israel — instead of other places — is considered a double standard, at the same time all people living in Germany are supposed to have an opinion on the conflict because of the German past. The Palestinian call for a state free of discrimination "from the river to the sea" — a call to unite Palestinians fragmented by partitioning of the land — has been read as the desire to annihilate Israel as a nation without reflecting on alternative concepts of collective being that think beyond the state. The desire to live under a form of governance different from a nation-state that functions according to logics of capitalism is a desire recognized by leftist groups across the globe, and it is strange to see how that desire is being criminalized by some to propose a monolithic, global anti-Semitism. Yet, of course anti-Semitism exists and exists across the globe, and also within the Palestinian freedom struggle; as much as anti-Black, anti-Muslim or anti-Asian racism, misogyny, misogynoir,

named as a specific modality of discrimination, and for the collective to think about removing these signees from the list. The foundation still explicitly expressed solidarity for the movement despite what it saw as omissions, but this comment opened the entire movement to questions with regard to its sincerity in covering all forms of discrimination.

This reflex is symptomatic of a larger constellation that makes up German political culture in general, and it is too large to be addressed in full here.[21] But the case shows in startling ways how

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queerphobia, and all the other forms of discrimination that have attachments to a certain material form exist, and it needs to be addressed. But there seems to be a growing incapacitation that is, in part, caused by Germany's own inability to recognize its position in the world, where the Nazi genocide might not be the only atrocity other geographies are grappling with. As Germany had once been lauded for its reconciliation of the past, there seems to be a mounting fear to be accused of anti-Semitism once more. The complexities of the German situation are again effecting an externalization (the others are anti-Semitic, the German state is not) or to a demand for a clean break (Germany has dealt with its past, so it's now time to move on), mostly proposed by emerging right-wing groups. Both make it impossible, or at least extremely difficult, to confront anti-Semitism in Germany, or to engage with a multidirectional memory discourse that sees relations between anti-Semitism and anti-Blackness, xenophobia, racism.

21 Indeed, the question of anti-Semitism is a central axis that legitimates many political disputes and one of the few axes that forces the political center to act and respond in an meaningful way. Activists and theorists have read such attention as a competitive dominance of Jewish victimhood, often placing it in opposition to the neglect Black and brown people experience before the state, as victims of violence, and within German cultural memory. After the end of my research phase, the German government proclaimed a central arm of the international Palestinian struggle (the Boycott, Divest and Sanction movement, or BDS) as monolithically anti-Semitic, a decision that caused a lot of friction in the German cultural and intellectual sphere. I do not see myself in a condition to evaluate whether the movement is inherently anti-Semitic or not. But the proclamation extended the suspicion of anti-Semitism to any potential supporters, including theorists, academics, practitioners and artists. Many cultural institutions banded together to point out that supporting an artist that has at one point supported a campaign by the BDS movement does not necessarily mean the institutions themselves are involved in that support, nor that the artist or theorist supporting these activities would necessarily

the modular continues to inform and intensifies the closures of relational avenues that could engage in a more complex understanding of positionalities and the political solidarities that they enable as multiple, ambivalent knowledge formation that nonetheless have ties to very material and infrastructural conditions. One central axis of this formation is the modulation of Jewish identity into white Jewishness and as oppositional to Black and brown anti-imperial struggle. Because anti-Semitism is considered as something other than racism, because Jewishness is not a race, the multiplicity of Jewishness is somewhat caught in a monolithic idea of (a certain kind of) European-descendant (Ashkenazi) Israeli-Jew. Although this will not play into my following analysis all too much, the banality should not be forgotten that Jews can be Black and brown, that there are antinationalists even in Israel, and that German historical guilt does not necessarily inform the political agency of people arriving from or growing up elsewhere. It also shows how Black and brown people are read as foreign in a different way than white and secular Jewishness, and how the different degrees of passing — albeit potentially not alleviating individual personal trauma — can serve as layers of protection that individuals marked by visible

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be an anti-Semite. It was also pointed out that proclaiming every concern for Palestine or Palestinians as anti-Semitic might be a dangerous dilution of the term. These debates are ongoing. I am wary (and aware) of the second historians dispute (Neiman and Wildt 2022) in the contemporary moment that has a number of theorists and activists working through the continuities and dissonances between the Shoah and German colonialism, some arguing for an incommensurability in remembrance practices and political solidarity. I reject the German bourgeois reflex of both claiming "authentic" Jewishness for a conservative pro-settler elite, which neglects the existence or legitimacy of Jewish public figures that support either Palestinian liberation struggles or criticize the state and mark all Black and brown people, and people supporting their struggles for liberation, as essentially anti-Semitic, effectively disavowing the existence of Black Jews. But I am also aware of a lack of engagement with the structural level of anti-Semitism, the traumatic affects its invisibility cause within Jewish populations in Germany (Coffey and Laumann 2021), and the sometimes suspicious omission of naming it as a specific form of oppression, or dismissing claims to interrogate anti-Semitic inflections.

identifiers signified as racial or religious may not feel they have access to. Indeed, as later debates have shown, anti-Semitism, like other regimes that rely on representation as a stand-in for visibility, requires literacy, and it may very well be the case that sometimes this literacy is lacking for people who have been socialized elsewhere. Certainly, white Germans are not literate in all variations of racism, and certainly that should not mean that they have a free pass to perpetuate racism. But in light of the regime of visibility that had marked Black and brown men as dangerous perpetrators, #ausnahmslos arguably targeted a form of visual discrimination that white (or white-passing) Jews are potentially exempt from, and had further subsumed anti-Semitism under the larger framework of racism. Indeed, there has been much dispute about whether or not Jewish people are actually "white," a debate that acknowledges the constructedness of racial categories that have little to do with melanin or even biology itself. If there are no human races, then the question is what modern-day racism actually targets, and in that light the differentiation between anti-Semitism and racism becomes less coherent. The example thus serves to complicate the ease with which an entire movement is dismissed (and was effectively also brought to its knees). In light of the lineages evoked throughout this book, the insistence on anti-Semitism — both as a specific case to be named and as an allegation monolithically projected onto the #ausnahmslos contributors as a whole — needs to be considered in the face of reductive prior modulations that had removed especially Black and brown women's access to material goods and public solidarities. Remembering that the initiative was making a central claim for Black and brown people in Germany, the question emerges whether the discomfort with the movement did not stem from the headscarf-wearing women who had initiated the movement, or a preexistent framing that had constructed "Muslimness" (and by extension brown people imagined to be Muslim) in opposition to "Jewishness" within the German imaginary.

It should be granted that there were varying opinions within the ausnahmslos movement, some of which directed them-

selves against the critique of being blind to anti-Semitism, and some directly addressing the specifically German and often distinctively confrontational stance of Anti-Germans (which had become established as oppositional to and therefore incommensurable with anti-imperialism after 9/11).[22] But not only was ausnahmslos monolithically discredited for having allowed the activists mentioned above to sign their statement, the position of the collective itself was interpreted to be congruent with those of Laurie Penny, Linda Sarsour, and Angela Davis — three different women with different political agendas and histories of struggle — possibly, because of the two women wearing hijabs who had cofounded #ausnahmslos and became central voices within the public debate. This seemed to be enough for oppositional voices to accuse the initiators of an overprotective stance toward migrants and refugees, and the perception that Muslim women could, seemingly, never be feminist, but would be bound to their men, who were painted as oppressive with equally broad strokes. Centrally, this narrative overwrites the diversity of Muslima life, while also centering on individual subjectivity as a central reason and placing of politics. The binary opposition to Western life was a forceful dysselection, which paradoxically hinged itself upon statements of solidarity with Jewish life — a solidarity framed through an exclusion of the ausnahmslos feminists and the refugees, migrants, and Black and brown Germans they were advocating for. Overt generali-

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22 For Germany, 9/11 therefore not only marks a point that effected state-sponsored and mediatized securitization on a large scale, but it also marks the most radical moment of division between an antiracist, anti-imperialist Left, and the Anti-German movement that most commonly expresses solidarity for Israel as the only democracy in the Middle East, and with this solidarity also gesture toward the United States as a space that harbored Jews and continues to do so, often complicating anticapitalist critique in the process. For a long time, these extreme positions seemed irreconcilable and, congruent with the terms of modulation, contained within renormalized identity categories. But both (in this extreme and simplified opposition) are not without false piety and affective instigation and the years of opposition have led to valuable deliberation and a renewed coming together in multidirectional forms of solidarity.

zations became commonplace, to a point where activist Kübra Gümüşay filed a lawsuit against the feminist magazine *EMMA* for accusing her of having intimate ties with Islamic radicals. Both Gümüşay's blog and *EMMA Online* issued a statement regarding the lawsuit, and both saw themselves emerging from the judicial proceedings as winners.[23]

In times of almost omnipresent connectivity and immediate responses, internet researcher danah boyd argues that this is the case because the internet is a space defined by "context collapse" (boyd and Marwick 2011). Because several different parts of discourses can be presented together in various and sometimes altered contexts, what can be perceived through computer interfaces may seem like a discourse in its transparent entirety, but is actually composed of a collage of "tweetable" power sentences without contextualization of the behind-the-scenes labor of many activists, policymakers, and media practitioners. To suggest that a tweet is potentially the only line of argument or the only form of expression thus means neglecting the labor that went into the pulling together of a campaign such as ausnahmslos, the labor inherent to formulating a statement that the group in all its diversity could agree on, and the different capacities necessary for building a website, the upkeep of the Twitter account, and so on. Activist and #ausnahmslos initiator Kübra Gümüşay sees this to have become a populist tactic to sideline the discussion that the collective was hoping to further. Instead, she pointed out that as minorities themselves they had very distinct issues they were addressing. Rejecting the critique that ausnahmslos was in some way itself ignoring German history, Gümüşay points to the public discourse's own omission of the very positions they were now trying to center upon:

We have to build on previous experiences — and we have been having these discussions for years. The populists are now pretending that we attempted to sweep the whole thing

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23 It may be added, however, that the *EMMA* article appeared two days before Gümüşay's.

under the carpet. But that is not true. Which is what our statement clarifies: We have demands, we have suggestions for possible solutions and we can discuss these topics without falling into the traps of racism. Sexism, racism and other mechanisms of discrimination always work together. As a society, we can't just discuss sexism and completely disregard the role of racism in the process. Women of Turkish origins, for example, or queer women experience several forms of discrimination at the same time. All we are asking is for these not to be treated in isolation. (Hacker and Gümüşay 2016, n.p.; my translation)[24]

This interview, given just days after the statement was issued, already points toward the fraught discursive situation that had arisen. It points to the preestablished normalization of anti-Muslim racism, and to the particular implications of digital context collapse. The claim that there is only hate on both sides proposes that these sides are clear; it renders them preestablished and naturalized. The German public thus neglected any consideration of the discursive labor that went into making #ausnahmslos such an important target just days after the release of its statement. Contextualizing it with other societal shifts, it is impossible to ignore the rise of PEGIDA ("Patriotische Europäer gegen die Islamisierung des Abendlandes"/"Patriotic Europeans against the Islamization of the Occident"), the right-wing party

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24 "Wir müssen dort anknüpfen, wo wir vorher auch waren — und wir führen diese Debatten schon seit Jahren. Es waren Populisten, die jetzt so getan haben, als hätten wir das Ganze unter den Teppich gekehrt. Das stimmt nicht. Was wir deutlich machen wollten mit unserem Statement: Wir haben Forderungen, wir haben Lösungsvorschläge und wir können über diese Themen diskutieren, ohne in rassistische Fallen zu tappen. Sexismus, Rassismus und andere Diskriminierungsmechanismen wirken immer zusammen. Man kann sich in einer Gesellschaft nicht nur mit Seximus beschäftigen und vollkommen vernachlässigen, was für eine Rolle Rassimus hat. Frauen türkischer Herkunft zum Beispiel oder queere Frauen erleben verschiedene Diskriminierungsformen immer zusammen. Wir fordern, diese Formen nicht isoliert zu betrachten."

AFD, and, centrally, the return of the "black horror" narrative that showed itself in the aftermath of #Cologne.

Leslie Adelson (2000) has suggested that after World War II, the figures of Jews and Turks are made to "touch" as the marginalized others of German history, a form of othering that is carried from a literary imaginary into certain parts of society to negotiate guilt, pleasure, and shame. In this case, however, there is a second sense of touch — as Germany willfully positions itself in a Judeo-Christian tradition, public debate constructs a division between the "Jew" that belongs and the "Muslim" that is the outsider. The touch becomes oppositional and is constructed only between the German and the Jew as natural allies, in line with the storytelling that emerged during the 1960s that began to omit the reality of the German public's large-scale complicity with the crimes of the Shoah (Czollek 2018). The narrative proposes white Germany to have dealt with its anti-Semitism, which is placed in the past and proposed to have ended with the Nazi regime and its reappraisal. In such a narrative, the German subject places itself as allied with Jewishness, and places both in a position of liberal progress from which Black and brown people are exempt.[25] This opposition thus ignores that the right-wing terrorists of the last years have often targeted read-as-Muslim places, such as Shisha bars or kebab outlets *and* synagogues or Jewish restaurants. Such discursive arrangements not only violently homogenize the figure of the migrant, ignoring Black and brown Jewish existences, but they also fall short of addressing the anti-Semitism that is often accompanied by physical violence within German right-wing groups and populations, even the German parliament. Of course, the internet is a place where anti-Semitism, like other forms of discrimination and hate speech, is rampant (Marx and Schwarz-Friesel 2013). But

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25 But it is also exactly this allegiance, which theorists such as Wynter notice in the way contemporary issues are being taken care of, and Wynter, for one, does posit coloniality in a Judeo-Christian tradition that certainly many Jewish people would take umbrage with and point to the ongoing hatred coming from the very core of this supposedly progressive social linkage.

in statistical evaluations, it is German neo-Nazis, not migrants, committing almost all[26] hate crimes against Jewish people, but also against feminized and racialized people. Given the histories I have delineated above, it would be extremely dangerous to suggest that anti-Semitism (like gendered violence) is being imported through arriving refugees and was not a problem before. The accusation of Muslims being the dominant source of anti-Semitism negates the diversity of brown life and conflates anti-Semitism merely with events conveniently situated far away, instead of within Germany's own borders.

Contemporary examples show that the mental capacities, affective labor, and living conditions of Black and brown women continue to be viewed through historically reductive images, as the state refuses to acknowledge their vulnerabilities. Turning back to the interfeminist feud shows the necessity of an intersectional analysis. Considering exposure as personal success, as Alice Schwarzer did, is negligent of the existence of racist terror, of what has been called "activist burnout" and the violent silencing that may come as a response to the publicity of the netfeminists presences. Especially because such forms of political activism were considerably new in the German landscape, mass-scale and automated hateful responses were relatively unprecedented and must have therefore had a considerably greater effect than possibly would be the case in future. Feminist podcaster Katrin Rönicke, who herself was in the midst of discussions around ausnahmslos and put a lot of research into disentangling justified critique measured against #ausnahmslos from the many trolls attempting to discredit the hashtag, mentions that the short-lived moment in the spotlight left a majority of the initiators distressed and alienated, to a point that they no longer wanted to comment on these entanglements publicly.[27] I want to stress that next to an arguably constructive form of

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26 It was 90 percent according to the Federal Ministry of Internal Affairs: https://www.bmi.bund.de/DE/themen/sicherheit/kriminalitaetsbekaemp-fung-und-gefahrenabwehr/politisch-motivierte-kriminalitaet/politisch-motivierte-kriminalitaet-node.html.

27 Conversation with Kathrin Rönicke on July 9, 2018.

criticism that allies such as the Amadeu Antonio Foundation may have directed at the collective, and next to the shaming and name-calling in which mainstream media joyously partook in public, there was an entire universe of trolls discrediting and threatening the initiators and active supporters of ausnahmslos in a way that goes unnoticed, because violence online was still overwhelmingly not considered to be real violence (Wizorek 2018). But this might be true for violence against Black and brown people in general, and this assertion questions whether what is currently being exposed online as an increase of right-wing extremism is not perhaps a part of the racial ideology foundational to white Germany.

At the very least, ausnahmslos challenges the liberal critiques of netfeminism on two levels. First, netfeminism as a derogatory term positions ausnahmslos as slacktivism and self-promotion. These claims are contradictory: they propose ausnahmslos to have no effect at all but also accumulate a lot of attention, and thus be very effective at the same time. Individuals such as Gümüşay then could only be successful self-promoters if their message has influence. But this influence necessitates a public form of intelligibility, which puts marginalized voices in the double bind that racialized subjects have had to endure since the beginning of the modern colonial predicament. This goes beyond the ambivalent reading proposed by Schwarzer, and to the very core of questions of representation. On the one hand, now that certain violations can be recorded online, racialized hatred is visible to more people than just the Black and brown people receiving whispered racial slurs in passing on the streets. On the other, this also leaves certain individuals speaking for a more diverse collective, and potentially fixates that position in problematic colonial readings. Given the pre-histories of the internet I have offered in previous chapters, the case of ausnahmslos then illustrates how social media articulations in Germany continue to enforce the logic of German-ness-as-whiteness, while anti-Semitism is willingly deployed as an example that distinguishes white Germany from the non-enlightened anti-Semitic other. These framings willingly feed

into Germany's assertion of its homogenic *Leitkultur,* especially before the continuous rise in anti-Muslim racism, which externalizes both anti-Semitism and misogyny as inherently foreign characteristics that had disappeared from the German context in the years after World War II. Such framings rework identity in homogenous ways, reducing difference in a way that comes to reinform social media discourse, and thus also police information on whom to consider a perpetrator. The terms of identification, as this chapter has shown, are *mythoi* and *techné,* and both structures influence each other in historical, leaky, and generative ways.

Uncertain Identities in Indian Electronic Space

Since Jawaharlal Nehru became the first prime minister of India in 1947, the question of technology has been posed as being in tension with and informing tradition — the binary positioning of development/science/progress versus tradition/reaction/stasis saw the independent Indian nation-state oscillate from the one to the other, something that held the promise of resolve with the advent of the mobile internet several decades later (Gajjalla 2019; Sundaram 2000). The emergence of the internet complicated the debates of an Indian national identity, as electronic space saw the elites residing in the diaspora finding new ways to iterate postcolonial identity. "Indianness" is represented through a digital diaspora, from afar, and in a different context than within the subcontinent. The elite diaspora drew upon an imaginary home they had left long ago, and a digital culture emerged at the turn of the millennium that represents an archive of *savarna* (upper-caste) Hindu practices from the diaspora that held on to traditions (Sundaram 2000). This is the scene that Sundaram identifies as dominant to the new virtual space within which Indian peoples come to practice technological modernity without actually having to engage with the embodied violence that displaced rural populations in their

encounter with the big technologies of the past, the great dams and steel mills. This leads to a reconfiguration of belonging from the diaspora, which Sundaram sees as glossing over material realities of displacement.

However, the arena is global, technology brings forth hegemonic monopolies *and* digital subaltern movements, where the question of the elite — and of representation itself — becomes complicated. It cannot be ignored that the internet represents new opportunities for young, marginalized, and otherwise underrepresented populations to have a voice and find collectivity. The jump to mobile devices circumvents the center–periphery model that technologies such as the *charkha* promoted, engineering small-scale community-building practices instead of large structures and plans. It is precisely in these emerging multiple spaces where what it means to be and belong becomes reconfigured and multiplied. Dalit groups in particular find space and negotiate consciousness within the internet, a community enabled by low-priced mobile devices that emerged by the year 2000 (Nayar 2011). Women, who would potentially find themselves under partner or parental surveillance when using the home computer or public internet cafes, arguably also profit from this jump to mobile devices (Bhattacharjya and Ganesh 2011). These movements, whose actors are located across Indian's own plural geographies and also outside of the nation's borders, offer a distinctive ambiguation of who can define the meanings and conditions of "Indianness" beyond the state hegemony, and Dalits and women, in particular, are able to harness these ambiguities before a state that continues to codify their position as inferior. Tracing these movements back to "pretechnological" concepts such as the *charkha* shows how this ambivalence is inherently not new, because the present is configured through a complex of situated and ambivalent genealogies and appropriations of technology as inherently cultural.

As has been shown within empirical studies on development aid and technological solutions, the sense-making practices that make new technologies legible to individuals and collectives are themselves notions that alter technologies. Situated

practices change not only their meaning but potentially their design and future application (Srinivasan 2019). In displacing the assertion that technologies are deterministic, the following chapter can once again focus on the political subject that not only is enveloped and brought forth by technology, but adapts its usage to embody the self, and may do so again beyond reductive paradigms of identity and representation. Via a small detour describing the relationship between the national subject and contemporary "Indigenous" technologies, I propose that solidarity and identity are mediated through an understanding of technology, and technology thus brings forth possible avenues for solidarity, and may hinder others, when readings of its multiplicities are limited. One such limiting feature is the codification of identity that has taken place via the creation of a system of unique identification for Indian citizens within the *Aadhaar* scheme. *Aadhaar*, supposedly a database that will be able to uniquely identify every Indian person enrolled, produces subjectivity in problematic ways that modulates the plurality of the Indian nation and has come to make certain, marginalized citizens hypervisible in a unitary and unambiguous way. From *Aadhaar*, the second part of the chapter focuses on what can be considered a microrevolution against such a notion of certainty of place and positionality, the case of the #LoSHA list. The list, which was crowdsourced to provide Dalit and other young academics often discriminated because of their (gender) identity with a modality of warning against sexual and gender-based harassment, became the starting point for a conflict on feminist solidarities, "true" politics, and positionalities. The #LoSHA list thus provides an example of how technology comes to inform, but also puts into conflict, the notion of "unique identifiers" and certainty of identity.

Unique Identifiers?

The notion of identity, and national identity in particular, has undergone some relevant shifts with and through digital spaces. The elites can potentially reshape Indian politics in a way that is

not possible for the poor populations on the ground. In a way, the *charkha*, explored as a technology of nation-building in chapter 3, predates ideologies of such decentralized centralization. The *charkha* acted as a mobile device loosely connecting villages as nodes, but also a mode of centralization in the way it was employed to perform unionizing functions for an independent India and its diasporic elites that can refer to (potentially conservative or already reworked) concepts of nationhood from the periphery. The politics and identities the *charkha* models, however, is a center-to-periphery, top-down approach, which restricts the reinterpretation and appropriation of identity categories in a way that is presupposed with many technologies. Its modular mode, where meaning has been preset, resurfaces in contemporary India in *Aadhaar*'s centralized database. When seen in continuity with (pretechnological) technologies, *Aadhaar* shows an inseparable embeddedness of bodies and subjectivities in technology, showing the generative potential of material relations that necessarily go beyond a notion of technology as mere tool. Read in this way, the positions discussed here challenge the divisions of mind/body, technology/culture, or even technology/nature, but also formulate the same aporetic dimension of technology as it is cast upon the body and goes on to engineer its social and cultural realities. As I hope to show later, spaces created by the technological can also be redetermined, appropriated, and filled with multiple and changing meaning, and they can both ambiguate and contest notions of the body that have been presupposed.

Aadhaar is a system of biometric governance, perhaps much like many others that are being or have been implemented in attempts to make nation-states more efficient. Supposedly, it enables the state to read and identify each enrolled citizen uniquely via biometric technologies, such as fingerprint readers, iris scanners, and so on. The state framework thus deploys a problematic archive of information that builds upon the identification of difference just as it produces that difference as different. Further, *Aadhaar* reiterates neocolonial modulation — this time imposed upon Indians by their own state — that co-con-

structs ideas about identity as unchanging, as transparent and codified into a biogenetic form that makes the body legible to the informational form of governance of contemporary state capitalism.

Aadhaar was deployed first upon the rural poor, many of them Dalit, Adivasi, or Bahujan (DAB), because it was framed as a welfare program. As such it was further directed at women who would need it to get rations of rice or cooking oil. But the technologies are not as pristine and infallible as the government suggests. Beyond rigidifying the role of women in the household, biometric details can be hacked rather easily, especially when codified into a numeric proxy. Fingerprints can be copied, and numbers — which are made up out of a combination of dates that identify the person, such as birth dates — are easily found out. But also the lawful and accurate usage of *Aadhaar* has failed its card bearers. When *Aadhaar* was first deployed, alarming reports from villages across the country reported a rise in starvation, when *Aadhaar* card readers failed because of irregular power supply, or when individuals or groups were refused recognition by technology because of altered fingerprints as a result of manual labor.[1] People not well enough to walk long distances from their home to points where food subsidies were being handed out could no longer send others in their place, as the arduous process of registration was often undertaken only by one family member, mostly the women responsible for the household.

Marketed as an optional model of identification, *Aadhaar* quickly became mandatory for enrollment into the education

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1   The fact that these technologies work less well on Black and brown, queer and otherwise underrepresented groups has been at the center of more recent research in the field of AI studies after researchers such as Joy Buolamwini and Safiya Noble registered the inability of facial-recognition software, recommendation algorithms, and search engines to represent these groups properly. The recommendation following these findings has been to diversify the database, but it is not about having more unique identifiers to choose from, but about being always only partially and dependently legible to the (machinic) order of governance.

system and social welfare benefits, thus constraining those without biometric enrollment from access to social benefits on both ends of the spectrum: better jobs and food subsidies. An official 2010 document still stated enrollment would not be mandatory, but a 2006 plan had already suggested there would soon be a "executive and legislative mandate for all service providers (government and private) to deem the UID number as *the* universal identity for service delivery" (Ramanathan 2017, n.p.; emphasis original). Despite the population's resistant attitude toward neocolonial technology, which had in the past been successful against many a technological venture capitalist,[2] the state had itself turned to digitizing tendencies with worrying effects. *Aadhaar* shows how even seemingly innocuous "Indigenous" identification systems can open themselves up for problematic appropriation, because their modular implementation and the certainty of identity they presuppose makes technologies problematic from the start. Indeed, *Aadhaar* has not remained true to its Indigenous origins, but data has been put on the market and sold to the highest bidder (Ramanathan 2013; Safi 2018). The Indian system of biometric governance has been put into place without statute[3] and has become mandatory for at least twenty-two welfare programs, forcing the poorest populations to submit themselves to state surveillance in return for the promise of fair food rations and basic necessities. Despite the ongoing revision of laws, such as the right to privacy,[4] its imple-

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2 The tale of how India fought back on Facebook's Free Basics program has been documented across web media outlets in India and beyond, but received little academic attention. The case must be considered a win against digital colonialism, for respective activists fought successfully, effecting a ban of the program, which gives free access to a limited amount of digital services, thus securing a priority position in extracting new user's data in the Global South.

3 A draft bill was retroactively put in place in 2010, after mounting pressure against the program.

4 The Indian Supreme Court ruled that the right to privacy become a fundamental right for Indian citizens in August 2017. This right was installed after ongoing negotiations on the legality of *Aadhaar* and the state's involvement in one's personal data, but it has since had implications for

mentations have been highly contested, as *Aadhaar* was further distributed according to social selection processes, which interrogate belonging, threat, and security rather than the initial assumptions of corruption and social welfare. Predominantly Muslim regions already under heavy military surveillance, most centrally Jammu and Kashmir, have been pushed to enroll, while the people of the northeastern states, who have their own historical and cultural tensions with the rest of India, were not offered the otherwise already mandatory registration.

This proves the ambivalent attitudes toward India's marginal population, expressed in terms of both surveillance and neglect. *Aadhaar*'s deployment mediates both, and normalizes these frameworks for the region they are deployed in. The rigid understanding of identity that such a technology produces is in itself contrary to the Indian cultural sphere, which had often negotiated identity as ambivalent and multiple in the past. But the modular identifiers upon which it is built are all the more worrying with the mounting Hindu Right majority that crept into parliament with Prime Minister Modi. Despite the government's efforts to present *Aadhaar* as a technology for the people, the contradictory documents on the system continuously raised suspicion, several of which seemed to suddenly appear and disappear at specific intervals. "Coercion and silence," as Ramanathan (2017) has extensively researched, seem an integral part of deploying the database of belonging. *Aadhaar* thus serves to surveil its own precarious populations. Ramanathan's research reveals not only paternalism but actual disregard the state has for some of its citizens. *Aadhaar* is most commonly framed as a surveillance strategy against terrorism — much like other globalized measures to secure a legible identity from respective citizens and inhabitants. As is the case with biometrics across the globe, *Aadhaar* invokes narratives of belonging

the question of homosexuality, which has finally been legalized again, thus repealing section 377 of the Indian penal code, which regarded "sodomy" as unnatural. The section was introduced during British Colonial rule, but had become part and parcel of the agenda of the Hindu Right.

and othering that map themselves onto political sentiments of the moment — and historical oppressions of the past — all too easily. Its initial function of welfare and social justice is hardly met, because the state ascertains welfare rationing according to biometric information, rather than lived reality.

With *Aadhaar*, the Indian state is faced with questions of consent and technological infrastructures in perhaps more compelling ways than many other seemingly progressive nation-states. In the face of India's histories of technological modulation as a form of subjugation by the British, it seems almost strange that the Indian state would employ such methods of unique identification. But the genealogy presented above suggests that the lines drawn between the West and India were perhaps always porous and followed economic incentive rather than identities, and the divisions were rephrased according to the specific (economic) goals that could tactically attach themselves to historical models of structural reform and individual recognition. Indeed, *Aadhaar* becomes a central technology of identification that negotiates all other avenues of belonging, as protests around the National Registry of Citizens (NRC) and the subsequent Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA) demonstrated in 2019.[5] Hidden within these two bureaucratic processes were effects of national legitimacy, which rearticulated colonial ideas of (non)belong-

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5   The CAA made people who had entered the country illegally from Muslim-majority countries eligible for citizenship as long as they were not themselves Muslim. The government claimed that this was because of persecution of non-Muslim minorities in the countries surrounding India, but persecution did not factually need to be proven for one to become eligible for citizenship. In many states, this caused Muslim and Indigenous minorities, already under constant suspicion, to fear that their minority rights would be at risk. Further, because of the NRC, which required proof of citizenship from a majority of people who lived lives largely not formalized by bureaucratic legitimation, minorities feared that their citizenship status could be revoked if they were not able to provide the right documents. Madhurima Majumder and I have written on these protests more extensively, pointing out the gendered dimension of this struggle (Majumder and Morais dos Santos Bruss 2021).

ing and ostracized already vulnerable populations according to bourgeois notions of legitimacy:

> The data collection process for the NRC tended to disaggregate citizens on the basis of property, lineage or employment record in the formal sector. It also collated on the basis of ethnic identity, gender, and religion, leading to almost four million individuals scrambling for more documents and filing objections on how the process was carried out. (Barbora 2019, n.p.)

With such frameworks informing the new laws, modulation turns again into dysselection. The NRC and CAA are deployed to privilege a certain type of identity, in line with hegemonies instated and deployed during the time of the Raj, reconfigured within Hindu law and codified into *Aadhaar*. The seemingly righteous reasoning behind the laws — Hindus having to leave the neighboring countries because of war and persecution and the connection of legitimacy to formal documentation — have disastrous effects for already marginalized Dalits, Muslims, and women, for people who cannot own land or hold down formal jobs, because of persisting and undocumented discrimination on the ground. Protests against these measures are as much protests against the normative construction of an upper-caste Indian subject as they are against the very real and nonabstract effects such forced normativity has on the lives of those that do not fit that norm in a country with a high degree of informal and undocumented labor relations. Privileging the type of documentation that these individuals and groups do not have access to becomes a way to conflate Indian subjectivity with a liberal and *savarna* framework.

