



***Making sense of the Internet  
in the diasporic space:  
“tactic digital Otherness”  
of Latin American migrant women in Granada***

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*To my grandmas, Lida and Maruja*

## Summary

*The backbone of my research project is made of the linkages and intersections between the Internet, migration and sexual difference, with reference to a group of Latin American women living in Granada, Spain, and their relationships with computed mediated communication via the Internet. Drawing on an ethnographic approach, I have made interviews to track the perceptions, discourses and practices related to the Internet among these women, taking into account their differences in age, class, education and migratory wave, as intersectional variables that overlap and co-produce each other. My main research question is How do Latin American migrant women in Granada make sense of the Internet in inhabiting the diasporic space? In order to answer it, I have drawn on the theoretical framework provided by the interdisciplinary fields of Feminist Cultural Studies of Technoscience and Postcolonial studies. Thus this research proposes to practice a “located politics of technology” (Vehviläinen 2002:23), taking into account “the starting point of each group's concrete setting” (Ibidem) in everyday practices related to the Internet. This approach challenges technological determinism and quantitative readings on the study of Internet users as well as allowing for a deconstructive reading of key concepts such as information society and digital gap, from a gender perspective. Moreover it proposes alternative conceptualizations such as “tactic digital otherness” that values the productiveness of embodied and embedded differences.*

## Resumen

*El eje de esta investigación está conformado por las intersecciones entre Internet, migración y diferencia sexual, con referencia a un caso de estudio cualitativo sobre un grupo de mujeres latinoamericanas inmigrantes residentes en Granada, España, y sus relaciones con la comunicación mediada por ordenador. Para ello he apelado al método etnográfico de las entrevistas, recogiendo sus percepciones, discursos y prácticas con respecto a Internet, tomando en cuenta sus diferencias en edad, clase socioeconómica y ola migratoria, como variables de análisis interseccionales que se superponen y co-producen. Mi principal pregunta de investigación es ¿cómo las mujeres latinoamericanas inmigrantes residentes en Granada, España, dan sentido a la comunicación por ordenador al habitar el espacio de la diáspora? La respuesta se enmarca en el espacio interdisciplinario de los Estudios Feministas sobre Tecnociencia y los Estudios Postcoloniales. Se trata de un ejercicio de “política situada de la tecnología” (Vehviläinen 2000:23) que toma en cuenta “el punto de partida de cada grupo particular” (Ibidem) para vincularse con la tecnociencia en el entorno de la vida cotidiana. Ello desafía enfoques tecnodeterministas y cuantitativos sobre los usuarios de Internet, a la vez que problematiza conceptos de amplia circulación en la actualidad, como sociedad de la información y brecha digital, desde una perspectiva de género. Asimismo, propone conceptualizaciones alternativas, tales como la “otredad digital táctica”, que revaloriza el carácter productivo de las diferencias encarnadas y situadas.*

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Cuando se diseña un estudio de caso etnográfico, los testimonios de las entrevistadas son un componente esencial y por ello las mujeres que compartieron sus historias conmigo son devotas de mi mayor respeto y gratitud. También quienes posibilitaron estos encuentros en el marco de sus actividades: la Concejalía de Igualdad de Oportunidades del Ayuntamiento de la ciudad de Granada, la Fundación Albihar, la Asociación de Uruguayos y Uruguayas de Granada y la Asociación de mujeres inmigrantes uno=uno.

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"Baby, I wanna tell you  
That in my computer I have  
One gigabyte of your kisses  
And your person in a floppy disk

Baby, I wanna tell you  
That you are the only one who interests me  
And the mouse that moves your mouth  
Formats my head

Baby, I wanna tell you  
That in my computer I only have  
A screen with your eyes  
And your body in a CD-ROM

Baby, I wanna tell you  
That I have connected the Internet of my dreams  
To your smile  
And to the modem of your hair

I wanna send you a message  
Open up you email for me  
I wanna send to you a diskette  
With a little bit of my love  
To make love to you"

"Mi PC", song by Juan Luis Guerra  
Album *No es lo mismo ni es igual*  
(my translation)

## Chapter 1: Introduction

Even if we do not know the person who has composed these verses, we know he has a computer with an Internet connection, and that he is doubly in love: with a woman and with his computer. An imaginary exercise of deconstructive reading tempts me to think that he is a white, middle-class, heterosexual man. The lover confuses their “bodies” -woman's and machinery- and suggests a morphologic feminization of the computer. Nevertheless far from being a declaration of cyborg love, the bodies’ frontiers are clearly delimited: on the one hand, the woman’s body and the computer; on the other hand, the man’s body who describes and confuses them. Witty metaphors and linguistic games are abundant, but always already from a masculine heterosexual standpoint of an enunciator who locates both woman and computer as objects of his desire and for his consumption. He has a computer, “his” PC, where the woman's kisses are measurable and her identity storable; he controls her mouth with the mouse and, from the screen, he can see her eyes unidirectionally (in this context, I doubt whether her eyes can see him too). Her smile and her hair are sources of energy for him, in love with a woman without ethnicity, nor class, nor sexuality except the one he confers to her.

With this reading, I do not want to attack the work of Dominican artist Juan Luis Guerra, who has captivated a heterogeneous public –me included- with romantic as well as politically loaded lyrics. But this song proves suggestive in many senses, as a part of popular culture which usually illustrates the anxieties that circulate around complex and contradictory realities. In this sense, “Mi PC” echoes the mediatic and technoscientific revolution that not so long ago was exclusive to Western, white, middle and high socio-economic class men. They have predominated in the early stages of development and research, as well as in the recent stages of design and commodification, access and use of the so called new Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) of which the Internet is part of. At the moment this thesis is being written, this predominant masculine profile holds sway in all key spaces for decision making, ceding slowly and gradually at the level of users.

In this sense, mi research constitutes an effort to understand the Internet phenomenon at the level of users from a different perspective that values the experiences of a group of particular women, privileging their testimonies over the gazes that fix them as mere consumer/ed “girls” of computer mediated communication. The journey I propose here invites us to listen to other songs and to see other choreographies on the Internet users’ experiences, with all the obstacles and contradictions such an endeavour involves. It is a project I take as continuity with my previous



experience as coordinator of ICT workshops with grassroots women in Montevideo, Uruguay, which I have enriched at the theoretical, methodological and reflective level<sup>1</sup> after my geopolitical move from Latin America to Europe and the academic experience acquired within the GEMMA programme.

Indeed in 1998, when the song was released, the percentage of this users' profile was majority in all statistics of both first countries to connect to the Internet, such as the USA (Media Awareness Network, no date), as well as in countries from regions in which connections were made later in time, such as Latin America (Bonder 2002). This scenario has recently started to change and in several regions of the globe, the percentages of men and women who access to the Internet tend to parity (ITU 2006). However, an uncritical celebration of this trend towards equality would not be prudent enough for many reasons, including the limits of quantitative studies as the only source to explain reality. As obvious as this statement may sound, the positivist tradition of western scientific knowledge continues to be adhered to many academic disciplines, in the form of an invisible membrane resistant to permeate the contributions of qualitative knowledge. In this sense, Internet users' statistics leave us with the bitter taste of a jigsaw puzzle which main pieces are missing; a piece of information without faces, bodies, or voices, which camouflages projections and wishes as hasty conclusions.

Quantitative approaches in technoscience studies are close relatives of the techno-determinist paradigm that has impregnated a great amount of the history of telecommunications, and which main motto is that technology drives social change. Technology, understood here as apparatuses, mechanisms and software, impacts society in an always already positive way, considering society as a separate and non-polluting domain. This reductionism avoids considering technology in terms of

“the rich interweaving of media technology, human action and social structure (...) the communication activities or practices we engage in to develop and use these devices; and the social arrangements or organizations that form around the devices and practices” (Lievrouw and Livingstone 2002:7).

This has been popularized by the approaches of the social construction of technology and it is relevant for my research in two ways. First, it constitutes a starting point to interpret the socio-political, economic and cultural implications of computer mediated communication (CMC) through the Internet in globalized times. Secondly, it enables an interpretative framework that considers

<sup>1</sup> The concept of “reflective” is used here in the sense discussed by Hyles as “the movement whereby that which has been used to generate a system is made, through a changed perspective, to become part of the system it generates” (1999:8). I will go back to this issue in the first chapter, when I discuss my methodology.

technological artefacts as vehicles of meaning, that is, “models to think with” (Geertz 1973 quoted in Lie 2003:252) that acquire specific meanings in different historical contexts as well as mechanisms of identification (Leander 2002), according to gender (Lie 2003), age, socio-economic class and nationality, among others.

When Internet transcended the borders of its military origins in the U.S. laboratories, first into universities and then to the general public in the early 1990's, the techno-determinist paradigm reverberated in a wave of optimist cyberdiscourses that masked it in a revolutionary and emancipatory imaginary, promising to “overcom[e] the limitations of time, space, or embodiment” (Eisenstein quoted in Paasonen 2000). Cyberdiscourses have grown in quantity and pretensions, and have been produced from actors as diverse as hackers, businessmen, politicians and human right activists<sup>2</sup>. These accounts had some reminiscences of old master narratives that insist on a progressive, linear development of events towards a better future, this time promoted by the circulation and availability of information and knowledge as values of exchange. In fact, “technological determinism has been a prominent theme in accounts of modernity and social progress” (Lievrow 2002:185) and proved to be problematic as it detached ICT from a “social landscape, which precedes, shapes, contextualizes and continues after any specific technological innovation” (Lievrow 2002:17).

In order to make an analysis of ICT taking this social landscape into account, a *glocal* approach is required, that is, an interpretative framework which contextualizes the experiences of specific groups of people and their relationships with technology in the always changing scenario of a current interdependent and interconnected world, in other words, a globalized one. A key concept to think of reality is that of transnational flows: multidirectional and continuous movements of capital, information, *imaginaires* and people who, with more or less fortune, go across geopolitical borders and question the definition and scope of nation states (Appadurai 2002; Castells 1996). What is new to this phenomenon is not movement; neither the systems of power that promote or stop ones or the others. What is historically making a point of inflection is the speed, scale, and amount in the circulation of these flows, their articulations and disjunctures, and how it all resounds in different regions of the globe simultaneously (Appadurai 2002) and in people and groups differently.

In this scenario of continuities and ruptures, I want to look at the intersections between the Internet, migration and sexual difference, as they may open up spaces for reflection in which old

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<sup>2</sup> Some examples are John Barlow, founder of Electronic Frontier Foundation (Featherstone&Burrows 1996), Bill Gates, founder of Microsoft, Nicholas Negroponte, and Democrat Al Gore, Vice President of US between 1994 and 2001 (Mosco 2004)

and new paradigms of inequality, change and resistance converge. Migrant populations have gradually started to engage with the Internet to keep affective, cultural and economic bonds with their communities of origin and, at the same time, they have built new links in the societies of destiny, contacting fellow countrymen and women, looking for working and leisure spaces in their new geopolitical location. In this context, I want to focus this research on a female migrant population in order to trace the assumptions at play in the relationship between ICT and gender systems. It is mainly about the cultural perception that posits technology as either neutral to gender or as a masculine domain in which “women tend to define themselves as non-experts” (Henwood quoted in Vehviläinen 2002:275), especially when sexual differences intersect age, socio-economic class and educative level, among others. My project aspires to portrait how specific women relate to the Internet as users within the framework of their migratory projects, exploring the nuances at stake from the fact of being current users to the yearn for becoming users in the near future, their expectations, fears, frustrations and motivations. The question that has guided my research can be synthesized as:

*How do Latin American migrant women living in Granada, Spain, make sense of computer mediated communication to inhabit the diasporic space?*

In order to provide an answer, I have drawn on the ethnographic method of the interview, which results are preceded and contextualized through a theoretical exploration of many disciplinary, ideological and epistemological folds, and how these debates have led to the need of feminist approaches to the Internet, migration, and the combinations which may derive from them.

The scarce literature on this topic supersedes the ambitions and possibilities of this research. I could venture that mainstream Internet studies have rendered invisible the particularity of groups when they encounter a technology that is still far from being massive, due to its recent emergence and also its unequal geopolitical, social and cultural distribution. These studies are strongly biased towards quantitative and universalistic claims, classifying people in terms of connected and non-connected, without tuning the conceptual and methodological tools to provide an account of a complex reality in which structural and cultural barriers assign beforehand who occupies one or the other binary positions. When I chose my research topic, I was motivated by a concern regarding the proliferation of techno-deterministic approaches and the lack of research on the Internet in the everyday realities of embodied and embedded subjects. I got some inspiration from authors who argue for the need of “ethnographies of everyday Internet use” (Bakardjieva 2005, Silverstone

2003) and the importance of exploring people's first steps in becoming users (Van Dijk & Hacker 2003, Frissen 2005:271).

My research is inscribed then in the emergent field of diasporic media culture studies which have started to explore the intersections of socio-demographic changes (migration) and technological changes (ICT) within post-industrial societies. Women's testimonies allow me to argue that the dynamics of their migratory projects have motivated them to take up the use of the Internet, overcoming personal and structural barriers which used to situate them, consciously or unconsciously, as strangers in computer mediated communication. This ambitious project calls for combining emergent and usually divergent theoretical, epistemological and methodological traditions, such as Cultural Feminist Studies of Science and Technology (or Technoscience), and Postcolonial Studies. Although there are tensions between them, they all share “the political commitment to the cultures and subjectivities of subjugated groups in society” (Lykke 2002:139). The formers are born from the intersection of three subversive interdisciplinary areas, both for their marginal position in the canon of human and social sciences and for their tendency to transgress the disciplinary limits of theories, methods and approaches (Lykke 2002): Cultural Studies, Feminist Studies and Social Studies of Science and Technology.

Postcolonial theories will provide the specific framework to contextualize current uneven flows of resources and people, inherited from the colonial epoch, and the conceptualization of subaltern. Since its emergence in Literary Studies after Second World War, the postcolonial approach has extended to various disciplines and areas of study engaged with the material-discursive consequences of European imperialism and its updating in new axes of power in which has been recently called neocolonialism (Ashcroft et al. 1998: 186-192). Although the postcolonial has been criticized for being opaque, ambiguous and even complicit with the global capitalism it criticizes (Dirlik 1997), I find it necessary for the analysis of new media and the diverse lines of research that may reveal the complex intertwining of patriarchy and colonialism (Fernández 1999).