The technological normativity with which these laws are legitimated and, indeed, modulated into fragmented pieces that only reveal their harm when regarded as a whole continues to project a notion of objectivity. The regimes no longer iterate the monumental force of the Raj, but perpetuate a subtle and slow violence of the sociotechnical state. The British — and later

national elites — had seen monumental technologies as markers of modernity and necessary for the nation's development, but the effects of displacing and impoverishing entire populations made the vast majority of dissenters suspicious of technologies as monumental — and thus static — objects of violence. With *Aadhaar*, indeed, technologies are not monumental, but subtle data frameworks that come to stand in for the enfleshed body before the state. But much like the colonial censuses, and much like the *charkha*, although the body is present at first, *Aadhaar* prescribes identities, instead of negotiating their lived realities. The database does not easily allow for changes in biometric information: a change in sex or gender is impossible to automatize, as is the simpler and more quotidian reality of altered fingerprints caused by years of manual labor that Indian farmers experienced. Through such technologies, (gender) identities become factual information and bureaucratic processes, often tied to bourgeois ideas of respectability and belonging, as illegibility to technology once again becomes deviance. *Aadhaar* thus not only repeats the assumption of the British colonial census, that identities are unitary, unchangeable, and bounded, but does so along the same assumptions of pure and righteous technology vis-à-vis an impure or untruthful Indian subject.

I want to suggest reading technology as developing with culture and in (sometimes antagonistic) relation to concepts of belonging and citizenship that are given form by historical tensions. The experience of monumental technologies, explored in chapter 3, gave rise to a felt need for Indigenous technology, and it not only served an understanding of technologies as violent, but actually accepted the Western assumption that technologies were stagnant and unchangeable symbols of empire as modernity. As a result, technology needed to be assessed according to notions of purity, those grounded in specific traditions and embodied practices that would keep Indian identities pristinely separate from the lure of technological modernity as it was being practiced in the West. The explicitly performative function of technology allows for a reassessment of the negativity with which (Western) technology is encountered in the Indian

narrative. Although there are dominant strands at play that effect repressive technological governance, *Aadhaar* illustrates that the problem is not one of technology, but one of politics. Ashish Nandy makes a compelling case for this continuity as the result of the modern organization of the state, which requires science, technology, and development to fortify its legitimacy beyond the prevalent notion of national security:

> For technology comes to represent an escape from the dirti-ness of politics; it becomes an indicator of Brahminic purity, a form of social change which ensures a place in the sun for portions of the middle classes whom the democratic process otherwise tends to marginalize, an anxiety-binding agent in the public realm, and often a media-based exercise in public relations. (Nandy 1989, 6–7)

Applying such a reading to *Aadhaar* echoes with its framing as objective and factual as a way out of the messy entangled politics of postcolonial India. In this situation, postcolonial critique is complicated through multiple narratives that deploy technolog-ical governance as a solution for all problems — food, education, national security. Contradictory forms of governance are sup-ported within and carried forward by the same institutions, and, more often, communal ambivalences in reading these narratives and their heroic protagonists are much more complex than the binary assumption of "good" or "bad." The true cost of progress, modernity, and technology, as Arundathi Roy has painstakingly pointed out, is rarely assessed (Roy 1999). A lasting suspicion in the grand narratives of Indian oneness after its overcoming of direct colonial oppression thus emerges from groups that find their bodies and identities continuously reformulated through the technological and informational bureaucratic state.[6]

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6 This has intensified with Narendra Modi's term as prime minister, as the Modi and bjp government has become increasingly blunt about the cli-entele it caters to. In several states, the history books have erased Muslim presences in the land that predate Hindu presences, and also written out Hindu-nationalist violence of the past. This act of history rewriting is not

As a result, Dalits and other Indigenous non-Hindu groups centrally turn away from the nationalist agenda, and have found spaces of community-building elsewhere, aligning rather with transnational movements than with local upper-caste ones. As Pramod Nayar (2014) has prominently shown, Dalits in particular have increasingly turned to the internet to write their own alternative histories that are negated in the nationalist narrative, and to connect across location in the diaspora to map how oppression reverberates across context. The Dalit online sphere shows a particular arena in which identity and representation are negotiated and worked through, made ambivalent and contextualized within alternative lineages and counterpublics. Dalit cyberpublics are thus the spaces that interrogate the national structure as limited and limiting, while also building counter-archives and proposing a multiplicity of Indianness. It is precisely this conjuncture of Dalit identities, anticaste activism, and the global public sphere enabled through the internet that I turn to next, where I identify practices of solidarity that work toward collective identities as multiple, opaque, and indexical, in the sense that they allow marginalized groups to make demands without relying on their transparency to the state that potentially puts them at risk. I will address a case that has rearticulated many of the problems and anxieties toward the legibility of identity on a slightly smaller scale and within the feminist movement. Feminist voices seem to be largely absent in the discussions on *Aadhaar*'s data falling into the wrong hands, but there seemed to be an overwhelming worry of the same being true for a circulated Google doc that would come to be known as the LoSHA list. India's increasingly digital bureaucracy must thus be mirrored with such skeptical stances on the ground, and how the specific case of the LoSHA list recurrently sparked caste anxieties, anxieties about truthful, meaning legible identifica-

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new. It corresponds with the Hindu revivalist movement during the British Raj, when Brahmins reminisced and reinstated remembrance in a way that recalled the Vedic period as Hinduism's "Golden Age" (Leidig 2016; Hasan 2007).

tion, and, in its disruptive potential may have actually initiated a new framework for encountering and confronting the flaws of a feminism posited between state and individual.

#LoSHA: Between Postcoloniality and Transnational Solidarities

LoSHA, the list of sexual harassers in academia, made no claims to Indian national subjectivity or even suggestions of carceral jurisdiction. But the controversy the LoSHA list sparked rearticulates questions of belonging that ambiguate feminist claims of homogeneity, which, despite having been central in their critique of nationalism, casteism, and Brahminical patriarchy in the past, became an assertion of power in India. The list's seemingly single-axis critique of heteronormative gender oppression revealed a variety of intersections and contradictions that contextualize the difficulty of a marginalized positionality in postcolonial contexts affected by and entangled with a modernity I have referred to as "digital." Through this list, a multiplicity of standpoints was made visible, which ambiguated the unified antinationalist stance from within the Left and feminist communities that had become normalized within the years of Right nationalist rule.

LoSHA was published on Facebook in October 2017, when the whole world seemed to be discussing #metoo. It began as a list of names of prestigious academics, accusing them of predatory behavior and sexual harassment in some form or other. The list became a viral phenomenon almost immediately, and it accumulated around seventy names of high-ranking academics acting on a global scale. The accusations were transferred to a Google spreadsheet within hours of it being leaked. The spreadsheet did not contain the circumstances of the alleged crimes or any additional information regarding the circumstances of the alleged assault in order to protect the victims' anonymity. It merely listed names and in some cases the number of times complaints had been brought forth. It was dubbed "the list of naming and shaming" (Menon 2017a) and found its heaviest

critics within the feminist movement itself, as established feminists issued a statement (which came to be known as "the Statement" versus what was sometimes simply titled "the List") condemning the list on the well-established feminist blog *Kafila*, the same day it appeared. When the leaker was revealed to be Raya Sarkar, a young, queer Dalit law student now residing in the United States, the divide was not bridged, but instead seemed to turn more bitter in tone. I read this incident as a continuation of the conflicts I have delineated in previous chapters. It is a conflict around hegemonic identity, the struggle for and against multiplicity in the face of a range of enemies identified as a more pertinent problem. It is a conflict that is rooted in the colonial and postcolonial predicaments of identity and nation-building, but it plays out within the field of technology and its capacity for multiplicity and ambivalence. LoSHA, too, was discussed in light of its technological and social implications, critiqued as "too foreign," as divisive, while at the same time being celebrated for its international thrust and as an iteration of Dalit feminism.

LoSHA is the first object of discussion in India to visibly signal to the supposedly already global #metoo movement with such prominence. The hashtag #metoo had resonated less in the subcontinent, and largely among younger city-dwelling feminists who were already attuned to the online space. LoSHA, on the other hand, became a public concern within feminist circles, especially among those who held academic positions. Its publication occurred as a response to an article by Christine Fair, which was removed from the HuffPost website on October 23, 2017 (Dasgupta 2018). In the article, the writer named her harassers under the hashtag #himtoo and explicitly detailed the continuity and systematic repetition of sexual misconduct that led her to leave academia. The article marks a shift in focus, as Fair argues that conversations on sexual violence should not pretend that these were crimes without origin, but begin to focus on the perpetrators (Fair 2017). Responding to this impetus, Sarkar published their list on Facebook to warn friends and followers of academics with problematic or predatory behavior, and compiled several posts asking for more contributions. As a

result, the list that came to be known as LoSHA documented the names of around seventy prominent and Left intellectual academics, naming them as predators, beginning with one of Fair's main perpetrators, the Indian academic Dipesh Chakrabarty. The list, crowdsourced among students in university institutions across India, was conceived as a "whisper network" (Gajjala 2018) to warn students of fraternizing with professors who were potential predators. As such, it was circulated without carceral intentions, but to instead record instances of violence and harassment for future students. LoSHA thus posited itself as a solidarity network, distributing knowledge commonly only circulated in intimate form to newer, younger, less informed students. Such networks have existed for as long as sexual predators have, but this instance, both materialized and distributed via the digital, was quickly understood to be replacing judicial mechanisms with vigilantism. This assessment further evidenced the continuous chasm between *savarna* and Dalit politics.

Shortly after LoSHA had appeared and "gone viral" in the format of the Google doc, Sarkar took responsibility for crowdsourcing, managing, and leaking the list, giving it a face and a target toward which to direct critique. Immediately, the feminist publishing collective Kafila issued a statement, which criticized and dismissed the list as "naming and shaming," and demanded it to be taken down in the name of the "larger feminist community" (Menon 2017a, n.p.). The statement and subsequent publications supporting it questioned the political valence of internet culture, and read LoSHA as testimony to a methodological gap between India and the digital infrastructures that symbolized an outside, but it also resulted in a frantic discussion that deeply questioned the continuity and unity of Indian feminist movements and strategies. Dominantly, there seemed to be the worry that LoSHA would dismantle precisely the mechanisms of due process and natural justice that feminists had taken decades to build, as the statement written by Nivedita Menon and signed by eleven other prominent feminists explained. The statement and its subsequent annex (Menon 2017b) suggested there could be flaws in evaluating certain cases as harassment; unfair accusa-

tions could be made against innocents, since lack of both details and evidence made it impossible for outsiders to evaluate the circumstances. The way LoSHA was set up, it was argued, led to different degrees of harassment being lumped together without nuance, as descriptions and resolutions were left blank — even for people already found guilty through institutional mechanisms. Feminists and intellectuals saw the danger of enabling right-wing conservatives in going "on the rampage naming every 'anti-national' as a sexual harasser" (Menon 2017b, n.p.) and feared that the list had been orchestrated as a defamatory ploy of the Hindu Right, because it only named academics of the Left. Pro-statement feminists further questioned the viability of anonymous contributions, the lack of context, and the format, that is, being put up on Facebook through Sarkar, who was now acting as a proxy and seemed to have sole editing power, while the Google doc could virally circulate beyond Sarkar's reach. In the arguments against the list, the digitality of the object opened the gates for an internet culture that knew only trolling and shame, was flippant in its judgment, and produced no real way to move forward politically. The signees of the statement argued instead for a return to and strengthening of due process mechanisms, which would validate harassment claims and support a fair and just outcome for all involved. In response to these evaluations, Sarkar and other feminists in favor of the list took to social media, arguing that the critics of the list were iterating a privileged *savarna* feminist position, driven by attempts to protect their own (upper-caste men), as many of the professors implicated in the list had ties to the *Kafila* collective and to those who had signed the statement.

At the moment of leaking, I was a visiting scholar at the English and Foreign Language University in Hyderabad, using the library of the Anveshi Research Centre for Women's Studies for my research. It is here that I first learned of and began to understand the positions and attitudes toward the list. My understanding of LoSHA was deepened further through a subsequent array of conversations in Bangalore in the aftermath of the list. Here, I was supporting and organizing budding conversations about

consent and feminist infrastructures at the Centre for Internet and Society (CIS), as a response to the center's advisee and former board member Lawrence Liang being implicated on the list. I was soon discussing LoSHA at cultural institutions, such as the Alternative Law Forum, the Srishti School of Art, Design and Technology, and with feminist practitioners across institutions, to learn from those immediately dealing with its implications, often negotiating personal relationships at the same time. Although their perspectives were central to informing my position as an academic predominantly educated outside of the context I was now embedding myself into, I do not want to pit these informants against the suggestions of "authentic" Indian feminism via phrasings such as "the larger feminist community" (Menon 2017a) employed in the statement condemning the list. Instead I want to point out that there is multiplicity, ambivalence, and affective attachment at play within such claims, and that technology may play a part in mediating them and framing them as (il)legitimate.

I acknowledge and relate to the convergence of offline and online lives that the #LoSHA feminists[7] arguably advocated recognition for, but in the prehistories of the internet I have so far delineated, I also see a negotiation of technological usage embedded in India's political ideologies from the start. I want to suggest that inhabiting digital technologies in similar manner can indeed produce ideological overlaps that complicate the traditions of identity politics and allow for solidarity across difference, but by no means make identities and expressions ahistorical, decontextualized, or irrelevant. Still, the disconnect to existing variants of Indian feminism was noted and some considered it worrying, since the radical rupture that occurred through LoSHA suggests that knowledge and learning would

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7   I use the hashtag here to separate the list as an object from the list as a discourse and the list and discourse supporters, whether they themselves contributed or not. "#LoSHA feminists" then refer to all pro-list feminists, while "LoSHA" refers to the list itself. "#LoSHA," in turn, refers to the discourse emerging around the object of LoSHA online, where often the hashtag was used to mark an article or statement as referring to the list.

not pollinate across that divide. On the other hand, Menon's statement was read as inflammatory and paternalistic, while her later writings pointed out that the publicity and openness with which the statement was posted at the time had its own feminist lineages in the way things were done (Menon 2019). Many of the feminists supporting the list pointed out that this justification was itself elitist — the leaker Sarkar did not have a public platform with an established readership (such as *Kafila*) and had instead used Facebook as the only means available to them. The list and its subsequent defenders made clear demands about identity politics and the disavowal of caste in discussions on gender-based violence, but LoSHA also problematized the question of being inside and outside (online and offline), of activity and passivity, and of an Indigenous Indian feminism that perpetuates a framework that privileges the heterosexual *savarna* (upper-caste) cis woman.

Although caste and identity politics played such an important role in the discussions, and I do address the problematic of caste shortly, it is not my aim to essentialize positionalities on either side of the debate. Instead, the analysis presented here departs on a less-traveled route,[8] as it focuses on the digital aspects of the list and its enabling capacities for queer politics at the heart of which lie an ambiguation and refusal of understanding identities as essentially authentic or static. I understand that in this I am following one route of Indian feminism, while others have stressed the necessity of devising a politics for sexual violence that hinges itself on the concept of "woman" as the embodied site of such violence — a virulent site of disagreement, not just in Indian feminism. The digital, as I will argue, invariably interrogates some of these notions and forces a denaturalization of

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8   "Less-traveled" does not mean I am treading in entirely unexplored territory. Radhika Gajjala's research in particular has been incredibly helpful, and at the time of #LoSHA, I was following a group of Indian digital feminists around Gajjala on Facebook and Twitter. Some of my learnings come from these conversations, and Gajjala's *Digital Diasporas* (2019) has documented many of the discussions at the time. I am thus especially grateful for this book, as these conversations have become citable references.

categories of belonging, simply because they are not always immediately clear. Sarkar's methods need to be contextualized through the historical imagination of technology, where individual bodies are either not good enough or too idealized for an engagement with technology. As I suggested initially, younger feminists growing up with the internet as a firm part of their quotidian lives may have developed a more intuitive and diverse engagement with online spaces, and thus may have acquired a different level of media literacy that made taking to a public spreadsheet a more obvious and less loaded choice. However, age cannot be the only avenue of explanation for the chasm between list and statement supporters. As many voices have since suggested, the divide between list and statement supporters was ideological, rather than generational (Ayyar 2017; Roy 2017). And yet the arguments provided by the statement and its follow-ups questioned the legitimacy and methodology of the list, reading it as uninformed and dismissing its activist potential because of its digital format. Expressing this technological skepticism, Menon called out the "finger-tip activists with no historical memory" (Menon 2018, n.p.), thus claiming that LoSHA was ineffective and ahistorical "slacktivism," while at the same time the list was being read as "mob justice" (Chachra 2017), suggesting overzealous vigilantism, and was even compared to a Gulag (Visvanathan 2018).

Any form of expression on digital social networking sites such as Twitter or Facebook can mistakenly undergo a reading of discontinuity (Balsamo 2011), precisely because the digital produces a different temporality than what is usually considered as linear history. As Chun (2018) has claimed, digital archives have been said to turn memory into storage, meaning that knowledge becomes stowed away and detached from its political relevance and historical lineages. Computation and the internet are now often read merely in terms of interface, where whatever is not immediately present is assumed to be lost in the depth of cyberspace, illegible on new media turned old, or never have been thought of in the assumption of a continuous present. When specific identity markers are not immediately

accessible, online objects are always first assumed to iterate a hegemonic position (the "view from nowhere"), meaning that a user in India would possibly assume content to come from a user that is *savarna* and middle-class first. As contexts constantly collapse online (boyd and Marwick 2011), it becomes increasingly difficult to follow the lineages that digital politics calls upon, because the assumption is that what you see is all you get. But it has been an impetus especially behind intersectional feminism that the contemporary diasporic or marginal subject consists of a multiplicity of positions and allegiances that do not open themselves up to a "certainty of place" (Grewal and Kaplan 1994), which falls into the trap of the colonizer's certainty of difference as always unchanging. Context collapse inherently challenges the assumption of the unified and unchanging identity, in a space that effectively allows for plurality and difference to be expressed by a singular user. Therefore, the list enables a representation that is multiple and ambivalent. Sarkar, as the leaker and representation of the collective, signals toward Dalit/anti-caste feminism, while the actual collective of victims may be a lot more diverse and also include other identities, even *savarna* cis women. Protesting the statement's claim that suggests the interface of the social media site as the only space on which politics happens, LoSHA supporters began to reveal the labor performed behind the list, the networks of trust and care that had been established, and argued that, read as a whisper network, there was no need to make victims come forward, because they were not asking for reparative steps to be taken (yet). Rather, LoSHA drew on the methodologies of "calling out" and "taking back," a firm part of feminist genealogies,[9] which the statement's suggestion of rupture failed to acknowledge within the multiple temporalities of the digital. In such a sense, the statement feminists and the discourse that opposed LoSHA are evocative of

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9   I am thinking of movements such as Take Back the Night, Hollaback, and others that originated in the feminist "Second Wave" of the 1970s and 80s, and especially in India were very suspicious of the institutionalization suggested to be of relevance here (Chaudhuri 2017).

Gandhi's anxieties about technology; just like Gandhian politics during the time of nation-building, they were asking once again the younger, different, Dalit (digital) feminists to adhere to the rules of the existing generation of feminists, despite the fact that it was purportedly causing them harm and making their pain invisible.

When Sarkar came forward as an anticaste activist, the Indian caste/class nexus that gives "some men a sense of entitlement and access to young women's minds and bodies" (Gopal 2018) became one of the central axes of discussion of the list, and so it is necessary to discuss this intersection in more detail. As Pallavi Rao has argued, sexual harassment cannot be seen "in isolation from other forms of systemic violence" (Rao 2018), and omitting the context when a Dalit comes forward to land in the eye of a storm is highly problematic. Sarkar's Facebook profile positioned them as an anticaste activist long before LoSHA, and the list cannot but be read in lineage with Sarkar's preceding practices that are publicly visible across social media sites. Because first posted on Facebook, these lineages must have been present at least to initial circulations of the list, and given the swiftness with which the statement was posted, may have not been entirely inaccessible to those signing it. If indeed there was a worry over the list having been deployed by the Hindu Right, Facebook would have given the opportunity to revisit Sarkar's activism, which could be traced back over months and perhaps years on their timeline. The conjecture of caste antagonisms has been discussed in great detail,[10] but its implications for the statement's claims to employ due process are central to the despair that LoSHA feminists felt upon reading it.

For many, the Internal Complaints Committees (ICC) and Gender Sensitization Committees against Sexual Harassment

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10 *Economic and Political Weekly* has put together a whole number of articles in a special feature on "Power and Relationships in Academia" accessible online. Further, in the fall of 2018, the journal *Communication, Culture & Critique* included three articles on LoSHA by Ayesha Vemuri, Pallavi Rao, and Radhika Gajjala, which I quote. This is only a few of the articles that deal with caste explicitly, and others are cited throughout this subsection.

(GSCASH), the central committees in charge of ensuring that due process is carried out at Indian universities, have more potential for the alleviation of trauma than filing a police report.[11] Certainly, the efforts to install mechanisms of due process independently from the state have been central achievements that can only be attributed to many of the well-established feminists who were now supporting the Kafila statement. These committees arguably apply feminist knowledge on sexual assault and misconduct, rather than judicial factors, protectionist state reasoning, or cultural myths. However, to pretend that these mechanisms serve all victims of gender-based violence equally would be naïve. Students experiencing discomfort with the actions of professors rarely report, especially when they do not evaluate the behavior as hard harassment (Das 2017). Due process mechanisms are difficult enough to navigate as a student or young academic, as accusations of false allegations, backlash by perpetrators or their peer groups, and refusal to work with accusers in the future are only some of the repercussions any person naming their assaulters may face. In addition, these committees mostly do not include representatives from all marginalized communities and therefore create a heterosexual and upper-caste matrix that may unwillingly perpetuate biases towards lower-caste, Indigenous, and non-Hindu minorities (Ayyar 2017; Kowtal 2019). Taking into consideration a dominant discriminatory stereotype, which frames Dalits as hypersexual and constantly available, especially to upper castes (Paik 2014), the question is, How sensitive are such committees to their own biases, espe-

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11 Like elsewhere, sexual assault victims often struggle to be believed, and cases are often dismissed for lack evidence. In this climate, women's complaints have regularly been disregarded, especially when directed toward upper-caste men. Corrupt police officers may refuse to file reports on assault, seem to file them, only to be lost, or file them and see them get thrown out in court (Krishnan 2018). Adding to these all-too-familiar scenes, the Indian political climate is increasingly toxic and turns against marginalized communities — searching for Indian authenticity through neoconservative to fundamentalist Hindu-nationalist homogeneity, and therefore paradoxically joining a global shift toward what is largely considered to be the "political Right."

cially when faced with husbands and friends as perpetrators? How legible is the discomfort of the students toward professors used to being pleased and catered to? The perseverance of caste-discrimination, coupled with the preponderance of upper-caste Hindu women on gender sensitivity committees, makes the mechanisms of due process and natural justice almost inaccessible to everyone at the lower end of the social hierarchy (Gupta and Dangwal 2017). These flaws in processes of natural justice within Indian academia were not new revelations, and yet they made for little lenience on the part of statement supporters. The insistence on due process and only due process thus intensified a wound already felt among the (predominantly) younger and socially marginalized students supporting the list, because statement claims seemed oblivious or indifferent to the caste-based inequalities that continue to exist, even perpetuating discrimination, as caste was further invisibilized or deemed irrelevant through the statement.

But India's caste hegemony hardens once more under Hindu-nationalist rule and increasing legibility before the state: Dalit and Adivasi communities could and can often find little distinction between the domination of the British Raj, the violence of institutions with Hindu-nationalist inflections, and Brahmin-centric heteropatriarchy that normalizes both (Mondal 2018; Thomas Danaraj 2018). Dalit lynching and gendered violence based on caste or religious discrimination have made it unsafe for these communities to protest in public spaces and university institutions. Names such as Chuni Kotal, Rohith Vemula, J. Muthukrishnan — an Adivasi woman and two Dalit men — have become central to university-based Dalit struggles because of their suicides following long episodes of institutionalized harassment. The bodies are evidences of the violence DAB people are faced with even in supposedly progressive university institutions — protesters mourning their deaths, too, have been shut down, often violently. The last decade has thus seen the arrival of a multitude of online presences, where Dalits attempt to rewrite histories of India from the point of their oppression, often under violent scrutiny of the state in its shift to the right,

but also of public universities as governmental institutions and sometimes, as in this case, even India's political leftist elite (Bargi 2017; Thomas Danaraj 2018). Internet formats, often met with said suspicion within the upper-caste heteropatriarchy, thus serve as a vital point of knowledge production and critique from a Dalit perspective.

In light of these technosocial constellations, I read LoSHA as an object that evoked connection only among those who populate the digital in intimacy, who could thus decipher it beyond what the interface was suggesting. LoSHA is thus indexical of a certain strand of feminism that presents its politics as an intimacy of context. This intimacy is revealed only in a deeper engagement with LoSHA beyond the interface that compresses the world of meaning-making that its participants are embedded in. As Lauren Berlant has put it: "To intimate is to communicate with the sparest of signs and gestures, and at its root intimacy has the quality of eloquence and brevity. But intimacy also involves an aspiration for a narrative about something shared, a story about both oneself and others that will turn out in a particular way" (Berlant 1998, 281).

Although intimacy is imagined as private, or part of the domestic realm, Berlant goes on to describe how it interrogates the public by creating a space within it: "intimacy builds worlds", it "personalizes the effects of the public sphere" (Berlant 1998, 282).The intimacy that Berlant sees evoked is mediated, it is a public negotiation that bridges the seemingly rigid binary of private and public. Intimacy always hinges itself upon the artifacts of knowledge production in circulation — it expresses an attachment that makes a person public within certain collective and sensual affects. Intimacy hinges upon the capitalist economy, but it also emerges to sustain the world it has built, and against the threats posed to counter that world. In such a sense the materiality of the list was what made it scandalous and uncalled for, because the statement feminists saw it to be materializing seemingly "intimate" contexts for the world to see in inappropriate ways. I will return to discuss intimacy as productive in more detail in the interlude. For now, I want to focus on

the plurality this proposes, which lends itself to another form of understanding the digital. If, indeed, the digital is a space that appears presentist in its compression of time and space, then it requires new modalities of intimate interrogation that foreclose themselves to an outside, while remaining in publicity. It could thus be argued that the digital invokes an intimate plurality that attaches itself to identities as ambivalent and fluid.

Mirroring these claims, Radhika Gajjala, Padmini Ray Murray, and others have shown how especially Dalit communities connect and are enabled to speak online and inhabit the digital beyond any worries over "authenticity" (Gajjala 2004, 2019; Nayar 2014; Ray Murray 2018), to escape home-grown hierarchies and critique localized universalisms. As we are reminded of the Gandhian call that Ambedkar and the Dalits should not argue for separate electorates so as not to divide the Hindu society, Menon's statement was understood to illustrate that the *savarna* feminists had little sympathy with list makers, instead protecting their own, upper-caste comrades. As Shailaja Paik (2014) has explored, marginalized communities across the world (in her example Dalit and African American women) struggle similarly with home-grown hierarchies and a feminism that occludes them in comparable manner.

The LoSHA advocates, on the other hand, devised rules according to a global community of marginalized peoples, finding a voice and connecting with similar struggles through the digital, perhaps evading too much the sense of location that the statement supporters felt in their political engagements against the rising Hindu-nationalist front. LoSHA departs from its national context to build "margin-to-margin" solidarity networks, even receiving a statement of support from the founder of metoo, Tarana Burke, reiterating that metoo had been created in solidarity with the most marginalized populations in mind (*The New Indian Express* 2017). The digital can hence be transformed into a place for those to speak and find community, who are otherwise omitted in the umbrella term of "freedom movements" they are supposed to find liberation under (Garza 2014). Such differentiation seems necessary, especially for feminism,

which has often had to withstand the claim that it is an elitist project, omitting Black and brown women, queer and trans women, sex workers and working-class women, differently abled women, Dalit women.

In such a reading, conflict can be made productive through its potential to disrupt the norm, and social media content can be seen to frame new spaces for the marginalized subject to remain, rather than to appear and disappear, when read as "viral." I thus propose reading the list as an anticaste and queer feminist object — one that has rejected a flaccid struggle under the umbrella of "the larger feminist community" for the sake of a critique of Indian elites that are seen to perpetuate rather than disrupt caste hierarchies (Bargi 2017). Instead of read as dangerous, frivolous, or troubled, the list in its digitality offers a new point of departure to address and critique Brahmanical (and other) heteronormative and elitist patriarchies on a systemic level, and allow subaltern positionalities to become authors of their own narratives and connect in solidarity and care. Very few of the individuals implicated on the list actually took the time to respond to the allegations. Those who did, did so on large media platforms such as *The Wire,* while LoSHA proponents were constrained to the credibility regimes of social media platforms. Given the discrepancy in how these outlets are weighted, this was seen as confirmation that the list-feminists were engaging in forms of networking that were not directed at, nor being received by, what was perceived as the hegemony. Precisely because the claims were presented as being made toward each other and not the carceral state or the perpetrators, LoSHA was arguably less about authenticating occurrences than about relationally working toward other forms of being-with. In this way, LoSHA has enabled a local, subaltern voice to travel across the globe (like the professors and alleged harassers in their academic capacities arguably do) and place itself in the trails of #metoo.

Caste — understood in this specific instance as an external form of identity projected onto the individual by a larger structure (the state/nation) — plays a role for the distribution of material and psychological resources, the legibility of vic-

timhood, and the modalities of articulation available to the individuals. And yet I want to point out that caste may not be the central, not even the initial, reason why Sarkar and others collaborated on the list. For the question of the harassed queer further complicated the call to due process at the time. Nonheterosexual sexual relations had only been decriminalized in 2018, after the LoSHA leak (Paletta and Anh Vu 2018). Theoretically, queer victims and victims, where the (alleged) perpetrator was of the same sex as the victim — if acknowledged at all — would at the time have run the risk of being equally criminalized, further complicating the possibilities for victims to come forward. Arguably, Sarkar's self-identification as queer posited them in relation to the globalized queer movement originating within Western Europe and the United States, rather than the various Indigenous queer and nonbinary communities in India, such as hijras or kothis, perhaps making their queerness further illegible or suspect. As there is an obvious lived difference to these communities, predominantly in terms of class hierarchies, the term "queer" invariably opens itself up to the accusations of neoliberal appropriation and a reification of Western superiority (Puar 2007). However, femme-presenting queer bodies learn to pass and invisibilize their specificities more often than those assigned the male sex at birth. Flocking to the digital potentially occurs more intuitively, as the anonymity of interfaces is arguably already familiar to femme bodies marginalized in such a way (Dean 2016; Gajjala 2019). But the invisibility of Sarkar's queer femme sexuality made other identifiers hypervisible in the Indian discourse: read-as-male Dalit rage, read-as-femme Asian migrant in the United States, read-as-Western technology, all implemented to critique *savarna* Indianness as the only iteration of Indian feminism and antinationalism. Instead of reading these critiques of Sarkar and LoSHA in isolation, Sarkar's queerness transcends their sexuality, perhaps even their Dalit-or-not-identity and comes to signify their status, positioning them on the outside of the statement-discourse.

Dalit Feminism as/in Transformative Justice

LoSHA cannot be made sense of without the sociotechnical situation that maps both the history of identification and the certainty of technological code into negotiations of truthiness, questions of evidence, and a political framework of the truth-teller as male and upper-caste within Brahminical patriarchy. Given these complications, the question of naming versus due process is arguably misplaced. Rather, one might ask how valuable due process may have been to Dalits at the point of the LoSHA revelations, how willing the committees might be to have a close look at one of their own, and how adequate the repercussions would be, should all of these steps even be taken. Paired with a tonality that was understood as patronizing and dismissive, the statement and discourse around it seemed to sever the ties between disappointed list-contributors and their former mentors and idols. Indeed, very few accused on the list even considered responding to the allegations, potentially approaching Sarkar as LoSHA's representative, or finding the time to apologize for any potential misconduct on their part. Those that did, did so publicly, in national media outlets, intensifying the communicative gap between the informal whisper network LoSHA represented and the high-ranking national intellectuals with international visibility. And yet, LoSHA disrupted the notion of a united Indian leftist intellectual front and revealed to some what others were unable to admit — that even *they,* intelligent, antinationalist, and "feminist" men, acted out an entitlement over younger women's bodies in a way that caused conflict and muddied consent. Beyond "hard" harassment, LoSHA articulated a need to reformulate the language through which to grasp gender-based violence and consent. In contrast, the assertion that the list was problematic because it did not address the "real" villain — the Hindu-nationalist Right, or even those assailants already convicted — articulated a conservative notion of gender-based violence. The statement echoed a Gandhian assertion of truth, assuming that what mattered most was overthrowing a monolithic evil rather than finding an

egalitarian and diverse concept of transformative justice that would allow for participation and self-evocation for all.