In the first chapter I will map a genealogy of those theories and key concepts that have guided the trajectory of my research, as well as the methodological options and challenges. This includes a reflection on the difficulties implicit in grasping historically recent phenomena such as the Internet and the diversity of approaches it has raised within academic agendas. I could not elude to inscribe the Internet phenomenon within the broad picture of the development of technoscience and their feminist responses. This will provide a theoretical context to locate my study as an effort to blur the dichotomies which order differences hierarchically in Western thought: man/woman, mind/body, technoscience/culture, natives/migrants, connected/non-connected, Self/Other. I find it

necessary to pause in this last binary and to dedicate chapter two to showing how the Internet is enmeshed in a discursive grid which extol its democratic and emancipatory potential, especially for vulnerable groups in society and how while presenting it as a panacea for inequalities and exclusions, it exacerbates them by locating excluded people as Others. I will analyse the mechanisms of Otherness activated by these discourses on the Internet, distinguishing those that serve mainly economic interests, considering the Internet as another opportunity to expand the market, from those that address the people who do not fit in the predominant profile of universal user, as Others. The “Information Society” and the “digital gap” are useful concepts to support my argument that universal models are not enough to grasp the complexity and dynamism of human experiences. Far from restoring the dichotomy Self/Other, my aim will be to give an account of its existence at the level of cyberdiscursive practices in order to look for alternatives that contribute to implode that binary. I am inspired by the conceptualization of the Other, the minoritarian and the marginal, as strategic spaces from which to adapt dominant ideologies to the realities of everyday practices and thoughts. Before the analysis and contextualization of the testimonies of the interviewed women in chapter three, I will attempt to provide an analytic space to inhabit/dwell that I have called “tactic digital Otherness”. This space is thought for those who are triply interpellated as Others through the overlapping of hegemonic structuring systems of our times: the gender system that locate women as Others, the capitalist system that “others” them as immigrants, and the democratic system that make them second class citizens at the level of digital inclusion.

Many pages have been written about the supposed benefits -and also pitfalls- that ICT represents for the most dispossessed persons of society but, what do the alluded people expect from and how do they live those supposed benefits? Which motivations do they find to take up the Internet? Is it possible to find similarities in their expectations, fears and motivations, beyond their different backgrounds and profiles? Which aspects confirm or challenge feminist theorizations on gender and technology? Which of them coincide with my previous assumptions? Which ones don't? The answer to some of these questions emerge from the emic<sup>3</sup> version I collect in chapter three and which I will attempt to systematize in the conclusions.

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<sup>3</sup> The **emic** perspective is an anthropological concept to refer to subjectes' symbolic-discursive constructions as insiders of a culture studied by the anthropologist. It is defined by an enunciator's subjective visions. Emic statements should be understood in relation with the **etic** perspective that the researcher elaborates from the testimonies of his/her subjects of study. These concepts are not opposite or dichotomous but “two stages in a dialectic process (...) in which etic study is the means through which the researcher approaches a language and is enabled to discover its internal emic structuring” (Hymes quoted in Hickerson 1992:187).

*“I feel aligned with ways of getting at the world as a verb,  
which throws us into worlds in the making and apparatuses  
of bodily production- without the categories of form and matter;  
and sex and gender”*  
Donna Haraway (2004:330)

## 1.1 Theoretical framework

To approach the Internet as a field for academic research presents theoretical and methodological complexities of some importance, which poses multiple challenges to those of us who enter it. First, it is a historically recent phenomenon which scopes and possibilities are always already under debate. This contemporaneity imbues it with a somewhat elusive quality as a mobile and dynamic object of study that reveals itself as hard to be totally grasped, full of terminology that urges to be specified every time. In different realms of society, we have become familiar with words, phrases and concepts used to describe the changes brought by ICT expansion. In a very short period of time, they shift from neologism to clichés, from specialists' jargon to common sense. It seems as if the vertigo of so many innovations and promises install itself in a vocabulary also in expansion that suffers or enjoys the human need for naming to understand and act upon reality. They circulate in different directions and are appropriated by multiple actors in diverse contexts and situations: academia, governments, business enterprises, activists, users, consumers, the media or the neighbours in the local bar. However, this circulation is neither innocent, random or horizontal. Words carry with them ideologies and systems of power (Foucault 1988). To be conscious of it has allowed me to call into question and unlearn words which I used to use uncritically to refer to the Internet and which, throughout the research, revealed themselves to be deeply rooted in hegemonic discourses, especially those referring to development and evolutionary paradigms that talk about technology in terms of “advances” and “impacts”.

A second challenge the Internet poses as an object of study is how its emergence and expansion have been accompanied by a dense discursive mesh of futurist predictions and emancipatory promises, typical of a determinist paradigm which has impregnated the first stages of every technoscientific innovations, giving the impression that sometimes “history stutters” (Flichy 2007:1). Similarly as with the invention of printing technology, electricity, trains, radio and television (Mosco 2004:22), the Internet awakes all kind of speculations and assumptions about its democratic and liberatory potential in every sphere of society.

Thirdly, and tightly intertwined with the previous challenges, the prolific and diverse academic production on the Internet implies numerous disjunctures and crossroads to those of us who start training ourselves in this field of studies. Gradually, consecutive researches have shaped a

theoretical and methodological corpus that far from being homogeneous and coherent, offers a great variety of approaches and reveals many interests at stake. There is no canon (Leung 2005:14) on which to build solid basis for argumentation. I feel that bibliography on the Internet reproduces the logic of hyperlinks, in their multiplicity, interconnections and serendipities. On the one hand, this situation is quite attractive as it provides me with explorations, contrasts and possible becomings. On the other hand, however, it overwhelms me when I search for references to guide my research and I must analyse thoroughly each author's argument in order to separate empirical evidences from ideological assumptions, political convictions from clichés, from anxieties about the future this topic seem to awake. At the end of the day, my disorientation is rewarded when I find approaches I share and identify with as a feminist scholar who dives into these waters. My bibliographic references partly reflects this dynamism and I consider it to be a unique and irreproducible piece of work, even when other people research the same topic I focus on. It is not a claim caused by zeal and pride, but by the conviction that to make a bibliography include stages of selection and emotional ingredients typical of autobiographies and even partially, they reflect our histories and life trajectories.

### **Janus' two faces**

As part of a generation who has grown up together with the emergence of the Internet, I have personally experienced the changes and continuities, limits and potentials attributed to the digitalization of human communication. This experience has been marked by several moods and reflections through which I have shifted from techno-optimist to techno-pessimist, and now I look for an intermediate position between the poles. By techno-optimism, or according to Hoofd "techno-happiness" (2008:2), I mean those positions that embrace technological changes as positive in themselves for the advance and development of societies, without promoting contextualized critiques. This vision is rooted in the most archaic traditions that posited science and technology as authoritative discourses of true knowledge, as well as techno-deterministic positions that explain the relationship between technology and society as separate domains in which the former impacts positively on the latter. Techno-optimism also feeds the opposite version: techno-pessimism or techno-phobia, when considering technology as harmful for all humanity, for specific groups in society or other non-human organisms. This polarization could be considered an update of the differential arguments of apocalypics and integrated, as Umberto Eco has exposed in the homonym book in 1965, about the attitudes towards the then emergent mass culture. Both approaches have

imbued the debates on technoscience in general and on the Internet in particular. Long dated, the polarizations pro and against technoscientific changes are updated and come to life once and again in front of diverse scenarios. The boom of the Internet at the beginning of the 90s in the U.S. and its growing expansion to other regions of the globe is one of many recent examples. A halo of optimism has surrounded the discourses on the Internet which promises of social, cultural, political and economic benefits have been repeated like mantras by diverse actors, including many feminists. Wajcman identifies an initial stage of pessimism in feminism at the beginning of the 70s, due mainly to masculine domination of technoscientific areas, and a later stage from the 90s on, in which “recent developments of cyberspace and digital technologies” are lived with great optimism (2006:50).

With regard to the research I am presenting here, I think it would be appropriate to invoke the image of the Roman god Janus, with his two faced head looking in opposite directions but with a 360 degrees visual field. Thus Bruno Latour illustrated the post-modern ambient which linked pessimist with optimist visions of technoscience after Second World War, without one having priority on the other one (Latour quoted in Sassower 1995:4). With Janus, also god of doors and gates, beginnings and endings, I would like to start mapping a route through the conceptual, theoretical and epistemological labyrinths that have guided me in this research.

### **Gender and technoscience: interactions, intersections and discords**

Although this research focuses on the Internet, I think it is appropriate to situate it in the broader context of feminist debates on technoscience, widely theorized during the last years. I have chosen to use the term “technoscience” in order to blur the conceptual borders that divide science and technology as neighbour but clearly differentiable domains, both between themselves and in relation with other areas of knowledge and society. First Bruno Latour in 1987 (Barnes 2005) and then Jean-François Lyotard (Sassower 1995) used it to refer to the interdependence of science and technology. Barnes distinguishes three semantic turns in the historical relationship between both concepts, which good and bad moves have implications in our current understandings of each. The first turn focuses on the irreconcilable distinction characteristic of most of the XIX century between theoretical knowledge of things (*scientia, episteme*) and knowledge understood as abilities and competences (*ars, techne*). This corresponds to “an extensive cultural and institutional differentiation, and a corresponding change in the nature and extent of the division of labour in the relevant societies” (Barnes 2005:144). A second semantic turn is that of the location of scientific



knowledge and technical abilities as distant from common life, turned into specialized sub cultures that were practised by professionals who act “on our behalf” (Ibidem). The third turn coincides with current trends of considering science and technology in terms of related practices and processes, socially organized and situated and as I will argue below, it is the one that sustain my research.

In Feminist Studies, the key author to understand the superposition of both domains, its process character and its rootedness in the socio-cultural is Donna Haraway, for whom “science is cultural practice and practical culture” (1997:83) and technoscience is a “specific, finite, material-semiotic universe”(1997:19) produced by multiple connections:

“Technoscience extravagantly exceeds the distinction between science and technology as well as those between nature and society, subjects and objects, the natural and the artifactual that structured the imaginary time called modernity. I use technoscience to signify a mutation in historical narrative (...) the word technoscience communicates the promiscuously fused and transgenic qualities of its domains by a kind of visual onomatopoeia. Once upon a time, in another, closely related, ethnospecific narrative field called Western philosophy, such entities were thought to be subjects and objects, and they were reputed to be the finest and most stable actors and actants in the Great Story Ever Told -the one about modernity and man” (1997:20).

Like Haraway, my use of technoscience is not a mere linguistic choice but it has political implications that refuses the hegemonic discourse of modernity and its defence of science as a pure entity, non polluted by society. Thus “fusion of categories are at play (...) science and politics, science and society, or science and culture” (1997:81). In feminist literature it is possible to distinguish focuses of attention on science and technology as separate domains, with separate correlates about knowing and doing respectively. The work of Cockburn (1993), Wajcman (1991, 2006) and Vehviläinen (2000) represent examples of feminist perspectives on the co-production of gender and technology. Pioneer research by Genevive Lloyd, Evelyn Fox Keller and Susan Bordo have focused on science studies and epistemological debates that, among other things, underscored how androcentrism disguised into universalism in the production of knowledge (Code 1998:174). They also inspired Feminist Studies of Science and the key contributions of Susan Harding and Donna Haraway, to mention just a few.

Internet Feminist Studies emerged from the reflections that since the 70s focus on the analysis of the relationships between gender and technoscience (Wajcman 2006:25). Many authors have mapped genealogies that reveal how diverse feminist approaches have intertwined with academic discourses of *mainstream* social theory on technological innovations, its contributions and

limitations, and how these historical precedents constitute a compass to understand current public policies and debates (Gill&Grint 1995, Henwood 1993, Wajcman 1991 y 2007, Vehviläinen 2000, Wood 2000 quoted en Gurumurthy 2004). Judy Wajcman's analysis has proven especially illustrative for me due to her immersion in these issues throughout her academic career, developing critical and reflective approaches to explain the changes occurred from 1991 to 2006, a period defined by the years of publication of two of her paradigmatic books on gender and technology. Thus I will refer to her work in extenso to build my own theoretical journey.

When in the 70s technodeterminism was reaching its peak, two schools of thought started questioning, from different fronts, its promises of social change through technological progress. On the one hand, second wave feminists denounced the lack of women's participation and the complicity of technology in the reproduction of the patriarchal model (Wajcman 2006:25). On the other hand, sociologists and historians (Barnes 2005) built the basis of Social Shaping of Technology (SST) by highlighting

“the importance of human choices and action in technological change, rather than seeing technology as politically and ethically neutral, an independent force with its own inevitable logic and motives, or as a mysterious black box that cannot be analysed socially” (Lievrouw 2002:185).

As we will see, the combination of both critiques will derive in productive approaches such as those of Feminist Cultural Studies of Technoscience. Feminist efforts to position gender as a variable of inequality regarding technology can be associated with political currents proposed by Alice Jaggar: liberal, radical or ecofeminist, and socialist (Jaggar 1986). As Wajcman observes, each of these currents focused its critiques and proposals on different areas: scientific education (liberal), reproductive technologies (radical), and domestic and office technologies (socialist). Moreover, some of them can be read as correlates of epistemological categories theorized by Sandra Harding in the 80s, in the empiricist scientific paradigms (liberal) and standpointist ones (radical and socialist) respectively. These correspondences are neither static nor absolute and nowadays the ideological approaches and their epistemological correlates are not so well differentiated, but overlap and co-produce each other. By suggesting these connections, I make an attempt to a hybrid conceptualization of the technoscientific, bridging theories on gender and technology -inscribed in historic, political and ideological periodisations- with theories of gender and science -inscribed in epistemological periodisations.

The main problem liberal theorists have identified is women's access to education and their employment in the technoscientific field. The main solution they proposed was in quantitative

terms: equal opportunities for men and women and same amounts of each in every realm of society (Wajcman 2006:27). This school of thought is inspired by first wave feminism of equality, according to which women should be able to compete in equal conditions with men. The pitfall of this approach is that it demands an adaptation of women to environments built by and for men, instead of questioning the basis of those patriarchal constructs. Following Wajcman:

“This liberal feminist tradition locates the problem in women (their socialization, their aspirations and values) and does not ask the broader questions of whether, and in what way, technoscience and its institutions could be reshaped to accommodate women” (Ibidem).

These discourses have their epistemological correlate in empiricism, for which science and technology are objective, neutral fields of knowledge, independent of external influences, including the subjects' gender. “Sexism and androcentrism were understood as social biases capable of correction by stricter adherence to the methodological norms of scientific inquiry” (Wajcman 2006:30). Another critique of the liberal ideology is its conceptualization of power as an individual attribute that works at the level of relationships between people, but it does not consider the power enmeshed in social structures (Wajcman 2006:39).

Liberal feminism was severely called into question by radical and socialist feminists. Although they had very different rationales, they both rejected the neutrality of technology and shared the premise that gender relations are intimately imbricated with technoscientific processes. The radical and eco-feminist shift, deeply rooted in Marxism, focused on the capitalist models of production (Wajcman 2006:31). From these perspectives, modern science is conceived as a mechanism of exploitation and domination<sup>4</sup>, imbued with the ideology of dominant classes' socio-economic interests. Thus radical feminists attempted to create alternative technoscientific knowledges and practices, in consonance with feminine ideas of peace and solidarity/sisterhood. In other words, they wanted a women's science radically different from men's. Its epistemological correlate rests on standpoint theories developed mainly by Sandra Harding.

The main critiques to these approaches point to it apparently “tendency to essentialism (...) they overlook the role of culture and history in shaping women's needs and priorities in different contexts, ignoring the way women's experience is divided by class, race and sexuality” (Wajcman 2006:39). In this sense, radical feminists victimized women as passive objects of patriarchal and capitalist technological “impacts” (Wajcman 2006:49). Thus I think radical feminism embodied,

<sup>4</sup> Not all the radical feminists opposed to technological innovations. The most paradigmatic case is maybe Shulamith Firestone's *The Dialectic of Sex: The Case for Feminist Revolution*, published in 1970. There she argues in favour of the liberatory potential of reproductive technologies for women.

without intending to do so, an inverted technological determinism in which women were negatively impacted without having the ability to question and subvert them into alternative relations<sup>5</sup>. Beyond criticisms, these perspectives proved helpful to make visible the politics of technology, the hierarchical systems of power at play, opening up possibilities to think of alternatives. “Although the idea of a technology based on women's values has lost much of its salience, the idea of a technology based upon different values remains a valid concern” (Wajcman 2006:39).

Recent feminist debates on technoscience have focused on reproductive technologies and ICT. Within the latter, studies on gender and the Internet have experienced radical changes in its approximately ten years of life (van Zoonen 2001). This conceptual dynamism constitutes a landmark of Feminist Studies as an interdisciplinary field in which debates, contradictions and continuous revisions are not a weakness but its greatest potentiality. From the 90s on, the cyberfeminist movement emerged celebrating the Internet as a horizontal space for feminist participation, organization and creativity<sup>6</sup> (Spender 1995, Plant 1998) finding many of the fantasies of cyberspace and virtual reality especially promising for the liberation of women (Turkle 1995). As it had previously happened with liberal, radical and Marxist feminisms, cyberfeminism was accused of being an expression of white, Western, middle class concerns, which joyful and revolutionary claims could not represent the problems of many women in different parts of the globe, especially in poor countries<sup>7</sup>. This critique stems from Third World and Subsistence perspectives, that became popular with the eco-feminism of Vandana Shiva y Maria Mies. Besides denouncing the patriarchalism of Western systems of thought and technology, this approach includes a postcolonial critique, underscoring the colonizing mechanism that “displaces local knowledge and experiences” (Gurumurthy 2004).

With all their divergences and limitations, the approaches I have been referring to until now constitute a fertile ground for exploring and reformulating the mutual implications of gender and technology. From the accuracies and errors of each of them it would emerge a hybrid approach of great potential to contextualize my research, as it escapes from polarizations implicit before (equality/difference, liberal/radical, real/virtual, first world/third world): the approach on gender

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<sup>5</sup> This is a critique Wajcman does of her own previous work, *Feminist confronts technology*, published in 1991 (Wajcman 2006: 49)

<sup>6</sup> Everett differentiates between the most optimistic views on cyberspace for women's struggles, embodied by cyberwomanism, and a more cautious or critical approach by cyberfeminism (Everett 2004)

<sup>7</sup> Throughout the text I will use expressions such as first and third world, rich and poor countries, developed and developing ones that do not reflect “the fluidity and power of global forces that locate communities of people as social majorities/minorities in disparate form” (Mohanty 2003:227). I am aware that this is a problematic terminology, “a very imprecise and inadequate analytical language” (Ibidem) but it is the current available language and its critical analysis, though urgently necessary, would be a topic for a more extensive section.

and technology as cultural and relational phenomena (Vehviläinen 2000:20, Gurumurthy 2004). Its basic principles are that technoscience is not neutral but deeply marked by gender and that women cannot be essentialized in a homogeneous category, as “there are differences among women and in women” (Vehviläinen 2000:21). In this perspective, gender and technology are dynamic and performative cultural constructs. Vehviläinen proposes to understand gender as “a process and a verb rather than a noun” (2000:22) which analysis calls for a consideration of several levels of the social life simultaneously. In a similar harawayan move, I propose here to expand the notion of technoscience from noun to verb in order to highlight those practices and processes which emerge from the interactions with human actions and social structures.

At this stage in which I have mentioned the word “gender” several times, it is required to offer a working definition to put aside the ambiguities and polysemy this term has had in its “uses and abuses” (Braidotti 2002). Following<sup>8</sup> Braidotti, it is a historically and culturally constructed multilayered concept that refers to “the many and complex ways in which social differences between the sexes acquire a meaning and become structural factors in the organization of social life” (2002:287). Its many layers calls for considering it at the level of personal identity, the social level as structuring principle and the level of normative values (Ibidem). Vehviläinen makes an interesting exercise of articulation of these levels in the analysis of gender and ICT. She understands ICT as configuring a particular knowledge and social order biased by masculine predominance, in which subjects' practices produce different interpretations according to specific locations and starting points (2002:23), in what the author has called a “located politics of technology” (2000:23).

In spite of the fact that there is not an explicit dialogue between their texts, Vehviläinen's proposal is inscribed in what Lykke defines as Feminist Cultural Studies of Technoscience, which “gives room for analysis of technoscience as a cultural activity among others and puts focus on a broad range of technocultural signifying practices and every day life practices (...) it situates itself within the perspectives and positions of inappropriate/d others” (2002:141). In the section on methodology I will explore the implications of everyday life, while in the next chapter I will take up again the idea of inappropriate/d others.

From this perspective, I can position myself as to prioritize issues that go beyond the mere access to computers and Internet connection, assessing how, through everyday practices in technoscience, differently located subjects in specific contexts make sense of their lives and negotiate their subjectivities.

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<sup>8</sup> Braidotti is sceptical about the current political potential of the concept of gender, preferring to use sexual difference instead. However she provides a definition of gender I want to work with.

Up to now, I have made an attempt to gather the required elements to build a theoretical framework for my research, searching in different disciplinary traditions and perspectives the ones I need to explore the experiences of Latin American migrant women in Granada as Internet users. They are pieces of a theoretical epistemological jigsaw puzzle that I have put into dialogue in a handicraft way, but which figure would not be complete until I include the dimension of migratory processes.

### **Mediation and movement in the diasporic space**

Migrant processes and the expansion of the Internet share the fact of being both products and producers of essential resources for globalization. Without falling into monocausal argumentations of globalization, I agree with critical approaches that denounce the mercantile and neoliberal bias of the processes of global interdependence and its consecutive exacerbation of poverty, injustice and violence within capitalist systems (Hertz 2001, Ramonet 2004, Sassen 2003, Stiglitz 2003). Among the many discontents of globalization, we find the bulk of migrant population that provides *a la carte* cheap labour force, very convenient for the positive economic balance but that segments the labour market in terms of stereotypes of gender, class and ethnicity. Moreover, the digitalization of shares, markets and moneys allows for instantaneous and omnipresent commercial transactions, the decentralization of productive processes, that materializes in the exploitation of natural and human resources of the so called third world.

But migration and the Internet also share a symbolic dimension of change in comparison with previous tendencies. Its disjunctive articulation implies “the work of the imagination as a constitutive feature of modern subjectivity (...) electronic media provide resources for self-imagining as an everyday social project” (Appadurai 2002:173-174) as fast circulation of information and images help us to imagine life projects of our own in other places (Appadurai 2002, UNHRC in Ponzanesi 2002:205).

Appadurai is one of the first authors who notice the interdependence between electronic media and contemporary migrant movements. Following Benedict Anderson's “imagined communities” promoted by print capitalism (1983), he locates global culture flows in the intersections of mediation (circulation of electronic images) and audiences always on the move. A feminist appropriation of this theory would allow me to explore how this complex grid of flows of people, images and technologies, strengthens, reinforce and/or subvert systems of power and inequality, how semiotic-material hegemonies perpetuate themselves and how cracks of possibility

open up to make room for the creation of alternatives, through the imagination of other possibilities.

In this sense, Avtar Brah's conceptualization of the diasporic space proves especially interesting for my research as it allows me to locate my interviewees as dwellers of

“the intersectionality of diaspora, border and dis/location as a point of confluence of economic, political, cultural, and psychic processes. It is where multiple subject positions are juxtaposed, contested, proclaimed or disavowed; where the permitted and the prohibited perpetually interrogate; and where the accepted and the transgressive imperceptibly mingle (...)” (Brah 1996:208).

The many folds contained in the concept of diasporic space are relevant to locate the interviewees of my research in three related ways. The first fold includes the etymology of diaspora, from the Greek *diaspeirein*, defined as “the voluntary or forcible movement of peoples from their homelands into new regions” (Ashcroft *et.al.* 1998:61) but it also transcends it to include “the distinct historical experiences of diaspora” (Clifford 1994 quoted in Brah 2003:179) that imprints specific particularities and contingencies. Several authors have proposed a typification of different diasporas (Cohen 1997 quoted in Shuval 2000, Appadurai 2002), partially fixing the dynamism of a concept that refers to continuous changes of displaced people and groups “who feel, maintain, invent or revive a connection with a prior home” (Shuval 2000:42).

The women I interviewed have been mainly motivated to approach computer mediated communication to maintain family and affective bonds with their societies of origin. In their practices of digital communication they reinforce cultural identities and keep some loyalty to the nation states they came from. However, this is not based on conscious nationalistic ascriptions or ideals. From their narrations, we are witnesses of the importance of family links as the main structuring axe of their experiences, their wishes of return in some cases, to continue the descendants in others, to strengthen the maternal roles and adapt them to the reality of transnational families. A second fold of the diasporic space is then the constitution of postcolonial subjects who in their journeys across borders displace the privileged position of national origins to the background and reveal the emergence of other embodied subjective positions (Dirlik 1997:505). Postcolonial subjectivity is a concept that recognizes for the so called third world subjects, multiple, changing and contradictory positions which prove difficult to grasp in all their complexities, leaking into categories such as first world that the most traditional discourses have previously neglected to them. (Ibidem). The liminality implicit in postcolonial subjectivity as well as in the diasporic space that makes it possible, its hybridity and “in-betweenness” (Bhabha 1994) problematizes every

attempt of fixing or essentializing their experiences, and proves to be a fruitful ground where to develop the also liminal concept of “tactic digital otherness” that I will introduce in detail in the second chapter.

A third fold of the diasporic space allows for an intersectional analysis -or in Brah's words, “multiaxial”- of the transgression of boundaries, not only territorial, political and economic but also cultural and psychic (Brah 1996:209). Precisely, these cultural and psychic dimensions in relation to the Internet are the ones the women I have interviewed walk across, stepping astride or tiptoeing, quickly or paused, according to each case, when they define themselves as users of something that due to age, gender, class, literacy and/or geopolitical location, had not coincided with their previous horizons of expectation.

My aim here is far from idealizing the diasporic space acritically as liberatory or empowering. I agree with many of the critiques proposed by Arif Dirlik regarding “the postcolonial aura” (1997) but I also feel his statements might leave us paralyzed. I want to rescue the diasporic space as indicating a point of inflection in the interviewees’ lives, postcolonial subjects for whom the experiences of here (Granada) and there (places of origin), of now and before, are tightly intertwined and traduced into changes on perceptions and expectations in their life projects. Instead of making a judgement of the women’s experiences as Internet and computer users in terms of positive or negative, I prefer to conceptualize it in the line of what Nira Yuval-Davis has taken from Italian feminists: a transversal perspective of “root and shifting” that applied to different contexts and realities, highlights the way each person has a *repertoire* of values, practices and identities more or less fixed or “rooted” and at the same time, continuously elaborates strategies to change or “shift” positions to adapt to situations of change and exchange. They are not opposed or exclusive dynamics but complementary and necessary ones:

“All people can learn to center in another experience, validate it and judge it by its own standards without need of comparison or need to adopt that framework as their own ... one has no need to ‘decenter’ anyone in order to center someone else; one has only to constantly pivot the center” (Barkley Brown 1989 quoted in Yuval Davis 1994: 193).

### **Necessary dialogues: theories of migration, gender and the Internet**

The study of migration is the oldest one among the ones I consider here, and both Internet Studies as well as Feminist Studies have had to cross-cut it to provide new perspectives of analysis



and to broaden the comprehension of massive migratory phenomena -in many cases, feminized (Brah 1996)- that characterizes contemporary hyperconnected and digitalized societies in times of global economy.

Until the 80s “the joint analysis of gender systems and international migratory movements has been ignored in the different theoretical models used in the study of migrations” (Gregorio 1998:21, *my translation*). This is explained in terms of the preponderance of macro approaches in comparison with the use of micro approaches, and the predominance of economic and political issues that have concealed the cultural and symbolic ones (Gregorio 1998:78).

At the same time, “studies and research on immigration and the so called information society are almost non existent and are absent from most part of reports and literature on this social issue” (Morales y Rodríguez 2008, *my translation* ). This absence, however, is in my opinion more apparent than real. On the one hand, this claim can be understood as an expression of concern for the lack of systematization in the research on migration and ICT, an emergent area which, in contrast to other issues related to the Internet, lacks a clear theoretical and methodological framework. It could also allude to the relative scarcity of literature produced in Spanish that, though in expansion, it does not reach the dissemination of its Anglo Saxon counterparts (this fact reflects in my own bibliography). On the other hand, in the process of elaboration of my own work I have come across many papers which object of study is, for better or worse, the intersections between migration and new media. Many of these papers focus on the democratic potential of the Internet to strengthen the fragile citizenships of migrant people, with quite optimistic approaches (Tucho et al 2005; Mitra 2001 and 2005; Hiller & Franz 2004) or more critical ones (Ledwith 2002, Morales & Rodríguez 2008). Most take the analysis of websites and online groups to draw their argumentations, exploring to which extent the Internet facilitates mechanisms of self-organization, circulation of alternative information, participation in the public sphere, the construction of social networks and identities.

In this line of research, it is worth mentioning two ongoing projects at a European level: the "Research Program on the Use of ICT in Migrations" and the “Diasporic Minorities and their Media in the EU: a Mapping”. The first one is a thematic research program of the *Fondation Maison des Sciences de l'Homme* (FMSH, literally “House of the Sciences of Man”) which “explores the impact [sic] of new technologies on the migrant world (occupation of digital territories by diasporas, policies on the digital management of migrants, fresh epistemological perspectives in the analysis of migrations in the age of ICT)” (FMSH, no date). Despite most of the reports are

published in French, one of them in English enumerates “the opportunities and challenges ICTs will present in terms of future trends in migration flows, and in particular, integration processes” (Ros et.al. 2006).

The second project, “Diasporic Minorities...”, is housed by the London School of Economics, as part of the *European Media Technology and Everyday Life Network* (EMTEL). It “aims at mapping the diasporic communities living within the fifteen European Union member-states and at examining how these communities which are alternative to the mainstream, develop their own media cultures. The study of diasporic media cultures is an attempt to investigate how media are involved in projects for minority empowerment, for inclusion and participation in local, national and transnational communities” (EMTEL, no date). This initiative is especially interesting as it promotes the production of national reports on the situation of electronic media produced by migrants organizations. For the purpose of my research, I want to refer to a brief though illustrative report on the Spanish context, which concludes that the media reality is “a *fragmented* one (with lack of networks among communities); an *ephemeral* one (with initiatives that start and die, that do not consolidate); and existent in the form of *collaborations* or participation in the already existent local/independent media (with articles, announcements, practical information and so forth)” (Gaya, no date). Furthermore, it mentions the lack of access to the Internet and digital illiteracy of many immigrants (Ibidem).