As a result, the very public occurrences mentioned above ease a reading of LoSHA as a critique of Brahminical heteropatriarchy, connecting struggles of sexuality, gender, and class/caste in one object, beyond the limited context of individuals being named as harassers. Sarkar, instead of aligning with the histories of *savarna* feminism in India, chose to put guerrilla tactics associated with Adivasi and lower-caste peoples to the forefront. Remembering that the Naxalbari uprising had its fiftieth anniversary in 2017, just months before LoSHA appeared, it is not too far-fetched to speculate on Sarkar's sympathy with the communist armed guerrillas, whose political aim was to uplift DAB communities by putting guns in their hands. Indeed, there have been references to the revolutionary Dalit also in other writings defending LoSHA, such as by Drishadwati Bargi, who responded to the Kafila statement:

> For instance, the Dalit–Bahujan man can play with the figure of the 'angry/militant/revolutionary male' and gain legitimacy and acceptance in a culture that valorises men with 'strong personality.' The same can make the Dalit–Bahujan woman a greater outcaste [sic], desexualised and perhaps, a little too queer for these spaces. This, in turn has its resonance in building friendships or feminist solidarities across caste. (Bargi 2017, n.p.).

Although at the time there was much speculation on the true status of Sarkar's roots, I argue that the digital posits them as multiple — an expression of DAB activism and the global public sphere. Considering Sarkar's vulnerability, waging it against their supposed privilege when situating them in the United States again forsakes questions of accountability and care for a fetishization of authenticity. Thus, insisting on more proof and insight into the occurrences rearticulates the colonial legacies of positivistic knowledges that fetishize truth as an objective fact. But as other complex cases discussed on the internet during that

time have shown (for example, the cases of Aziz Ansari or Avital Ronell)[12], it is impossible to objectively assert a situation where sexuality is negotiated in line with power hierarchies and consent becomes a grey area that is spread out between aspiration, desire, and integrity, where the accuser often becomes read as the problem. LoSHA underlined the allegorical nature of truth and the judicial mechanisms that perpetuate an understanding of truth as objectively accessible.

In composing what I read as a structural critique, rather than expecting punitive measures against individuals, LoSHA thus added intersectional inflections to a discourse on consent and harassment, which identified a lack within contemporary infrastructures that was not only material, but epistemic. It is only in this reading — transformative rather than carceral — that LoSHA may release its potential to speak to the hybrid intersections of discriminatory practice. Precisely because of its collectivity, its connection to the intersectional and Black-led metoo movement, and the centrality of Raya Sarkar as the queer Dalit leaker — their position in the United States protecting and enabling them — LoSHA systemically identified faults in Indian feminism's caste/gender discourse. Because the Dalit is made out as either desexualized or hypersexual, Bargi's statement cited above suggests the Dalit position as in itself already queer — a position that, according to Castro Varela, Dhawan, and Engel (2011), always includes a struggle to move from spaces of invisibility to legitimacy and representation. As Mimi Mondal has stated, a Dalit with a voice is no longer seen as an authentic Dalit (Mondal 2018), referring to the doubts cast on the true nature of Sarkar's positionality. Ashley Tellis (2012) (also added to the list) has lamented that the Indian queer movement did not stand with Dalits, laborers, farmers, or sex workers. But I argue that speculations about Sarkar's identity posited them as constantly in between, and effectively their queerness was read as foreignness, thus echoing precisely the type of reductive dis-

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12   Amia Srinivasan, *The Right to Sex* (2021), discusses the nuances of cases such as these in a timely manner.

course Tellis so deeply criticizes, as the statement seemed to shun LoSHA's militancy and strategic use of anonymity.

For, with Sarkar coming forward to defend the list, other contributors were enabled to remain in the sheltered anonymity Sarkar had provided for them, but could still take a public stand in solidarity with #LoSHA, without the danger of being retraumatized through victim blaming. Raya Sarkar takes on the role of representation, without claiming to speak as a sole knower, as they could refer to a whole range of testimonies they were speaking for. All along, the list was posited as a crowdsourced document, as a whisper network, and as apart from carceral action. Meanwhile, the statement, which posited the *Kafila* feminists as authentic knowers of the context, widened the gap and rearticulated demands for authenticity that would codify the LoSHA contributors in ways that once again might make them legible in problematic ways. Sarkar acknowledges the systemic quality of harassment on their Facebook page, which exemplifies their reading of sexual and gendered violence, where it is grasped not as a singular act, but as a cultural fact:

> People are within their right to discredit the list and call it false despite mounting public testimonies from survivors but they may not harass any of us to reveal details for their own lascivious entertainment. Some folks claimed that it is unfair to clump all alleged harassers together because some of them may have harassed "less" than the rest. Rape culture is when people grade your trauma. There is no such thing as sexual harassment lite™. If an act falls within the scope of sexual harassment, then it's sexual harassment. Period. (Sarkar 2018, on Facebook)

Sarkar defied the constant inquiries into further details to occurrences that led to names being put on the list, invoking a critique of judicial procedures that often undermine feminist support by fetishizing proof. Instead, Sarkar stressed the necessity of acknowledging the right of victims to have their own scale for the trauma they have had to live through, therefore attesting to

cultures of violence rather than to individual perpetrators, to notions of healing rather than punitive measures. In a conversation in Gajjala's 2019 publication, Sarkar attests to the intricate details that went into compiling the list. As Ayesha Vemuri mentions in this conversation, discourse on LoSHA often omitted the fact that Sarkar was trained as a lawyer, thus had expertise on what fell within the scope of sexual harassment, and vetted the contributors to LoSHA accordingly, even offering support, should any of the contributors want to take legal action (Gajjala, Vemuri and Sarkar 2019, 192). This again allows for a reading of LoSHA as accompanying and at best interrogating and transforming the legal system, not dismantling it. In this light, LoSHA becomes a digital testimony that does not pretend to replace the law, but critiques its gaps and interpretations within feminist movements. Instead of lacking nuance, I read LoSHA as a comment on the structural quality of sexual and gendered inequalities, which can also manifest in friendships, mentorships, and quotidian forms of personal exchange.

These shared qualities were articulated by LoSHA, even though they may not have been immediately accessible to feminist ideological formations of the statement that were outside of these frameworks at the time. Because it was not immediately visible online, the capacities to form an attachment were not accessible, thus leading to a neglect of the nonpublic iterations of intimacy that laid the ground for LoSHA. The statement feminists failed to access the complexities behind the interface, and therefore expressed ignorance toward the offline labor and historical continuities that made an object such as LoSHA possible in the first place. In part, I see this occlusion facilitated by the notion of the digital object as "viral," and thus contagious, polluted, alienating, but also circulating to at one point disappear. This negates both temporality and presence of the digital beyond its iteration on the interface. Following Chun, I suggest an understanding of bodies that "inhabit" the digital through their interfaced objects, rather than proclaiming that digital objects travel as infectiously "viral" (Chun 2016). This shifts a reading of the digital as contagious and frivolous to the acknowl-

edgment of offline labor, but also suggests an understanding of the embodied situation from which such objects are produced. Seeing LoSHA as an object that is inhabited through more and more bodies joining a collective, rather than in "virality," understands that LoSHA did not just travel, implying that it left nothing behind, or comes from polluted origins and "infects" people. Instead, it is my understanding that it grew to include more and more people in different ways, people who embodied it either as contributors or in the traditions of consciousness raising when read as a "whisper network."

Those arguing against the list seemed unable to see the internet as a serious site for activism, despite the importance of the digital in the protests after the Delhi gang rape of 2012. At the time, the mass protests in solidarity with the victim were all organized online, via the same social media channels that Sarkar was now using, and by the same people now shaming online engagement as nothing but hysterical tipping (Dey 2018; Jha and Kurian 2018). However, the event has been said to mark a turning point of Indian feminism toward the internet and with it "to a global vocabulary of rights" (Kurian 2018, 16) that resonate with mainstream media outlets on a transnational scale. The problematic evaluation of social media, seemingly dependent on who uses it, resonates with Gandhi's assessment of dirty bodies having to adapt to pristine technologies. I read such statements as negligent of what it means when a queer young Dalit lawyer becomes the face of a critical feminist object and subsequent target of an ideological battle initiated by supposed allies who, controversially, ask for allyship in return. Further, one must think about the material effects that allow for possibly *savarna* students to hide behind a queer Dalit defending the list in full-embodied precarity, and the avenue of critique that chose to forgo any mention of the Dalit leaker by focusing instead on the irrelevance of caste, unless all contributors would be Dalit (Menon 2017b). I do not want to pit these identities against each other or construct contorted claims about authenticity. Rather, my argument is that the modular has produced these fronts and suggested them to be insurmountable, despite

a Gandhian and postcolonial evocation of unity. I have argued for an understanding of digital space beyond notions of virality and crisis, as a transnational arena that both influences and challenges local positionalities as bounded, authentic, and separable. LoSHA exemplifies how quotidian digital acts can give voice and form solidarities for those marginalized within local umbrella-term movements for social justice. Especially in terms of the iterative space it creates for those, whose trauma is least recognized within public discourse on violence, objects such as the list allow marginalized expression to critique naturalized hegemonies within political groups. As a digital object, the list was open to many different forms of engagement and can be read as a hypertextual manual that invites its contributors and readers to connect to it on all these identity levels mentioned above, arguably at the same time. LoSHA must thus itself be read as a queer object, as it attests to the multiplicity of identities that inform and iterate each body, but also permeates the boundaries of individuation that inform modular typification.

The list has since effected more nuanced conversation about sexual violence and patriarchy, which have spilled beyond the leftist intellectual academic landscape of LoSHA and paved the way for a questioning of positionalities within workplace institutions and across caste boundaries. Since LoSHA, the question of Brahmanical patriarchy has become central in India's social media landscape. In light of new hashtags, such as #smashbrahmanicalpatriarchy[13] and movements that offer online sex education, self-help, and community consultation, centering increasingly on Dalit perspectives, I argue that the list has produced affective solidarities, which allow for dissent and discussion beyond the law and carceral feminism. These new discussions make do without framing feminist solidarities and kinship formations as fragile, juvenile, or volatile, just because they find representation in a digital form. Looking beyond the sensationalism of the moment, LoSHA can give way to a new language

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13 Initiated by Dalit activist Thenmouzhi Soundarrajan, or @DalitDiva in the aftermath of the list

of care and intimacy, of connection and solidarity across age, caste, class, and any other category that may seem to divide feminisms into unlikely enemies, but actually only addresses lack within feminisms that should always strive to update their scope — whether standards and methodologies are met or revised. No one owns feminism, nor is it fixed in a specific form.

It is not uncommon for articles, written on and after hour zero of leaking, to include sidenotes and edits, mentions of accusations of sexual harassment in footnotes, but also of more intersectional readings of violence in doing so. The aftermath of LoSHA has shown that after the sense of crisis has died down, the list effectively opened a space to continue these old and yet-to-be-resolved struggles. However, it has also allowed for #metoo to resurface within Indian cyberspace in difficult ways. The same methodology of naming and shaming has been implemented within a recent resurgence of the movement. And yet, *savarna* feminists have welcomed this round of #metoo, and it has commonly been marked as its first arrival in the country — LoSHA and Sarkar's efforts simply erased (Rasul 2018; BuzzFeed India 2019). This occlusion of LoSHA thus not only repeats, but actually deepens the initial wound inflicted upon Dalit feminism through the statement. It validates the narrative that resistance to LoSHA was in part based on caste anxieties and a fear of obsolescence. It has been argued that feminism in India has always based itself on collectivity, and that no validation of individuals would be required (Menon 2019). But the statement so clearly sided with the Brahmin and upper-caste male identity of most of the accused that such phrasing that elided the power dynamics of the statement versus list controversy may have only added to the broken trust between the groups.[14]

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14 Of course, decades of Menon and her peers acting as an antinationalist in support of marginalized communities on the ground cannot be equated with my own circumstantial and limited experience of Indian feminism both online and off, so that the evaluation of the statement-feminists undertaken here may indeed only be partial. Sarkar's skepticism on the intentionality behind omissions such as their own might still be valid, as even the inclusion of Dalit positionalities in Menon's 2019 article contex-

The internet thus reveals what was already there — the fact that lived realities and solidarities transgress and circumvent monodirectional identity categories on multiple levels, but also the fact that violence can and very often does express itself "merely" in forms of unquestioned privilege, quick omissions, or even identitarian reductions. At the same time, the digital — though not necessarily new — complicates prevalent understandings of in-groups and out-groups centered upon in postcolonial analysis — of identity and multiplicity, of response and responsibility. The conflicts in solidarity discussed within the case of LoSHA point to the difficulties inherent to overcoming "authentic" notions of identity within digital space. But LoSHA and other lists that have appeared target mainly a culture, where silence is the trade-off for supposed safety and where sexual violence seems like a crime without origin. They argue for a situated-yet-universal approach to questions of sexuality and violence. Especially for victims of intersectional violence, these objects mark a moment that breaks precisely that code of silence, and demanding not only protection but a response and acknowledgment of hurt, beyond a formal or institutional frame that often fails or ignores the most marginalized bodies in their community. Finally, LoSHA, metoo, and the hashtag #metoo must therefore be read through histories that are grounded within intersectional networks of care, that were laboring away unacknowledged long before these hashtags traveled across the globe, just as they work to undo the modular/universal binary. I read these objects of circulation as systemic critique of patriarchy, but also of a feminism that continues to consider only the most hegemonic concept of "womanhood" as viable for victimhood. Certainly, the digital does not alleviate these pains, but it serves to rein in those otherwise omitted by problematizing, if not queering, the notion of authentic and unitary identities.

Instead of dismissing technology entirely, LoSHA shows an engagement with lived experience, where grassroots com-

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tualizing feminist histories itself remains an empty gesture, if it cannot enable exchange away from keyboard.

munities may explore and appropriate digital media for their own means and goals, and researchers learn from these experiences instead of imposing their own "knowledge management systems" (Srinivasan 2019, 13) on to subaltern communities. In light of India's governmental turn toward a Hindu-nationalist right-wing brigade, where governments look the other way when communal violence happens to befall non-Hindus or non-Brahmins, this becomes an important point of resistance in the decolonial struggle and in critiquing the nation-state's constantly narrowing ideas of belonging and citizenship that reconfigures man2.0. One might argue that solidarities across difference failed here, or were only achieved at the price of a queer Dalit's mental health and social integrity, but Dalit feminism has since received a substantial amount of visibility and continued with renewed vigor.

Leaks and Remains

Digital cultures need to be understood to be entangled within ever-expanding control societies that originate in a desire for identification and identity as a form of governance. This goes contrary to a cybernetic timeline of digital computation that sees the emergence of control societies to begin after World War II, with the birth of cybernetics, and the mode of binary thought that accompanies the material development of the computer. The digital as a system that fragments individuals into unitary, unambiguous categories is a form of categorization that I have — in line with contemporary media architectures — called "modulation" and situated within genealogies of colonial violence. I have argued that the necessities of rigidifying difference as dysselection fuel the development of technological artifacts that mediate and modulate identities since the colonial encounter — race and gender are incentives for, but also mediated by, emerging technologies. Modulation is then neither radically new nor evolving as a form distinct from what Michel Foucault has called the "disciplinary society" (Deleuze 1992; Deleuze and Hand 1988; Foucault 1995), but entangled in and evolving out of modern science as a biogenetic form of viewing the subject and subjectivity. The bodies of the colonized become the basis upon which the colonial information-gathering apparatus builds and prospers, carving out different (modular) spaces for individuals

according to overemphasized markers of difference inscribed into technologies of governance and population control. Throughout history, modulation expands both the encroachments upon those historically marginalized to more and more people and renaturalizes the framing of bodies as unchangeably different and isolated from each other — modulation begets dysselection, and does so in an expansive manner. Because technologies are framed as radically new and different, their incorporation and occlusion of the prevalent racist and sexist assumptions into a coded backend make discrimination through technologies such as the internet seem ahistorical and innocuous, as a glitch rather than what they really are and always have been: forms of ensuring the autopoiesis (Wynter 2001) of liberal subjectivity, the ongoing normalization and seeming unchangeability of the status quo as the figure of man.

Digital technologies have cut ties to these genealogies in problematic ways, not only naturalizing this construction of the ideal human norm but also addressing online individuals to expect further segregation on the level of representation (e.g., through platforms limiting the reach and visibility of othered people through shadow bans) and interpellation (e.g., automated content selection that produces a stream of content affirming existing beliefs on identity in what has been called "the filter bubble"). The user thus comes to not only expect segregation, but to understand it as neutral, normal, and safe, and willingly gives up more and more of her opacity in exchange for the promise of "accurate" representation. However, since accuracy is itself a modular feature based on the pretense of complete knowability and clearly delineated categories, the modular form always produces excess and connections in ways that both buttress and undermine its autopoietic function. In the preceding chapters, I have tried to show the cracks within autopoiesis, acknowledging that they do not necessarily provide opportunity for solidarity. However, without being too celebratory about what living in these cracks and edges might effect, I see a need to not overlook the modalities of inhabiting seemingly homogenous space, and to acknowledge the individual body's relation

and access to these modalities, which I will present as a knowledge problem in so-called information societies. This is not to fall into the trap of proposing that fascism is the result of a lack of education, but quite the contrary — the knowledge problem of solidarity proposes that solidarity is possible only when an individual is acknowledged and recognized as a knower that can stand for and with a collective. This suggests that solidarity is not so much a question of being, but of affectively seeing oneself embedded in the life worlds of those for and with whom one choses to stand. Solidarity-as-knowledge hopes to displace the binary of solidarity or objectivity, for there can only be solidarity in distributing identity information about an other, be it solidarity that promotes modulation or solidarity that refuses it.

The remainder of this book looks at instances of intersectional solidarity to argue that, despite the seemingly totalitarian expansion of the modular form, and despite narratives of what may have seemed like instances of "failing," there are always modalities of relation that surpass, intervene, and create in the face of — and despite or even because of — systemic modulation. It is these relations, leakages in their own right, in which I hope to find a basis for solidarity. I see these modalities as a way of what Donna Haraway has called a capacity of "keeping heart, of giving each other the capacity to get up in the morning with a certain capacity for play and joy" (Haraway and Tsing 2019, 17). This should not be confounded with a surplus of optimism about where this world is going. My proposition is nonteleological; it does not carry suggestions for an endgame, a new political strategy, or a place of radical incorporation of difference, and thus I struggle to call these practices "empowering." But in the past, things have gotten better only when people stand together, and never when they do not. Sustenance and dependency upon an other may make visible a foundational relationality, which embeds itself into the very infrastructure that segregates individuals on the surface, thus proposing a sense of possibility. I have tried in this book to reveal social cohesion and thus to suggest a dependency that is inscribed into the infrastructure. Instead of empowerment, I have found the political vocabulary

of solidarity more useful for investigating digital infrastructures. It proposes a modality of struggling together that does not require a liberal subject (which takes on a representational or propositional form) as central to having agency, to speak, or to recognize its own situatedness.

The remaining chapters thus do not negate the argumentation of the preceding chapters, but they build upon them to state that in each ruin, there is nonetheless the possibility of life, to paraphrase Anna Tsing (2015). This interlude explores two aspects of solidarity that have developed within digital logics of the modular, building on the excess that is always inherent to digital reductions. One is that of vulnerability, the other that of intimacy. I will discuss each through an example from feminist digital practice in the following chapters. These build on what is commonly termed "identity politics," a term often used in derogatory ways, to propose a deep and emotional involvement, a sense that the affected cannot speak rationally of their situation. It is also a term that runs the risk of being co-opted by the Right. The following discourse hopes to resituate identity politics within the very material realities of its emergence, the Black feminist proposition that both invisibilization and essentialism stand in the service of material dispossession (The Combahee River Collective 2014). Whereas the previous chapters have shown how identity politics necessarily play a role, even (or especially) when not articulated as such, the following argue for a necessity to overcome them, to not overstate differences but explore sameness across difference within digital excesses. This is not an easy task, and without an interrogation of the claims upon which a common struggle is articulated, minor voices within larger movements may be silenced into disappearance. But looking at the histories of intersectional feminism I see these struggles misplaced, or perhaps wrongfully addressed. I think of Trinh Minh-Ha, who has stressed that feminism must constantly work at deconstructing the common sense of what it means to be "woman" (Minh-ha 1989) and attempt to develop a theory of solidarity based in the practices of the digital age for doing so. In this sense, I take a more optimistic approach

toward new media turned old, at a time when cyberlibertarians are already moving on to newer new media.

I have argued that the supposed crisis new media induce is possibly not all that new. But just as the modular leaks into the present, so do the entanglements it presents as separate on the surface. Many of the characteristics of the internet rearticulate variants of premodern and precolonial[1] conceptions of identity, the body, and of difference as constructed and dispersed, collective and entangled. If the initial euphoria around the internet seemed suspicious, turning away from the internet at a time when all hype is moving toward so-called AI, virtual and immersive reality, or web3.0 will only repeat the cycle of ahistoric framings that end up leaving previously new media behind merely to update with new gadgets to reproduce ideologies of the ever-same (Chun 2016). The technological avant-garde may experiment with newness, but the people stuck in the old infrastructures are quotidian subjects often invisibilized, such as mothers, poor women, older women, and less literate women (Digital Bauhaus Summit 2016). Considering the studies that claim young women in the United States learn more about rape culture on Tumblr or TikTok than in school (Rentschler 2014; Valenti 2013), or that minority groups can find community online in a way that society does not make space for otherwise (Baer 2016; Pedwell 2019), I see dismissing the internet as itself an expression of the modular that posits rationality and objectivity as superior to lived experience. Rather than dismiss internet infrastructure as only problematic, I want to "stay with the trouble" (Haraway 2016). Staying with the trouble means realizing that despite the inequalities within the structure that makes up the world as we know it, fantasies of exit will always

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1 In saying this, I do not mean to fetishize the precolonial as pure, authentic, or more just, but I want to point out the way that networked computing has already incorporated Indigenous and non-Western ideals, but appropriated and framed them in a way to suggest that neoliberalization and modulation are the only way forward — a suggestion that I want to displace.

mean leaving those more marginalized behind (Digital Bauhaus Summit 2016).

Staying with the trouble, in this case, means interrogating once more the relationship between solidarity, modulation, and identity. In the Western intellectual tradition, solidarity has been explored as a position that is opposite to objectivity. As Richard Rorty (1989) describes, both (solidarity and objectivity) are points of reference that place human lives in a larger context, both positions, therefore, make sense of the world through knowledge claims. These claims, yet again, relate the individual making these claims to the world. Rorty sees the notion of objectivity constructed as a relation to a "nonhuman reality," while solidarity is the construction of knowledge in relation to a certain community, either present, past, or located elsewhere. Rorty elaborates that from each position, it is possible to derive a certain agency and responsibility towards the world:

> Insofar as a person is seeking solidarity, he or she does not ask about the relation between the practices of the chosen community and something outside that community. Insofar as he [*sic*] seeks objectivity, he distances himself from the actual persons around him not by thinking of himself as a member of some other real or imaginary group, but rather by attaching himself to something that can be described without reference to any particular human beings. (Rorty 1989, 167)

Not only does this quote suggest a specific identity, to which solidarity necessarily must adhere,[2] but it also poses objectivity as

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2   This is why many feminist theorists dismiss the notion of solidarity. It is understood as presupposing a group identity, to which individuals must concede and has thus been called "exclusionary" and "reductive" (hooks 2015). This evokes precisely the notion embedded in the charkha: that there is a group identity first, and then the group. Chapters 4 and 5 of this book exemplify some of the difficulties that Butler and hooks suggest; however, I will argue that despite these problems, solidarity is de facto always across difference, and thus plays an important role in creating networks that are inclusive and genealogical, instead of "cyberlibertarian"

the unmarked relation to some other, "nonhuman" entity. What Rorty suggests is that solidarity can only be felt among those that are the same, that community must first be defined before it comes into being, through people who have the same struggle and are equally constructed in difference, that is, dysselected in the same way. I propose instead that the *type* of dysselection might be less central to solidarity than the *fact* of dysselection. I also propose that solidarity can act and be enacted beyond the monolithic figure of the human. Not only must solidarity as social cohesion surpass the framework of the human to elaborate upon infrastructures, it also then acknowledges its own situatedness by accentuating certain relations over others with effects on society at large. Solidarity then does not make the systemic aspects of the world more just, but it can perform and produce knowledge concerns in ways that allow for questions of social justice to be articulated in newly visible and different ways, by new and different people, and in ways that may activate a sense of relation within those who imagined themselves as passive or detached before. Following Haraway's exploration of solidarity across species lines (Haraway 2008), I see solidarity not promising an end to all suffering, and Haraway does not presuppose that solidarity cannot also cause suffering.[3] Instead, she suggests that a capacity to respond in accountability — "response-ability," as she calls it — is a vital constituent for engaging in relations that go beyond oppression and objectification, alleviate suffering wherever possible, just as response-ability enables a nonindividualist form of agency in the recognition of entanglements. Response-ability builds on the capacities of both recognizing the historical formations that have divided bodies and recogniz-

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and ahistorical. I also argue for a solidarity that might be extended from a position of privilege, but does so to let the marginalized be able to speak.

3   Haraway refers to solidarity with lab rats and other nonhuman beings and does so in a quite pragmatic manner at times. But I see her argument resonate with Black feminist discourse, where white feminist "nods that silence" (Uttal 1990) have been criticized for evading disagreement, for agreeing without understanding, and evading discussion when one does not.

ing this historical formation being, to some extent, shared, and thus binding the other to the self in difference. As Erin Manning (2016) suggests, it is just such a "minor gesture," located at the fringes of perception, that may transform the field of relations altogether. Recognizing that there is no way of operating outside of racial capitalism and the modular tendencies of contemporary governance, I conceive solidarity as the nuanced expressions that result in a "showing up" (TallBear 2014) for each other in a way that is increasingly possible through transnational and collectively produced networks. I thus want to discuss digital solidarity,[4] first, by establishing solidarity as a frame of knowledge and knowledge production, and then by exploring how digital imaginaries and their infrastructural realities not only complicate but also potentiate the complex space of feminist transnational solidarity, of multilateral solidarity across difference, and after modulation.

Digital solidarity is an attempt to think together what has been modulated apart. It is a practice and a relation, where bodies are fixated and made separate. To a certain extent, solidarity can therefore give agency to the imagined passivity of victimhood and frame it as a complex negotiation of vulnerability, of the body, and of multiplicity, putting these in relation to each other. I conceive of solidarity as that which may activate individuals to begin to think about the shaping of social processes, as part of the process in which an individual becomes active within a group and recognizes the self in difference and in multiplicity, both shaping and integrating into the collective. Digital solidarity, then, should be understood as activation on the go, something that must happen again and again, carried forward like oral history, a flexible set of knowledges that produce belonging by rearticulating the position from which to speak in a countermodular understanding of multiplicity.

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4   On another level, my work here also exemplifies what it sets out to conceptualize; as I have elaborated upon in the introduction to this book, I see this writing as an expression of solidarity in a time, where feminist and antiracist positionalities are being attacked from perspectives that are slowly shifting from right to center.

Beyond merely describing the dependency of one upon the other, I see this basic relationality as also communicating cohesion that is not merely economic or structural. The aspect of relationality, as it is framed in intersectional feminism, suggests that a division between self/community/subjectivity and other/society/objectivity — modular in itself — needs to be questioned. Attempting to displace problematic dichotomies, Chandra Talpade Mohanty has suggested that feminist solidarity is a model that focuses on "mutuality and common interests, it requires one to formulate questions about connection and disconnection between activist women's movements around the world. Rather than formulating activism and agency in terms of discrete and disconnected cultures and nations, it allows us to frame agency and resistance across the borders of nation and culture" (Mohanty 2003, 243).

I understand Mohanty's concept of solidarity as an attempt to grasp complexities along multiple axes of discrimination, but also of shifting locations and relations. I read Mohanty as arguing for the necessity of understanding difference "on the move," without homogenizing it to an essentializing group identity that runs the risk of rearticulating the colonial attachment to certainty and accuracy. In this sense, solidarity becomes relational in terms of the ways in which a body can be affected by difference — meaning that one should fight for an other not only because the other may not be able to speak, but also because this othering is not frozen in time — and the modular comes to affect and differentiate more and more people. I thus propose that what binds groups together need not be identity, but a "set of shared sentiments and sensations" (Gilbert 2014) that arise from an acknowledgment of intimacies and vulnerabilities.

A point of criticism of this approach may be the observation that political demands are watered down the more accessible and general they become. It is also true that very often this watering down results in reductive representations that once again sideline the subaltern first. I hope that the way I have tried to argue for a more inclusive and ambivalent form of understanding identity within the digital does not have the same

effects. . In the following chapters, I will discuss how the digital — like any knowledge form — must serve for partial perspectives on entire movements that are more complex than what a user may encounter on her interfaced surface. I argue that, more than ever, it enables representations to be understood as multiple and embodied forms. Thus, when I speak of digital feminist movements as solidarity movements, it is essential to think of their organization beyond what the mainstream may encounter through their interfaces, and of the greater complexities that are constantly being articulated, critiqued, and refurbished within these movements, but which the general public may not get to see at all stages (@lasersushi 2018).

In such a framing, solidarity needs to be understood as a form of informational activism, the power of which lies in its openness that allows people to join in and gain agency. This agency does not express itself in teleological terms, but rather enables recognition (Dean 2016), inhabitation (Chun 2016), and remaining (Jucan, Parikka, and Schneider 2019). I return to Chun's argument that social media's YOU is always singular plural to argue that in that singular plurality, the internet pulls together just as it modulates and divides. Arguably, this is not a new function, but an inherent part of the logics of the modular itself, dividing on the surface, just as it throws together individuals into types. These typifications always lead to excess — because they reduce complexity and sort entanglements into clear-cut categories. This excess can be used, I argue, and I see two strategies emerge within netfeminisms, where the one aims at distributing vulnerability through "shadowy presences" (Chun 2016), and the other channels intimacy by explicitly naming collectives: "If the modern concept of race is premised on an epistemology of visibility, but the visible is racialized and thus insufficient ground for knowledge (Chun 2009, 20), then there is a gap between subjects and their representations that might open up possibilities for escape" (Agostinho 2018, 143–44).

Agostinho expresses a moment of irritation and nonrecognition as the moment of hope — because representations of self must be understood to emerge from a multiplicity of identi-

ties (social media's interpellation always as singular plural); the gap between the representation and its underlying subject constellation consists of a reminder that these representations are never authentic, have never been based on a fundamental truth. It is this gap that I address, adding that the raced dimension is always supplemented and codified further with gender, so that both function in relation to, and with the working ways of, technology. If representations never consisted of a true and authentic self, but is co-constructed by technology, then perhaps the artificial interface online can be understood in terms of a temporary home, which deconstructs the notion of a unitary identity for a representation of embodied multiplicity. Collectivity thus allows for individual bodies to inhabit the digital through a simultaneous visibility and invisibility, producing embodiment in a manner both collective and opaque, despite the algorithmic mandate to capture and individuate all. These collectives are instances of a common form (Federici 2014; Gilbert 2014), where solidarity arguably becomes possible across difference through affective recognition of difference as "on the move" (Pedwell 2019). Theorizing solidarity as social cohesion in the digital necessarily must build on an acknowledgment that has been voiced historically by Black feminism — that the body of the marginalized does not appear with claims of veracity, but can always be made to appear as inauthentic (Dean 2016). The paradigms of vulnerability and intimacy allow me to explore how, despite (or because of) the ambivalent "truthiness" of the web, knowledge can be produced in solidarity and across difference, precisely because inhabiting the digital already happens "in difference" (Dean 2018).