The theoretical panorama is somehow distressing if one looks for systematic studies in which migration, gender and ICT converge. In Spanish, one of the few pieces of work was produced at the Universidad de Barcelona. It is a brief introductory paper but, as the title “Woman and the immigrant” (“La mujer y el inmigrante”, Tejedor & Pintos 2008) suggests, it does not provide an integrated analysis. Other papers on this topic, still unpublished and not academic, were produced for the conference “Woman, immigration and new technologies” held 4<sup>th</sup> November 2008 in Castilla y León, Spain (Casa Isadora Duncan 2008).

I will argue that it is necessary an interdisciplinary dialogue between Migrant Studies, Feminist Studies and Internet or New Media Studies in order to provide accounts of the multiple and complex social, economic and political dimensions of the vertiginous changes and movements of people, information and capitals. These complexities cannot be merely apprehended at the macro level, but require zoom lenses to consider the everyday realities of specific groups and individuals whose experiences of globalization and digitalization might present similarities and tendencies but, above all, many productive differences.

## 1.2 Methodology

### The politics of location and encounter

My research inscribes itself in the practice of a politics of location threefold: methodologically, theoretically and, consequently, politically. As I have already mentioned in the introduction, it is based on a qualitative case study which draws on the ethnographic method especially developed by anthropology, a discipline that has underscored how talking about others is to talk about ourselves (San Martín 1985). In this sense, the interview is understood not as a simple extraction or exchange of information between two parts, but as a relational process in which each part projects on, constitutes and locates the other one.

The empirical study I present here gathers the experiences about the Internet of a group of embodied and embedded women, taking into account their starting point from specific locations (Vehviläinen 2002:286). Between February and April 2009 I made semi-structured face to face interviews with fourteen Latin American migrant women aged between thirty and sixty years old who live in Granada, Spain. Their countries of origin are as diverse as Uruguay, Colombia, Bolivia, Peru, Paraguay, Nicaragua and Brazil. In order to validate my interpretation of their testimonies, as well as the theoretical and methodological toolbox that contextualizes them, I had to locate myself as a researcher, being accountable for the power locations I inhabit, in a sort of personal cartography (Braidotti 2002:258) that reveals the partial and situated character of my knowledge claims (Haraway 1991:191).

When I contacted the women I wanted to interview, I introduced myself as Uruguayan and explained to them my interest to work with Latin American women as I feel familiar to and part of this reality. I felt that somewhat this made us closer to each other, providing a nuance to the privileged position from which I was to formulate the questions, visible in my white skin before the rich ethnic diversity of Latin America; invisible in my situation of student with a scholarship and welcomed to “Fortress Europe” (Lutz 1997). However, this identification of proximity should not be mistaken for symmetric relations between who writes and the interviewees, nor with a lack of the critical distance every ethnographic research requires to elaborate the *etic*<sup>9</sup> approach.

The politics of location, even being accountable for the hierarchy of powers between the researcher and the subjects of study, allows for understanding the action of locating in terms of multiple movements, in which I locate my subjects of study while locating myself, and they locate

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<sup>9</sup> For a definition of “etic”, look footnote 4 in page 13.

me when they locate themselves. Thus my positioning is not that of studying them as different to my identity of researcher or student or white Latin American, but difference is produced at the level of “particular modes of encountering” among others (Ahmed 2002:561). This shift of perspective problematizes the Self-Other dichotomy and the positivist assumptions that others' specificities can be grasped by the knowing subject, underscoring the importance of the exchange between both parts (Ibidem).

In this sense, my research follows what Guber calls a constructivist perspective on the interview, conceived as “a social relationship in which the information provided by the interviewee is in reality what s/he constructs with the interviewer in the encounter” (Guber 2001). This overlaps the politics of location with what since Sara Ahmed's work (2003, 2000) could be called “the politics of encounter”, which working definition may be the power structures that circulate in multiple directions between the subjects of the encounter, in this case, interviewer and interviewees. Paraphrasing Stuart Hall's concepts with regard to representation, we could also distinguish here between politics and poetics. The first is discursively “more concerned with the *effects* and *consequences*” (1997:6) of the encounters. The second one would serve in its double meaning: the one referred to its inventive character -derived from the etymology of *poiesis*-, and the one referred to the forms, that is, how the meaning develops during the encounters, providing a semiotic reading of different languages at play (verbal, corporeal, etc.) in the personal encounters between multiple “I” and multiple Others.

The questions that guided our encounters and focused on the issues I wanted to highlight were continuously reformulated by the women's answers, in which the topics they felt comfortable to talk about at those particular moments leaked into the narrations: confessions, anecdotes, complicities and silences. Both the women and I are and were questions and answers that merged into each other and exceeded productively into new formulations. This view challenges the most traditional approaches to the relationship between researcher/subject of study. Following Guber, “if in the common questionnaire the researcher make questions and receives answers, in the ethnographic interview the researcher formulates questions which answers become new questions” (Guber 2001). This reversibility of subjective and objective experiences is the essence of reflexivity (Hayles 1999), a concept that reminds us that the distance between interviewer and interviewees is not static nor the limits easy to draw.

The articulation of politics of location and politics of encounter has helped me to conceptualize the methodological terms of my own research in many senses. Thus I have realized that both my privileged location as a researcher and the analytic categories I have built to limit my

object of study are frail, dynamic and partial. On the one hand, my role as researcher has proved to be a provisional identity I acquire only when people accept my invitation to have the interview and we sit together to chat. On the other hand, the interviewees are not an homogeneous nor static collective but a construct of my authorship, conceived for the sake of the research. I have selected some people's attributes and like when shooting a photograph, I have framed and frozen an instant of reality in order to offer a partial but in deep view of that what I deliberately want to stress on. The pillars of my selection are the categories "woman", "immigrant", "Latin American" and "residents in Granada". They are pillars because they support my research on Internet practices since they allow me to demarcate my sample of study. However, they are not architectural pillars, solid and immovable, because in every scientific research we need to argue our choices and to accept their contingent and subjective character. In this sense, every categorization deserves critical discussion under the evidence that the strands that compose categories overlap to each other (Wittgeinstein 1958 quoted in Ashcroft *et. al.*1998) and are intertwined according to the researchers' *capriccios*. In the process of analysing the particular experiences of my subjects of study I also fell into the trap of partially essentializing them through fixing them into the categories mentioned above. It is some sort of "strategic essentialism" that Spivak elaborated for the liberation struggles and that here I appropriate to argue my choices and leave room for critics and doubts. I retake her words when she says: "I cannot in fact clean my hands and say I'm specific. In fact, I must say I am an essentialist from time to time" (Spivak 1984 quoted en Ashcroft et al.1998:79).

The encounters with the interviewees were held individually in their houses or places they attended for training, for a period of between five and twenty minutes each. They were invited to take part in my study through their link with associations of and for immigrants in Granada. I have selected these associations taking into account the degree of participation of Latin American women and this criteria coincided with the heterogeneity of Granadine scenario regarding networks of organizations and services provided to immigrant population. Thus I have included two immigrants' associations, one non-governmental foundation that has specific programmes for migrant women, and a programme of the city hall that offers digital literacy courses for women only. In the first two cases, women are or used to be organizers, leaders or active participants of varied political and cultural activities. In the other two organizations, however, women are beneficiaries of the training programmes offered. The associative link constitutes an axe of differentiation in their economic and socio-educative profiles, tightly related to their online experiences. I will focus on this in chapter three.

The interview focused on their migratory projects and the relation each of them has with

computers and the Internet. My aim has been to explore their perceptions on the uses and practices of the Internet within the diasporic space, considering not only the narratives of advanced or daily users but mostly those of women who are just starting to take up CMC. Indeed, most of the interviewees was, at the moment the interview took place, in a very first stage of acquiring the skills that would allow them to use the Internet and computers autonomously. This lends a certain originality to this research, in comparison with some tendency in qualitative research about Internet users that mainly focus on the strategies of those who already access to it as a quotidian and daily practice. I have tried to get first hand testimonies of women's expectations, aspirations, projects, symbolic universes and *imaginaires*, women who often feed statistical data on the so called digital gap. As I will argue in the following chapter, many of them are simply digital Others in a system that mainly classifies users into connected and non-connected.

### In search of the everyday life

Throughout the interviews I have been able to gather women's experiences with computers and the Internet, in consonance with the feminist tradition that emphasizes the need for valuing women's testimonies and experiences as sources of valid scientific knowledge, necessary to provide accounts of reality in its multiple complexities. From the ethnographic standpoint, everyday life is worth being told, and from the feminist standpoint women's experiences are worth being heard. To apply the ethnographic approach to the research on the Internet calls for considering it a process and cultural artefact in which interaction with different subject positions and universes of meaning emerge. This fact has at least two conceptual consequences of great importance, each of which posits specific methodological challenges. The first one relates to embracing a non utilitarian approach of technoscience (in this case the Internet as part of the ICT conglomerate) that goes beyond the idea of a tool for communication and information, to make visible the complex play of people's negotiations, resistances and adaptability strategies. The second element to be taken into account is the vindication of everyday life as an empirical space in which Internet is inscribed, thus where we can aspire to know the different meanings it acquires in the life of diverse groups and persons.

Methodological challenges, deeply interlocked among themselves, share as common background the many limitations of language to apprehend reality. Thus when I designed the guide questionnaire for the interviews, I could not avoid the verb "to use" when referring to computers and the Internet, nor the concept of "users". Moreover, the answers to my questions always already

carried with an unnameable gap between the lived self and the self of enunciation, produced by the ambiguity of practices of representation. Following Stuart Hall:

“What recent theories of enunciation suggest is that, though we speak, so to say 'in our own name', of ourselves and from our own experience, nevertheless who speaks, and the subject who is spoken of, are never identical, never exactly in the same place” (Hall 1993)

This reflection leads Hall to question the fixed, static and transparent character of traditional understandings of cultural identity. He proposes alternatively a more dynamic and complex definition based on changing positionings instead of on essences, “unstable points of identification or suture, which are made, within the discourses of history and culture (Ibidem). My focus on women's narrations of their experiences with/on the Internet (both real and potential ones) is based on this view of cultural identity as becoming, especially with regard to digital culture, that is, how subjects position and identify themselves on the moving and everyday stage of new media practices.

Everyday practices contextualize how gender and technology mutually operate. However, the everyday is not a given that I could grasp and analyse but is, by definition, “hidden and evasive” (Highmore 2002:145). Its dynamism makes it resistant to be apprehensible, reflected or completely revealed: “the everyday too can be seen as textured by evocations that point to a sensory realm never fully mappable by images and words” (Highmore 2002:146). This has been considered by Cultural Studies through its definition of culture as “practices of everyday life and signifying practices in general, including all kinds of popular culture and media” (Lykke 2002:138).

One of the most influential theoreticians in the study of everyday life is multifaceted Michel de Certeau, who started an ambitious project of valuing this space in “*L'invention du quotidien*”. His work is especially relevant to my research as it prioritizes the particular to the general, the situational and the contextual to the universal, and by conceiving the everyday in positive, affirmative terms, imbuing it with creative potential (Highmore 2002:151). De Certeau aspired to build the basis for a “science of singularity (...) a science of the relationship that links the everyday pursuits to particular circumstances” (de Certeau quoted in Highmore 2002:145). That is its strength but also its biggest weakness, as there are tensions implicit in the act of generalizing the meaning of cultural practices, only capable of being understood and analysed through the particularities of its circumstances (Highmore 2002:170).

Even with its own contradictions, I will argue that the testimonial is a valid source of knowledge in consonance with de Certeau and his colleagues' efforts “to construct a general poetics of the practices of everyday life”, and to give value to the act of listening, that is, the interviews, in

order to prioritize “speech archives” (Highmore 2002:168). My research is inscribed in this epistemological path of making the everyday an archive “yet to be catalogued, that might also resist cataloguing” (Highmore 2002:161) in its heterogeneity, its temporal, particular, elusive and always fugitive character. On the one hand, de Certeau is aware that archives have traditionally silenced the everyday, dismissing its interest for the production of scientific knowledge. On the other hand, he finds positive signs in the silences of the archive, as sites for exploration, for tracing a “geography of the eliminated” (Highmore 2002:163) which against every attempt of suppression, emerges from scientific oblivion with the tenacity of the residual.



## Chapter 2: The Internet and discourses of Otherness

In this chapter I aspire to focus on a crucial issue for feminist and postcolonial thought: alterity and the construction of Otherness. This conceptual tool applied to the particular case of the Internet and digital technologies might reveal how power is structured under novel shapes but always already embedded in the hegemonic capitalist ideals of Western societies.

As I have mentioned in the previous chapter, many feminists have denounced technoscience as a traditionally androcentric and patriarchal phenomenon (Haraway 1991, Harding 1986, Wajcman 1991) linked to bourgeois, racist and militarist interests (Harding 1986:137), mastered by the universal subject of the modernist project: white, heterosexual, Western, middle or high class men. Although we nowadays witness a gradual process of democratization of the Internet at many fronts (use, access, infrastructure) and of “internetization” of democracy in many geopolitical regions (participation, electronic vote, electronic government, digitalization of public administrations, etc.) it is necessary to remember the bureaucratic and capitalist rationale that promote this expansion.

This chapter take up again postcolonial concerns about colonial and imperialist enterprises, their link to subaltern subjects and the construction of Otherness, appropriating and reformulating them in order to read the historical and geopolitical contexts in which the Internet emerges and expands. The richness of postcolonial approaches and their potential to revert hegemonic discourses of modernity constitute an invaluable toolbox to critically assess concepts such as the information society (IS), the digital gap and cyberspace, and how they produce the same inequalities they name.

The mechanisms of Otherness activated in these conceptualizations makes room for a series of doubled edged approaches, that go from the victimization of the non-connected Others to the praise of the emancipatory possibilities ICT, and especially the Internet, offer them. These approaches correlate to quite polarized perspectives: those who conceive the Internet as horizontal, participative and non-hierarchical media through which the other subjects could change their subordinate position (Castells 2000, Poster 2001), and those who look at the Internet cautiously, as another reason for oppression and inequality, taking away every or part of agency to the more dispossessed people. In the first group we find the rhetoric theorists of the IS, a key concept to understand how the digital Other is constructed.

## 2.1 The information society

The general context this research takes place in is the so called Information Society (IS), a concept that tries to locate our contemporary societies in a different and later stage of the industrial era. This does not mean to abandon other valid definitions, such as societies more or less capitalists (economy), democratic (politics), post/modern (socio-culture) or sustainable (ecology) (van Dijk 2006:20-21), but to focus attention on one relevant aspect for my argumentation.