Vulnerability

One of the defining features of social media spaces is the capture of the self through relation and approximation: users are identified as individuals, merely because of their probability of being like others. On the surface, social media is all about a community of "YOUS," but instead of actually engaging with what Chun

terms the "YOUSER" (Chun 2016) on an individualistic level, the algorithms collecting personal data generate a relational data body of similarities with other users. This is what I described in chapter 1 as the "modulation of race" into the backend of networked computing infrastructure. Social media targeting draws upon and overemphasizes specific tastes and preferences into individualized profiles that codify race, class, gender. But it is precisely this singular plural YOU that may potentiate solidarity within the digital, as it creates this "you" only in a collective capacity. To recap Chun's main argument: The community of "YOUS" that defines who "you" are to/on social media emerges not because people are the same, but because similar preferences and practices are read as similar identities. Data representations online may appear neat and segregated, but they are factually intertwined with complex forms of leakages. Understanding the internet quite literally as a web, Tania Pérez-Bustos has shown how the clean surface of the net (the interface) is backed by a messy and chaotic backend (the code), illegible without training. Weaving between these fragmented worlds, the marginalized and the alienated have a renewed possibility of articulating a sense of self, as "the network becomes knowledge, just as knowledge becomes the network" (Pérez-Bustos 2016). It is in this reading that I understand networks as entangling and disentangling practices, as both buttressing and undermining the attempts to contain modern identities into singularized and alienated consumers.

As Chun shows, digital media and networked computers function precisely because they leak. Computational infrastructures rearticulate the modalities with which identities and subjectivities are made visible — presented as unitary and authentic, the leakiness of computational and subjective representation needs to be revealed. A nonleaky computer is a faulty computer — its function depends on the ability to access and be accessed by the network. This leakiness is demonstrated through a simple command, putting the computational device in "promiscuous mode":

A wireless network card reads in all the packets in its range and then deletes those not directly addressed to it. These acts of reading and erasure are hidden from the user, unless she executes a UNIX tcpdump command or uses a packet sniffer in promiscuous mode so that her network card writes forward these packets to the computer's central processing unit (CPU). (Chun 2016, 59)

With this command, a "personal" computer produces a visualization log of all the information that it continuously sends to and receives from other networked devices, processes that otherwise go unnoticed, because they are not logged but immediately deleted. The idea of "personal" devices (and, in the diffractive logics presented here, of a "personal" identity) is an illusion, which does not mean that its naturalized form has no material reality or could be altered by mere wordplay. However, given the constant relationality upon which networked computing and, as I have argued, the socio- and techno-political is based upon, a reframing could open up different alleyways of solidarity.

Instead of changing the modalities of computational functions, promiscuous mode only reveals what is happening anyway. The interconnections of networked devices are what makes them function, but also what makes them vulnerable to attack. It is also only in this moment of attack that the infrastructures and their *constant* leakage become a problem (Stalder 2010), and it is this moment of crisis that reveals a gendered and raced panic over what is happening anyway, for example, in equating promiscuity with the danger of infection (in this case to virality — to a virus). Applying this logic to social media and its human users, the YOU mentioned above is tracked and made unique through certain actions as concrete and visible as "likes," which are yet again stored and fed across platforms in a leaky manner that goes unnoticed for most of the time. What the interface produces as an individual on the surface is in fact entangled in a complex process of information exchange that produces a coherent self only because it occludes the information that would otherwise

reveal the entanglements of the own and other selves, inseparable from each other by constantly reestablished connectivity.

What the interface produces is thus the result of a series of choices. Chun gives the example of the brutal and viciously public rape in Steubenville, Ohio, in 2012, where an unconscious young woman was gang raped at a college party. The scene was filmed and put on social media, and the victim learned of the bodily violation through the repeated acts of sharing and archiving of the video footage. The students involved in the violent bodily act received minimum sentences, but Alexandra Goddard, a former Steubenville inhabitant who had documented the boys' boastful behavior online during and after the live rape, was sued for defamation, even though she only collected and shared content put up publicly by the rapists themselves (Chun 2016). Leaking, if this can be seen as an instance thereof, is a question of power, and as Agostinho and Thylstrup have argued, the assumptions of what contains and what leaks is heavily gendered (Agostinho and Thylstrup 2019). Instead of reading Goddard's actions as acts of solidarity with the victim, they were read as acts of aggression toward the perpetrators (Chun 2016). This shows that the same act can fall on either side of what Rorty has termed "solidarity or objectivity," and how the supposedly formal and objective bureaucratic form — publishing information on other people — is heavily gendered and deeply political. The vulnerability that marks individuals should thus be contextualized accordingly, situated within a system that is modeled on precisely that vulnerability — in this case, the patriarchal order that produces women as embodied objects, rather than as humans with agency or selfhood. However, computer programs constantly trace the relations that could potentially become identified as dangerous, because these leakages are central to the computational function of modular identification:

> This traceability has entailed the massive rehabituation of individuals into authenticated users through the expansion and contraction of privacy via notions such as 'friends' on social media; that is, through modes of leaking that both

> undermine and buttress walls that supposedly protect and secure. (Chun 2016, 64)

Social media produces individuals by ignoring their leakages. Social media friends are both sustenance and danger; in the digital, users engage intimately with unknown chatbots, just as one wrong click can make them betray even their closest friends, through a virus or phishing attempt. This is what Stalder (2010) has termed to be at the root of the crisis of (information) security, as it is a form of security that is based on and only functions under conditions of constant insecurity, and through the omnipresence of the leak. Social media thus relies upon modular divisions of private and public, self and other, just as it perverts the same in the constant negotiation of the connections it requires to function. Vulnerability is constructed within technologies, it can be mediated, and it can be changed.

Increasingly, identities produced in the network are transported into the supposedly oppositional offline world through surveillance media, border regimes, and digital methods of social engagement, such as digital payment methods, algorithmic sign-in functions, the gamification of biometric capture through Snapchat and Instagram filters, or constant device tracking via GPS. What does it mean to critique vulnerability in a space where the main premise of constructing that space is the same that creates such vulnerability? Instead of offering vulnerability as a danger or threat to be vanquished in the name of security, its overlap with solidarity as a chosen relation in the face of uncertainty suggests remaining, care, and sustenance. I will consider vulnerability as the basis of action and change, to acknowledge the relational quality of being inherent to the leakiness of seemingly stable digital identities. The aim of solidarity is not to vanquish vulnerability, or to place it as an opposition to threat,[5] but to acknowledge it as a basic factor for political life,

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5   That is, when a collective subject, white women, are vulnerable, then it is not because of individual, or even groups of Muslim men walking the streets drunk at night, but because the state does not protect them, because

as the foundation that makes action possible (Butler, Gambetti, and Sabsay 2016).

Chun proposes the "shadowy inhabitation of networks based on a right to be vulnerable and not attacked" (Chun 2016, 31) in relation to the suicide case of Amanda Todd. The fifteen-year-old who killed herself after immense cyberbullying produced a notecard video that went viral[6] after her death. In the video, she tells the story of the horrifying harassment and abuse she suffered, which began at an age of twelve, after an anonymous user watching her video streaming channel coaxed her into showing her chest. When she did, the image, captured via a screenshot reappeared on porn sites and links were sent out to Todd's peers, her mother, and several teachers. Even after Todd changed schools, the image reappeared on her classmates' mobile devices and continued to circulate — at one point even as her own profile picture on Facebook. Despite the immense violence that Todd suffered online and subsequently offline, and despite the official responses to these crimes by police officers claiming that there was nothing she could do, except go offline, Todd remained online and chose the same medium that had been used to exploit her to tell her story. In the video, Todd's testimony describes her mobbing and first attempt at suicide through notecards. But even though she reveals her name, her body is never present and all the viewer of the video sees is a shadowy outline and the notecards. Chun describes how this incident has become a template that created a network of vulnerable inhabitations for other teens being bullied because of their gender or sexuality, and later the same notecard template

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they are called liars when they report sexual misconduct, and because patriarchy teaches people across location that women are worth less than men, unless they are registered as not belonging. Yet again, these white women are less vulnerable to state violence, which performs the same type of misconduct as those deemed suspicious, as nonwhite men who are incarcerated and sometimes violated. Is there not something to be said about this relationality of suffering?

6   According to Chun, the original was quickly taken off YouTube after Todd's suicide, but one of the video's many copies reached 16 million views.

serves to foster inhabitation to illegal immigrants appealing to the DREAM Act in the hopes of receiving US citizenship.

Almost as a sidenote, Chun mentions the template becoming a "shield" (Chun 2016, 195), which connects those repeating its aesthetics into a community otherwise isolated through online hate speech and cyberbullying. I find this concept of the template useful for negotiating vulnerability and the digital as a site for collective inhabitation. I want to pick up on this notion of the template to see how it is enacted as a habituation — or rather, inhabitation — of the digital.[7] Vulnerability becomes an invitation to contribute, relate, and inscribe the user into the discourse and thus build community, rather than remain within a space of identitarian sameness. Exiting this particular framing means acknowledging that practices may err, and be unsuccessful, and that a singular act does not make for a fixed and continuous identity. This means that a collective identity is not without contradictions, and that a singular speaker may be partially "wrong," but that conflicts can be addressed through care, and without movements or people being destroyed.

Intimacy

In a context of sexual politics such as the one this book is building on, the terminology of computation explored above produces a framework that runs on slut-shaming and policing intimacies; a revelation of things supposedly private is regarded as promiscuous, even if they are happening anyway. The private realm of social reproduction is put in reference with the modalities of

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7   Chun notes that media practices matter. This is no naïve statement, but points to the actual materiality of media practices, in the form that they create and alter digital infrastructures through the production of data. Chun speaks of habitual media practices that create patterned data logics, and I argue that they are not only habitual in the sense of repeated and collective media practices. Extending the habitual to the inhabitation points out that media practices are also, first and foremost, embodied, and that the body that inserts itself into these structures is also a body that will, in some way, make them its own.

sexual regulation. Tellingly, not only does a monogamous mode not exist (computers would be inoperable if they did not leak), but also packet sniffers that reveal a computer's "promiscuity" have been termed illegal, and such programs (that reveal what is already there — making public what is believed to be private) have been equated to wiretapping (Chun 2016). The gendered terms along which computational logics are deployed (and certain actions criminalized) then shape the infrastructure and logics of the web and digital media in general, leaving these biases to proliferate within the digital as unquestioned common facts.

This mirrors and is reflective of queer visibilities and public intimacies, such as gay cruising and public sex, that are considered to be instances of failed intimacies. Queer intimacy becomes a scandal in the face of a publicity that perceives certain bodily closeness as something private and contained within a heteropatriarchal family, while also negating such privacy to queer bodies. Feminist politics that do not rely on a heteropatriarchal and bourgeois form of identity are equally confronted with outrage, when care and kinship is performed publicly in terms that are illegible to these normative forms. But the insistence on intelligibility, on remaining within public space in an othered form, can produce new intimacies and relations that irritate the status quo. As I will argue, any form of public relationality between women that does not accentuate their "specialness" (Minh-ha 1989, 159–64) as the requirement for publicity can be an act that also displaces the logics of the modular. I look to frame intimacy in the language of Haraway, as "response-ability" (Haraway 2008), to describe the capacity for responding to situations in a way that relates, that builds, rather than destructs. "Response-ability," "the ability to find responsible (accountable) actions," is a Harawayan framing that considers care, relationship, and expression and is equally guiding for my understanding and framing of intimacy. The acknowledgment of intimacy in contexts that perforate the realm of the private then has the potential to shift these segregated infrastructures often assumed as natural into alternative, more collective formations. If a scandal is produced through the publicity of something considered

private, then the disjuncture between the supposedly private experience of intimacy and the publicity of a certain space may harness that gap and shift normative ideals. Just as public intimacy is constructed as danger and threat when performed by the wrong bodies, intimacy itself is then a modality of negotiating the normative within the space of the normative.

Following this suggestion, I want to interrogate the possibilities of intimacy within the digital as a second condition for solidarity. For, without intimacy, there can be no trust, and without trust, no community worthy of its name. But I argue that this intimate form of solidarity requires reflection, as affects, responses, and emotions must all be understood as historically crafted and embodied through positionalities within a social order (Ahmed 2013). Understood as an emotional expectation toward an other, intimacy regulates social behavior and is therefore by no means something that miraculously exists on the intrapersonal level. Instead, I read intimacy as a responsible engagement with a position that is not one's own, that can be unknowable, but nonetheless evokes a response that is framed by reflexive closeness and trust. Like an acceptance of vulnerability, intimacy is the realization of dependence on, and affective knowledge of, an other *who is not like the self.* Contrary to vulnerability, which is less a matter of own choosing and more the basis of relation at all, intimacy constitutes the relations that are chosen, sometimes not without discontent. Haraway (2016) proposes "Make Kin, Not Babies" as a slogan that could arguably come to stand next to "The Personal Is Political" as the feminist war cry of the digital age.[8]

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8 Some scholars have identified "Make Kin Not Babies" to signal toward a belief in overpopulation as a problem for the planet, say, rather than the distribution of material goods. Other scholars have read the slogan as anti-maternal and thus somewhat flawed with regard to its feminist potential. I understand the claim to make kin as inclusive of actual children, but perhaps critical of their function as normative metaphors of futurity and familial values that do not extend beyond the biological. Thinking also of bell hooks's many writings on pedagogy, I wonder whether the slogan could not potentially be integrated into a new form of intergenerational

Within internet studies, intimacy has been negotiated in relation to (mediated) work and labor relations (Gregg 2011), as intimacy both *with* and *through* media technologies (Jamieson 1999; Ahmed 2010), as thus altering temporal and spatial boundaries (Hjorth and Lim 2012; Sharma 2014), and therefore negotiating boundaries of private and public, of work and leisure and of self and other (Berlant 1998). In such a reading, intimacy extends beyond the individualistic, private aspects of personhood, as emotions are contextualized as social and historically shaped — thus informing and being informed by the/a public. This may be all the more so within new media infrastructures that have already jumbled common conceptions of private and public, and made the boundaries between them more visibly porous — public corporeal intimacies facilitated through dating apps, tweeting private thoughts from intimate spaces for the public, or other forms of publicly or secretly emerging relations through leaky devices and networked technologies. With or without the awareness of others, all interrogate the boundaries posited between domesticity, respectability, the private, and the public stage of what is commonly thought of as "the political." But the internet's multiple temporalities and its contextual collapse may muddle capacities to distinguish the direction in which the response is responding. Through networked computing, intimacy has bridged private and public spaces in ways often interpreted as scandalous, while the more profound scandal — that of colonial, gendered, racial violence — often lies elsewhere.

Context collapse thus happens on various levels: the private/public convolution as well as temporal and spatial dimensions discussed throughout this book create new group identities, with specific cultural codes. Intimacy is thus a possibility of communicating in a reduced manner, where the meaning of hashtags and other discursive cyphers are common sense and thus referential systems can be used reductively, meaning that a sparse

kinship that does not rely on reductive mother–child relationships that keep the mother figures tied to domesticity.

reference may invoke a larger shared story, a shared context and genealogy. It is this form of knowing that I have to some extent seen within the analysis I presented in chapter 5, where "digital tendencies" (Pedwell 2019) are produced, seemingly intuitively, functioning like the vernacular. However, if intimacies and vernaculars are responses to a history that precedes them, then such shorthand, shared among and ingrained into communities, is cultivated, not naturally there, and can come to stand in and protect certain knowledges from easy appropriation, with what Ahmed suggests as "the pleasure of opening up to other bodies" (Ahmed 2013, 165). It is this pleasure of openness that I want to again address in its potential for solidarity. But contrary to the openness presented through the concept of vulnerability, which shields and makes opaque, this openness articulates an act of naming, of making intelligible and representing. Through such openness, I read intimacy as producing a public interface, which purports the assumption that there is more to the story, while at the same time communicating with sparest signs and identifiers. Because, as I have argued, the digital interface is only the frontend to a messy and leaky backend of networked code, the understanding that what you see is not entirely what you get is an essential learning in modular/digital worlds.

What has been colloquially dubbed "Black Twitter" (Clark 2015) is an example of a discursive space on Twitter that revolves around issues with "a black frame of reference" (Ramsey 2015) in the language and cultural codes predominantly accessible to nonwhite users. Black Twitter is often understood as an African American phenomenon, and some of the examples I present confirm these origins. However, Black Twitter has engaged Black and brown people across the globe and has initiated a series of discourses on a global scale that carry both diasporic and local inflections. Black Twitter has been most evocative as a solidarity movement, famously through #BlackLivesMatter. But even before the hashtag that is now global in uniting Black and brown people, a number of solidarity movements emerged from Black Twitter to inform other movements centered around or originating from Black and brown communities and locations

beyond the United States. How does such intimacy — as embodied connection or bond — play out in the dispersed space of the internet, often understood to be either a cold and heartless void or an engagement with disembodied minds? Here, the usual face-to-face, hand-to-body intimacy is not a quotidian practice among strangers, at least not yet.[9] And even if it was, the internet infrastructure values transactions and superficial exchange, not reflective and intimate connection. Nonetheless, many a user has been politicized through the internet, or found a community they trusted enough to be vulnerable in, despite never actually meeting in person.

The hashtag #iftheygunnedmedown was one among many that related to the killings of innocent Black bodies in Ferguson, Missouri, and elsewhere, and has broadly been grouped into the Black Lives Matter movement that received mainstream attention in response to the killing of seventeen-year-old Trayvon Martin (Everbach, Clark, and Nisbett 2018). #iftheygunnedmedown was a reaction to the discourse around the shooting of Michael Brown, the eighteen-year-old who was shot and killed by a white police officer in 2014. For Trayvon Martin, wearing a hoodie meant death — the same attire that makes up Facebook billionaire Mark Zuckerberg's uniform and that his white body has bestowed with cultural capital. When the neighborhood watch coordinator who had shot Martin was put on trial, it was this hooded sweater, in connection with the Black body of the teenager, that affirmed his presence as dangerous and became

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9   Although, surely, this will change soon enough and already first attempts are being made at taking digital forms of intimacy into the offline world. So-called social robots that are equipped with learning algorithms enabling them to recognize voices and follow communication rules are already being tested in nursing homes to reduce loneliness. An app called "huggr" wants to enable a reduction of stress and anxieties through connecting people to randomly exchange hugs based on GPS information. The app has been in its beta phase for years, hovering in the wings, ready to start once safety concerns are thoroughly addressed. It seems intimacy is a central concern within the digital, and again the assumption is that simply exposing individuals to intimate encounters will enable them to feel intimacy.

the framing through which the man's actions became righteous, an "honest mistake" (Weeks 2012). Media depictions regularly affirm this connotation of Black bodies with danger, for example, through using images of the murdered youths drinking alcohol or engaging in what appeared to be drug use, wearing heavy jewelry and enacting hand signals that unknowing viewers would easily associate with gang signs. Michael Brown, too, was depicted in such a way: the most common image used within media coverage of the story showed him wearing a basketball jersey, the right hand raised with three extended fingers. This gesture, a version of a common greeting among youth across the world, was interpreted as a gang sign by many commenting on the story, and eighteen-year-old Brown framed as a thug—the suggestion being that, despite any evidence, he probably had something up his sleeve, and if he was not culpable of this, then definitely of something else.

#iftheygunnedmedown's critique inserted itself into these racist narratives and commonly used images of the young victims that served to confirm stereotypes of Black people as unruly, dangerous, and violent. #iftheygunnedmedown proposes a counterarchive to these discourses and depictions of African American teens. The hashtag posed (Black) Twitter users the question, Which images would the media pick for their report if you were shot and killed by police? Many users used the hashtag to present at least two images—one with drink in hand, smoking a cigarette, wearing a bandana, showing hand signs; another where they were receiving a degree or diploma, wearing a suit or uniform, reading a book, helping the elderly. Users posted their own image pairs on Twitter and supplemented with the question, Which image would the media choose #iftheygunnedmedown? I read these image pairs as means of identification that illustrate the intimacy that Black Twitter users have with each other—precisely because they know that Trayvon Martin or Michael Brown might very easily have been they themselves—Black bodies in public space, their mere presence marking them as dangerous. Thus, intimacy is created through identification—"which moves or pulls the sub-

ject towards another" — through the knowledge that the fate of the young men (Martin and Brown) is tied to the Black users' own. Ahmed describes identification as aspirational, as not quite there yet: "Identification involves making likeness rather than being alike; the subject becomes 'like' the object or other only in the future" (Ahmed 2013, 126). This likeness is presented here as a negative teleology, an intimate knowledge of the closeness Black teens in the United States have to Brown's and Martin's fate. The temporality of the hashtags and their identification illustrates a difference to the strategies of distributing vulnerability through the template. The template produces a likeness through the offering up of a space of collectivity that occludes identity, but the strategies of producing intimacy function precisely through acts of naming and identification. These acts of naming produce reference both to the historical discriminatory processes through which individuals recognize their being-alike with others, meaning the framing of Black presences as abject or thuggish and thus destined to die, and to a futurity, which is aspirational, because acts of naming demand recognition of vulnerability because of these problematic histories. Note that the individual users do not express a desire to end police violence, at least not on the surface of Twitter's interface. Rather, these users demand to be seen as humans and attest to their own dysselection by critiquing the violence of representations in news stories that seem objective to white readers.

Intimacy is thus sustained through public self-identification. In the example of the hashtag #iftheygunnedmedown, this aspirational quality is expressed in the negative, a negative that reveals the systemic aspects of these individual articulations as responses to a system that devalues Black life and frames it as dangerous and criminal. The live bodies of those not gunned down give testimony to the danger of being, while themselves attesting to having to navigate constantly being read as dangerous. Because others identify the Black body in a certain way, these bodies are forced toward each other, forced to take each other's place. These expressions of solidarity thus also acknowledge that intimacy does not require sameness in identification,

because, as Ahmed observes, "becoming like them obviously requires not being them in the first place. So identification exercises a distinction between the subject and object of love" (Ahmed 2013, 126). Identification happens in difference, but this difference can also be excavated within the image pairs themselves, attesting to a multiplicity inherent to (these) identities. Artist critic Aria Dean has observed these stand-ins as solidarity specifically with regards to police violence in the United States and comes to a similar conclusion:

> This "consent not to be a single being" reflects the same fungibility that means that violence against one black body cannot be isolated and understood as being against that body alone, where I am you and you are me, where "we are all (insert #nameofpersonmurderedbypolice here)." (Dean 2016, n.p.)

The experience of being interchangeable in the face of police brutality is what draws these bodies together, but also allows for their multiplicity to emerge. Although Dean is speaking about other hashtag protests, this resonates deeply with the intimate circulation of the hashtag #iftheygunnedmedown. The hashtag resists the oppressive representations of Black life as only criminal and acknowledges what these framings intimate — they bring people together through their shared identification, thereby creating a sense of collectivity.

Template Solidarities in Digital Vulnerability

In the interlude chapter, I once more foregrounded conceptual work and argued that vulnerability is systemic, historical, constructed, and scripted onto specific bodies in a manner that Wynter has called a "dysselection" from the figure of the human. The interlude proposed that the distribution of this vulnerability may happen through the inhabitation of a shadowy presence, a template, that allows vulnerable individuals to speak and be present without being identified. This chapter reads the template as it was used to distribute vulnerability within the Blank Noise project, a movement based in Bangalore that connects users and provokes discourse on gender-based violence across India and on a transnational scale. Blank Noise expressed solidarity for #ausnahmslos in 2016, for #LoSHA in 2017, and has engaged communities in many Western countries to pay attention to India without inducing a fetishized and oversimplified reading of India as the "rape nation" (Abdulali 2018). I argue that Blank Noise has successfully harnessed what I call "template vulnerability," so as to tell stories about the systemic quality of gender-based violence through a networked and relational expression of self. Blank Noise's central intervention #INeverAskForIt is one that does not negate the power of the digital, but acknowl-

edges its modular forces and engages them in a way that circumvents identification and embraces vulnerability. It does so through what I frame as "an inhabitation of the digital" — collective-yet-opaque — through the template. As solidarities come to be through an inscription of the self into a discursive space in relation to an other, the template can be a way to reveal the internet's (and with it, larger societal) systemic vulnerabilities, and therefore critique how the already marginalized carry the burden of giving testimony of this marginalization.

With its interventions, Blank Noise negotiates the vulnerabilities of the bodies behind testimonies on gender-based violence by giving them a sense of anonymity, and yet allows them to be present, speak, and give testimony within the digital space. In line with the opportunity to inhabit and remain within the digital that the template allows for, I call these formats "inhabitations of the digital." The collective inhabitations I find within #INeverAskForIt circumvent the burden of proof, because the hashtag may circulate as a story, an image, a voice, without pushing the body behind it into a spotlight that may result in uncomfortable attention. Arguably, its effects, too, remain representational and affective. But perhaps this is the transformation that is needed, as the carceral, truth-based modality of identifying right and wrong remains with individuality in accusation and solution in problematic ways, as the #LoSHA case in chapter 5 has shown. Navigating the digital, the template becomes a temporary place from which to inhabit a particular position, which comes to displace the notion of individual identities, as this speaking position may be populated by more than one body, more than one self. Because the digital is constantly leaking, the template cannot but travel and reappear within different contexts — it thus invites contexts to collapse. With this relational inscription of the self into the template, the user participates in constructing a referent-we — both acknowledging the collective and inscribing the self into the public.

Blank Noise is a digital project that addresses gendered forms of violence within India and on a transnational plane. Emerging from an art project, Blank Noise came into being to reassert

the local understanding of sexual street harassment, commonly referred to as "eve-teasing" in India and South Asia. Blank Noise founder Jasmeen Patheja was graduating from art school with a feminist project, thinking about the role of art in creating language of empowerment and self-definition at the research-based art school Srishti in Bangalore (Ferrario 2015). Her research began with mind-mapping exercises on public space with young women, where Patheja discovered that her participants tended to associate public spaces with a range of negative emotions and terms. "Aggression," "staring," "vulnerable," "groping," "feeling sick inwards" (Losh 2013, n.p.) were much more dominant terms on the map than what Patheja had hoped to be able to link with positive civic participation and cultural interaction. Her work then started focusing on raising public awareness about where these anxieties were coming from: "As an art student, I was interested in feminist art practices, feminist activism, and the role of an artist in social transformation — namely how art can heal and be co-created. Secondly, I too have experienced harassment. The frustration and disappointment I wanted to express made me realise that there was actually no space for people to talk about it and even feel safe bringing it up," said Patheja (Ferrario 2015, n.p.).

I first met Jasmeen Patheja through a fellowship at the Centre for Internet and Society in 2013, where she was an informant on a project that explored the way digital natives were using information and communication technologies for political expression, and I was researching forms of digital participation. But it was only during my second stay in Bangalore in 2017 that I could engage with Blank Noise more deeply, which had by then already made a long and difficult journey as a movement, to suddenly have the promise of more regular and institutionalized funding on the horizon. Throughout my stay in Bangalore, I had the chance to sit down with Patheja for chats and discussions, mostly informal, because of our intersecting networks. I was able to witness a time where Blank Noise was processing a significant shift from being a movement to a structure with slightly more stability, as Patheja had recently received a larger grant that

would fund office space and fixed contracts for additional staff to process requests and support interventions.[1] Patheja has since been able to employ two individuals and actively engages with undergraduate students, inviting them to participate in Blank Noise projects on the campus of the Bangalore-based Srishti Institute of Art, Design and Technology, where the office was now located. Blank Noise began as an interrogation into solidarity through art, but it has become a successful social movement that is known across India and showcased in spaces interested in the intersections of activism, art, and feminism across the globe.

In our conversations, Patheja described half of the work Blank Noise does as finding a language to discuss sexual violence and street harassment; the other half is building public interventions — their practice is deeply ingrained in constant negotiation and thus itself research-based. These interventions focus on creating the much-needed space for conversations by building on experiences of the victimized and being oriented toward their needs. Blank Noise builds communities through active engagements, inviting individuals to appropriate and contribute through guiding quotes on their website, such as "an idea has no significance or meaning until someone makes it their own" (Blank Noise, "About Us," n.p.). As an urban-dwelling cis woman, Patheja saw the necessity of using the capacities she had access to for creating frameworks for less privileged women to find spaces to express themselves, and thus strongly focused on questions of accessibility and the making available of as much of her findings and infrastructures as possible. But she also wanted to respond to the real needs of the women around her. To do so, the most pressing issue was alleviating gender-based anxieties — the workshops identified them to be emerging from the normalized objectification of femme bodies in Indian public space and from the incapability to speak to this objectification. In part, Patheja identified the reason to be the way harassment itself was discursively framed as "eve-teasing," which sounds almost playful, but evokes Eve as the biblical

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1   Conversation with Jasmeen Patheja, January 23, 2018.

figure who went against God's word and her better judgment to be seduced by the devil. In such a reading, the blame is put on woman-as-Eve, who should have known better and should have done as she was told. Possibly, this reading rears its colonial head, for ancient Hindus, Mughals, and Buddhists did not consider women or promiscuity as sinful — in precolonial India, there was no Eve. However, the term also invites an allusion to Krishna, the eighth manifestation of Vishnu and a powerful deity in Hindu mythology.[2] Krishna, the story goes, is always teasing his beloved Radha, and although they unite in the manifestation of divine energy, they are never married because their duties pull them apart (Badrinath 2006). And though this may sound less problematic than the story of Eve, this myth, polluted by heteronormative gender norms, justifies modern tropes of "boys will be boys," because Krishna's duties are more important than the commitment to the woman he supposedly loves, but his activities, sometimes downright evil and hurtful, are trivialized as pranks and teasing. Although Hindu mythology has a fluid perception of genders, contemporary Hindu-nationalist thought has rendered this reading to the effects of normalizing heterosexuality as the divine plan (Meghani 2009).

I have already discussed the difficulties of disentangling "Western" and "authentic" positions, readings, and practices, and Blank Noise, too, must be read as oscillating between being positioned as either Western or authentically Indian, perhaps again showing the complications of women's agency, so often co-opted in concerns about nation or empire (Rajan 1998; Mitra 2012). As these short illustrative remarks show, the concept of eve-teasing can be traced back to religious and precolonial myths about gendered relations just as much as to Western gender norms and does not require "authentic" origins to be understood as problematic (Meghani 2009; Williams 2006). Eve-teasing not only trivializes gender-based harassments as innocuous play, but it also puts the blame on women, suggesting that it is their behavior that invites teasing. The provocation lies in acts

2   Thanks to Ira Raja for suggesting I read the term in this frame.

as simple as wearing jeans, since women in Western clothes are constantly presented by the conservative Right as loose or corrupted, which happily distorts remnants of the Gandhian notion of wearing local cloth to undermine the British: appropriating the *charkha* and wearing the *kaddhi* for spiritual salvation in problematic notions of purity that erases the Hindu Right's own Western or state-capitalist aspirations (Rajan 1998). Blank Noise proposes a shift in focus, where individuals are addressed as part of the community without authenticity checks that tend to burden the individual body, to instead build on individual experiences, to show their interconnectedness and care for the bodies that are made vulnerable in this way.