Robin Mansell locates the origins of the IS in the post Second World War, in which a scientific community wanted to improve information and communication control systems applied to cybernetics and robotics. In this context, a normative vision of IS was developed by Western rich countries (Mansell 2008:4), according to an *ethos* that explains the development of societies in terms of technoscientific advances and its unquestionable benefits for economic growth. This techno-deterministic logic reverberates until present times in many academic, corporative and public policy discourses that, as we will see later in this text, locate the IS and technoscience in general as a desirable and necessary stage in the development of every society (Lykke 2002:139). The rationale that now links to the Internet is not new. Neither is it a coincidence that techno-determinism became strong in the 70s, when developmental discourses and “the tale of the three worlds” (Escobar 2002:82) reached its peak. In this tale, the world is divided according to a political hierarchical order of differences (Massey 2001, Haraway 1989 quoted in Escobar 2002: 82). My concern is with that conceptualization of the IS as a homogeneous and universal model to be exported from the rich countries to the poor ones, like a humanitarian aid package that takes for granted a (economic) positive impact. This fact, plus an economic vision of information as commodity, has provoked many critiques of such a way of describing the new technologic paradigm. Castells accepts “information era” as a valid concept but suggests to use the metaphor of network society instead of IS for being “vague and misleading” (Castells 2000:10). For Webster, “most definitions of IS refers to the quantity of information (...) but they are unable to identify the qualitatively new in this kind of societies” (2006:20). Van Dijk makes an effort to “typify contemporary developed and modern societies marked by a high level of information exchange and use of ICT” (2006:19), and he proposes to articulate IS and its emphasis on “the *substance* of activities and processes” (Ibidem), and the network society, that “emphasizes the forms and organization of processing and exchange of information” (2006:20).

The concept demands caution the least, because it hides a lineal rationality according to which the development of poor countries will depend, to a great extent, on their integration to this

model. In this scenario, I propose three levels to think of Otherness in relation to the Internet, not as isolated and hierarchical stratifications but as areas for analysis deeply interlocked, even if they depart from different philosophical presuppositions: the other space and the other subjects.

At the first level, the spatial metaphor applied to the Internet promotes Otherness as positive difference that evokes ideas of the mythic and the sublime (Flichy 2007) of an unknown space doubly attractive. On the one hand, a virtual space radically different from the real one, that would allow for freer and less prejudicial interactions among users whose bodies are not any more visible nor relevant. On the other hand, the Internet appears as an unknown space to be explored and conquered, following “man's historic quest to conquer nature (...) [as if] these space explorations were imbued with the adventure and romance of earlier maritime voyages” (Wajcman 2006:89). At the second level, I will refer to the definition of subjects in terms of their degree of usage of the Internet -users- underscoring how Otherness is conceptualized as negative difference, as “lack of”, in this case, connection, access, usability, etc. Thus subjects who do not occupy these positions are turned into Others in the discourse of the digital gap. At a third level, I propose to combine the previous ones, taking into account this other space as a place to be inhabited according to embodied subjective elements, going beyond usability and making an attempt to conceptualize this Otherness in positive terms, as productive multiplicity.

The two first levels I have mentioned share their origins in cyberdiscourses, that is, hegemonic narratives produced by dominant political and economic interests. On the contrary, the third level considers how subjects negotiate their conditions of Otherness. Far from reinstalling dichotomies about the One and the Other, this kind of genealogy of Otherness about the Internet attempts to show the porosity of limits between the two and the ambiguity of positive values traditionally attributed to the One in detriment of the Other.

## **2.2 (Positive Otherness I:) the Internet as virtual space**

Cyberspace. Cyberpunk. Cyberdiscourse. Cyborg. Cyberfeminism. Cybersubjectivity. Cyberfantasy. The list could go on, since in the last few years everything seems to experience the cyber prefix syndrome which originated in 1948 through Norbert Wiener's cybernetics (Featherstone & Burrows 1995:2). It was later popularized by-cyberpunk writer William Gibson in his famous science fiction book *Neuromancer* in 1984 to refer to that other domain of interaction through “a global computer network of information” (Ibidem). Cyberspace can be the result of using different technologies -even the telephone “with the common ability to simulate environments

within which humans can interact” (Featherstone & Burrows 1995:5). When Internet came out of the US military laboratories that had conceived it and started to be used by universities and virtual communities of hackers and computer experts (Flichy 2007), it soon became the referent of cyberspace *par excellence*, the most quoted expression of virtual reality. The notion of virtual reality has an aura of transcendence, as a dimension different from reality through simulation and representation. The 90s offered the perfect setting for the circulation of seductive ideas about the unlimited possibilities of cyberspace for individual success and joy, economic development and democratization of opportunities and resources for everybody: from John Perry Barlow's 1996 “Declaration of the Independence of Cyberspace”, to telecom companies advertisements (Nakamura 2002) and Al Gore's Information Superhighway, just to mention some of them. By 2009 the cyberoptimism of the 90s is still around, but has been also challenged by critical approaches that expose the economic and political powers that sustain it, the privileged location of its promoters and the flawed assumptions from which it emerges.

The idea of cyberspace as different from real life provided a suitable framework to develop the Cartesian mind/body distinction to extreme narrations, as that of MCI's Anthem advertising<sup>10</sup>, or the California New Age group “The Extropians” that with the help of 'smart drugs' believed in the idea of downloading one's mind into a computer, “freeing oneself from one's body” (Flichy 2007:141). This fantasy of abandoning the body through CMC has been shared by very different people: escapist nerds, scientists trying a new tool of knowledge, artists in search of new ways of expression (Flichy 2007), cyberfeminists who dream with a genderless world. I could agree with getting rid of the body as a metaphor within a cyberpunk novel, but outside fictional parameters, I will align with those who, from different disciplines and standpoints, have warned about the political implications of believing in such a split (Balsamo 1997, Hayles 2003, Kolko et al. quoted in Daryl Slack & Wise 2002). Indeed feminists concerned with “the project of identifying the sexed corporeal basis of thought and subjectivity” drew on a renewed interest on the body that during the 80s characterized social and philosophical theories like poststructuralism and phenomenology (Ibidem) as “social and sexual and psychic identities are inscribed in and on the body, and not in opposition to it in some other mental, space” (Lovell 1997). In this line of thought, US professor Anne Balsamo argues that “the repression of the material body belies a gender bias in the supposedly disembodied (and gender-free) world of virtual reality” (Balsamo 1997:122) and she asks “how do virtual reality technologies engage socially and culturally marked bodies?” (Balsamo

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<sup>10</sup> “There is no race, there are no genders, there is no age, there are no infirmities, there are only minds. Utopia? No, the Internet. MCI suggest that on Internet there are no body markers such as race, gender and age, but “only minds”, suggesting that “cyberspace may break down ethnic and racial differences” (Nakamura 2002:255).

1997:125).

Moreover, the promises of the Internet as another space in which bodies that signify differences based on sex, ethnicity or other markers would disappear, proved to be flawed in, for example, the exacerbation of stereotypes in always sexy feminine representations and hypermasculine avatars and video game heroes (Lie 2003). Following Braidotti,

“The alleged triumph of high-technologies is not matched by a leap of the human imagination to create new images and representations. Quite on the contrary, what I notice is the repetition of very old themes and clichés, under the appearance of 'new' technological advances. It just goes to prove that it takes more than machinery to really alter patterns of thought and mental habits” (1996).

### **2.3 (Positive Otherness II:) the Internet as territory of conquest and colonization**

If considered as a territory which simulates and represent centres and peripheries of economic, cultural and political power through computer mediated communication, the Internet can be considered another colonial and imperialist endeavour, with its own specificities. In recent years, the concept of cybercolonialism has emerged to address the circulation of colonial discourses in/about cyberspace, including the idea of a new territory for exploration and conquer (Hui Kyong Chun 2002). Most of this work has been inspired by Edward Said's discourse analysis of colonialism (Leigh Morbey 2005), and his core idea of “orientalism” as a Western practice “for dominating, restructuring, and having authority over the Orient” (Said 1978:3) that through representing it as an objectified, primitive and dependent Other, differentiates from and so define the Western itself. “Analogous to this understanding is the West's, and particularly the United States' historical global domination of computing expertise” (Leigh Morbey 2005).

The U.S. has had a predominant place within the Internet landscape, with 60 % of all users, hosts and networks (Mierzoeff 2001:106) and the highest percentage of global traffic. This is of great importance if considering that while “the actual technological shape of the system is uncertain, whoever controls its first stages could decisively influence its future evolution, thus acquiring structural competitive advantage” (Castells 1996:365). The unequal distribution of users, infrastructure and economic benefits across the world are strong indicators that processes around the Internet are far away from liberating humanity but “deeply rooted in the reproduction and enforcement of economic and political power structures and structured privileges” (Paasonen 2000).

The International Telecommunication Union (ITU) provides updated revealing figures on the distribution of Internet throughout the world. Regarding users, in 2006 the G8 countries

(Canada, France, Germany, Italy, Japan, Russia, the UK and the US) had “13% of the world’s population and more than 40% of the world’s total Internet users.” Ex-colonies of developed countries have the lower rates in access and infrastructure, while the African continent the most disadvantaged, a situation that extends and intertwines with historical conditions of structural poverty and inequalities. These outstanding disparities between regions are already in the agenda of many governments and international conferences such as the World Summit for the Information Society<sup>11</sup> (WSIS). In general, attempts to bridge the so called digital gap consist of donations of computers and endeavours to take Internet connection to every corner of the world. According to Hui Kyong Chun, “those interested in 'wiring the world' have reproduced narratives of 'darkest Africa' and of civilizing missions (...) conflat[ing] spreading the light with making a profit” (2002:243). This vision is shared by Maria Fernández who considers that “utopian rhetorics of electronic media occlude the practical project of creating new markets and work forces for capitalist enterprises (Fernández 1999:60).

The problem is deeper than making Internet connections available but concerns also how this is done. The map of Internet backbone architecture, that is, the main “trunk” connections of the Internet, shows the predominance of developed countries in the ownership of the nodes of main traffic. This has a direct impact on the speed and the price of connection, as the citizens of developing countries have to pay much higher rates for slower services. But it also involves problems in the security of flows of information, surveillance and censorship. It is mentioned that while the first wave of colonialism “pillaged material resources” (Leigh Star & Bowker 2002:159) from developing to developed countries, the second wave of colonialism will pillage information (Ibidem).

By 2009, utopian accounts on Internet benefits prove to be far from reality, as the Internet is a privilege of small groups depending on their socio-economic class, gender, age, ethnicity and nationality, and its development has been launched by corporative and financial interests. In this sense,

this “utopian universalism can be seen as replacing the ideals of the “civilizing mission” of earlier colonialism (...) as Edward Said has eloquently argued, humanitarian rhetoric is crucial for imperialist projects, since it is through such rhetoric that decent people come to willingly support imperialism” (Fernández 1999:59).

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<sup>11</sup> Launched by United Nations and held in two phases: Ginebra 2003 and Tunis 2005. More information at <http://www.itu.int/wsisis/index-es.html>

An example of utopian and neocolonialist rhetoric of the Internet can be found in the advertisements of the biggest Internet provider companies. Lisa Nakamura shows their contradictory narratives in which promises of equality blur with “the continued presence of stable signifiers of Otherness” (Nakamura 2002:257) that “corporate image factory needs (...) in order to depict their product” (Nakamura 2002: 263). IBM, for example, uses a series of “idealized images of Others”, like an Indian man, an Arab on his camel, a Latina girl, making statements in high tech language, a tension in which they “miraculously speak like 'us' but still look like 'them’” (Ibidem).

#### **2.4 (Negative Otherness:) users and the others**

In direct relation to the examples mentioned above, at the second level of Otherness regarding the Internet we find deeply rooted and legitimated discourses which define one according to others in processes of inclusion and exclusion or, following Ahmed, incorporation and expulsion (2003:6). Thus the subjects who do not participate in the Internet are constructed as Others in contraposition to a model of users based on the dichotomy “connected/non-connected”. This paradigm is an inherently negative one from the very moment it conceptualizes difference in terms of what some have (computers, internet connection, ICT skills) and others do not.

Before going further on this issue, I need to define more precisely the concept of the Other as negative difference within the Western philosophic tradition and its feminist appropriations. In general terms, the Other is defined as a disempowered subject category in opposition to which the dominant subjectivity is constructed, such as “the slave to the master, the woman to the man, the black person to the white one, etc.” (Sturken & Cartwright 2001:361). In Western thought there is a long tradition of considering the Other and its difference as something threatening that requires to be controlled the least (Godzich 1986: xiii).

In “The Second Sex”, Simone de Beauvoir develops the concept of woman as “the Other” of patriarchal culture, in relation to the man as “the One” (Beauvoir quoted in Pilcher & Whelehan 2004:90). She considered women were somewhat complicit in their subordination because they are “often very well pleased with [their] role as the Other” (Ibidem). Her work has been largely criticized, especially for homogenizing the category “woman”, but it was pioneer for feminism and her conceptualization of the One and the Other has been highly influential in subsequent feminist studies on the construction of femininity as a subordinated category in every social domain: economic, political, cultural, educative and technological. The positioning of women as Others in strategic enclaves of power configures attitudes of “a lifetime of subordination, whereby femininity

is that against which masculinity defines itself and asserts its superiority” (Paechter quoted in Pilcher&Whelehan 2004:91).

Following the feminist tradition in the analysis of Otherness, I want to extrapolate the concept of the Other to the field of Cultural Studies of Technoscience. Thus I have coined the term “technological Other” or more precisely “digital Other”, to refer to subordinated groups and individuals whose embodied Otherness reverberates in the access and appropriation of ICT. This embodied Otherness manifest itself in those bodies that do not respond to the humanist universal model of white-young-Western-heterosexual-man, and that lack of material and symbolic resources to occupy the digital space. This universal model characterized the profile of the first Internet users, mainly scientists, scholars and hobbyists (Bakardjieva 2005:4) who still today predominate as the experts both in our cultural imaginaries and key locations of power in the design, development and decision making on ICT. Recent analysis of specialized magazines such as *Wired*, have revealed how advertising of ICT products continue to reinforce masculine and feminine stereotypes of Internet users,

“cultivat[ing] a pervasive form of maverick masculinity to place technologies as the province of an elite, white, male subculture. This (re)turn to traditional and conservative imagery is particularly alarming given evidence of women’s continuing exclusion in technological cultures and occupations” (Dempsey 2009:37).

Even when multiple and contradictory actors and discourses are involved in the process of construction of digital Otherness, I will argue that there is an already set up backdrop in which elements are assembled and recombined but according to a single script in which the ability to name acquires great influence. As I have previously done with the concept of information society (IS), I propose now to provide a close reading of the term “digital gap” to unveil the ideological assumptions at stake.