Beginning in 2003, the first efforts focused on shifting the responsibility for addressing street harassment from victims to perpetrators, but also to idle onlookers who walk by unaffected.[3] Blank Noise has since created spaces for women to speak up on the events of sexual violence perpetrated against them, and to learn to identify and critique such violence in its subtler and structural iterations. Blank Noise has turned to analyses of pop culture through Bollywood films and songs people sing in the streets, which has resonated with quotidian life across communities. The movement thus addresses the structural quality that teaches gendered normativity according to binary imaginaries and the iterations of desire that Bollywood has played its part in normalizing. The levels of engagement differ with each intervention, but they are all tinged with pop culture, and thus engage people on a social level that is not only easily accessible, but can be considered enjoyable and create inhabitable situations within environments subconsciously perceived as hostile. Despite these many variants, one of the more serious projects that directly channels experiences of gender-based violence and

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3   And thus two years before the globally recognized iHollaback movement was founded and eight years before the first slut walk happened in Toronto. I say this simply to point out the faulty perceptions within anecdotes of the West being somehow more advanced or more progressive than other places.

harassment has been highly successful, and Blank Noise has archived it under the hashtag #INeverAskForIt.

The project reaches beyond its predominantly middle-class participants (Blank Noise refers to all participants as action heroes/sheroes/theyroes) to engage immediate neighborhood communities across class and caste boundaries in a way that continues to be rather unusual, not only in India. Blank Noise invites anyone to become an action s*hero,[4] and is continuously working on its own inclusivity. Initially, Blank Noise implemented a masculine form of address and called their participants "action heroes." After Raya Sarkar came forward (see chapter 5), Patheja felt the need to reflect on this masculine-centric terminology, especially for a project negotiating gender-based violence and marginalized voices.[5] In the present, Blank Noise community members refer to themselves as "action heroes," "sheroes," "theyroes," "s_heroes," and any other variant, but centrally the focus on action and activation remains. To me this shift suggests an ability to admit to shortcomings and learn from others in an affective and compassionate manner, something that Patheja illustrated also with regard to caste inequalities in addressing street harassment. Understanding that physical spaces in the Indian public have been constructed to omit a female presence, her first step was finding spaces of articulation at all: Patheja's first instinct was to photograph those who harassed her on the street, and she put the images up online — including what the harassers had said or done, in the hopes of finding catharsis, engagement, or exchange. But she soon realized that this opened up questions of caste — she,

4   Blank Noise uses several variants of expressing the gendered multiplicity of identities and usually either names heroes, sheroes, and theyroes, or uses a generic form that includes the gender gap. In line with this suggestion of openness, I have chosen to continue using the asterisk to leave the term open for ambiguous and nonbinary expressions of gender identity, but also not to erase the fact that gender-based violence is most often directed toward an embodied expression that harnesses and potentially alters structural ideas of femininity, which is a complicated way of saying that, in most cases, gender-based violence targets women and femmes.

5   Conversation with Jasmeen Patheja, January 30, 2018.

a *savarna* cis woman, who was predominantly being addressed by lower-caste men on the street, men who may not have access to the internet in the same way and could therefore not defend themselves. Patheja did not want to run the risk of reiterating the stereotype of the hypersexual Dalit before an upper-caste community. She then realized that she did not want to shame those who would not be able to respond,[6] or to reproduce the tropes that it was only the poor and lower-caste men harassing upper-caste women. And since she was looking for catharsis, Patheja decided to center on women, hoping to produce a collective and even transnational sense of agency based on communal creations of identity through storytelling.

#INeverAskForIt: Resisting Modular Codification

> What makes so many women and girls across geographies remember the clothes you wore when you experienced any kind of sexual threat, intimidation, violence? Your garment is your story, your witness, your truth. You are not alone. Your garment will stand together with another garment: connecting your experience with another Action Hero's. Together, we are strong. We are safe. We resonate. I Never Ask For It.[7]

The way of engaging with this intervention has shifted from time to time. But from the beginning, central parameters remain: #INeverAskForIt invites s*heros to share photos of the garments they wore when they experienced sexual violence, contextualized through personal recollections of the encounter. Based on the premise that victims can mostly remember what they wore when encountering sexual violence, and countering the assumption that clothes are to blame for the encounter,

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6   A crucial distinction to the shaming that happened through LoSHA. The academics accused on the list not only refused to respond to the accusations, but when they did, they did so in national media outlets such as The Wire.

7   From the Blank Noise Tumblr page: http://ineveraskforit-testimonials.tumblr.com/.

#INeverAskForIt builds material testimonials of clothing via photo contributions that are framed as "witness, memory and voice" (Blank Noise, n.d.). The hashtag functions across several platforms and contributions are posted to Twitter, submitted via email, can be recorded offline at the Blank Noise headquarters, or submitted to the "I Never Ask For It" Tumblr. Ever since having been able to invest in more stable infrastructure, all submissions are archived on the Blank Noise homepage.

Contributors can either photograph their garments or donate them to Blank Noise directly, an opportunity to get rid of garments potentially connoted with triggering memories, perhaps too meaningful to simply throw away. This allows for participation on a fairly low scale of commitment, which still has the potential to be a cathartic moment for the abused. Blank Noise can itself be seen as a proxy that safe-keeps the garments as testimony and memory, but its dominant focus for the contributors is on giving voice through as many avenues as possible. Next to the visual and textual narratives, the Blank Noise website also provides the possibility of submitting audio and video recordings, thereby not limiting the storytelling to the ability to read or write in a certain language — a central condition of access in a country with twenty-two official languages and where a little under 25 percent of the nation was illiterate in 2011 when the project started (Indian Census 2011). The collected testimonials were first published on the #INeverAskForIt Tumblr[8] page, and have been shared across many dominant social media sites, such as Twitter, Facebook, and Instagram. The garments were photographed and put up online. In addition, they could physically be sent to or dropped off at the Blank Noise headquarters, a helpful avenue to include people without smartphones or easy access to email and computers. These garments were publicly exhibited at

8   Since beginning this research, Blank Noise has collected the dispersed actions and tied them into the project website, which went online in early 2017. This has happened in parallel with Blank Noise establishing itself from a movement to an organization, with new funding opportunities, and founder Jasmeen Patheja has since been able to employ two women to work on processing the data and organizing activities.

an event at Bangalore's central bus stop, with another following at Bangalore's well-known Cubbon Park, places where people gather, have time to engage, and potentially come back to. In this way, #INeverAskForIt directed itself toward a broader public from the beginning, and functioned in a way that acknowledged the continuity and entanglements of online and offline spaces, when many public interventions did not. Patheja and Blank Noise planned to repeat these events on a transnational scale in 2023, where nodal points of public significance would serve to display the clothes once more.[9] #INeverAskForIt's and Patheja's experiences with documenting her harassers informed initial aspects of the intervention. They are illustrative of the particular situation in India, where people's access to the digital sphere varies according to gendered, age-specific, and geospatial dimensions, and, of course, according to class status. #INeverAskForIt is indicative of the continuities between offline and online spaces in general, meaning that its method produces learnings that reach towards the universal. The significance of recognizing infrastructures and public spaces that may seem universal as gendered, but also showing specificities of race, caste, and class, is an attempt to make visible and undo the modular form in which contemporary worlds are built. #INeverAskForIt, rather than formulating specific teleological demands that can be reincorporated into carceral state politics, focuses on storytelling. Truth-telling and testimony is not put under general scrutiny, but can simply be a means for individuals to build community in a shared recognition that binds individuals together at the margins of seemingly all-inclusive public space.

Beyond the focus on garments, contributors may give as much or as little details around the contexts of their assault as they like. This produces a range of narratives that make a case for testimonies of garments as means of witnessing but also that express affective states and desires that do not succumb to a narrative of the proper victim. Some of the images merely depict items of clothing and the hashtag, but others include

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9 Conversation with Jasmeen Patheja, January 23, 2018.

long insights into what happened, poetic negotiations of pain, or wishes and expectations for the future. Some posts articulate how acts not recognized as harassment made them feel unsafe, such as leering, being followed, or men making a point to get out of the bus at the same time as the women. Some accuse a certain uncle anonymously, or express fear of crossing a certain road where streetlights are yet to be fixed. #INeverAskForIt can thus be read as an archive that collects femme-specific affective infrastructures and negotiations of safety beyond carceral punishment of individual perpetrators. Online, the testimonials are all built up in the same way, mostly with a picture of one or several items of clothing, the words "I Never Ask For It" stamped on to the picture in a frame, and, if provided, a text recounting the incident appears when a cursor hovers over the image on the website. The images are set up before a neutral background and in subtle colors, the box with the lettering is always legible, framing it, producing the template through repetition. Because there is no body behind the garments, I see the framed letters shield and support the bodyless garment as an expressive form that relies on the absence of the actual enfleshed body to protect it from the interrogating gaze of the public. These depictions thus differ, say, from the mainstream representations of sexual assault victims I discussed in the case of #Cologne in chapter 4, which did not let women speak for themselves but claimed to do so through textual images. Before the background of the seemingly subjective but factually generic testimony by *Focus* magazine ("women accuse"), the subjective, situated notion of an "I" in #INeverAskForIt is a subjective testimony and invitation, since the "I" is as much the I of the person the garments belong to as is the I of the user encountering the images online.

I thus read #INeverAskForIt as a template that allows for those who have encountered gendered violence to inhabit the digital and speak from a "shadowy presence" (Chun 2016, 31), instead of having to expose oneself completely — as is usually the case within judicial processing of sexual harassment cases. The burden of proof insisted upon before the law often leaves victims of sexual harassment unacknowledged or feeling all

the more violated, not only because gender-based violence predominantly takes place when people are alone and this results in a he-said/she-said situation when taken to court, but also because victims can be retraumatized in the process through inquisitive and insensitive questioning, expressions of disbelief, people speaking out in defense of the alleged perpetrator, and so on. It should come as no surprise that (despite an increase in reporting) victims are still very often not believed or blamed for occurrences of harassment, but also that the forms of violence are varied and most of the lesser violations do not leave physical marks or reason for judicial forms of redress — which, in any case, is often not the type of justice victims might be looking for. Remembering that most cases of gender-based violence include personal relationships, reporting an intimate friend, partner, or family member may not be the most desirable solution, and Blank Noise offers a way of navigating trauma beyond the carceral and punitive state. #INeverAskForIt circumvents the need for ultimate certainty and long searches for factuality, as the clothes are virtual embodiments that represent a story but occlude identity and, with it, the modular fetish of identification and authenticity. The absence of bodies shields those giving testimony, providing actual safety from further harassment since bodily markers, full names, or even IP addresses are inaccessible (even to hackers), because all uploads to the site are processed by Blank Noise. The template then transforms the image to be aesthetically identifiable as part of #INeverAskForIt, via common form, the stamped image relating the hashtag to the movement and the metadata based on the Blank Noise server protecting the contributors' data bodies. The image may circulate and leak all it wants, but the traces always lead back to Blank Noise, be it on the level of algorithms, representation, or design. This is important, because Blank Noise is open to appropriation, and the content that fills the Blank Noise website is deliberately framed as freely accessible and shareable, a nod to the virality and leakages of digital infrastructures, where images and data are never safe from appropriation. Although the images invite circulation, the collapsed contexts of the digital cannot cause

bodily harm because the images are too innocuous to repeat the pain inflicted on individual bodies when taken out of context, but the visible and invisible formatting leaves the images traceable and tied to the Blank Noise project.

I sat down in 2018 to talk to Patheja about the implications her movement had had on negotiations of both sexual violence and digital activism. I met her at Shrishti School of Art, Design and Technology, where the Blank Noise offices were now located, to discuss the developments and framings that the group had thought about, and how they had played out — both in the digital and the offline spaces of public significance. In our conversations that I documented in field notes, I got the impression that Patheja was constantly aware of the relative privilege her position as a *savarna*, urban, and relatively fair-skinned Indian woman awarded her.[10] From this position, appropriation was a good thing, meaning that anyone may engage with the interventions Blank Noise had started — Patheja formulates this offer of appropriation as an act of solidarity, instead of detachment. The internet as a space of appropriation allows Blank Noise to share resources freely and willingly with those who might otherwise not have access to such knowledge repositories and archives. Blank Noise was exemplary for something I have noticed in later variants of Indian (and also other) digital feminisms: the focus on providing resources and infrastructures for community-building and exchange, rather than propositioning means to go forward with them. Blank Noise does not work from a position of expertise, but relies on the demands and ideas of the community for their content. I got the sense that this was a deliberate decision, precisely because the project centralizes on reaching out to poorer or more marginalized women and queers, who may not always be able to contribute directly, but can nonetheless profit from an acknowledgment of experiences similar to their own, of relatable and relational storytelling on the site, and in public space. These images provided in the template format thus have the capacity to affect and be affected, their formations

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10   Conversation with Jasmeen Patheja, January 23, 2018.

may morph and the inhabitations may change, but, in part at least, I see its force stemming precisely from its ability to circulate and be appropriated. Blank Noises focuses on offering these spaces for articulation and making them accessible. The question of appropriating identities becomes unproblematic, because Patheja sees the community to consist of precisely those people participating, not of a previously identified specific group with a preidentified specific aim. Gender is thus co-constructed with and through the Blank Noise webpage.

Patheja understands Blank Noise's function as primarily one of community-building, rather than actively engaging with governments or organizing traditional forms of protest. Notions of authenticity, righteousness, and fairness are perhaps displaced, but only because Blank Noise focuses on inhabiting and gaining a sense of community, on feeling less alone. The idea that the specificity of the body is occluded may seem like a renaturalized universalism and the template a modular form par excellence, and, given the discussion of the #LoSHA case, it may seem problematic to not be able to respond or take action on a more specific basis of identity. But in understanding identity as a result of a violent and modular process of identification, solidarities are more inclusive precisely when overriding the colonial sense of authenticity and difference that continues to shape contemporary politics. Because Patheja's positionality is arguably privileged, she constructed Blank Noise in a way that those contributing would be able to negotiate their own needs of identification and intelligibility, without having to adhere to Patheja's standards or subject position. Such a fluid and open perception of identity seems to be indicative for online social movements and the increased mobility inherent to digital globalization. A notion of identity as multiple and on the move contests the immense and omnipresent attempts of capture by state and private institutions that continuously enclose precisely on this openness through modular logics, for example, in a renewed fetish of categorization and naming implemented through real name policies and unique identifiers. Instead, Blank Noise's openness proposes a nonteleological form of activism that cir-

cumvents the propositional and perhaps the traditional form of causality the modular has instated as normative. Instead of mistaking such a nonteleological form with silence or the absence of speech, I argue that reading these forms as inhabitations opens itself up to a more speculative and care-centered approach to activism and solidarity.

Blank Noise is thus able to give space to articulations that have yet to be organized into a form of intelligibility: #INever-AskForIt allows for a form that goes beyond the conventional framework of the political, to instead activate affective infrastructures and relational forms of embodiment. Such a modality not only focuses on care, kinship, and solidarity, it displaces the structure of the modular and undoes its preemptive temporality. Instead of having to translate individual acts and narratives into what has been called the "propositional form" (Butler and Cazier 2017), Blank Noise can be seen to open itself up to a more speculative language, where the focus is on memory, witness, voice — on a collective sharing and articulating of vulnerabilities and desires. Arguably, relations become multidirectional, and claims are put forward without a specific linear aim. Instead, the inhabitations negotiate quotidian desires on a small communal scale, directed toward communities rather than to state policies. Blank Noise expresses the desire for action and solidarity from below and from within. It is constantly working toward creating a community that puts forward notions of self-governance, birthed out of affectively shared desires. I understand these practices as attempts of healing through collective negotiations of trauma and time, and as small, quotidian desires.

As I was looking through the #INeverAskForIt archive, one of the images that stayed with me most was of a red *kurta*, a traditional Indian, loose, collarless shirt usually made of cotton or silk, which can be worn in everyday or formal settings. I don't know why I remember it so clearly, but this version of the simple and quotidian garment stood out to me on the website from the start. Perhaps because it was one of the first images I had seen in the series, or I had visited the website so many times during my research that the red *kurta* with yellow and

black embroidery simply stood out. Perhaps it was the arm that held the *kurta*; it was the only image where a hint of the flesh was present, but I never knew whether it was really the fleshed individual that had discarded the *kurta*, or perhaps one of the Blank Noise people documenting a garment that had been sent in or dropped off at the office. Maybe it didn't matter. Perhaps it stayed with me because the story it told was one of hope and desires, and not of violence and pain. The contributor going by the name "Sapna" told the story of how their favorite garment, this red *kurta*, hung limp in the closet after their husband died. Sapna began wearing what is customary for a Hindu widow: traditional white garments and shaven head. After having done so for five years, Sapna decided to drop the traditional mourning dress, and one day put on a special garment they kept in their closet, the red *kurta*. The *kurta* obviously bothered the community; Sapna describes being harassed by members of their community and insulted for acting inappropriately, for wearing red. But in their story, they do not seem spiteful, their desires are not carceral: Sapna dreams of driving to the ocean, dipping their toe in the water, feeling the wind blow in their now-grown hair. The red *kurta* embodied these seemingly quotidian desires and willfulness, capturing them in the bold red and the playful embroidery, circulating them among users and visitors of the Blank Noise website. To me, as I looked at the *kurta*, Sapna was present. Although I had never met them, their desires, affects, and stories spoke to me through the digital template and their favorite dress. I could not but see that Sapna had inhabited the template and made it their own to tell their story. At the same time, they had shared not only their story but an affective digital object that would let others inhabit the story, inviting others to process their own stories and experiences through Sapna's, and express their (gendered, embodied, and situated) humanness beyond a normative form.

Although the digital glosses over bodily specificities by collapsing contexts, the discarded clothes give the viewer a very mundane sense of subjectivity, relations, and desires. Cases such as Sapna's articulate a subject through the clothes it has

discarded, producing a relationship between vulnerability and safety, between visibility and the invisible, unarticulable identity. Regarding the images of the *kurta* made me wonder where this s*hero was now and how old, how young they might be. I imagined their now-long hair being tussled by Bombay wind. I imagined them giggling like the girls I had seen loitering at the promenade before Girgaum Chowpatty, or dipping their toes into the ocean in the anonymity of the crowd gathering there for its spectacular sunsets. This speculative evocation reminded me that there is always more to be known, that images only tell a sliver of the truth. Sapna's accountability is not toward inquiring state mechanisms, not toward the question of this being a judicial case of harassment or not. Sapna simply refuses community harassment as the desire to define and fixate them or their desires. Because notions of veracity have served women little in the discourse on sexual violence, I see the template form displace the propositional and teleological one, inhabiting and remaining instead of demanding and critiquing. Sapna and their peers make no carceral demands, but express a desire to be seen, remembered, heard — witness, memory, voice.

Beyond these affective frameworks, Sapna's contribution does not evade critique of the violence of community surveillance and patriarchy. The people harassing Sapna were perpetrators from within their community, who had either witnessed them wearing white clothes over years or knew them intimately enough to know their status as a widow. Although there is no explicit narration of what happened, Sapna's story tells the tale of how "the truth" of their desires was irrelevant to their community, which subjects them to their communal morals and values ascertained as "true" and righteous according to a patriarchal standard. Meanwhile, Sapna's red *kurta*, arguably expressing their own "truth," becomes the object upon which both their desires and their humiliation may hinge. Through the template, the *kurta* becomes an "indexical medium" (Keeling 2005) that points toward the contexts in which it was produced, but also indexes discourses on safety and danger, and how they are entangled in political framings. The red *kurta*, taken out of

context, signifies nothing reprehensible and thus makes claims toward a universal framework — that women should be able to wear what they want without being reprimanded. But the specificity in which it appears — the perhaps older, perhaps dispossessed widow, already ostracized from her community and lacking a husband — allows the template to carve out a space for previously unintelligible bodies that are decontextualized only in the sense that its context did not allow for a reading of Sapna's agency and desires that position them within the realm of the human. The personal physicality of the damaged body is not explicit, but it is accentuated upon through the body's absence from the depictions. The images thus present an embodied mind, but also illustrate quite literally how the body is constantly produced and reproduced by material, semiotics, and discourse, some of which are harnessed and automatized through technological infrastructures. The internet and networked computing reflect such understandings of identity and being that suggest relational entities acting in concert. Online, the distinction of where one body ends and another begins is disrupted by the revelation that the digital produces an "other-than-human embodiment," rather than disembodiment (Clough 2018, xxxii). Of course, the template is not the body. But it represents embodiment, and suggests continuities between analog and digital, virtual and flesh, mind and body.

The Blank Noise website is a space that centralizes the dispersed vulnerabilities by providing templates from which users may speak without becoming targets themselves. I read the inhabitation as an expression of the body and its desires that are offered to a community in good faith, which yet again leads me to an understanding that the contributors both validate and are validated by Blank Noise's framing. Without them, the movement would not exist, just as the individual voices are amplified and contextualized through Blank Noise. The focus on storytelling, on the material circulation of indexical bodies that are protected but may express desires, and the community-building that inscribes the "we" as it builds it, leaves behind the narrative that someone assaulted will remain a victim forever, or even that

it is shameful to be one, that victimhood makes people immobile or passive. Just as media narratives may only hint at what might have happened, and are always partial in their perspective while being contextualized as representations of the real, the general gist is that one may not need to know every detail, if the testimonies of women were believed with more frequency or appropriate avenues for community healing were put in place. Because the interventions work to fulfil the needs of their contributors, but do so in the open publicity of the internet, the aspect of carceral opposition is arguably circumvented — it doesn't matter how terrible or less terrible the experiences were, because the aim is not to compare levels of pain or humiliation so as to ascertain the level of appropriate punishment. Instead, the stories shared via the hashtag critique the ubiquity and normalcy, with which such encroachments happen in a variety of forms. Implicitly, the sharing of mediated vulnerabilities creates community.

Blank Noise thus navigates the multiplicity of subjective space; its contributors are represented within the ambiguities of specific location and global solidarities. The action s*heroes are conjoined in a complex network; the result of it is the inhabitation and distribution of a repeating template, a constant reminder of the ubiquity of gendered violence and oppression, as both mutate and change within multiple axes of discrimination (as when Blank Noise switched from "heroes" to "s*heroes" after #LoSHA). The women and others who lay testimony to #INeverAskForIt join in a collective form of embodiment, which constitutes itself exactly through the absence of a specific body, and thus distributes individual vulnerability. Usually not marking a body means that the viewer imagines derivatives of man2.0 (in this case, probably an upper-caste, light-skinned Hindu woman as the viable victim of assault), but with #INeverAskForIt the templates allow for marginalized peoples to express their stories as "the default" instead of as a "special interest story" (Haraway 1988). Even if it runs the risk of misunderstandings and oppositional readings — the risk that comes with not revealing all there is to reveal — the story can be circulated in the world

because its bodily vulnerability is mediated by the Blank Noise website. The garments themselves become "memory, witness, voice," their relevance is underlined by the public framing Blank Noise gives these garments, as much as the ability to control the narrative behind that memory, witness, and voice. In the global and nonteleological arena of the Blank Noise website, Sapna's respectability is not (cannot be) questioned by the red *kurta* she wears, pragmatically, because the website does not have a comment section. But in its simplicity as object of consumption it also demands a reevaluation of the wearer. Because the red *kurta* can circulate, arguably without infringing upon personal rights of the embodied individual, Sapna's story can reach a different level of intelligibility and visibility. Because her story is protected by the boundaries and contextualization of the Blank Noise website and the template design, context collapse can only occur in a way that invites identification, that invites others to inscribe themselves into the same space of expression.

In this way, questions of appearances, community backgrounds, localities, and sexuality are less dominant,[11] since the depictions of garments without bodies point to an almost imaginative victim. The images reroute any charge of authenticity or lack thereof, but return the articulations to reference a more systemic quality of gender-based violence through the repeating framework of the template. It is the clothes that code these experiences "female" without presupposing what this might mean; their testimony through personal stories (the focus on interiority) make them woman-as-human, without presupposing any natural or authentic notion of "womanhood" or a reductive "we" that goes beyond a singular moment of circulation-as-inhabitation. Arguably, these expressions need not even be gendered, and can extend the notion of victimhood in a way that turns again to the perpetrator, for, irrespective of the victim body and appearance, the victim did not ever ask for its victimization. Rather than address the perpetrator directly, however, Blank Noise appeals to mass culture, and the way such cases are

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11   Although clothes do, of course, also hint at these characteristics.

usually discussed or mediated in the public — spectators become enveloped to interrogate their own participation in the systemic quality of gender-based violence when they do not intervene in the public acts of sexual harassment that happen on a daily basis or through the cultural products mentioned at the beginning of the chapter. Assisted by informed action sheroes, theyroes, and heroes who can point out specificities of location, for example, by engaging directly with the communities present at public events, such as the exhibitions displaying the garments, spectators are offered the opportunity of engaging in a critique of street harassment in playful and quotidian ways. Other than the clothes, there are no markers of individuality, and the contributions float in an ambivalent space between anonymity and naming.

In times of digital enhanced photography or video material, it seems to raise more suspicion when things are actually caught on camera than if they are omitted (Kunstmann 2012, 3). The depictions in #INeverAskForIt do not engage with this ambivalence between real and constructed testimony, even on a technical level. Since there is no accusation, no visual body, the attention is merely directed to the mass number of garments, which stand for the mass number of people who have experienced sexual harassment, even before #metoo ever became the dominant space to discuss gendered violence online across the globe. Users who post are not identifiable beyond their first names and items of clothing. The absence of the bodies evades the question of authenticity, but simultaneously inserts the body as something that has been fragmented and possibly broken by long histories of subjection that go beyond this exact moment. In this way, the testimonials receive a new, unquestionable truth-value, which is subtler and situated, but also has greater effect as it reverberates among the community, is low-level in terms of engagement, but makes strong visual claims about the frequency of gender-based violence, without the risk of putting the already vulnerable bodies in harm's way again. Therefore, #INeverAskForIt addresses the systemic quality of gendered violence, rather than pointing out individuals who commit such acts, but also burdens the viewer instead of the victim.

Still, the individual depiction of one testimony, one set of clothing, one body that is present in its absence, advocates an individual and its capacity for "self-elaboration"[12] (Osucha 2009, 78), the capacity that according to Osucha allows for interiority and a reformulation of humanness. It is only in speaking for the self that the body regains agency over its scriptedness, and in elaborating the self, in connection and relation to a collective template, the Blank Noise action s*heroes participate, become visible, become. This is also evident in the way Blank Noise explores its own name on its website:

> **Blank:** *that which is not allowed meaning, form or articulation*

> **Noise:** *that which heightens, builds itself.*

In this understanding, Blank Noise is itself the template, the blank, which allows for what is otherwise perceived as noise to build itself, articulate interiority, hurt, emotions, desires, affects. It addresses those who are not allowed to speak and calls upon them to use Blank Noise to do so, relates to them and suggests they are not alone.

Because the intervention addresses the irrelevance of clothes for the experience of harassment, it can not only be read as a precursor to the slut-walks happening all across the globe in later years. Further, it is a premediated response to the critique on slut-walks, which argued that it privileged able-bodied, cis-

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12   Invoking a history of nineteenth-century US media culture protocols, Osucha points to the racialized regime of photographic depictions. Her examples point to modes of representation, where photographs of individuals are reserved for white bodies, while people of color are usually represented in groups. This motion ties white bodies into a cultural formation of what she calls "self-elaboration," the possession of one's own image and recognition of the depicted subject as an individual with certain rights. In her explanation, people of color represent the backdrop, ornamental figures with no rights and no voice. The depiction of each testimony can therefore be seen as empowering, as it represents individuals and not types, a privilege that, according to Osucha, is traditionally reserved for whites (Osucha 2009).

gendered women with a Western, Christian, or secular background. Contrary to those street-based activities, Blank Noise was able to channel other avenues of access that did not distinctively hinge on the figure of the slut. Whereas in other parts of the world the term has become a moniker for the liberated woman, wearing what she wants and being explicitly sexual, in India it is regarded with the legitimate concern of an illiberal call for women to perform their sexual liberation. This can translate into a desire to perform for men, and thus runs the risk of being fixated into a hegemonic exchange for social currency (Berlant 2011; Bhattacharjya 2018). With #INeverAskForIt, covering certain body parts, having a severe disability, or being otherwise unable to show face at a street protest (because of childcare duties, curfews,[13] religious duties, etc.) would not be an obstacle, as sending a picture would not necessitate action s*heroes leaving the house or revealing their identities and faces, even if they are invited to do so, should they wish it. The template pictures become digital objects of circulation, which can be shared without the dangers of context collapse that so often distort viral messages and identity performances within social media. Because of its template format and Blank Noise's aesthetic identification, the images necessarily refer back to Blank Noise and its framing of the discourse, singular images are "branded" as part of Blank Noise's framework through hashtags and the design of the template. In this way, "membership" (Dean 1996) — meaning who

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13   Imposing curfews seems to be a favorite solutionist pastime of the Indian government across party lines. Curfews, often accompanied with dry days (where selling alcohol is prohibited), are constantly imposed so that no riots happen on the streets, e.g., on or prior to election days, from a certain hour at night, in university hostels, and at public institution housing, always in the name of safety and security. They can be invoked as emergencies, constantly the case in Kashmir, or as part of the set of rules that regulate quotidian life, as in women's hostels on university campuses. One of the biggest movements against curfews for women is the digital feminist movement *pinjra todd* ("break the cage") that has been central in organizing an intersectional fight to end sexist containment of women at university hostels in the name of safety.

constitutes the "we" — is constantly reflected upon, and can shift from moment to moment to accommodate difference.

The templates are therefore reproductions without originals: they inhabit an ever-changing digital world in an ever-changing and yet remaining kinship network, just as they produce situated stories and specific embodied representations. The templates deconstruct the notion of authentic womanhood, of the ideal feminist subject, but also of authentic postcolonial expression, which posits feminism as a Western concept problematically antagonistic to Indian traditions. The images are testimony to a "fake real," they are actual digital objects, but there is no way of authenticating the testimonies and their claims to authenticity, beyond the structural knowledge of the omnipresence and frequency of gender-based violence that they yet again attest to. At the same time, the embodied testimonies and quotidian desires that garments such as the red *kurta* give evidence to make claims to a real — meaning enfleshed — subject with a specific (but not exponentially articulated) body and positionality. Ironically, the only moment of context collapse is then the enfleshed encounter, where expectations of community are met with the actual bodies that have contributed to the network. As Blank Noise stages interventions into public offline space again and again, contributors have ample opportunities to meet, beyond their digital, templated connections. Here, it is not the overwhelming need to navigate multiple audiences in one space, but multiple spaces suddenly reduced to one embodied community that evokes a realization of overlap and community across difference.

Beyond Single-Axis Solidarities

The first event was a public exhibition of all the garments collected at the time, which was accompanied by other forms of community engagement, such as active conversations with passers-by, documenting reactions, and action s*heroes explaining the impetus behind the collected garments. Against criticism that Blank Noise might be a movement for upper-caste people

only, the movement has managed to engage with an auto-driver community outside the doors of the Blank Noise offices in Yelahanka. Auto- or rickshaw-drivers in India have a bad reputation. The reports of being overcharged or tricked lend themselves to more general assessments of auto-drivers as untrustworthy and by extension dangerous in a classist moral panic. Blank Noise's experience, Patheja tells me, was quite to the contrary.[14] The auto-driver community in Yelahanka agreed to take what Blank Noise calls a "Safe City Pledge" after being invited to visit the garment exhibition at Srishti. The Safe City Pledge can mean different things for different people. Women have taken a pledge to walk alone at night, to insert their bodies into the space to demand that it should be safely accessible to them. Parents have taken pledges to teach their youth respect and consent. Boys have pledged to become aware of the effects their rowdy behavior may have on women and girls. For the Yelahanka auto-driver community it meant that the drivers were not only willing to engage with the ubiquity of sexual harassment and gender-based violence, but were invited to think about moments that may have made women feel unsafe in their vehicles, or where, driving through the city, they could pay attention to situations that could become threatening to women. The auto-drivers from Yelahanka that took the pledge now drive through the city with large yellow stickers on their rickshaws that identify them as Yelahanka Action Heroes. In this way, the template is returned to the offline world, and participants can be identified as allies beyond the single event and in more quotidian situations, as the stickers visibly signal toward the movement in an offline version of the hashtag.