## **2.5 The digital gap(s)**

IS and its quantitative emphasis (Webster 2006:20) provide a framework in which the concept of digital gap develops, as a numeric cartography which classifies the degrees of exclusion and inclusion ICT represent for different regions, countries and people. At first, it used to be defined simply by the division between connected and non-connected to the Internet, computer users and non-users. In any case, the stress was on the *access* to ICT, considering individuals’ socio-economic level as a possible cause for exclusion, but with no great concern for disaggregating the information



in terms of class, sex, age, etc. Although this approach is still prevailing, it has been criticized for offering a partial and limited vision of a much more complex phenomena. It was necessary to start looking at the digital gap as something that presented multiple dimensions and many folds. The classification of connected and non-connected was complemented by other variables that revealed there are different levels of stratification. Variables of age, sex and ethnicity were also considered as provisional causes of inequality that would be soon overcome, as marked groups have started gradually to catch up with ICT (van Zoonen 2001). However, socio-economic differences at both individual and national levels would continue to represent major obstacles for the massification of the Internet (Ibidem).

Valerie Frissen warns, however, that the digital gap is conceptually misleading in many senses. First, it assumes ICT “effects” as positive themselves and necessary for citizenship. She demystifies this ideas and argues that many non-users have “very good reasons” (2005:273) not to use ICT, for example, they do not feel attracted by software and hardware that have been designed for advanced users, or lack of motivation or involvement of their social networks. Secondly, the idea of gap assumes difference as something static, synonymous of inequality, that constructs a dichotomy between those who “have” or “information rich”, and those “have nots” or “information poor” (Ibidem). According to Frissen, differences are dynamic and changing, and many people who used to be marginalized in ICT have started to become interested in their own ways. A third misleading conceptualization of the digital gap is to explain the causes of exclusion in terms of cognitive aspects (lack of abilities and knowledge) or lack of material resources. Frissen states that the cultural is more influential in many cases, and it can be only revealed if differences are conceived in their multidimensionality (Ibidem).

The definition of the digital gap needed to be pluralized to become a really useful concept to apprehend reality. In this sense, a first digital gap defined in terms of access was distinguished from a second one that refers to uses and appropriations. This focus on uses allowed for a differentiation of several levels of intensity, according to the amount of hours of connection, and the complexity and diversity of everyday users' applications, such as information, recreation, communication, programming and design, etc. It also motivated new approaches that explore the difficulties for access many users may face and that had been invisible until then. Van Dijk&Hacker propose a typology for understanding the multiple “barriers to access and the type of access they restrict” (van Dijk & Hacker 2003) that we will see reflected in many of the testimonies included in the following chapter:

- “1. *Lack of elementary digital experience* caused by lack of interest, computer anxiety, and unattractiveness of the new technology (“mental access”).
2. *No possession of computers and network connections* (“material access”).
3. Lack of *digital skills* caused by insufficient user-friendliness and inadequate education or social support (“skills access”).
4. Lack of significant *usage opportunities* (“usage access”).

Van Dijk&Hacker denounce how “Few data are available -particularly in official statistics- concerning the first experiences of potential users of digital technology” (2003:317). These authors urge to conduct more research that take into account “the ingredients of the mixture of reasons observed here (anxiety, negative attitude, lack of motivation)” (van Dijk y Hacker 2003:318). They refer to some isolated examples of studies that have considered the qualitative nuances of the digital gap, by exploring difficulties in access beyond having computer and connection or not. The results show that “older people, those with low education, a large proportion of women, and (functional) illiterates are strongly overrepresented among people with a lack of motivation” (Ibidem). Thus while some statistics on access tend to portrait an optimist panorama in which men and women share similar percentages of representativeness, some qualitative studies reveal how many women face specific difficulties due to gender inequalities.

In a broad study that focuses on ICT uses and skills, Cecilia Castaño concludes that the second digital gap affect mostly women. Following the literature on this issue (Bonder 2002, Castaño y Torre 2007, Hafkin y Taggart 2001, quoted in Castaño 2008) she identifies some difficulties for a full integration of women in the IS, mostly related to “their position in the labour market” and, tightly related to this, “cultural and institutional problems” (2008:58, *my translation*). She considers the work place as a key space in which people take up informatics and Internet use, and how women's less participation in qualified and well paid jobs in comparison to men constitutes a handicap to motivation (2008:59, *my translation*). In this sense, time is a scarce resource for multitasking women whose overlapping responsibilities in their jobs and with their families leave no room for personal time to surf the web or learn computer skills (Ibidem). This suggests the existence of a grid of inequalities inherent to gender systems that conditions how specific women “perceive less utility of the Internet in comparison to men” (2008:60, *my translation*).

All this is corroborated with a research developed from the Observatorio e-igualdad of Universidad Complutense de Madrid (Departamento de Economía Aplicada V, Facultad de Ciencias Políticas y Sociología). It is based on data collected in 2006 in Spain through the *Survey on equipment and use of ICT in households* (*Encuesta sobre equipamiento y uso de tecnologías de la*

*información y comunicación en los hogares (TIC-H)*. It was elaborated by the National Survey Institute (INE). With this quantitative data, Castaño and her colleagues designed a qualitative research with a sample of women with different backgrounds, linked to the technological field as users, workers and researchers. I found this study pretty interesting as an effort to materialize or flesh out the statistical data from INE. However, as we will see, this data is not always representative of the complexities of reality. Castaño recognizes the limits of quantitative studies that “do not offer enough information on people's contexts and homes that allow for an explanation on why there are gender differences and inequalities, beyond stating they do exist” (2008:61, *my translation*).

In the European context there are some encouraging trends towards gender equality in the Internet access between men and women (first digital gap). In 2007 “the number of Internet users was constantly on the increase and in a faster way than that of men users” (Castaño 2008:9, *my translation*) but women continued to stay 10 points behind men in this regard (Castaño 2008:56, *my translation*). Scandinavian countries have the highest rates in the growth of women Internet users, in comparison with south Europe. In Spain, “the gender digital gap has increased by two points between 2003 and 2007” (Castaño 2008:57, *my translation*).

An important dimension when looking at the gender digital gap is the one related to the inclusion of women in the development of technologies, such as universities, companies and *think tanks*. Castaño concludes that “women are catching up as elementary and primary users, but are not doing so in the generation of technologies. They go backwards even as professionals or students both in European Union and the U.S. (...) this is explained in terms of the persistence of forms of discrimination related to the required ICT skills and abilities as well as the access to careers, the industry and companies related to the generation of technology” (Castaño 2008:60).

Both Frissen's (2005), Van Dijk's (2003) and Castaño's (2008) approaches exemplify efforts to go beyond mere quantitative trends of indexes used in the study of infrastructure, classifying people into connected and non-connected, which results are rarely disaggregated by sex or sensitive to a gender perspective. Most of the times, these quantitative data are supported by governmental entities or telecom companies and reflect a technical or business approach rather than a socio-cultural one. “Historically, and even today, ICT indicators overwhelmingly focus on infrastructure and connectivity –in other words, how many phones are in use, rather than who is using them for what” (Mahan 2007:77). We need to ask “what is exactly being measured? And above all, what is that is not being measured at all?” (Piscitelli no date, *my translation*).

Even in this context of absences and invisibility, there are some numeric approaches that, besides confirming the existence of territorial digital gaps (between countries, between the rural and the urban areas), economic ones (between those who have high, medium and low incomes) and generational ones (between young and elder people), allows for a (grosso modo) calculation of gender digital gaps that cross-cut all the others. This accentuates or diminishes according to the different regions of the globe, and becomes especially critical in those countries where feminization of poverty and women's precarious economic, social and cultural rights are common currency. For example, in 2004, the percentage of women Internet users was estimated in 22% in Asia, 38% in Latin America and 6% in Middle East (García Ramilo 2007:8). However, these data lose their geopolitical correlate when we study Latin American migrant women living in Spain, demanding for new approaches and conceptualizations.

Going back to Castaño's study, in a section entitled “Non Spanish women and ICT” the survey disaggregates computer and Internet use according to nationality, distinguishing between Spanish and foreign women. Castaño concludes:

“(...) foreign women are better integrated to ICT in comparison with Spanish women and despite the gender digital gap still exist among them, it is smaller. However, most of them make a more sporadic and less intensive use, except from those connected more than twenty hours per week” (Castaño 2008:126).

While Castaño warns readers on how surveys on immigrant people tend to consider “people from other nationalities living in Spain as a homogeneous group”, she hurries to arrive at dubious conclusions without problematizing enough her claims. I argue that packing migrant women in the category of “non Spanish women” works as a mechanism of Otherness which conceals their existence and the specificities of their particular experiences. This reductive standpoint borders on scientific positivist approaches that claims objectivity on the basis of numeric descriptions of reality. However, its inability to grasp the relational and everyday character of people's interaction with technology, urges for a displacement of its place as favourite source of knowledge in influential areas of decision making such as governments and companies.

## 2.6 The third digital gap

To consider migrant movements within the frame of IS provides alternative approaches to the conceptualizations of the digital gap that may suggest the existence of a third one. In the previous section, I have referred to the first and second digital gaps in relation to Internet access and use respectively. The third digital gap would be defined by inequalities affecting particular profiles of immigrants. As groups with their own specificities, immigrants have diverse geopolitical, socio-economic and cultural origins, whose migratory projects and movements reflect plural and dynamic realities of the ancestral practice of people crossing borders due to political, economic and social reasons. In this sense, the concept of migratory flows seems suitable to describe complex and always changing phenomena according to historical periods, directionality of places of destiny and origin, people's backgrounds, among other variables.

Recent reconfigurations in the capitalist economic model have led to a proliferation of migratory movements from poor to rich countries (Brah 1996:178), a tendency that at least in the Western hemisphere, coincides with the unequal distribution of resources between a pauperised South and an enriched North. In the concrete case of Latin America, since the 80s, millions of people have emigrated to the U.S. and Europe in search of better life conditions. Many of them come from low income households and get the most precarious and worst paid jobs in the destination country that, however, often offers better opportunities than in their countries of origin.

Since the expansion of the Internet in the second half of the 90s, these immigrants occupy an ambiguous position within IS, where computer and Internet skills are highly valued for social and economic integration, to access and produce information which has acquired exchange value. In this context, the emphasis on the third world origin of these migratory flows acquires special relevance. As I mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, the expansion of the Internet has not been equal in a world characterized by deep inequalities in the distribution of material resources, something that becomes especially evident in the technoscientific fields. This has led to a mismatch in the informational and digital strategies within the different regions. On the one hand, the first and second digital gaps are generally suffered in the poor countries. On the other hand, these digital gaps also exist inside rich countries, and the third digital gap might accentuate this tendency because with immigration, digital poverty (another fold of poverty) settles at the heart of more “advanced” societies.

I must say that literature on the third digital gap<sup>12</sup> is still scarce and even divergent. My argumentation follows the line of Morales & Rodríguez's conceptual work in this regard. These authors identified the hypothesis of a third digital gap in a report on the Moroccan population in the provinces of Cádiz and Málaga, presented in 2007 to the municipal authorities of Andalucía, Spain (Ribes et al. in Morales & Rodríguez 2008). The report shows how non digital literate immigrants face the problem of arriving in countries where governments have adopted strategies of interaction and citizenship based on the Internet. Some examples are the online presence of public entities such as ministries and city halls, in which has been called e-administration and e-government. These initiatives obey to an *ethos* which values the Internet great potential as a mechanism to promote more horizontal and non hierarchical spaces of participation, a way of improving public services through decentralization, speeding up bureaucratic procedures, to mention just a few. However, the promotion of digital citizenship presents some drawbacks as it reinstall inequalities between citizens who have not taken up the Internet in their daily practices, many of whom we can suppose to be immigrants. Another drawback is the covering of economic and political interests which turn access instrumental and conceive IS as an allied to “make a flexible and fragmented labour market” (Morales&Rodríguez 2008).

At first sight then, digital inclusion may seem praiseworthy. However, it imposes a hegemonic choreography which motto would be “Learn computer skills for a better integration”, occluding the predominant rationale that turns this symbolic capital into a prerequisite to enter the labour and consumption market. Thus digital citizenship, the construction of online networks, activism and other functions would have a secondary place, conditioned by the demands of the market. Following Morales & Rodríguez, to build a theoretical reflection of the third digital gap would allow to

“go beyond those typical claims on new technologies use and access, and to put our theoretical reflection in dialogue with last studies in communication and society that incorporates variables such as migration, ethnicity or identity, escaping classical socio-economic determinisms” (Wilson et al. quoted en Morales & Rodríguez 2008, my *translation*).

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<sup>12</sup> By 7th May 2009, the searching engine Google Scholar offered one single result with the key phrase “third digital gap”: a document in which it was defined as the difference between digital rich and poor people inside a country or region, or between different countries (Gupta 2004).

It could be argued that the so called third digital gap may be already included in the definitions of the first and second ones: in the end, it is about disparities in access and use, contextualized in a particular social group. It is not about multiplying digital gaps *ad infinitum* as a way of addressing digital exclusions for reason of age, sex, ethnicity, nationality, class, etc. These variables do not define separable digital gaps, rather they intersect with each other forming a complex mesh of subject and social realities. Its particularity rests, however, in that it reveals substantial changes in the way of conceptualizing the IS. On the one hand, the digital gap calls the attention on the structural inequalities that reproduce mechanisms of exclusion, balancing the optimistic promises of cyberdiscourses. On the other hand, I think it reinstalls the inequalities it names by constructing another factor of Otherness, measuring access and uses according to universal and generalizing models that occludes the differences of users. The act of quantifying access and defining intensities of usage based on this model limits a much richer and diverse spectrum of located practices and experiences that reveal to be too evasive for quantitative methods to measure them. I think the digital gap can be a useful concept to describe the constellations of Internet and ICT users, but it needs to revise its basic precepts in order to be reconceptualised and take the inputs from qualitative research.

In this line, my proposal of acknowledging a digital Other is a figuration inspired in the material-semiotic reality of certain social groups who question and challenge the classification of their experiences in terms of connected/non-connected, advanced/late users, first/third world.

## 2.7 Tactical digital Otherness

Otherness has not always been conceived in absolute negative terms. From different disciplinary locations, many theoretical and philosophical traditions have recognized in the inhabitants of the margins of economic, political and social power, a privileged position from which to promote changes or simply adapt hegemonic knowledge to the particular wishes and needs of their situated experiences. Some examples are Deleuze & Guattari's minoritarian subjects (1987:291-92), as well as women in many feminist theories which, according to de Lauretis, enable readings that provide "an emerging redefinition of marginality as location, and of identity as desidentification" (quoted in Haraway 2004:58).

In the field of feminist epistemologies, for example, Sandra Harding developed the standpoint theory according to which women's subordinate position in systems of power may have

better, more objective and less biased knowledge than those who are in the center of scientific production (1993, 1986).

So called feminists of difference, which holy trinity is composed of postmodern thinkers Helene Cixous, Luce Irigaray and Julia Kristeva, dedicated great part of their work to celebrating feminine Otherness as a privileged location from which to criticize patriarchy. They identified subversive and emancipatory feminine ways of doing and thinking, such as *écriture feminine*. This apparent privilege of femininity might have inspired the most radical cyberfeminist approaches, that conceive of the Internet as a naturally feminine space for women's empowerment and organization, as I have already mentioned in the first chapter. This postmodern turn of feminist theory puts value into difference not in terms of equality and sameness, but as Other.