Blank Noise's biggest achievement is probably not only the large participation numbers, but also the gender balance of participants, which lies at almost 50 percent for male and female genders each, but there is no documentation that goes beyond the binary genders. It is perhaps surprising that Blank Noise has been able to rein in men with almost equal frequency as women

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14   Conversation with Jasmeen Patheja, February 2, 2018.

from the start, considering how much resistance other variants of feminist activism tend to encounter. Even though there might be axes of participation reserved for specific testimonies of victimhood, men may think about their own Safe City Pledges in the way of the Yelahanka auto-drivers contribute by joining in more traditional public interventions, such as roadblocks, or the funded feminist research internships that took place in 2018 and 2019. In this program, students, predominantly at Srishti, were asked to conduct artistic research that centered on gender sensitivity. Their research was supported by infrastructural and monetary means, so that students could not only build an actual knowledge product but also learn pragmatic methodologies for research, such as creating interactive questionnaires, engaging with people on campus in artistic ways, or filing first information requests to police and government. They were further assisted in creating digital knowledge products to display their results. For example, a map of feminist hashtag movements around the world enabled a documentation of Blank Noise's own resonance, and also identified possible new avenues of interaction by thinking through hashtags that could be meaningful in their particular context. The map is accessible on the Blank Noise webpage. The students learned that they could produce meaningful work and had to take responsibility for their outputs and research focus, while being able to rely on the experience of CIS lawyers and tech-practitioners for assistance.

During the time of my stay in Bangalore, Blank Noise had begun to collaborate with a hijra/sex worker community around the nonprofit *Sangama*, located just outside of Bangalore, to negotiate questions of safety and gender-based violence from their perspectives. In the words provided to describe Sangama on their website:

> Sangama is a sexual minorities, sex workers and people living HIV human rights organization [*sic*] for individuals oppressed due to their sexual preference. Sexuality minorities include, but are not limited to, hijras, kothis, doubledeckers, jogappas, lesbians, bisexuals, homosexuals, gays, female-to-male/

male-to-female transsexuals and other transgenders. We aim to help live their lives with self acceptance, self respect and dignity. We especially emphasize the concerns of sexuality minorities from poor and/or non-English speaking backgrounds and sexuality minority sex workers, who otherwise have little to no access to information and resources. (Sangama n.d.)

Sangama's executive director, Rajesh Srinivas, became a collaborator of Patheja's, as Blank Noise was looking to interrogate their own omissions after #LoSHA. Upon Patheja's suggestions, Srinivas, Sunil Abraham (CIS director and founder), and I met to discuss the possibility of alleviating the needs and desires of a peripherally located queer community that battled with multiple degrees of discrimination and vulnerabilities.[15] Interestingly enough, Srinivas mentioned that what many of the individuals visiting the center needed most seemed to be media literacy workshops in their own languages, so that they could find and access information online via the center. Demonetization, digital India, and Aadhaar had worried especially these communities, whose identities were fixed before a digital state that at the time criminalized nonheterosexual intercourse. Reminding me that nonbinary folks suffered under the recent Aadhaar schemes all the more, Srinivas pointed out that state violence could only be met with increased media literacy and cybersecurity programs for nonbinary people, something that CIS was specialized in providing in a variety of Indian languages. Srinivas allowed me to think again about the way that digital and sexual politics intertwine, how questions of consent, virality, promiscuity, and safety all come to bear on the body already burdened with surplus vulnerability to normative infrastructures that dysselect or modulate them. Srinivas reeled the quotidian and embodied worries of an arguably heterosexual and cis-gendered movement back in to include the concerns of a rural and diverse

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15 Conversation with Rajesh Srinivasan, Jasmeen Patheja, and Sunil Abraham, February 1, 2018.

hijra community who saw state violence and India's digitization schemes as that most threatening to their public visibility and social coherence — and their sexuality.

To summarize, Blank Noise functions via fluidity, openness, and multiplicity — not only in the movement's alleyways of engagement but also in evoking identities beyond the modular. Arguably, Patheja has created Blank Noise to build itself — a movement that recognizes radical openness and vulnerable exposure as necessities to regain a notion of futurity that is not preemptive or modular. But the movement's founder and its facilitators are also aware of the violence of intelligibility, and attempt to negotiate it through shadowy presences on the private public space of the Blank Noise home page. The intervention #INeverAskForIt is central here, because it provides an example of a template for testimonies of sexual violence and harassment. This template enables the victims to negotiate their vulnerability, telling their story without trading testimony for safety. Individual contributors are not addressed as passive victims, but as active agents — as action s*heroes. In transferring experiences to the garments, a part of the body is externalized and transported into the clothes, uploaded, perhaps, into the digital image for others to connect to. Support, belief, shame, blame — it is all being addressed *through* these digital objects and their relational quality of truth, without essentializing any of these categories or privileging certain avenues of contribution. This intervention especially, but Blank Noise more generally, functions along a prerogative of collectivity that distributes vulnerability through shadowy presences in a space that supposedly tells and knows all. The internet's modular function is surpassed by the personal collectivity of relatable stories and images that may circulate, without necessarily collapsing contexts, until they are made flesh in offline interventions.

Digital solidarity is always a hybrid effect of online networking, which carries the experiences of digital communication "into all kinds of social institutions and practices, up to and including the reorganisation of physical space" (Stalder 2013, 52). From this I draw that one alleyway of digital solidarity is the

capacity to shield and make opaque questions of authentic identities for the sake of a collective multiplicity. This chapter has thus focused on hiding and protecting, on negotiating vulnerabilities through the template. But Blank Noise illustrates that what may feel safe for some bodies (speaking from the shadowy presence) can produce difficulties for bodies that need to be seen, such as the *hijra* community. In chapter 7, I shall reflect on processes of naming and revealing as ways to create a network. I see this as a second modality of solidarity, which I argue harnesses intimacy rather than vulnerability.

Intimate Response-abilities

In chapter 6, I proposed that distributing the systemic vulnerability as it is produced within digital space is possible through a template. This seemingly modular form allows for opacity and protection, as it makes use of the ambivalence of the template's group identity that allows a user to be present without being vulnerable to algorithmic capture or trolls. The other side of digital solidarity I see employed within digital infrastructures consists of intimate naming. Twitter is a prime example, where context collapse leads to fragmented discourses. On Twitter, keeping up is difficult when one is not directly affected or where content can be misconstrued as reductive shaming. Hashtags are regularly reappropriated and misused, which detaches the hashtag from its initial context to move it to another, or a combination of hashtags may illustrate an even deeper sense of belonging, of context. This also means that several different publicities may be circulating on platforms such as Twitter, which may be addressing different communities with different interests across the globe. The fact that these discourses also provide continuities that cross boundaries of nation or even perceived-as-contradictory forms of marginalization show how intimacy of context may also draw different communities together. For example, when a burning issue such as accrediting #metoo to Black activist Tarana Burke caused discussions that Black and brown

people were invested in across the globe, when Burke acknowledged #LoSHA as a version of #metoo, or when the hashtag #MenAreTrash began trending globally in 2018, it was arguably the constant experience of being left out or not accounted for in solidarity movements that made femme-representing Black and brown people pick up on the hashtag across location. Because this latter hashtag is an informative example of digital intimacies and "misunderstandings"[1] thereof, I will delve into #MenAreTrash a little deeper to illustrate how conflicting avenues of intimacy framed the responses to the hashtag. The hashtag is also a gateway to the discussion of German netfeminist intimacies — it caused thorough controversy in Germany's internet-savvy media spaces. #MenAreTrash therefore gives me an opportunity to engage with the arc that leads from Black Twitter — seemingly a non-German phenomenon — to the contexts to which German Black and brown people are exposed and gain legibility, and finally leads to an engagement with the white women of the *Lila Podcast,* who take action and create intimate solidarities in a more affirmative form and from a position of privilege.

#MenAreTrash: Revealing the Whiteness of Twitter

The hashtag #MenAreTrash emerged out of a South African discourse on domestic violence and rape culture as early as 2016, which died down but was reanimated in 2017, when the death of a young woman was heavily discussed in South African media. Twenty-two-year-old Karabo Mokoena disappeared and was

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1   By framing the lack of intimacy as a "misunderstanding," I do not mean to excuse the hurtful behavior of white feminists attacking or policing Black and brown women, nor do I want to propose that there is a normative propositional form that these hashtags naturally are embedded in. I want to point out that there is a knowledge gap, in which white feminists are simply not the experts, when it comes to navigating "anonymous global networks" (Dean 2016). I say "misunderstanding" hoping to engage white feminists who have yet to acknowledge the multiplicity of world and the incommensurability of knowledge that can come with these multiplicities.

later found dead, her body burned beyond recognition. The case was discussed very publicly, because of the frequency with which women were disappearing at the time, but all the more when it became clear that Mokoena's partner was the culprit — a man who had helped the victim's family look for her, seemingly unperturbed by his knowledge that she would never be found alive. In an Op-Ed discussing the Mokoena case, journalist Rufaro Samanga points out how #MenAreTrash does away with respectability politics that usually polices women's behavior and expression. According to the author, the "shock-value" of the hashtag would immediately make men uncomfortable, and Samanga expressed hopes that discomfort would shake the commonsensical quality of such cases of violence (Samanga 2017). By pointing out male fragility and the multiple levels of "not getting it," often larded with sarcasm and humoristic praise of men who vowed to do the bare minimum, many of the Tweets using the hashtag premediated negative reactions to it.[2] #MenAreTrash has thus also served to intervene into the sensationalism of media representations and pointed to the systemic and quotidian quality of gender-based violence, where male hurt feelings — often expressed in terms of violent threats — in response to the hashtag documenting a woman's death are read as just reactions against an unfair and generalizing claim. Such a reading centering on male fragility, despite the fact that initially the hashtag was used predominantly to document serious and certified cases and spread statistics, shows the commonsensical quality of dysselection that is being targeted and contested through the equation of men and trash.[3] Here, the hashtag

2   This type of humoristic engagement has also traveled. Instagram profiles such as @awardsforgoodboys emerge to congratulate men on their supposedly fervent activism, which is presented as a minimal level of human decency. The account shows cartoon images of awards, which illustrator and author Shelby Lorman fills with actual experiences that she crowdsources through Instagram submissions and her own dating experience.

3   In a study by WITS University on gendered violence conducted in 2016, the alarming results stated that more than half of the participants from Diepsloot — a peri-urban settlement north of Johannesburg, where the study

#MenAreTrash served for feminists and allies to point out that it was men who would need to change, and it was men who would now be required to prove, beyond lament and hurt feelings, that they were not, indeed, "trash." "Trash" addresses the corruption, exclusion, and violence that has formed this category in opposition to humans who are accordingly not trash, and thus questions the man = human equation that Wynter has criticized as an overrepresentation.

In hegemonic geographies of the Global North, the hashtag has led to contorted discussions under hashtags such as #NotAll-Men (also present in the South African context), which yet again led to the usage of #YesAllWomen, a hashtag that had already been introduced in 2014 to respond to the killing of seven people. At that time, the young male culprit who shot six people and then turned the gun on himself left behind a YouTube video and a 137-page manifesto relating his hatred of women to the fact that he was twenty-two and still a virgin (Buxton 2014) — a first public iteration of what would come to be known as the "incel" (involuntary celibates) movement: a community of young white men that expresses entitlement over women's bodies in violent and narcissistic ways and schematically sorts individuals into types according to standardized levels of attraction (Bratich and Banet-Weiser 2019). Already, then, the discussions were larded with defensive #NotAllMen tweets, which reappeared with the globalizing capacities of #MenAreTrash. Many South African respondents pointed out that #NotAllMen was a feeble response to the statistics mentioned above, but the global iterations by feminist users seemed to shift focus back to the women who experience this violence, while still attempting to point out that these crimes were not without origins.

Many Black South African celebrities endorsed #MenAreT-rash (Samanga 2017), and this could be how it expanded across the boundaries of the country. Despite there being no explicit mention of its origins in the hashtag, the focus on Black and

was conducted — stated that they had raped or beaten a woman in the past year (Rebombo, Hatcher, and Christofides 2016).

brown women was somehow transported to different contexts, also to the United States and Europe. In Germany, its discussion centralized on and around the Twitter profile of a Kurdish journalist, whose tweet evoked an entire series of racist and misogynous responses. But before I move on to the German reception of #MenAreTrash, I want to point out the three avenues present in the example above that evidence why solidarity requires intimacy. First, the origin of #MenAreTrash in South Africa, where domestic violence and femicide have greatly affected the lives of women, especially Black women, situates its lineage within an intersectional movement. This movement was birthed out of a recognition that Black and brown suffering was underrepresented in discourses on sexual and domestic violence, but also proved a disavowal of the violence directed toward Black South African communities, of which women were its most vulnerable victims. Intimate knowledge of contexts thus allows for users to trace these histories, to be aware of what systemic work the hashtag does, and to situate those most vulnerable at the center of it. In this intimate awareness it becomes possible to give these origins credit and the victims support, but also to understand how to relate to the hashtag. Second, this hashtag shows how these types of solidarities may travel to other locations and become a transnational way of talking about systemic injustices that are both context-specific and global. Understanding how these instances of violence reappear across location means understanding the hashtag as not about singling out individual or even all men. Instead it signals toward a systemic quality of male violence that predominantly directs itself against women. To make a point about respectability in light of this violence is a form of "misrecognition" of these contexts that deepens the prevailing wound of overrepresentation. As I have argued throughout the first chapters of this book, the overrepresentation of "man" is made visible as a collective position of power, rather than an individual body or subject. When a hashtag such as #MenAreTrash travels on a global scale, it lays testimony to the global quality of that overrepresentation and the violence it produces. Any investigation into the hashtag and its back-

ground, any *intimate* engagement, would then arguably enable a response that goes beyond male fragility and hurt feelings transported through #NotAllMen. Of course, not all men are predators and not all men rape women, and it seems ridiculous to insinuate that this would be a claim anyone would make. But all men benefit from the culture that belittles women and makes them vulnerable to premature death and precarious living, even if they are also (and at the same time) harmed by it. Be it in terms of reproductive rights and medicine, the job market, algorithmic knowledge production, or everyday micro-oppressions that secure male dominance; men are entangled in these realities, whether they want to be or not, and negating this structural privilege is a position that the hashtag equates with abysmal behavior that deepens the wound, with "trash." I discuss below how the users implementing #MenAreTrash were very aware of the difference between these two positions, and misreading these realities—as any articulation under #NotAllMen necessarily does—easily marks the respective viewers as outside of the intimate solidarity networks that the hashtag seeks to establish. Instead of reading #NotAllMen as reassurance, using the hashtag can be a signal for women to interact with caution, or prefer to not interact at all. I understand the usage of #NotAllMen to mark individuals according to their own attachments to the figure of man. In failing to attach to the #MenAreTrash hashtag, #NotAllMen positions its users in solidarity with that figure of man both hashtags evoke, the structural man contested and embodied by the #NotAllMen responses that choose to defend men instead of express solidarity with their victims. And, finally, the response #YesAllWomen reiterates that feminized bodies always run the risk of male violence, bodies that have to live with the violent reality of male fragility, the recognition of which can always potentially lead to death threats, doxing, and violent stalking, practices that illustrate and document the systemic veracity of the first hashtag #MenAreTrash.[4]

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4   One might consider what women are called in public and on different
     stages provided by media formats on a daily basis without so much as a

An intimate knowledge of such contexts can open up the hashtag's relation to other movements in the past or the future. The context from which #YesAllWomen emerged was the same as the context for #MenAreTrash: systemic quality of gendered violence and its rootedness in a specific framing of masculinity that is rewarded within patriarchal and racial capitalist structures and automatized through algorithmic knowledge production. If hashtags such as #MenAreTrash reappear and are explicitly framed in their histories and recognized as repeatedly not new, then they also document the ever-same antifeminist arguments, and the continued fallacy of individuals understanding or wanting to understand these iterations as systemic. Therefore, solidarity movements can become intimate over time, reintimate through other contexts, and build bridges across supposedly linear ideas of time and progress. Turning now to the responses the hashtag received in Germany, I see a predominantly white and bourgeois (male) audience's failure of intimacy with the lived realities of Black and brown women articulated. But the German appropriation of the hashtag also gives me an opportunity to engage with the intimate solidarities of those who read the hashtag with its historical lineages and political intentions, mostly because they felt the systemic thrust of the hashtag applying to their own realities in some way.

When the hashtag was picked up in Germany, it was through the Kurdish journalist Sibel Schick, who recycled it explicitly by tweeting that "it is a structural problem that men are trash" (@ sibelschick 2018; my translation). Despite backing up her claims of making a structural argument with a poem that accentuated the social position of "men" as a configuration of power, Schick's post kicked off a frantic discussion around the generalization the tweet seemed to propose. Many recognized what Schick lit-

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raised eyebrow of resistance. Or, considered historically, there were probably also nice aristocrats in the *Ancien régime,* but none of the initiators of the French Revolution would have doubted that they needed to lose their privilege — Off with their heads! This may be considered an unproductive polemic, but the consequences for men on Twitter are arguably manageable.

erally spells out — the "structural problem that men are trash." However, there were some who seemed immune to the explicit framing, the larger discourse Schick was suggesting, and the value that the hashtag had for relations of solidarity. Much like in the South African context, mostly men but also some more prominent white cis women spoke out against it, belittling the hashtag as reductive and thereby failing to read the hashtag's contexts in its initial claims. Some commenters on Schick's post pathologized the statement and suggested therapy; others called Schick a generalizing sexist or engaged in more violent and aggressive forms of blatant misogyny. Although her tweet does not mention skin color at any point, it is noteworthy that Schick was called a racist several times. This last point illustrates the irritation that a nonwhite woman may pose in a context that is always presumed to be white, the terms in which the mere presence of nonwhite bodies reveals the infrastructural quality of whiteness. Because Schick as a brown person generically speaks of "men," white male Twitter users framed her as a racist. But rather than addressing race relations, the commenters calling Schick a racist reveal their own presumptions of whiteness as the online default, and the individualist ahistoricity with which they engage with Schick's tweet — deliberately reading the word "structural" as "generic."

The whiteness of these responses also reverberated with white feminists, some of whom articulated a lack of intimacy with the lives of Black and brown women more generally. Prominently, sociologist Jutta Ditfurth retweeted Schick's post, but spoke out "in defense of" her male friends from Schick's statement: "In defense of my friends (white, black and POC) I want to please be blocked by all that agree to [Schick's] statement below. In times of right-wing deployment, such an identitarian, anti-emancipatory, regressive cul-de-sac is nothing that helps minorities" (@ jutta_ditfurth 2018; my translation).[5]

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5   "In Verteidigung meines Freund*innenkreises (Weiße, Schwarze und PoC) möchte ich bitte von allen blockiert warden, die dem verlinkten Satz zustimmen. So 1 identitäre, antiemanzipatorische, regressive Sackgasse ist

In her retweet, Ditfurth explicitly mentions Black and brown communities, but at the same time argues that Schick, as a brown person, is unhelpful to these communities in the face of right-wing populism. In the tweet, Schick is excluded from white feminism, but also from antiracist frameworks. Meanwhile, Ditfurth's retweet inadvertently and publicly framed both #MenAreTrash and Sibel Schick's Twitter account as minority rights projects without acceptance in a larger community that Ditfurth placed herself in, all the while making Schick vulnerable through this publicity in parallel. In an interview with ze.tt magazine, Schick describes how, after Ditfurth's retweet, the right-wing trolling and hate speech increased dramatically and quite disproportionately to a tweet that Schick understood to be impolite at worst (Reisinger 2018). Ditfurth responded on Twitter that, against evidence of harassment that was mounting on Schick's own timeline, Schick's claims were a PR strategy and that Schick had invented the trolls allegedly harassing her for attention, a historically common strategy that undervalues or ignores nonwhite suffering and reprimands women (especially Black and brown women) for hitting the wrong tone. This is a tactic that detracts from the validity of the statement to end any discussion by scolding a person for how they communicate, a tactic with classist inflections referred to as "tone policing" (Poland 2016). Despite the Black and brown communities she was supposedly backing, Ditfurth was either blatantly unaware or intentionally biased against the fact that Black and brown folks are much more likely to be harassed online than white people and, as feminist editrix of Slutist.com Kristen Sollee claimed in 2017, the same is true for women: "Every ten seconds someone calls a woman a 'slut' or a 'whore' on Twitter; 25 percent of women between the ages of eighteen and twenty-four

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in Zeiten des rechten Aufmarsches nichts, was Minderheiten hilft." It is perhaps noteworthy to mention that throughout this book I have resorted to using now more common denominations of "Black" and "brown," but the German language has yet to find a word to replace the shorthand PoC, or its more inclusive iteration of BIPoC (Black, Indigenous, People of Color).

have reported being sexually harassed online; and 26 percent of women in that age group have been stalked online, too" (Sollée and Conover 2017, 138).

Ditfurth expresses gross inability to engage with the systemic quality of the hashtag beyond her own limited experience, which she posits as universal. Instead, Schick is accused and made hypervisible, a Kurdish socialist who can expect to be marginalized not only by German but also by Turkish users. Ditfurth opened the floodgates for trolling and online violence against Schick as a brown person and a woman. In fact, Ditfurth actively denies the possibility of this happening, calling Schick an attention-seeker, while at the same time rhetorically suggesting she, Ditfurth, was shielding her Black and brown friends, which she evoked generically as the more authentic opposition to Schick's post. Apart from this sexist and racist dismissal of Schick's position, Ditfurth's response illustrates unwillingness or incapacity in understanding the systemic aspect of the tweet, because she does not have intimate knowledge of the reasons behind the hashtag or its history. Thinking of the hashtag's South African origins and the reiterations of it in the West by Black and brown Germans such as Schick thus shows that intimacy is not just a vague feeling, but relies on cultural and historical acknowledgment of difference and accountability, just as much as the affective responses that frame the boundaries of solidarity. At the same time, (white) users that did know the hashtag had first emerged in South Africa used precisely this point to argue that it was perhaps less relevant in the German context, rearticulating the stereotypical assumption that patriarchy elsewhere is more violent and dangerous than one's own (@AlDavoodi 2018). Here, context collapse and lack of intimacy served to reassert white men's assumptions that the hashtag was not directed at them.

Ditfurth's example is a negative one that expresses the lack of intimacy as an historical acknowledgment of pain and difference, and thus her affective response is reactionary and alienating, while arguably others tweeting in support of the hashtag may have known the intimate context, even without engaging

with its origins in South Africa. But the value of #MenAreTrash was itself self-fulfilling, because Schick's own harassment, visible on her Twitter profile, validated her claims made toward toxic masculinity. Schick was able to contextualize the hate she was exposed to by referring directly back to the hashtag and the comments on her very own timeline. She makes an important claim about different degrees of vulnerability by critiquing the causality of toxic masculinity: upon hearing a flippant derogative comment hurled vaguely in the direction of a group that these men, rather than Schick, claimed to belong to. Upon for the first time being addressed reductively as a group identity, these men threatened Schick with rape and murder.

This irony did not go unnoted. The Jewish satirist Shahak Shapira commented upon these developments, saying he wasn't sure all men were trash, but after seeing the responses to the hashtag he had been reassured that Schick was not exaggerating (@ShahakShapira 2018). Shapira's response illustrates a form of discursive intimacy that hails reflexivity; irrelevant of subject position, the veracity of such tweets can only be assessed in solidarity with the tweeter or posited against them. Sometimes, the open discussions of the tweet — the way people respond to a tweet — can emphasize the constant violence certain bodies are exposed to, and convince people of the embodied truth-value of their position. Seeing the hashtag emerge from South Africa and be transported onto the Twitter feed monitored by a Kurdish female body allows me to see it in lineage with Black Twitter, but also returns Black Twitter's globalizing and diasporic impetus to specific localized moments in which intimacy allows for an articulation of solidarity across difference — in this case, for example, by the white Jewish man Shahak Shapira with the Kurdish woman Sibel Schick, but also by both with the South African context. Black Twitter can thus be understood as an affective and intimate, but also widely diverse, form of community-building. It is hypervisible in the transnational interfaced public, but coded and illegible without more intimate knowledge of and deeper engagement with the context.

The discussion, which went on for several weeks, shows that at least some users were willing to engage with the hashtag and tweet beyond its seemingly superficial or flippant claims. But Shapira's post invites me to speculate upon the assertion of value these social media commentators have in a larger structural view. Schick and Shapira are both public figures, but Shapira has since started his own late-night show on German public service television channel ZDF. Schick, on the other hand, was able to print little more than an extensive humorous pamphlet called *Deutschland schaff ich ab* (an obvious play on Thilo Sarrrazin's racist book that was published in earlier years) with an obscure publisher called SuKuLTuR (Schick and SuKuLTuR 2019). This is perhaps illustrative of the construction of "touch" with which German media culture hopes to align itself in a Judeo-Christian axis of solidarity after the Shoah, a modality of solidarity that seems empty in light of real violence against Jewish people on the ground. But there are also potentials for avenues to open through positions of privilege. Precisely because women bear the brunt of the burden, and attacked with more frequency and for harmless statements, the necessity of translating certain demands into the language of liberal democracy is sometimes an act of solidarity and survival. Twitter requires oppositional voices to users such as Ditfurth who appeal to a larger (white) audience. Indeed, some white feminists have considered using their privilege for such means. In looking at an early phase of the *Lila Podcast,* I see an attempt at making these intimacies more available to a larger public. In the next section, I address how it has attempted to make space and give voice to positions other than their own.

#dieseFrau: Intimate Networks and *affidamento*

The Twitter hashtag #dieseFrau and its successor #favouritefeminist (#*Lieblingsfeministin*), both initiated by the *Lila Podcast,* are exemplary for articulating how intimacy and solidarity function on the level of representation and knowledge, but also on the level of circulation and support, and how these param-

eters can be found and expressed via hashtags. I have already suggested that, on the one hand, hashtags can flatten discourses for a more generalized public. But public debates flatten context in general and thus hashtags only take hold of the context collapse happening either way. On the other hand, searching for a hashtag, or even clicking on one that is currently trending, will immediately show an overview of who is using or responding to the hashtag, from where, and at what time. In parallel to the assumption of flattening, social media infrastructures enable a historical and contextualized engagement with hashtags that is multiplicities and diverges from the itself reductive assumption of what hashtags are usually considered to be: problematic superficial signals with no cultural memory. When I speak of intimate relation, I am gesturing toward noncapitalist, relational lineages that are multiple, mutual, and convivial. I argue that these relations are flattened by language standardized according to a hegemonic script and globalization as a modality of Western expansion, just as neoliberal corporations such as Twitter flatten the world of digital relation and intimacy into the attention economy. When I turn to #dieseFrau next, I want to also look beyond its act of naming a woman as present in discourse and time. I see it as an instance of naming in the face of vulnerability, behind which those who have intimate context-knowledge may relate and enter into relation. Through #dieseFrau as an act of naming, women are positioned as cultural workers and knowledge producers, and their knowledge is offered to a broader audience in defiance of and contrast to man2.0. #dieseFrau is a playful and relational introduction into feminist worlds, where users may support individuals currently under fire, or relate historically to how feminists of the past have touched their lives.

The *Lila Podcast* introduced the hashtag #dieseFrau in 2019 to celebrate International Women's Day when it became a public holiday for the first time in Berlin. The podcast, which hosts conversations on topics once a week, online and free of charge, is symptomatic of new forms of netfeminist knowledge production in Germany. Several podcasts have sprouted from different cultural and political contexts across the German soundscape,

making it appear incredibly diverse in terms of topics, positionalities, and audience. This development suggests an evolution from online print media to other forms, such as audio and in lesser form the visual (e.g., via Instagram), to circulate feminist media as legitimate knowledge production. Despite the *Lila Podcast's* moderators' homogenously white identities at the time, the show and its creators, Barbara Streidl, Katrin Rönicke, and Susanne Klingner, are embodied testimony to the entangled-yet-heterogeneous contexts of German netfeminism. For many years, they were part of the *Mädchenmannschaft* blog that I already mentioned in connection to the #ausnahmslos contributors in chapter 4. The blog still attests to numerous different voices within the general media sphere and has suffered all the trials and tribulations of being a successful feminist medium. *Mädchenmannschaft* was and continues to be a controversial outlet, and has included many positions often read as (too) radical in the face of a social media context where whiteness is the default.

The three *Lila Podcast* founders left *Mädchenmannschaft* on their own accord, after some disagreement that they unanimously agreed to not talk about publicly in too much detail.[6] Other ex-members have suggested that they felt uncomfortable with the dogmatism of identity politics that some *Mädchenmannschaft* members were pursuing, and *Lila Podcast's* Susanne Klingner suggested that no longer working with cis men to draw them in and familiarize them with feminist ideas was not an option for her. As the preceding discussions of hashtags such as #MenAreTrash show, these differences in opinion of who can become an ally, who one is addressing and who is included, are based in part on privilege and positionality, but in part also in the very real experience of being brutally undermined, which Black and brown women have been more likely to experience. I imagine it to be far easier to work with men as a heterosexual white cis woman than as a Kurdish woman perceived as Muslim and called a racist and sexist by white men online. In a white-

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6   Conversation with Kathrin Rönicke, July 9, 2018.

centric context like Germany and with three white moderators, these women may not seem ideal to describe the possibilities of intersectional solidarity of German netfeminism. However, I want to suggest that there is an importance of white women actively engaging with questions of race and interrogating the unmarkedness white women enjoy with regard to race relations. Given the historical framework presented throughout previous chapters, I also see white women as being in a central position able to deconstruct dysselections by refusing the modularity proposed by white infrastructures, to reject the framework that seeks to draw them in at the cost of Black and brown women and queers, only to position them in domesticity. As white women's role, too, was carved out in relationship to the figure of man, there is not only a responsibility white women have in interrogating their privilege, but also something to gain from radical allyship with Black and brown women because it was their dysselection that would also go on to advance white women's own marginalization. Of course, this idea is not mine, it has been voiced by Black and brown women many times (hooks 1989; Minh-ha 1989; Mohanty 2003; The Combahee River Collective 2014).

White women can, in theory, occupy a middle ground, where translation is possible, since they speak both the language of domination and marginalization. White women may build bridges, but these bridges are oftentimes constructed only with the place of domination in mind. As bell hooks writes:

> Often when the radical voice speaks about domination we are speaking to those who dominate. Their presence changes the nature and direction of our words. Language is also a place of struggle. I was just a girl coming slowly into womanhood when I read Adrienne Rich's words "this is the oppressor's language, yet I need it to talk to you." This language that enabled me to attend graduate school, to write a dissertation, to speak at job interviews carries the scent of oppression. Language is also a place of struggle. (hooks 1989, 16)

hooks is delineating how language is already prefigured by positionality, and how using certain tonalities and words already makes the message intelligible to an intended recipient. In this light, #MenAreTrash can be read as directed toward women, centering on women while men are allowed to watch from the sidelines — the tone does not address them, but defies them. Equally, tone policing perpetuates exposure to racism (and classism). Black and brown women may be less likely to always frame their messages in respectability politics for different reasons. Having been historically denied access to spaces of knowledge production might mean there is a lack of a shared language to articulate trauma. A constant exposure to racism can effect frustration or a feeling of being gaslighted. The experience of being "misunderstood," of being made into the problem, while violent anti-Blackness prevails and receives sympathy, might mean that individuals rebel against the white liberal proposition of what it means to have "good manners."

It may thus come as no surprise that the hashtags proposed by white women remain more within the realm of polite and productive suggestion, of building bridges, rather than open defiance. This comes with its own strengths and weaknesses, but for now, it can be said that a white impetus to deconstruct marginality and position the center as aligned toward Black and brown positions alleviates the burden of making precisely these women work against constantly being resituated at the margins alone. Because white women are more likely to have the material capacities to build bridges, I read the choice of the *Lila Podcast* women to do so as a productive engagement with their relative privilege of being white and cis-gendered. I chose the podcast specifically to interrogate the privileges of whiteness and suggest that the *Lila Podcast* attempts to harness whiteness in a way that transports inclusiveness and does so to make room for those who lack a voice wherever they can, because they can. The podcast is well established within netfeminist discourses in Germany. In fact, it already has the reputation of being a feminist classic in this relatively young media format, certainly not from a lack of alternatives. Today, podcasts are seemingly every-

where, and the podcast form enjoys a growing popularity across Germany.[7] Although the podcast is a format that may predominantly reach a more affluent middle class, it does so without the technological difficulties that less literate people may feel with the other formats I have explored throughout this book. Further, it is arguably this middle class that (white) feminist solidarity movements have to address, to reel in and force to account for their own participation and structural involvement with cultural modulation.