The problem of many claims from de Beauvoir to cyberfeminists has been to assume this feminine Otherness as a common feature of all women, without taking into account intersectional variables that evidence big differences between them. This critique emerged from women who felt Others in relation to white Western heterosexual women who theorize on women as a homogeneous, monolithic, static group (Mohanty 1984) universalizing women's problematics and situations of oppression from that privileged perspective. Afro-American, chicanas, lesbian and postcolonial feminists have underscored and vindicated the multiple dimensions of Otherness when sexual difference cross-cut ethnic, class, generational and other differences (Hill Collins 1991).

These claims offer the possibility of diverse ways of thinking Otherness in complex terms, putting aside binaries such as negative/positive and victims/empowered, to propose alternative looks that attend to the ambiguous spaces of Otherness in which being other is not a fixed nor unitary identity, but it is inscribed in spaces of continuous negotiation of differences. This blurs the borders between the One and the Other; limits become mobile and dynamic, losing the stiffness that used to define them. In this line, we find the feminist figurations of the Harawayan cyborg (1991), Braidotti's nomadic subject (1994), Zafra's Netianas (2004) and Anzaldúa's *conciencia mestiza*. The latter inspired the so called "borderland theory" (Segura y Zavella 2008) in its conceptualization of inhabiting an indefinite space, or better, defined as an interstice between cultures, languages and places. It is in those interstices of moving borders that "women, men, and youth, straight and queer, adapt, resist, and develop new strategies to negotiate social inequalities" (Segura y Zavella 2008:537).

The concept of "inappropriate/d Otherness" that Haraway (1992:300) takes from Trinh Minh-ha, illustrates the tactical digital Otherness I want to develop here. The authors refers to:



“the othering effects of sociotechnical and cultural relationships in capitalist and postcolonial societies, and to the way in which power differentials along the lines of gender, race, ethnicity, class, age, sexual preference, etc. are constructed in interplay with these relationships” (Lykke 2002:136).

The inappropriate/d would be given by the impossibility of being classified neither as the One nor the Other, rejecting the assigned places by modern Western narratives of identity politics: it is “a way to figure “difference” as a critical difference within” extensible to relationships between humans, the organic and the technological non-human” (Haraway 2004:70).

Thus I propose to hybridize the inappropriate/d Otherness with what I referred to before as the “digital Other” (constructed partly by the digital gap and cyberdiscourses) in order to conceptualize a “tactical digital Otherness”. It may occupy an ambiguous space of indefinite and indefinable limits, full of contradictions and cracks through which subjects negotiate their conditions of Otherness and take hold of diverse tactics to pursue their aims within the overlapping and intersections of various hierarchical systems of organization of differences in our contemporary societies. These systems are mainly the sex/gender one, the capitalist and the democratic one. Tactical digital Otherness feeds on the theoretical inputs of the two Michels: Foucault's productive conceptualization of power and de Certeau's everyday tactics. For a better understanding, I propose to look at the experiences of some of the women I have interviewed, whose narrations remind us the diversity of ways of thinking, experiencing and dwelling in the Internet, besides technodeterminist, mercantile, patriarchal, cyberoptimist and even academic discourses.

The capitalist system, which emerged with the industrial revolution, is thought of as the only possible economic model nowadays, strengthened by globalizing tendencies that enable the decentralization of productive systems and the exacerbation of inequalities in the world distribution of material and symbolic wealth and poverty, the free circulation of capital but limited circulation of persons with a spectrum of fugitive, precarious and differentiated citizenships. The increasing demand of cheap labour force for industries and services found its correlate in the patriarchal system that assigns different roles to men and women, dismissing traditionally feminine tasks, such as care and domestic work. The precarization of feminine jobs has been dialectically accompanied by a feminization of precarious labour, including those jobs third world migrants find in the first world labour market. In this sense, migrant domestic workers embody what Vandana Shiva denounced in 1997: “the bodies of the empirical subjects who signify difference (woman/native/earth or natural others) have become the disposable bodies of the global economy” (Shiva quoted in Braidotti 2008:14). These women assume the tasks their first world peers do not want or cannot do, sometimes because they have qualified full time jobs, becoming as Rhacel Salazar Parreñas has

eloquently shown, the “servants of globalization” (2001).

Democratic systems and their rhetoric of human rights attempt, to a more or less extent, to contain the overflows of the capitalist system through public policies for employment and digital inclusion, among others. In this frame, many migrant women find a way to take up computer and Internet courses. Without destabilizing gender roles, this offers them a possibility to look for other horizons for personal training and self realization, in a sort of “technologically mediated agency” (Vehviläinen 2002). Thus (digital) Otherness become tactic in the sense elaborated by de Certeau, who naturally links both as sharing the same location: “the space of the tactic is the space of the other’ (de Certeau, 1984: 36-7). In a smart interpretation of the French author’s work, Ian Buchanan highlights the complementary as well as contradictory relationship between de Certeau’s tactics and strategies, which I quote in extenso for its relevance for my argumentation:

“strategy is a technique of place, and tactics is a technique of space. The essential difference between the two is the way they relate to the variables that everyday life inevitably throws at us all. Strategy works to limit the sheer number of variables affecting us by creating some kind of protected zone, a place in which the environment can be rendered predictable if not properly tame (...) Tactics refers to the set of practices that strategy has not been able to domesticate. They are not in themselves subversive, but they have a symbolic value which is not to be underestimated: they offer daily proof of the partiality of strategic control and in doing so they hold out the token hope that however bad things get, they are not necessarily so. In other words, tactics operate primarily on the plane of belief”. (Buchanan 2000: 88-89)

The women’s practices are not subversive themselves but have the symbolic value of “the partiality of strategic control” of gender/capitalist/democratic systems in which they are immersed as subjects: “Tactics are not liberatory in the material sense of the word: the little victories of everyday life do no more (but, also, no less) than disrupt the fatality of the established order” (Buchanan 2000:105). I consider this to be an important issue because throughout the process of my research I have struggled to avoid every apology to new media practices -including those alternative ones to the universal user model- and all empowering ascriptions that cyberdiscourses have constructed.

I propose now to continue the journey and go from the macropolitical to the micropolitical level to formulate a containing framework for the individual experiences in which digital others construct their subjectivities in relation to the Internet.

### Chapter 3. The Internet in the feminine diasporic space

Latin American migrant women are marked by Otherness in three related ways, according to the binary understanding of reality that hierarchically orders the differences between men and women, first and third world, natives and immigrants. Many of them are also in the intersection of the various digital gaps mentioned in the previous chapter. As we will see below, the training programmes in digital inclusion many of my interviewees were taking, interpellates them as Others: some from a feminist liberal perspective of affirmative action; others from a standpoint that reinforce the gender stereotypes of the Spanish labour market in their condition of Latin migrant women. With nuances, the training programmes follow the rationale of labour and social integration, addressing women as Others in the sense of digitally excluded from society. Most of the women have been informed about the training programmes through social workers who systematize offers and demands in the labour market for migrants and/or unemployed people. Women accept the interpellation, they want to train themselves and work, but their strongest personal motivations are in the plane of affects, in the need of communication with families and friends far away, in their countries on the other side of the Atlantic Ocean. They want to keep old bonds rather than building new ones.

The concept of tactic digital Otherness would be found here in a double move. On the one hand, it reminds us of the limitations of the taxonomic models that classifies users profiles. On the other hand, it enables to rescue women's spaces from the problematic mechanisms of Otherness, spaces that may have not been possible, or at least visible, and how many of them take what the training courses offer and adapt it to their own needs. Having laid out the conceptual landscape, I can go forward in my project of a located politics of the Internet, in which I aspire to contextualize its usefulness, potential and drawbacks in specific situations of embodied subjects that make sense of their everyday practices.

As I mentioned in chapter one, the interviewed women are not an homogeneous group nor they constitute a representative sample of migrant women living in Granada. Indeed the selection of their narratives attempts to consider the differences between them, the diversity of their stories in the Granadine migratory scenario, where several solidarity networks and services for migrants coexist. There we find associations of immigrants as well as others dedicated to give advice and training, organized by non-governmental foundations and the city hall. In the following section, before focusing on women's testimonies, I will provide a brief description of the spaces in which I have contacted them, in the context of the Spanish public strategies for digital and gender inclusion.

### 3.1 Granada in the context of public strategies of digital inclusion

With different accent, governments in various parts of the world have committed themselves to design public policies that promote citizens' integration to the new dynamics of digital democracy. In the European context, the Lisbon summit held in 2000 gathered representatives of the member states of the European Union (EU) and, for the first time, considered digital inclusion as a key element to make the region competitive before 2010 (Castaño 2008:16). Since then, there have been several following-up teams, reports and documents in which the information society has been addressed in terms of regional competitiveness and social cohesion. Many reports refer to the digital inclusion of the most unfavoured collectives of society, with emphasis on disability and access centered. Women's inclusion is based on “the promotion and improvement of employment” (Castaño 2008:299), considering the existence of cultural barriers that influence different attitudes of men and women towards ICT, highlighting the importance of reaching equality. However, “in no case are the particular situations of specific women's collectives being shown” (Ibidem). Spain has followed these strategic lines through the promotion of actions and programmes at the national, regional and local levels. An exhaustive analysis of this policies exceeds the possibilities of my research. Thus I will mention some regional initiatives and I will focus on the Andalusian case to contextualize two specific programmes of digital literacy in which some of my interviewees have taken part in.

Each Spanish Autonomous Community designs its own strategic plans, both regarding digital inclusion and gender equality public policies. In that intersection of ICT and gender, there are programmes to promote the participation and collaboration of migrant women on the Internet. One example is the AlfaBeta Project developed in Cataluña, a *Project for the Mediatic and Digital Literacy of Immigrant Women (Proyecto para la Alfabetización Mediática y Digital de Mujeres Inmigrantes)*. It underscores the Internet applications as means for women's social and labour inclusion that “reassure their personal abilities, their self-esteem and their motivation for learning, all what favours their social capital and improve their personal situations, options and quality of life” (AlfaBeta no date). The aims of this project also considers the importance of the creation of networks “as a way of keeping in touch with their countries or places of origin, boosting links with their community in the diaspora and helping them to make new links with people and institutions in their context of arrival” (Íbidem). In a similar vein, a website with information and resources for migrant women has been recently created in Castilla y León. [Http://www.portalin.es](http://www.portalin.es) was launched in November 2008 during the conference “Woman, immigration and new technologies” organized

by the *Single Mothers' Association Isadora Duncan (Asociación de Madres Solteras Isadora Duncan)* as part of the Programme Day Center for Immigrant Women (Casa Isadora Duncan 2008).

In Comunidad de Andalucía there are many initiatives of digital inclusion. The most ambitious one is maybe the *Guadalinfo Network (Red Guadalinfo)*, defined as “the biggest virtual city of Andalucía, composed of almost 700 centres and around half million users (...) in which the digital sphere becomes an ideal space in which Andalusian society transforms itself to overcome cultural, economic and social boundaries” (Guadalinfo no date). In the centres there are training courses on Internet and computer use, offered for free to every resident in the region -including immigrants- and their activities and various information are compiled in a website. This initiative is framed by the *Andalusian Plan for the Information Society 2007-2010 (Plan Andalucía Sociedad de la Información 2007-2010)*, launched by the regional Ministry for Innovation, Science and Bussiness (Consejería de Innovación, Ciencia y Empresa). With a subvention from this regional ministry, the Cultural Department for Equal Opportunities of the city of Granada has offered, since 2004, free training courses on Internet and computer use specific to women: “Internet for all” (“Internet para tod@s”). This programme of Digital Inclusion is framed by the *Municipal Plan for the Equality of Opportunities for men and women (Plan Municipal de Igualdad de Oportunidades entre mujeres y hombres)* that is currently active in its 4<sup>th</sup> edition. Courses are given in daily sessions of one hour and a half during two weeks and take place at the offices of Women's European Center Mariana de Pineda (Centro Europeo de las Mujeres Mariana de Pineda (MP), where I have contacted many of the Latin American women who took part in my research. It is an affirmative public policy to make women curious and enthusiastic about digital communication, bridging the second digital gap with a strategy from a local institution. Vehviläinen highlights the importance of this kind of initiatives oriented to:

“(...) those who deviate from the (liberal) ideal, in a Western information society, of the white, middle-class, well-educated man. Different and contradictory figures, such as the woman who cannot type, should find room in the courses developed in terms of “equal access” (2002: 288).

Despite there are not official numbers on the percentage of immigrant women who attend, both the course coordinator and one of the teachers have perceived a recent increase in the attendance of immigrant women. The coordinator of the courses, Agent for Equality Inmaculada Carmona Cuesta, explained that the initiative emerged after ascertaining statistically the existence

of “a big digital gap affecting Granadine women, especially those above forty years old”. According to her, this caused concern to the authorities for considering informatics and the Internet as “necessary for women's inclusion and participation, both in the market place and in any other search of resources”. This line of action will continue with the fourth Equality Plan that is being elaborated in 2009. Carmona said that

“in most houses there is a high percentage of computers, but women do not use the family computer because they feel that fear of the apparatus (...) because they have been socialized that way (...) we start from the assumption that women are more reticent to use computers, they are afraid of having things erased, of not knowing, of blocking something”.

The courses include a module on gender. In Carmona's words:

“It is very important for us that, in any activity we organize as the Cultural Department for Equality of the city, we address women transversally to raise consciousness on inequalities based on gender (...) We live with that illusion of equality, it seems now we are all equal; indeed we do have legal equality but in practice, it has not arrived yet”.

The total duration of the training is, on average, fifteen hours distributed in two weeks. Carmona said that most women think the courses are too short:

“For someone who has hardly ever seen a computer, it might be short time, but our goal is to generate curiosity so that they continue to use computers at home or at the access centres provided by the city hall, in a self-taught way, with the little knowledge they acquire here”.

The approach of this training programme follows the lines of liberal feminism that, as I have referred to in detail in the first chapter, aspires to provide access to ICT to most women through affirmative action plans that may compensate gender inequalities.

The main reasons women felt motivated about taking up the use of computers and the Internet are job search and improvement of current jobs, as well as communication with family and friends. This conclusion derives from the testimonies of many of the interviewees, and from the opinion of one of the trainers of the courses:

“Most women want to communicate with their home country so they want to learn [how to] write emails, chat, and talk with their family. Some of them also need to check their files in immigration offices' websites (...) when we learn how to search in Google, for example, each of them looks for what is of their personal interest, many look for jobs (...) it is harder for elder women, but old immigrant women are the few”.