After leaving *Mädchenmannschaft*, Rönicke (together with Klingner) formed the podcast label *hauseins*, where different podcast formats have emerged to focus on different topics. All podcasts on the label are crowdfunded, which means that loyal listeners provide individual podcasts with a regular donation-based income flow. Thus, the *Lila Podcast* and others on the hauseins label take on a similar function to public service media, perhaps come to displace them in the shift toward the gig economy. Because the state is increasingly unwilling to fund or subsidize political and cultural projects or institutions,[8] more and more podcasts and small-scale media producers are relying on private support for their funding. When I met Rönicke to discuss the *Lila Podcast,* she identified a gap in public service media, in part because public service media was beginning to function like private media companies, focusing mostly on viewer attention and entertainment, even though they should be indebted to a democratic and diverse notion of the public.[9] Rönicke sees the crisis in public service media, said to be a result of the internet and its new formats, to be intensified by public service media's imitation of private media formats that cater

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7   According to journalist Dirk Peitz, 15 percent of the German population listens to podcasts, and the numbers are rising (Peitz 2018). The *Lila Podcast* is mentioned on several podcast hit lists and can thus count as a medium that reaches a broad spectrum of the German population.

8   See, for example, the discussion on the institutional nonprofit status that was withdrawn for several left-leaning organizations in Germany, who could as a result no longer apply for state funding.

9   Conversation with Kathrin Rönicke, July 9, 2018.

to entertainment interests and populist attention economies. Through crowdfunding, Rönicke was suggesting that media producers received some of the autonomy previously granted to public service media. In theory this situation could also lead to a refeudalization of public media channels in a worst-case teleology of neoliberalism, but Rönicke reads the crowdfunding of her podcast as a redistribution of means according to direct democratic values. In her reading, podcasts can therefore be knowledge distributors for politically motivated content on a different level than the public service media channels that appear to be in crisis.

Founded in 2013, the *Lila Podcast* has since served as an outlet for public thought, and is arguably a place to have difficult conversations across difference, something that is challenging even for the moderators at times. In the show, the moderators often emphasized the desire to build bridges across contexts and how podcasts allow for the moderators to gain further understandings of the persisting struggles, and arguably pass this knowledge on to their listeners. For example, by enticing men to participate in feminist discussions, podcasts such as this one have been important knowledge outlets that people who know little about feminism may find to be an easy entry point. Especially because many people doing political work from the margins express fatigue about men (or the figure of man) who demand they give up their time to explain things to them, podcasters such as the group around the *Lila Podcast* can help to alleviate that burden by taking a middle position that teaches feminist knowledge without the free labor women and specifically Black and brown women are often expected to provide. Judging from the comments on the podcast's social media presences, the *Lila Podcast* has connected to a wide audience and has been able to build attachments that go beyond a white mainstream.

Some topics clearly cater to a white middle-class audience. Examples include the discussion of men and their role in reproductive labor, "male feminist ambassadors," or pop cultural products, such as films and books with a feminist touch or discussed in a feminist analysis. But the moderators have also used

the space to listen to Black feminists, such as Natasha Kelly, to Muslim feminists, such as Sineb El Masrar, or the former sex worker Ilan Stephani advocating for an acknowledgment of a feminist sex worker industry. The podcast has talked about regretting motherhood, about body hair, abortions, and the German law, all in sometimes more and sometimes less radical manner. The podcasters thus use their whiteness to discuss it and set it in relation to other positions, a practice that arguably articulates whiteness in attempts to mark it. At the time of writing, the podcast is on a refurbishing break and preparing for a relaunch. This relaunch is directed toward making the podcast more inclusive, and the moderators express their desire to make the lives of LGBTQI+ more accessible and to pass the proverbial mic (Rönicke 2019). The three moderators have called to their communities and especially marginalized listeners to take the given infrastructures into their own hands and make the *Lila Podcast t*heir own. According to their own call for participation, the three moderators do not have a fixed vision for how the restructured concept for the podcast will look, and thus place all decision-making processes with the new team. For this reason, the following arguments refer only to the *Lila Podcast* prior to its relaunch in 2020.

I had encountered the *Lila Podcast* via Twitter, where my research on #ausnahmslos took me to discussions of antiracism vis-à-vis anti-Semitism, two positions that had been cast as irreconcilable in the German context at the time. Rönicke had dedicated an entire podcast to the question of anti-Semitism in feminism, and her nuanced discussion of different aspects around the accusations made toward #ausnahmslos made me hopeful to encounter a white cis woman who understood intersectional solidarities in their difficulties. I wrote an email to the podcast, and a little while later I met Rönicke to discuss the possibility of intersectional feminism online. In our conversation, she began by telling me how the three moderators had left *Mädchenmannschaft* — disagreements had occurred over and over at different levels, until the three decided to leave the collective. But Rönicke also accentuated at different points of our con-

versation that disagreement was an important part of her own political process, because it led her and the other podcasters to constantly interrogate their politics and redefine their positionalities. With this, Rönicke framed openness as a central category of solidarity that in light of the previous discussions seems all the more important for those who carry privilege. Needless to say, I understand disagreement as a vital part of feminist politicizing, and of political movements overall. Disagreement is necessary and constitutive for political growth (Uttal 1990). Therefore, solidarity can also be formed in disagreement, but then tone, context, and *intimacy* become important aspects of such an agonistic form of solidarity.

One of the first things Rönicke said was that she understood solidarity precisely as giving those women room to speak who did not have a platform or were not particularly well known within the Western European and German language spaces of privilege we both occupied. This is also why the *Lila Podcast* sees one of its central roles in bringing marginalized and diasporic feminist knowledge to the hegemonic German context. The people invited to the podcast are taken seriously as experts in their field, and thus positions expressed by these guests are often left to stand for themselves uncommented.[10] The

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10   This can also be quite frustrating. I remember one episode with drag queen Vivienne Villain, where the drag queen criticized German women for their renunciation of femininity and refusal to embrace a femme appearance. And, of course, being femme is undervalued and femmes are often taken less seriously — arguably, embracing femininity can distort this public devaluation. However, I also remember my discomfort with anyone — even a drag queen — lamenting that women should wear high heels and lipstick more. Because Villain connected that desire for more performed femininity with "mere" aesthetics rather than precisely the societal devaluation of femininity, I experienced their lament as further objectification that affirmed only that women had to "look pretty" and, despite acknowledging that the burden for women assigned male at birth might be higher to perform femininity, was disappointed that Susanne Klingner, who hosted the episode, did not intervene. But accepting women as experts in their own right may mean that I misunderstood Villains intimate solidarities, or that this position that I — to a point — disagree with can also be expressed legitimately without me dismissing Villain as a

podcast thus looks to nuance the markers of representation and amplify marginalized voices through the platform they have as white and heterosexual cis women. It is interesting that despite such a variety of themes that could threaten the dominance of man2.0, Rönicke says that she has not been the target of hate speech and antifeminist violence with as much frequency and vehemence as many other netfeminists acting in public. In part, Rönicke attributes this to the podcast medium, where the fact of her voice explaining difficult contexts in a calm and collected manner is less of a trigger that would anger respondents. In her opinion, this soothes the scope of misunderstanding, which Rönicke implies is more likely to happen in text-based conversations.[11] However, the case of Schick and #MenAreTrash that I discuss in this chapter makes me wonder whether Rönicke's racial and class position has not been an additional layer of protection against rampant and violent trolling. "Leaning in," even just in terms of tone, can have the effect of disciplining marginalized bodies all the more, when they continue to frame their arguments in a tone that is not to the recipient's liking (Grewal and Kaplan 1994; Daniels 2015). Still, it is true that Rönicke's analysis is always calm and collected, always ending on a hopeful and positive note. This positivity expresses a hope of finding female conviviality beyond the "awesome fact" (Davis 1983) of gender-based violence that binds women together. The podcast is thus representative of an ideological apparatus that sees acts of solidarities as calm havens, secluded bays that shelter from an otherwise raging mob on spaces such as Twitter. Such reflective calmness may indeed be helpful to further engage patiently

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knowledge producer altogether. Indeed, a new split with regard to feminist intimacies emerges between trans feminists and those who see trans women as a threat to femininity, commonly referred to as TERFS ("trans exclusionary radical feminists"). Andrea Long Chu's essay "On Liking Women" (2018) is an insightful and well-written polemical discussion of that split which questions whether there is any use of attempting to regulate what we desire, even if that desire is for a Rihanna lipstick.

11   Conversation with Kathrin Rönicke, July 9, 2018.

in translating the demands of angrier/hurt voices to the white hegemony.

In celebration of International Women's Day, the podcast thus suggested the hashtag *#dieseFrau* to collect and celebrate great women in public. The hashtag translates into "#thiswoman" and bases itself on the rather simple concept of "shine theory," an attitude, which proposes that "I don't shine if you don't shine" (Friedman and Sow, n.d.). Although this may seem superficial, because of the conjecture that intimacy suggests relation, shine theory developed as a way of publicly thinking about female friendship in the face of a capitalist environment that teaches women and femmes to see each other as competition (Friedman 2013). Shine theory was developed by Aminatou Sow and Ann Friedman, themselves podcasters and feminist media practitioners; one, a Black woman and social entrepreneur, the other a white journalist and cultural commentator. They, too, have cultural (and probably other) capital at their disposition, and it is precisely for this reason that they suggested promoting the work of other women and ending the myth that doing so would somehow undermine one's own success. Despite its neoliberal inflections, I understand this relationality as self-care, because it is care for the community and opposes the myth of female competition to take up a place under the seeming benevolence of the male gaze. In the sense of relating, shine theory allows for a coming together of bodies in a positive sense, by recognizing an other's achievements. In the United States, the hashtag #shinetheory has been taken up and tweeted by then-presidential candidate and self-identifying democratic-socialist Alexandria Octavio-Cortez, and by her mentor Pramila Jayapal. It has been placed under articles on Serena Williams's success, and it has leaked from media and entertainment to academia and activism.

Unfortunately, the *Lila Podcast's* success was not as virally effective. Although prominent voices such as Mithu Sanyal and Kübra Gümüşay have retweeted the hashtag #dieseFrau, it died down fairly quickly after the celebrations of International Women's Day in March 2019. However, throughout the early

months of that year, there were references to contemporary net-feminists, such as Sibel Schick and Fatma Aydemir, to historical figures, such as the four "mothers" of the German constitution Frieda Nadig, Helene Weber, Helene Wessel, and Dr. Elisabeth Selbert, to pop cultural contributors who may otherwise not have been considered, such as rapper Shirin David, and many other feminine and feminist figures. Many of the historical, foreign, marginalized, or very young women were not part of my usual filter bubble; when I searched for the hashtag I encountered feminists I had never heard of before. This suggests that in addition to building a network, hashtags serve to educate and connect individuals by penetrating filter bubbles. Further, the *Lila Podcast* contextualized the broader scope of their hashtag, placing it in a lineage of femme-centric relationship building. In the episode that aired the week after International Women's Day of 2019 (episode 134), Rönicke and Streidl framed #dieseFrau in the context of *affidamento,* a feminist practice that focuses on female bonding and attachment. The word roughly translates as "entrusting, committing, or confiding in/with/to someone." It originates from the Italian feminism around the Milan-based women's bookshop and the feminist philosophical group DIOTIMA, which organized around the idea that female friendship is the basis for liberation and the beginning of an end to patriarchy. The term arrived in Germany in the late 1980s, and has been vaguely interpreted as female friendship and a strong bond, as the ability to trust another woman's judgment (Schrupp 2005a, 2005b). The term continued to have currency, for example, in 2007, where it became titular to a nonprofit organization that has since produced a network of institutions supporting women (Affidamento, n.d.).

One of the feminists that traveled to Italy in the late 1980s to come home with the practice of *affidamento* is Antje Schrupp, another known figure in Germany's feminist universe. Schrupp has also been on the *Lila Podcast,* and in episode 134 the moderators both reflect on how they learned of *affidamento* through her work and workshops. On her own blog, Schrupp describes her excitement and euphoria at meeting one of the DIOTIMA, Chiara

Zamboni, in 1995. She writes that her excitement stems from meeting a like-minded woman, who is not only vocal about her politics but actually also kind and friendly (Schrupp 2005b). In her description, Schrupp contextualizes her surprise at this supposedly quotidian observation and identifies a hitherto existing lack — the lack of female theorists and philosophers who bind her, engage her, and affect her to write herself into the seemingly objective field of theory.[12] DIOTIMA is not a closed group, but rather a practice; the Italians say "fare Diotima" (Casavecchia 2018). The practice is grounded on a philosophy that embraces "womanhood" and theorizes on the state of female difference, but also actively engages in lived female realities and relations. *Affidamento* focuses on difference and diversity — equality, in this logic, is merely standardization, an assimilation to the modular and monohumanistic figure of man (Soltau 1989; Wynter 2003). At every meeting, women relate to at least one other woman present in what they call "dual relations" (Casavecchia 2018) with the intention of producing something — a book, a play, an idea for the next meeting, and such. The practice of dual relations is the result of a series of conflicts about hierarchies and leadership within the loose collective (Schrupp 2005b). Schrupp attributes the group's survival precisely to the ability to navigate a relational way, which succumbs neither to the rigidity of hierarchical leadership and rules nor to an illusion of the complete lack of hierarchies. The dual relations system is a strategy, which serves to make women accountable first and foremost to their relational partner, and to prioritize the navigation of hierarchies in this smaller relational context, before allowing it to expand (Schrupp 2005b). This system of productive intimacy thus also

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12   *Affidamento* is thus a concept that is itself radically open to adding meaning and practices. Arguably, Sara Ahmed's practice of only quoting women in her academic work could also be read as practicing *affidamento*. I also remember having similar sentiments upon becoming part of a feminist theory reading group. What excited me was that I had incentive to read feminist literature on a regular basis, and that encountering women with radical thoughts and shared issues excited me, gave me energy.

allows for disagreement, but precisely on the basis that intimacy has been established before.

Schrupp seems continuously impressed with *affidamento*, and she continues to make efforts to develop the strategy in the German context. Schrupp now edits a theoretical blog called *beziehungsweise*, which in direct translation means "respectively," but poetically translates as "regarding relations." This rhetorical figure has reappeared in several left-wing circles, prominently in the feminist analysis of gender relations in past and future revolutions, *Beziehungsweise Revolution* by Bini Adamczak (2017), who reconnects identity struggles to their material base via the terms of relating to one another. Adamczak shows how gender relations can become affective styles of governance, which can affect material infrastructures in sometimes surprising ways. Through *affidamento*, through taking seriously the judgment of another woman and thus building a relationship to understand her difference, I imagine the clash between Schick and Ditfurth over #MenAreTrash could have arguably been resolved in intimate solidarity. Had Ditfurth felt accountable first and foremost to Schick as a knowledge producer with a political goal in mind, and thus taken her judgment seriously, she would not have attacked her publicly in the name of an obscure attachment to a nonpresent group of Black and brown people that supposedly backed her claims. Perhaps, after careful inquiry and a localizing of perspectives and expertise, Ditfurth would have understood the systemic thrust of Schick's tweet, would have perhaps not felt attacked, even if she would have disagreed. As a result, the argument would not have had to expose Schick's vulnerabilities (which all are subjected to, but which Schick, as a brown person, is targeted for).

Returning to the *Lila Podcast,* we see Rönicke and Streidl, too, position the hashtag #dieseFrau within these contexts of trusting women as knowledge partners. In tracing the hashtag on Twitter, feminist networks become visible: first, through women mentioning women in a way that suggests they work with each other, or are bounded to each other in some way, but also in terms of admiration for feminist work, be it historical or

contemporary. As in *affidamento*, #dieseFrau must not pretend to be an encounter on eye level — the authorities may very well be dispersed across several bodies or centralize in one woman that another looks up to. It is the connection to an *other*, who may have had different experiences, but whose desire faces in the same direction as one's own (Schrupp 2005b), that describes the intimate solidarities I am exploring here. This also means turning away from affective politics of negativity, towards positive, communal interaction within small-scale learning and solidarity networks. Especially for young or timid individuals who have not or will not become public personas, the hashtag serves as a possibility of engaging, merely by naming their favorite feminists — because Twitter notifies users when tagged in a post by their handle. Therefore, the public tagging of a (hierarchically) distant feminist establishes the possibility of relation. Feminists and women may respond to their nomination, and an act as tiny as "liking" (clicking on the heart button below a specific post) the tweet can reciprocate validation, something that I observed happen with #dieseFrau rather often. Many of the women mentioned in the hashtag responded by sending thanks, hearts, and messages of affection upon being named. This has the effect of countering the constant hate speech women are subject to in disproportionate ways. Just maybe, it trains the algorithm. Second, the hashtag made these women more visible to different users and could thus bring other knowledge producers into the user's filter bubble than she would possibly normally engage with, as in one case, where a network of interpreters and translators materialized through different groups of women being named. This shows how such hashtags have the capacity to circumvent the modular interface of the internet and its segregationist politics, just as they are used to minimize the invisibility that stems from modular dysselection and its material effects. As that example shows, the hashtag not only celebrates a diffuse skill set, but actively suggests women as experts in different fields. The hashtag theoretically simplifies the search for knowledge producers with a lesser reach and can serve as an archive, for example, for ending the dominance of "manels"

(men-only panels) at conferences and symposia. Theoretically, such hashtags can thus serve to reiterate women as experts in their own right, and rearticulate the importance of peer-to-peer knowledge traditions.

Of course, the hashtag has not only been used to eulogize women. A Twitter search shows that some individuals use it to complain about the women in their lives. However, the hashtag does not seem to have been hijacked in the same way as others, for example, the hashtag #ausnahmslos discussed in chapter 4 has often been circulated to make fun of women. Whereas #ausnahmslos was intentionally used by right-wing trolls to lead the discussion in a different direction and reappropriate the hashtag, those who used #dieseFrau to complain that all seem to have done so before the *Lila Podcast* suggested it and not intentionally to distract or troll a budding community. The hashtag also had limited success over a very short period of time. One of the reasons it may have died down for the moment could be the focus of the hashtag. Promoting "this woman" may have exclusionary effects for queer, nonbinary, and nonfemme folks, who suffer under similar and more forms marginalization. However, though #dieseFrau has mostly served to tag cis women, I see no reason why the hashtag could not be used for queer and other women and thus effectively widen the scope of who might be considered to represent a "woman." In fact, one of the benefits of the hashtag lies precisely in cherishing the diversity of femininity without actually requiring context for what makes the featured person a woman — other than their skills in this or that professional or public field. Effectively, #dieseFrau is an example that recodifies femininity; an example that brings forth gender as technology, through technology, in positive rather than limiting ways.

As one might imagine, resistance to women is even stronger in the face of a self-proclaimed womanhood that is not white, heterosexual, or middle-class. Therefore, I see potential in appreciating femme knowledges, and the hashtag suggests intimate knowledge of these women, but the podcasters might not only have received empowering feedback. At the time of

this writing, the *Lila Podcast* seemed to have reacted to the ambivalence of focusing on femmes by introducing the hashtag *#Lieblingsfeministin* ("#favouritefeminist") instead. The hashtag was posted explicitly by podcast founder Rönicke in mid-2019, perhaps to respond to the focus of the previous tag, but perhaps also to produce an explicitly feminist archive, rather than an overview of women from all walks of life. The hashtag did not have a large influence. But what I found relieving about this development was that, at least on the surface, no one needed to be publicly shamed or banned from the medium for this alteration to occur.[13] The three cis women of the *Lila Podcast* either understood their reductive scope and altered it, or were actively encouraged to be more inclusive without it becoming a grand political turf war, as in the examples I discuss in earlier chapters of the book, such as the contested solidarities of #LoSHA or #ausnahmslos. I read this as the intimacy of the hashtag, where those who know the context will engage, but it does not technically take away space from other conversations.

At the same time, it is questionable whether the label of "feminist" will be taken up as graciously as simply celebrating femininity—it is not just right-wing trolls and conservative reactionaries that do not employ the term. Many Black and brown women do not use the word "feminists," precisely because of the experienced and historical exclusion by white feminist movements (Kendall 2013; Eddo-Lodge 2018). At another level, the label might possibly narrow the field of nominees, as translators, doctors, and lawyers can be female and do important work for and with women without calling themselves feminists, and many people still shy away from attributing the label to anyone who does not explicitly use it themselves. However, given the continued disavowal of women as knowledge producers and experts, even when it concerns women's issues and bodies, a too

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13   This even though Schick was mentioned in Rönicke's thread and responded to being named with a screenshot of her account being blocked by Rönicke's—suggesting that at some point an earlier feud had taken place. Arguably, Rönicke has simply learned to keep a cool head. Arguably, Rönicke also has whiteness as sustenance.

harsh critique of #dieseFrau underestimates the necessity for creating affective bonds and relations between women. It would also not be in the spirit of *affidamento*. As Dorothee Markert describes on the *beziehungsweise* blog she edits together with Antje Schrupp, there are still many women who entrust only men with an authority over their lives — as doctors, therapists, scientists, lawyers, or politicians — despite men's repeated failures to correctly identify the wants and needs of women (Markert 2011). #dieseFrau can celebrate marginalized cis women and build an archive of femme knowledge producers, just as Rönicke talks to drag queen Vivienne Villain on the *Lila Podcast* and can advertise queer icon Rain Dove's appearance on the hauseins podcast Straight Talking. Through *affidamento*, I understand the white woman's role to be one of listening and believing, but also, as Barbara Streidl says in the episode of the *Lila Podcast* mentioned above, of receiving the authority to take up the struggle next to and in intimacy with her other. The *Lila Podcast's* mission is thus to teach and distribute feminist knowledge, and its moderators also benefit from the diversity of their guests, a benefit that is passed on to their listeners.

As this chapter has shown, the radical openness of new social movements is easily decontextualized, which can lead to "misunderstandings" on varying levels of severity. However, these misunderstandings seem to sometimes stem from an epistemic inability to overcome one's own modality of being, from an intimate solidarity with a context that lies in opposition or is conflictual to the one that is misunderstood. For this reason, expressions of solidarity require an intimate reading, which I have framed along the Italian feminist concept of *affidamento* — a strong female relation that invokes trust, judgment, knowledge, and learning. It frames the willingness to engage with articulations, even if they may seem puzzling or hurtful, as in the case of #MenAreTrash, precisely because *affidamento* describes a commitment to seeing women as expert knowledge producers. Because the digital constantly flattens articulations and collapses contexts, users should not presume that what presents itself on the surface is the only context to the message. Especially on Twit-

ter, where hashtags perform the function of indexing, discussions and genealogies are easily searchable. Thus, quite contrary to what the general public seems to believe, the internet can be a place to learn about nuance and navigate difference to create a multiplicity of women-based networks. Precisely because everything seems either frivolous or dogmatic, a relationality, which cautiously questions contexts in intimate solidarity, can bind individuals together, at least for the duration that the hashtag is trending, and in unexpected ways if the hashtag reemerges. "Solidarity circles," as Rönicke calls them, are inconsistent and can change over time. Because of digital circulation one might not always know the last update on an apology, or the lack of the same. But a feminism that aims to be transformative must necessarily take into account that individuals cannot be the only ones made responsible for systemic injustice — not because they are not responsible for their actions, but because their actions do not define their bodies in essence — individuals can learn and change. Most of all, they can change sides. Intimacy in this sense enables a procedure that takes into account one's own partiality of perspective and that of another user. Violent practices are, unfortunately, not always avoidable, but even discursive violence should be done with an acknowledgment that removing ("canceling") individual culprits does not affect the structure itself, which will continue to produce individuals to take the incarcerated or criticized person's place. Solidarity then is precisely the counterweight to the modulation and containment that effects the division of bodies into countable units, which have nothing to do with each other. Concepts such as *affidamento*, which I have approached through aspects of digital intimacy, thus offer marginalized women the space to entrust their values and voices to others, and authorize these possibly more visible others to further their cause. The intimate solidarities described here are acknowledgment of relational worlds.

On the other hand, affirmative hashtags such as #dieseFrau serve to draw in the larger public. The hashtag marks and circulates knowledges carried by other(ed) bodies and knowledge producers to increase their currency as experts. This type of

relationality may be read as a reductive, or as neoliberal self-promotion, but the concept of *affidamento* also carries the affective hope of a digital experience that is accountable to its communities. Within this context, the hashtag seeks to produce intimacies instead of alienation. Therefore, intimate solidarity describes the encounter with deeper entanglements through the recognition of seemingly superficial objects and interfaces. Further, it includes the community-based opening up to unknown knowledge producers and experts, through intimate identification and naming. If the *Lila Podcast* forms the center of such a network that unfolds around #dieseFrau, then Twitter users may stumble upon the hashtag *and* the podcast, just as listeners from diverse walks of life may engage with the crowdsourced knowledge of an intimate community one may otherwise never encounter or engage with. The hashtag builds on a networked form of trust; it creates an affirmative identification of experts and a relational network of knowledge producers. Effectively bursting the filter bubble, the community builds itself, through user engagement, visibility and intimacy.

Toward a Media Planetary and Networks of Care

In this book, I have traced a cultural history of the digital that expands beyond the usual frame of an immaterial mode of computation beginning at midcentury. I have instead discussed the digital as a modality of categorization that correlates with the Enlightenment ideology of rational thought and its practice of cordoning off social realities into unitary and dichotomous fragments. In its hegemonic iteration, the digital offers the foundation for an ideological separability of previously entangled realities and bodies. Social media interfaces are thus contemporary spaces that produce race (and gender) as/and with technology — these cultural paradigms of identity and identification are as much shaped by technological infrastructures as technological infrastructures are inscribed with and materialize through imaginaries about race and gender. With reference to Deleuze's control societies and the internet architecture, I have called this paradigm "modulation."

But this paradigm is not, as Deleuze has claimed, foundationally new. The modern-orientalist imaginary of binary opposition and unitary and unchanging categorization is transposed onto individuals and scripted into infrastructures of today's seemingly neutral and most ubiquitous technologies.

More recently, the ties between colonialism and digital cultures have increasingly come into focus of research, and the internet recedes from view as new technological trends such as AI seem to require urgent attention. But many of the learnings that come out of this research are applicable to newer technologies such as AI, the imaginaries they produce and are produced in, and their constant iterations of newness and complete knowability — articulated, for example, within AI discourse through a concept of accuracy.[1]

Potentially, it is the very fact that social media networks appear to be on the decline that attention to their earlier formations is important. Wynter's concept of "dysselection" has been a key channel for understanding the fragmentary partitions that inform today's internet as an unmarked space that claims whiteness as universal and the figure of man as the prototypical user. With Wynter, I have argued that the iteration of "digital" man is simply the latest version of modulation as dysselection, thus combining the insights of critical decolonial theory with an insight into sociotechnical systems. In this sense, algorithmic forms of production merely rearticulate and automatize what has in the past required justification, first of the church and then of science. What Deleuze is then noting in *Post-script* is not the shift to such control as a new paradigm, but the repetition of existing control mechanisms and their expansion to others, both temporally and politically. Today, the reduced terms of identification are automatized, and thus still overwhelmingly seen as objective. Wynter's overrepresentation of man is naturalized, as he becomes man2.0 within the digital economy. This figure thus shapes and influences desires, and can do so even with those that are seemingly drafted as oppositional responses. Accordingly, I have spoken of the algorithmic reproduction of the human on the basis of Western whiteness, even if certainly there are non-

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1   In some of my more recent work, I focus on AI accuracy as invoking the same knowledge paradigms explored here — in algorithmic knowledge production, accuracy becomes an expression of that which is already known, rather than an account that assesses all data neutrally (Morais dos Santos Bruss 2023).

white media moguls that potentially have just as harmful an influence on global infrastructures. As Wynter allows her readers to see, they, too, have committed to this monohumanistic figure, irrespective of their racial backgrounds, and submitted to a form of governance that relies on identification as control. In line with Wynter's processual shifts between different modes of legitimation, I have thus extended the timeline of the digital to include its mechanisms of social sorting as they occurred in the colonial setting, specifically within the settler colony of German South West Africa. But the effect of modular thought does not only express itself in the hierarchies of colonial thought.

Throughout the book, there are jumps in time that echo what I have called "leakages of the modular." These temporal shifts mirror the nonlinear development of knowledge being lost and found, and they imply that the development of technology, too, need not be imagined as stageist, indeed, a stage-model of development overwrites the dysselection that was present within technology from the start, as it is illustrated by the case study of early internet culture. Instead of the disembodied version of the digital produced by 1990s cyberlibertarianism and the California ideology, digital modulation thus has the function of shaping bodies and regulating their mobilities by beckoning complicity and supposing objectivity. But it would be wrong to suppose this a specificity of cyberlibertarian ideology without historical precedent; indeed, the cyberlibertarians themselves are benefactors of a global colonial model of extraction, invisibilization, and dysselection after modulation that is reproduced in early internet culture.

In German South West Africa, as one of many origin stories, modulation is inscribed into the regimes of governance from the start, but becomes justified through the Nama and Herero war in the early twentieth century. The introduction of the pass disc to demarcate Indigenous populations creates a visible regime of racialization, which maps itself onto, reifies, and fixates the preexisting modular ideologies of racial hierarchy. Detached from the archives of information through the indexical medium of the pass disc, race can circulate visibly and "factually" in the

broader public and leak back to the German nation in the form of emergency medallions that materialize affective structures of racialization within Europe. In Indian nationalist thought, the *charkha* spinning wheel produces an Indian subjectivity that is imagined as morally pure and authentically non-Western, a subjectivity that negates the complex reality of diverse communities struggling for legibility beyond this hegemonic notion on the ground. These struggles are very much material. Grounding the digital from its imagined immateriality, I recognize it as a function that drives the modular as a system of unitary and distinctive categorization, which informs the distribution of resources, knowledges, infrastructures. Modulation is thus a founding strategy from which racial capitalism emerges on a transnational scale, fundamentally creating and structuring not only the Indigenous bodies as workers, slaves, subalterns, but further effecting the gendered and racialized hierarchies that inform an understanding of objectivity vis-á-vis technological modes of identification until this day.

The case studies in each chapter have exemplified how these historical lineages shed light on feminist intersectional solidarity projects and movements in the present. They show how the attachments to and blurring of specific identity categories can be strategies driven by divergence from or attachment to the figure of man, depending on the constellation of race/caste/gender as/and technology they are responding to. In this way, intersectional feminist solidarity movements become a problem for hegemonic discourse when they depart from colonial legacies of segregation as safety and toward questioning vulnerability. However, feminist solidarity may also require a form of segregation from a proposition of homogeneity, which has oftentimes articulated itself in a specific claiming of identity. Within the networked and globalized digital space of the internet, the queer Dalit that accused Brahmin intellectuals of sexual misconduct is read as an enemy to a "larger feminist movement" (Menon 2017), just as the feminists that created the #ausnahmslos movement in response to the incidents in #Cologne were read as conservative when wearing a hijab, and more generally complicit

in women's exploitation in light of the manifested imaginary of North Africans and brown men more generally as threat. The digital automates the relationships between margin and center, it reifies this relationship, but also expands the center, creating more and more excess at the margins.

Conversely, in this seemingly automatized form of modulation, a user may be included into the realm of the unmarked figure of man because of their preferences and actions — read here as a willingness to participate in processes that completely assimilate the user to an updated, technological figure of man. What is publicly read as attachment and detachment to certain politics transforms a vision of solidarities, but also reshapes modular groups, for example, the figure of the Dalit or the figure of the woman wearing a hijab. In this way, the body becomes information, just as information embodies — precisely because the information on the body is what produces it in its enfleshed and socially intelligible form. Contemporary social movements, too, have become *informational* because of the amount of communication and information spread involved in making these movements intelligible, while this information also produces a counterarchive on identity and representation (Gajjala 2019). I have looked at how these informational qualities foster solidarities in affective and emotional ways, ways that signal toward a material reality of difference and sameness across interests and identities. Solidarity then may also consist of pedagogics that make available data points and information frameworks; solidarities contextualize certain positions that become legible to certain individuals (e.g., through hashtags or via podcasts). These practices reformulate the meaning-making of modular frameworks, and they do so by inviting individuals to attach themselves to a collectively reworked, sociotechnical identity that is vague, ambivalent, and technologically produced. Such informational activism (Halupka 2016) thus serves as a reconfiguration of colonial dualisms, most commonly muddying the differentiation between connective and collective activism — as either reaching out or building with — but also transgressing the realms of private and public politics, of self and other, and

of racial modulation. The logic of networked computing both rigidifies and ambiguates these divisions, and it is for that reason that computational infrastructure allows for an exploration of excess, multiplicity, collectivity. Information activism thus overlaps with feminist epistemologies of science and technology presented throughout this book, which question the separation between private and public, mind and body, solidarity and objectivity.

Through the virtual, the body becomes legible as a "complex intersection of materiality and meaning" and thus "the insertion of the body […] produces meaning through the articulation of differences between bodies and non-bodies, between spaces and non-spaces" (Galloway 2012, 190). What Galloway states in relation to virtual spaces and digital technologies is, simply put, a more contemporary repetition of feminist thought, expressed as early as, for example, by Simone de Beauvoir: "To be present in the world implies strictly that there exists a body which is at once a material thing in the world and a point of view towards the world; but nothing requires that this body have this or that particular structure" (de Beauvoir 1956, 36).

The body, feminist theory teaches, has always been informational — for the self, but also as information directed toward and mediated by society and, I have argued, the technologies it produces. Media, it turns out, do condition our situations, but this "our" is not a universal category — it has been modulated by colonial, heteropatriarchal, material dysselection.

Wynter's demand for a new frame of reference has marked the later chapters in this book, which have turned toward relational forms of accountability and solidarity. Hence, there may be something productive to this notion of being on the outside and finding yourself there with others. Paradoxically, the leaky backend connects bodies, identities, and devices, and draws them together into a socio-technological assemblage, while upholding and rigidifying modulation on the interface in a metaphorical mind/body dualism that is naturalized via cultural *mythoi*. This is true for computation and virtual space, but also for "offline" politics, because the boundaries between

the two are porous, ambivalent, and sometimes hard to iden-
tify. Further, the increasing convergence of online and offline
life shows what critical humanities in the field of postcolonial
and feminist theory have been arguing all along, that the crea-
tion of difference is historical, that matter is not unchangeable.
Technologies are distinctive molds that serve to segregate, dif-
ferentiate, and performatively modulate bodies into their social
functions; they could be different. Despite increasing awareness
of the effects of such social constructions, there is little inclu-
sion of the marked embodied and situated perspectives in the
discourse on digital governance and networked societies. As
regulations on hate speech misrecognize these forms of violence
within online spaces as ahistorical, whiteness has reemerged as
the paradigmatic protected identity on a global scale.

And yet it is pertinent that digital spaces are not framed as
optional spaces of expression, that access to them is not lost.
The persistence of embodiments I have hoped to illustrate with
the case studies discussed throughout this book iterate the gaps
these bodies experience in relation to hegemonic, liberal, white/
savarna, and upper-class feminisms, but also that these bodies
have their own insistence and presence within digital space.
Indeed, their presence within these infrastructures, I argue,
has the potential to alter the meaning-making frameworks of
digital space. Chapters 4 and 5 showed how this can result in
conflict, because the feminist expressions of #ausnahmslos and
#LoSHA disrupt the spaces of bourgeois white and racist Fem-
onationalism (in the former) and of classist and casteist uni-
versity infrastructures (in the latter), the cases of Blank Noise
(chapter 6) and The *Lila Podcast* (chapter 7) establish a more
affirmative and inhabitable form of digital embodiments. Both
of these entities come from a position of privilege with hopes
of opening that space up to others, to pass the proverbial mic
and acknowledge, mediate, and give platforms to the presences
and desires of others. They are thus indicative of what has come
to resonate within many new social movements, formulating
actions and interventions in solidarity across difference from a
point of flexible identities and relative privilege. I say relative,

because the individuals working to establish these movements, read as privileged because of their identities or their social and cultural capital, are not detached from identity-based violence and in their resistance to modulation put their privilege on the line, acknowledging that it never was a trade-off for safety. These feminist movements see themselves as implicated in the problem at hand, irrespective of their embodied positionality, recognizing that liberation has to be for all to be real liberation. Seeing this transposed onto the infrastructure produced by seemingly new technologies, such a relationality allows for an identity-driven approach that nonetheless understands these identities to be performative, relational, and multiple, limited first and foremost by the material histories of imperialism and racial capitalism present and forceful, which need to be grappled with and negotiated with care.

I have read solidarity through the affective qualities of intimacy and vulnerability in order to articulate an acknowledgment of such relational care that builds community while building identity. Inhabited by individual expressions, the collective body allows for a shared "referent-we," which is not static but fluid and open for appropriation. It forms according to affinities, is in constant negotiation, and therefore carries the hope of being able to continuously address the shifting effects of modulation. The two strategies inherent to vulnerability and intimacy accompany these modalities of collective inhabitations. For one, vulnerability is not just performative and constructed, but also inscribed into the materiality of digital space through infrastructures, algorithms, and networked computing that necessitates the leak to function, but makes certain users responsible for the insecurities inherent to such leakage. Networked computing thus illustrates in technical terms the pressing activist idea that practices, identities, and habits are not essentially, unchangeably, and deterministically embodied as autonomous certainty, but embedded in and thus dependent on constant negotiation of and relation to structural, geographical, and political issues. However, modulation through algorithmic knowledge production also shows how these relations function

on existing modular identities, and thus cannot serve to include peoples in ways that are different than in the past. Contrary to these prescriptive modes of identity and identification, such as the hashtag intervention #INeverAskForIt, a disembodied digital object may become the representation of a collective embodied inhabitation. Through #INeverAskForIt, one image comes to represent and circulate desires to which a myriad of victims of sexual and gender-based violence might respond. It thus has connective and collective functions to address the state of patriarchal violence, without the victims themselves having to come forward or be named, managing their own vulnerabilities through a less vulnerable digital presence. The hashtag precedes the global #metoo movement, but can arguably serve to integrate #metoo into a more planetary perspective. The shadowy presence offered by the template exempts the bodies behind it from the inquiring gazes of judicial mechanisms and social heteropatriarchal strategies, such as victim blaming. Through the collectivity of the digital object brought forth via #INeverAskForIt, the body may speak and be present, despite the opacity and shelter offered by the template. As Padmini Ray Murray has said, these instances "highlight the violated body by its very absence, or by gesturing to its absent presence" (Ray Murray 2018, 189). Although the strategy emerges from the relative privilege of academic space, it does not speak for an othered woman, but rather universalizes the experience of sexual harassment to speak to women and folx of various class and caste backgrounds, and to people experiencing harassment because of nonhegemonic gender representations. The hashtag becomes a space for them to inscribe their stories into the collective body of the template. Further, Blank Noise's street interventions arguably bring different individuals into the Blank Noise network by showing how they, too, are complicit and accountable, thus rearticulating the leakiness of the social network as an effective continuity of Bangalore's streets. Blank Noise hence does not represent othered voices, but attempts to physically and virtually draw these othered voices in, by showing how they also are

accountable and capable of acting, without having their vulnerabilities exploited.

If this first strategy offers solidarity through protection and anonymity, the second strategy of digital solidarities that I see deployed against the modular is very much about revealing and naming. The hashtags I have discussed through the affective qualities of intimacy in chapter 7 are indexical, they point toward contexts, histories, and bodies, and thus have a revealing and naming tendency that inscribes bodies into the virtual. The hashtags related to Black Lives Matter and hashtags such as #MenAreTrash and #dieseFrau all invite relation and recognition, instead of opacity and shadowy presences. In naming, these hashtags build visibility networks that produce a counterdiscourse to the dominant narratives in more mainstream media outlets, and have even in certain cases actively sourced journalistic reporting, such as in the case of hashtags attached to the wider framework of Black Lives Matter. By naming, be it experts with a feminist attitude as in the hashtag #dieseFrau or victims of racialized police violence through #iftheygunnedmedown, a form of identification takes place, where similarities of experience formulate a type of intimacy over which individuals may connect across difference. Naming thus creates public networks, which can be a source of great strength, but may also make those named more vulnerable to harassment.

These acts of resistance and solidarity do not express a radically new political paradigm. But the online conflicts and overwhelming hate, expressed most pointedly toward nonwhite, nonmale, and nonheterosexual bodies deviating from the figure of man, pulls the hate, trolling, and violence individuals have always heard, felt, and seen into the public. Instead of bearing the brunt of these forms of violence alone, they are now documented in the public privacy of social networking sites, such as Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram, for a larger transnational society to see, evaluate, and lay testimony to. Although many have voiced panic over the normalization of such violence and hate speech, I read this as the amplification of problems that are not new and have been boiling within the backend of society

for decades. But even though this has led to optimistic prophecies that a new transparency will lead to more equality, the cases throughout this book also show that technological innovation alone cannot disrupt the potent force of modulation.

Instead, the suggestions of vulnerability and intimacy can be integrated into what has been called the "planetary turn" that evokes Gayatri Spivak's (2003) notion of the planetary as a "move away from the totalizing paradigm of modern-age globalization" (Elias and Moraru 2015, xi) toward a recognition of relationality and interdependence, of multiplicity beyond reductive readings of identity politics. I see this turn articulating a hope for a cosmopolitan order that acknowledges the entanglements of cultural productions and subjectivities, some of which I have discussed throughout this book. These transnational and cross-temporal collective modalities of being create a cosmopolitan reality that resists its eurocentric reductions and engages a cosmopolitanism beyond the modular, in a minor mode, so to speak.

I have identified solidarity strategies through intimacy and vulnerability, which equally rely on relational embodied representations that negotiate lived experience in a collective manner and as structural, material critique. They affectively call attention to the structural disavowal of only certain intimacies and vulnerabilities being posed as problematic, those that appear as the embodiments of the already marginalized. Both strategies intrinsically operate through the digital in historical lineage with intersectional feminisms. They are incidents that are representative of larger networks and negotiations, all available to the informed and/or intuitive user. Both strategies thus fall on either side of an ambivalent visible/invisible divide, but can also point to an unwillingness to exist only in the binary because their readings are multiple, attach to certain groups in certain ways, and might inspire a different form of being-with that carries material consequences. As Lisa Nakamura has suggested, the practices and digital inhabitations, just like Black and intersectional feminism, produce knowledge "through the body, and not in spite of it" (transmediale 2018). The excavation of rela-

tionality from the invisibilized backend thus allows for a rearticulation of solidarity that can integrate traditional paradigms of the international proletariat or the Combahee River Collective's claim that insisting on identity is precisely *not* an individualist or individualizing modality of being. Framing it in this way, I see the possibility of digital solidarity focusing once more on material inequalities as the basis for modular distinction and a codification of difference — difference is mediated materially and discursively, it is *bios,* and *techné,* and *mythoi.*

The strategies to overcome and rework any one of these frames should never be seen as indefinitely positive; they also always carry with them the risks of violence and exploitation. Both vulnerability and intimacy — as stand-ins for protecting and making intelligible — can be harnessed as empowering strategies, just as they may cause further violence. In Europe, refugees burn their fingerprints to be unintelligible to the registration technologies at the border for fear of being deported — invisibility through self-harm makes them a shadowy presence before the violent European border regime (Wood 2018). On the other hand, Indian farmers, whose manual labor has served to work away their fingerprints, starve to death because the digital state makes their needs a matter of suspicion, when the *Aadhaar* readers cannot match their bodies to the saved data imagined to be more factual. These bodies want nothing more than visibility before the state, but fall short of the intimate encounter with their virtual representations (Rao and Nair 2019). Although I have argued for both intelligibility and opacity as moments of solidarity and collective inhabitations, these examples show how both strategies are ambivalent, and never generalizable as inherently good or bad.

What these simultaneities then explore is that computation *and* cultural logics can also not be seen merely in terms of totalitarian control or deterministic materiality. As digital administrative governance increasingly turns toward datafied bodies and away from enfleshed realities, the shifts toward the digital that can be observed in India and Germany may partially be effected by this turn toward population governance through social mod-

ulation and an imaginary that equates sameness with safety. The clean, separable data bodies are coming to matter more than the flawed embodied subject they are loosely based on, as the space of the internet creates superempowered media conglomerates to govern and homogenize data subjects. The dualism of mind and body is thus pulled together in theory, while dirty flesh is continuously problematized and externalized. However, because of the embodied issues the digital forms of activism address here, I have argued that not only is the body present within the virtual, but it is also present as an inhabitation, not a viral phenomenon that infects and disappears. Internet activism, such as the movements discussed here, materializes the body in the realm of the presumably clean and immaterial digital space, problematizing this performance of cleanliness in the process. Because of the relatable, quotidian, and above all networked quality of digital computing, the data infrastructure of modulation is effectively drawn out of the invisible backend into the vulnerable frontend. The hate speech, trolling, and harassment that Black, brown, and Indigenous people, intersectional feminists, queer folx, and other others are faced with online on a daily basis testify to the importance of their work just as much as they disrupt the assumed whiteness of internet users. The inhabitations that these movements foster and nurture allow marginalized individuals to be present, even if these othered peoples often chose to be visible only through their anonymous and collective contributions.

Each of the interventions described here marks an insistence that the digital community learn how to know, feel, and live otherwise. They insist on the cracks in an assumed universal of global technologies and shift the focus to the manifold differences inherent to the collective inhabitations of the digital. However, these cracks have also had fragmenting effects that foster misunderstandings and dissonance. As affect gains political currency, those invested in the political substance of their societal infrastructures are prone to misreading or appropriating the language of critique being deployed even by affirmative hashtags, such as #dieseFrau. Even though, as Nakamura (2018)

has suggested, social media's turn to affect — as personal, confessional, and empathetic — has been accompanied by a turn to Black and intersectional feminism (itself personal, confessional, and empathetic), the solutions continue to express a superficial and consumable spectacle of diversity representations and positionalities. It is still questionable whether such spectacular and affective expressions will carry their claims forward into material realities.

Unfortunately, the same cannot be said for oppositional and regressive strategies. Because the globalized networked society is composed of leaks and overlaps, it may sometimes be difficult to distinguish the desired relationality from its forms of appropriation. Stalder has pointed to the danger of states, corporations, and sometimes even reactionary political groups that implement what he calls "astro-turfing," "the faking of grassroots involvement by paid operatives" (Stalder 2012, 251). In its most innocuous manner it draws the unknowing subject into false support, or profit generation through data collection or payment to a fictitious organization. In its most dangerous effects, astro-turfing can provide the paid operatives with data that identify and target dissident subjects for persecution. Very often, these mechanisms follow logics that draw in identity-based politics and support. A recent example is the technological exchange that took place between Germany and Turkey in 2019, where a German technology firm sold spyware to the Turkish state. Turkey has been courting the EU to become a member state, despite reports of its continuous human rights violations, which are often given as reasons for freezing accession talks (European Parliament Press Release 2016). In 2016, Turkey was said to have deployed heavy-duty surveillance tools to monitor and locate Erdogan-critical voices in the country. According to the German-language newspaper *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* (FAZ) (Bubrowksi and Lijnden, n.d.), which was one of the first to report on the incident, a website was created with an interface that mirrored the government-critical "March for Justice." The website provided an app, which turned out to have harbored a state Trojan that infiltrated the mobile phones of thousands of

Erdogan critics.[2] Users visiting the site and downloading the app deployed an entire surveillance package onto the device once the app was installed. Mobile phones were infected with the Trojan that monitored user's location, communication, transactions, and more (Meister 2019). But the supposedly pristine European moral stance, cited especially in relation to the ongoing negotiations with Turkey, does not hold when it comes to this particular technological exchange. The software was reportedly been provided by German tech company FinFisher, which also provides the software implemented in German predictive policing. It has also sold its products to governments in other countries, such as Egypt, Ethiopia, Bahrain, and India, where governments have deployed them against civilians. Exporting the software under seemingly ambivalent conditions, FinFisher has been indicted for export violations, and a criminal case has been filed against the company. Not only does this export stand in crass contrast to the discourse around Turkey entering the EU, where it is often said that the EU will not tolerate further human rights violations for any member state, while itself being involved in dirty deals with Libya, Qatar, Turkey, and many more. More pressingly, the subtle and hidden exchange of software for money in this context suggests a division between politics and technology that is simply untrue, now and historically. Liberal and technological forms of governance that channel such notions of democracy show the importance of grasping capitalism as "racial" — in this particular case, the Turkish human rights violations posit Turkey as barbarian, while Germany was left to grapple only with economic aspects, such as export violations. Moreover, both incidents attest to the socio-technological regimes implicated within it, meaning that technology in both cases is framed as neutral and unmarked, but actively enables great harm through the logics of modulation, which in this case results in the iden-

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2   A Trojan is a certain type of spyware that — much like the eponymous historical horse of ancient Greece — uses software installations as a vehicle to enter a device's system to then monitor its every informational exchange, unbeknownst to the user.

tification and capture of any state-critical deviance. The cases further attest to a disjunct between supposed safety provided by the state and the lived reality of the people that actually inhabit it. The report only mentions state Trojans as an infringement on Germany's export policies, but these kinds of state Trojans are problematic in general, as they implement existing software breaches to deploy their spyware, giving governments reason not to report the safety loopholes. Because the usage of state Trojans depends on these security breaches remaining unacknowledged for the spyware to be operable, individuals, not only in Turkey but wherever state Trojans are implemented, are willfully kept in the dark about their devices' possible vulnerabilities. State Trojans thus make devices all the more vulnerable to being hacked by other cybercriminals and further infringe on the user's right to privacy and safety in the name of (state) security. The safety of the individual citizen is put at risk for the supposed greater good of a secure nation. As a result, state surveillance mechanisms must be read as effectively dangerous to certain individuals, encroaching upon them with similar force as the threat from which these mechanisms are meant to protect its citizens. Safety and vulnerability are political frameworks that participate in dysselection.

It is still questionable how effective the collectives discussed here will be in light of the increasingly diverse and hidden ways in which these logics operate. As solidarity arises from exactly the forms that racial capitalism pulls apart, it does not necessarily posit something *against* that formation of racial capitalism, at least not in the classic dualisms of heroic activism posited against effeminate passivity. In the fetishization of activity, solidarity may never be enough. But as increasingly more persons are drawn into the modulated backend, nation-states, too, will struggle to sustain themselves on the grounds of assumed homogeneity. Trumpism, Hindu-nationalism, German neofascism, and so on will not have sustainable solutions for societies that are necessarily global, not even for those proponents of the figure of man. As German philosopher Bini Adamczak said in a talk, now that the end of the world need no longer be imagined,

we can get on with banding together to imagine the end of capitalism, and, I would add, its modular separabilities.

The strategies discussed throughout this book are therefore always ambivalent and context-specific, and also carry the hopes for a world that turns from a stageist globe to a pluriversal and entangled notion of the planetary. The planetary is not an easy answer, because it complicates the notion of universal globalization. Instead, one of Spivak's suggestions is to make the world uncanny in the Freudian sense — *unheimlich* (Spivak 2003, 74). The German *unheimlich*, in Spivak's interpretation, becomes the unwillingness to make oneself feel too much at home — in the literal translation, un-*home*-ly. I read this as Spivak's attempt to rephrase a continuous effort to deconstruct what counts as common sense, even in the comfort it creates for the intellectual mind. This work has shown how that means different things for different people, a lot of whom will have to get out of their so-called comfort zone forcefully, while othered others may require the reclusion of collective inhabitation, finding homeliness within an other's story. As an intellectual exercise, the uncanny means to be constantly questioned and framed as — to a certain extent — undesirable, just as shelters and temporary inhabitations are important aspects for those in the cross fire. To a point, solidarity offers temporal comfort in uncanny situations, where those who feel *homey* (*heimlich*) receive a call to approach the uncanny, while the uncanny may become a home to those who do not have one. It describes an attempt to recognize and relate to how an other's intimacies and vulnerabilities are a response to one's own. Through the uncanny, vulnerability of an other is accepted and acknowledged, despite the shadowy presence she speaks from. And since the uncanny is always relational, this means sharing intimacy with an other where commonalities can be sought after, but are always insecure. Therefore, Spivak's imperative is antagonistic to the histories of modulation, and it more distinctly counters technological innovation, which often aims to make (certain) human lives more comfortable, less complex, through homogenous and serialized codification. The

uncanny prefers excess; it draws out fleeting and fugitive data subjects.

However, in light of the violent appropriations mentioned above, it is a pressing necessity to continue to make visible and fortify the networks of care that inhabit the digital, despite increasing modulation, appropriation, and control. Instead of constantly looking for new spaces upon which to construct the utopian, it is precisely the problematic infrastructures that necessitate critical interrogation and attempts to make lives more livable within them. Sarah Sharma has been a central critic of the tendency to solve problematic infrastructures through an imagined exit, which reverberates with my discussion of cyber-libertarianism as producing the internet in imagined newness. The notion of exiting (e.g., exiting Facebook platforms for more secure infrastructures) is not always an option, at least not for the gendered and racialized other. Critiquing a new leftism that searches for easy answers, Sharma discusses how exits and escapes are fantasies that replicate — indeed are — "an exercise in patriarchal power, a privilege that occurs at the expense of cultivating and sustaining conditions of collective autonomy" (Digital Bauhaus Summit 2016). Exit thus stands in contradiction to care as that which responds to the uncompromisingly tethered nature of human dependency and the contingency of life, the mutual precariousness of the human condition. Women's exit is hardly even on the table, given that women have historically been unable to choose when to leave or enter inequitable power relations, "let alone enter and exit in a carefree manner." Exiting thus involves the same tendencies of individualized, consumer-oriented quick fixes that I have described to be the basis of contemporary modulation. The exit necessarily breaks ties and leaves behind. It attempts an autonomy in a society that, as I have argued, cannot function without disavowing its entanglements and leakages. To exit thus means to cut ties with the network; it iterates an imagined purity only available to some. For this reason, the mainstream, hegemonic, and quotidian social networking sites, such as Facebook or Twitter, should not be scoffed at, because they engage people, especially women,

on a low level, where skills and technological know-how is not as central as, for example, in producing a more secure technological infrastructure for a collective data and body to inhabit.

One point of departure thus necessarily lies in remaining, and remaining with intersectional feminism, which deploys affect, relationality, and care as centering on and emerging from embodied realities of being instead of objectivity claims or empty universals. The notion of identity put forth by the Combahee River Collective continues to be a viable strategy to oppose automation and modulation, precisely in its fluidity, multiplicity, relationality, and not in its essentialism. The multiplicity suggested within the collaborative text *A Black Feminist Statement* (The Combahee River Collective 2014) makes uncomfortable — *uncanny* — the invisibilizing tendencies of race as technology through the very presence of its practitioners.

As one last example of such an embodied care network can show, integrating Black feminist thought into technology offers completely different requirements and produces different material artifacts. Such is the case for Hyphen-Labs, a queer Afrofuturist art collective creating what they call "digital narratives" at the intersection of product design, virtual reality, and neuroscience. Their three-part virtual reality project called "Neurospeculative Afrofeminism" is the award-winning central piece to a number of gadgets, sculptures, and immersive virtual reality (VR) videos. The videos and all the gadgets produced for its implementation gesture toward Afrofeminist and queer lineages. For example, the Octavia Electrodes and Chandeliers, decorative and alien-like, invoke Octavia Butler's Afrofuturist imaginaries. The electrodes represent hair extensions, which are described to be interwoven with brain-stimulating electrical currents that negotiate neuroscientific advances from below. In the VR narrative, the user enters a hair salon in the body of a young Black female to get these electrodes braided into their hair. Once in, the electrodes-turned-braids take the user on a journey through space and time, passing different representations of Black women and how they participated in innovations in science and technology. Further speculative products include

Ruby-cam earrings, which allow its wearer to document its surroundings through tiny integrated cameras, or reflective visors that let wearers see out while hiding their faces from recognition software (Hyphen-Labs, n.d.). A shawl, draped across the face, tricks surveillance cameras equipped with face-detection software, because the shawl's colorful patterns are made to appear like several tiny faces that distract cameras like digital mirages. These objects represent the possibility of wearable and inconceivable objects that return the gaze in what has been called "sousveillance" (Monahan 2009) (literally, "viewing from below"), and can be read as instances of inhabiting a template — only that here it is fused onto the body through a wearable device. Centrally, they show what technology made for a certain community (instead of for profit) could look like. The VR video, Hyphen-Labs hopes, will create more experimental inhabitations through enabling other representations of Black and brown women and documenting their contributions to technological innovation. The entire process was accompanied by constant exchange, not only among the members of the collective, but also with Afrofuturist artists displaying their work on Instagram and other social media channels. Hyphen-Labs documents their ethical source collection — the collective contacted every single Instagram artist that was an inspiration to the piece, and the Neurospeculative Afrofeminist project thus ended up being a product that was crowdsourced by Black women and Afrofuturists from across the globe. The collective describes their choice to situate their video in a hair salon, because they see it as a place that has always been regarded as a safe space for Black women. Although they received further assistance from neuroscientists, one of Hyphen-Labs' aims is to distinctively attempt closing the gap between different forms of knowledge production. The project is hoping to use these immersive experiences to invite young Black and brown people into a discourse they may still find distant, alienating, or unreachable, just as they participate in rectifying the image of Black women as technophobes, either incapable or fearful of engaging with technology. Because the research products are mostly aesthetic, Hyphen-Labs is hoping

to draw marginalized youth into neuroscientific research in a playful manner, and tell stories that subvert the usual hegemony of white bodies as the only bodies with a story to tell. The collective does not necessarily engage critically with their own (albeit situated) techno-utopianism, but they do show awareness of the genealogies of Black feminism, the histories of marginalization that they critique, and the need to imagine a different world, even if just for a moment. Hyphen-Labs thus engages perspectives that are not new or innovative in the usual sense of the word, but combine critical perspectives of the past with technology design for a future that may circumvent the reductive propositioning of users only as man2.0. Thus, Hyphen-Labs is exemplary in its attempt to involve more diverse perspectives in the creation, development, and deployment of new technologies and technological devices. It does so with a focus on embodied experience, but without essentializing or appropriating that experience. The narrative is prefigured, and users may not take control of the perspective or the avatar they inhabit — the Black woman they can "become" is not theirs to move around. Engaging with the project thus requires the users to fully immerse in the world created by Hyphen-Labs, without being distracted by the pornotropic display of personal items that authenticate the experience or the violence implied in a white person taking control of a Black avatar. Rather, it is a colorful and futuristic scenario of speculation, which combines one embodied perspective with emerging technologies and the Black and brown women in history who have shaped this specific perspective.

It must nonetheless be remembered that the art world can be elitist and alienating to many, and technological experiments specifically often require a deeper understanding of the technological backend that once again limits the access (understood as a deeper engagement than mere monetary possibility) to these technologies.[3] As Nakamura notes, "Users who lack digi-

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3   Another point I have completely omitted throughout this book is the labor aspect of new technologies. Women in the art world may be celebrated for creating innovative technologies, such as the ones Hyphen-Labs is

tal literacies as well as cultural ones are less likely to be aware of alternatives to services like Facebook, or indeed, to be aware of the risks associated with their use in the first place" (Nakamura 2015, 223). Nakamura identifies this group to consist predominantly of women — poor, older, or migrant women, in particular. Reminded of the praxis of care as unwillingness to exit, feminist solidarity movements will have to increasingly negotiate these very vulnerable positions, which require a presence in the social networking sites that have the most reckless data-capturing mechanisms. Especially because women, not just feminists, are more likely to provide the free labor usually expected from social networking sites, there is a need to address the new immaterial labor forms that serve to produce value within them, just as it leaves behind those most likely to be producing that value. Standing in solidarity must therefore expand upon the avant-gardistic strategy of Hyphen-Labs, to also mean remaining within the problematic spaces of Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram, despite the ability of these platforms to capture and identify users, and ignore their data rights.

Crowd-based movements, such as the ones discussed throughout this book, are more accessible and understandable — they do not require special skills or introductory courses and can negotiate engagement in the short term and longer term. Instead of exiting a space, they invite people in. The initiatives Blank Noise offers often center on enabling those usually silenced to speak up and tell their story, but newly arising forms of community engagement also actively oppose online hate speech and extremist content, especially in the West, where the

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involved with, especially because Afrofuturism is arguably trendy at the moment. It is important to remember that these futuristic devices are manually assembled, predominantly by Black and brown women in the Global South, whose labor conditions are invisible in most of the discourses on technological innovation. Although some device-producers have begun thinking about "fairer" modalities of producing technological devices, these usually do not have the same resources as the big technology contenders and are thus less "comfortable" to use, as they are often clunkier, less sleek, and have lower technological capacities than the latest iPhone may have.

discursive arena seems more violent than in India. An important benefit of all of these strategies is that they offer terms of engagement beyond the judicial state. Activist communities can inform and learn from each other on a transnational scale, instead of relying only on carceral or judicial mechanisms. This offers new possibilities for a planetary feminist network that is loosely connected, but may nonetheless focus on locally specific and changing themes. They carry with them the hope that relating differently might produce different material relations. It matters what beings are being in what way.

However, the overwhelming capitalist extraction within internet and data infrastructures necessarily seems to require more regulatory paradigms, which in the present seems possible only through the anachronistic engagement of nation-states, employing ideas of homogenous subjectivity and containing them within borders in attempts to regulate this transnational — both global and planetary — network. The modern nation-state itself expresses the contradictions of modulation, as backend and frontend change places in moments of crisis. Despite such realities, I have been hopeful in discussing feminist collectives that may give impulses for lawmakers, institutions, and digital practitioners to address identity-based violence as structural, material, and historical, but also to think beyond carceral and containing measures or modes of redress that demand authenticity and accuracy. Most centrally, I have wanted to articulate the ties that seemingly frivolous or sectarian-identity politics has to material strategies of distribution — that grasping something legible via whatever means and however problematic can allow for an individual or group to get things. Solidarity is a central axis to overcome the individual strategy of accumulation, to strive toward a transformative capacity that no longer attaches material goods to the intelligibility of the liberal subject and its attachments to man, however faint or oppositional. But this transformation should not do away with the flawed individuals struggling toward and against that man; this rearticulates the notion of clean technology idealized as the other of the dirty human. I have argued for remaining rather than exiting

problematic contexts, in full awareness that not everyone has the strength to do so, all the time. But as connections increase, not only on an abstract level but as *felt* entanglements, relations can be negotiated in more careful ways. "Staying with the trouble" (Haraway 2016) in the media planetary necessarily must be a collective practice, which requires trust and the right to take risks. Because racial capitalism obscures the dependencies it has forcefully created, the resulting alienation expresses the performative disconnect, an inability to see entanglements that enable individuals to feel individual. Focusing rather on relationality, the perspectives in this book suggest that agency is not situated within an individual, an actor, or a subject and that a collective realization of embodied, relational multiplicity may give an account of a new international class consciousness. The ability to act, in any which way, is the result of precisely an experience of relationality, where individuals learn that they are entangled in something/one, can relate to something/one, or necessarily rely on something/one. This collectivity, however, is never univocal, but must be a multiplicity of voices and strategies. Solidarity after modulation is solidarity across difference.

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