Another group of women I interviewed were taking computer courses in a non-governmental foundation, Fundación Albihar (FA). It is a private entity that aims at “promoting the social and cultural integration of women in society, defending their rights and the recognition of their legitimate aspirations in all fields (FA sin fecha). They also organize activities “to promote family and youth in Spain, solidarity with the most unfavoured stratus of society, the elderly, immigrants, and development cooperation in other countries” (FA sin fecha). The computer courses are called “Guadalupe project” (in honour to the Mexican virgin, as in the beginnings there were many women of this country attending them) and it is part of a broader training programme which include courses on domestic labour (cooking, sewing, cleaning) in order to help migrant women to fit the Spanish demand of domestic workers. The idea of these courses emerged from an informal and spontaneous concern of a group of Spanish friends who perceived how the ignorance of the environment avoided many women to get jobs in Spanish houses<sup>13</sup>. The computer courses are offered every Saturday afternoon in the building of Colegio Mayor Albaycin and they are preceded by an optional religious mass held in a small chapel inside the building. These day and time suit the free time slots these women have as full time domestic workers.

### Immigrants' associations

At the beginning of this research, I was interested in contacting women organized in immigrants' associations to explore if and how they used the Internet for their political activities. This hypothesis weakened soon before a changing reality in which most associations keep their legal status but are currently inactive. This implied a critical change of emphasis in my research. Nevertheless I decided to contact women who were part of some organizations whose testimonies on their individual experiences with the Internet were equally valuable for my work. Thus I have interviewed three women related to the *Uruguayans' Association in Granada (Asociación de Uruguayos y Uruguayas en Granada)* and two Peruvian sisters who were the founding members of

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<sup>13</sup> In an informal conversation, one of the coordinators emphasized that they design their activities “with a gender perspective”, helping migrant women to improve their economic situation. However, she recognised that the premises they work with have been strongly criticized by feminist groups that understand their courses reinscribe women in their traditional roles.

*Immigrant women's association one=one (Asociación de mujeres inmigrantes uno=uno).*

Both associations are committed to the dissemination of Latin American culture and to give support to Latin American newcomers in Granada, provide them with information, advice and spaces for reflection on the fact of being an immigrant. Both associations are or were quite small, with an average of ten people participating regularly during the most active moments. In both cases, the disarticulation of the groups was explained by the moving away of people due to diverting opinions or travels to their home countries or other cities. The current economic crisis was also mentioned as a factor that limited people's time and energies to devote to the associations. Another reason was found in the quite stabilization of Spanish policies on foreigners, one of the facts that used to keep them active and organized until approximately 2002.

### **3.2 The micropolitics of the Internet in the women's lives<sup>14</sup>**

An accurate valorization of the testimonies poses the challenge of locating similarities and differences according to intersectional coordinates of analysis that take into account multiple variables, such as migratory waves, the associative links or their relation to the associations or services of/for immigrants, age and level of Internet users, to mention just a few.

The associative links constitute fundamental differences in women's economic and socio-educative profiles, closely related to their online experiences, to the point that it is an axe of differentiation between the interviewees. All the women who were part of the immigrants' associations, have a technical or professional degree and are regular Internet users. In contrast, women who were attending the computer courses both at MP and FA are a more homogeneous group whose socio-educative profiles, though very diverse, dilute in the common destiny of working at the domestic service in Granada.

Migratory waves, that mark the historical period in which emigration took place, are another factor of differentiation in testimonies and profiles. Three of the women emigrated during the 70s and 80s. Two of them, Uruguayan citizens, emigrated for political reasons after a dictatorship. The third case, a Brazilian woman, did it for personal reasons after splitting up with her boyfriend. The rest of women have emigrated in more recent times. A Peruvian woman travelled to Spain in the 90s for professional reasons. Other women did it since 2000, explaining their reasons in economic terms: a Uruguayan woman who wanted to keep her standard of life despite the economic crisis that exploded in the South American region in 2002. Other women wanted to increase the meagre

<sup>14</sup> The transcription of the interviews is in private possession of the author. The names used here are fictional in order to protect the identity of the interviewees.



economic resources that had in their home countries.

On the one hand, it is possible to identify similar opinions and expressions between them, regarding their subject positions as immigrant women and as potential or real Internet users. These similarities seem to transcend the differences of their contexts of enunciation. In this sense, all the women, independently of their profile (though with nuances), give positive value to digital literacy as something necessary nowadays, underscoring the relevant role the Internet has for communication with their families in their home countries. I propose now to order their testimonies according to the following narrative strands: the experiences of (re)learning computer and Internet use, the articulation of maternal roles with Internet users' roles, and the negotiation of family and personal times. These strands are neither separate compartments nor easily segmentable, as topics repeat and intertwine between different testimonies and inside the same testimony. They aim to guide the reading in terms of coincidences and divergences, and to locate them in such a way that they can be transversed by other recurrent topics such as self-esteem and personal growth, fears, reticences and satisfactions.

### Learn and remember

The two Uruguayan women who emigrated for political reasons in the 70s, have taken up the use of the Internet while being already in Spain. The eldest one, Nadia, 64, social educator, defined herself as “an illiterate person regarding computers and the Internet”. However, she has learnt to use both ten years ago and she often needs them for her job. “I am an elementary user for obligation, and I feel the computer domains me, that I cannot resolve things there”. This perception would coincide with the results of some research that have shown how women tend to underestimate their technological skills (Castaño 2008, Henwood quoted in Vehviläinen 2002:275). As I have mentioned in the previous sections, work and educative places act as motivation for ICT training. It is the case of Olivia, 40, a Uruguayan graphic designer whose job demanded her immediate assimilation of computer and Internet skills. Her experience online is by far the most advanced of the interviewed women.

For Nadia, approaching computers at her work place in an educative institution was not a motivation, but an imperative:

“the Internet is compulsory for me because at my job there are computers, we need to search for data (...) I make searches on Google to organize the [educative] programmes and I check emails (...) It is not something

that calls my attention at all, though I know it is the best way of communicating with relatives outside Granada”

Her first steps in informatics were self taught, without formal courses but the help of “younger workmates who knew better”. Nadia feels a stranger to the Internet in particular and technology in general:

“I used to resist to it; the mouse used to scare me, it seemed to me that if I touched it, the computer would fall apart. I used to feel that because I had never tried before (...) I have always felt resistant to technology, even the mobile phone, I must have been the last person who started to use it!”.

She attributes these feelings to a generational reason, as she does not see it affects boys and girls differently nowadays. She bought a computer and paid for the Internet connection until her daughter left the house, “for her studies”. Nadia prefers old media like the telephone and letters to communicate with her friends and family, but sometimes she writes emails, especially to her seven year old grandson who lives in Uruguay. “I know [the Internet] is very important for everything, but I do not feel enthusiastic about it. It is something wonderful for the youth, it broadens horizons. I prefer to read and write”.

Nadia's reticence to the Internet did not prevent her to stimulate Regina, her friend from the *Uruguayans Immigrants' Association*, to open her own email account. Regina still remembers vividly the crossing by boat that brought her to Spain in 1975, running away from dictatorship with her one year old baby. Today, with 59 years old, social worker, she defines herself as an addict to the Internet and negotiates the time of family computer use with her son and husband. For her, learning how to use a computer was a personal achievement of autonomy:

“I want to get things on my own, to be able, and I do not like being dependent. My life has been a constant dependence; every time I needed to go somewhere, someone had to take me because I did not know how to drive. Finally I learnt to drive five years ago”.

One year before, in 2003, she had done her first attempt with computers:

“I would always say *I must make it!* I did not have a computer so I went to the Library of Andalucía, where you could access to the Internet for up to one hour, but I spent fifty minutes looking for the “@”. I asked somebody and did not know either, then we asked a boy; by that time I only had ten minutes left!”

Her tenacity was complemented by some training courses at her work place:

“they [the courses] helped me to lose fears (...) computers do not act on their own, it is a mechanism that we need to know how it works and if you do not use it properly... I have erased many thing millions of times for not saving them. Sometimes you need to make lots of mistakes”.

Later on, the family bought a computer for the house, especially for her son who also explained her some applications. Like Nadia, Regina explained her difficulties and fears with the computer in terms of age, of not having had the chance to grow with this technology and to feel “very clumsy to learn”. However, her husband Ariel, who belongs to her same generation, did not express any difficulties nor resistances to learn informatics at his work place, helped by workmates. For Regina, her son and husband's patience and support have been very important in her learning process: “At the beginning I used to depend on them very much (...) my husband explained to me 25800 times that what I found hard”. Nadia's support and email exchanges were also crucial. At the same time, Regina herself encouraged two other friends to take up the Internet. One friend “rejected computers (...) but needed to start working and she would be asked to have that [knowledge] (...) she did a course that helped her to understand, and then her daughters helped her to open an email account”. The other friend had divorced and still had her email address with her ex-husband's name. “*Come on!* I told her, *how can it be possible?! (...)* I insisted so much that one day we sat together [in front of the computer] to open a new email address, we were almost two hours for that because I am not that fast yet, there are many difficulties for me”. In the near future, Regina hopes to attend a course to improve her Internet skills. “What I know is a product of the support I have had [from other people], and of my own interest, motivation and energies”.

Other testimonies highlighted the importance of learning through courses, and they linked it with the necessity of having a computer of their own. The Latin American women from Fundación Albihar (FA) and Mariana de Pineda (MP) shared the experience of being at the very beginning of the courses and, in many cases, they were using a computer for the first time. In their narratives, it is possible to identify what Ernst Bloch called anticipatory consciousness:

“A consciousness of possibilities that have not yet been, but could eventually be realized (...) Utopian desires attempt to change the present by integrating possible futures, it is the quality of hope that transforms this present. The recognition that possible futures are latent within the present simultaneously enables belonging and becoming” (Bloch quoted in Munt 2001:6).

Learning processes are motivated to improve present conditions, being it laboral ones, of

communication and strengthening of family bounds with those who are physically far and away; all this emerge from projections into a future time.

Besides the courses, the women also share the use of cybercafes as main points of access to the Internet, as they do not have computers or connection in their places. For Amanda this means an obstacle for learning. She is a 55 years old Colombian woman who arrived in Granada three years ago, “running away from war and looking for opportunities to improve her economic situation”. Now she works “taking care of a grandma” and on Saturday afternoons she attends the cooking courses of FA. She does not stay to the computer course that is given immediately afterwards, though she expressed she would like to:

“On the Internet we can get information on many issues and we can communicate with our home countries in a cheaper way (...) when I buy a computer in the future I will learn. I could start here [at FA] but it is only every eight days and by then I will have forgotten everything. I need to have where to practice, and at my workplace I have no chance. I would never remember everything”.

Her job as a full time domestic worker avoids her going out during week days so she could only use the computers during weekends at the cybercafes. “I should have [a computer] myself, buy one and have it at my workplace”.

At Mirta's house, Brazilian, 51, there is her daughter's computer with Internet connection, but Mirta does not use it much. “I turn it on but I can only practice writing, I write people's names (...) My daughter does not have the patience to teach me and she tells me not to enter”. She has started the computer courses at MP and feels very enthusiastic about it. She wants to communicate with friends and to prepare her Curriculum Vitae. “The most difficult for me is to remember ...where to click, that is hard for me”. Her access to the Internet is now limited to the two hours a week of the courses, as she has not have good experiences in cybercafes. “I am ashamed of asking for help. The other day I asked the girl [who works in a cybercafe] to put my photo in the CV and she told me *We are not here to teach you*. I told her that I would pay for it. In the end, a boy who was there helped me”.

Among both the participants of the courses at FA and MP there are young women who want to review and remember computer skills they had acquired in their home countries. Joaquina, Bolivian, 31, learnt while she was studying Business Administration: “For the last four years I have seldom used [computers], only for chatting. Here [in Spain] I use it to search for job offers, and before that [in Bolivia] I would search information in relation with my studies”. Now she wants to have a certificate to include in her CV. Úrsula is another Bolivian young woman, 32, who also

wants to refresh what he had learnt ten years ago while studying Social Communication and Executive Secretary in her home country. "I have forgotten and I come here [to the courses at FA] to remember, because if you do not practice, it goes away".

In Paraguay, her home country, Diana, 42, had always worked as a small shopkeeper until a robbery made her indebted and she had to close her business. She came to Granada six years ago to earn the money to pay her debts. Some time later, her husband and daughter -now aged thirteen- joined her in Granada. At the moment I interviewed her she was unemployed and wanted to use her free time to improve her skills for business, that she defines as her vocation.

"Each day there are more advances in electronic [applications] for studies and business. I have a computer at home but I cannot use it because I do not know how; I want to buy something and I cannot do it through the Internet. And if I think of having a business of my own again in the future, and I need to use computers, how can I make it? I need to take a course to learn how the apparatus work".

She does have an email address that her daughter opened for her so she can keep in touch with her sisters who live in Buenos Aires. Since she started the course at MP, Diana shares what she learns with her husband and daughter. "Now I go home and give lessons too", she said proudly.

### The connected mothers

Informatics as a complementary skill to the maternal role emerged in various testimonies. Úrsula's migratory project is to go back to Bolivia and meet her sons aged twelve and six, who now live with her ex-husband. She confessed me she attends the courses for them:

"It is mainly to guide my sons, because if some day they ask me something and I am ignorant, I do not want to be a shame for them. I got a degree in Social Communication, and if I do not know about computers, that sucks!"

For Rosario, Colombian, 43, it is also important to be an updated mother.

"We must follow the world's pace. Now it is informatics. [Computers] did not use to call my attention before, I preferred the telephone for communication. Now I am very interested so I can help the kids with homework. Yesterday, for example, my son had to do something for school about Colombia, and for me it was very easy to access [the Internet] and search for the information. [At home] we have a computer but no Internet connection (...) My son knows how to do it but sometimes kids want to play tricks, they say *Yes, I searched but could not*

*find anything*. Now he cannot do that to me any more. We went together [to the cybercafe] and made the search”

Jacinta's nineteen years old son knows he must be good at school. His mother, Peruvian aged 51, can access the school website and with a special password check all the information related to his school performance, his absences, grades and other informations.

In many other testimonies, the main motivation for learning to use computers is to facilitate communication with sons and daughters who are geographically far away. María, Bolivian, 51, is proud of her three son and daughters, professionals who lives in Buenos Aires and in Bolivia. Before coming to Granada, she used to live in Argentinian capital city, where her son taught her how to communicate through the Internet with the people in Bolivia. Her sister, who also lives in Granada, has a computer at home but María prefers to check her email at a cybercafe or during the courses at FA because “if you do not own [the computer] it causes some fear, you can click somewhere and it goes everywhere”, she said.

“My kids used to tell me *Oh mum, you must learn!*, told me Laura, Bolivian aged 56, “and I would never take it seriously, I was working and I did not have the time for anything else. Now that I am here [in Granada], I regret so much that I did not learn”. Before coming to Granada, five years ago, her sons helped her to find the information related to paperwork to live and work in Spain. Now she is anxious about learning how to have online chats with them, but in Granada she says she does not have the time either because she works as a full time domestic worker at a house and a shop.

### Time

Many popular expressions refer to the value of time as a scarce resource, an idea that has become very fashionable nowadays in which the accelerated processes of the global economy demand long working days, both inside and outside the house. Several feminist researches have shown how women deal with double or triple burdens. It is the case for women with precarious jobs as well as those with qualified ones, as they all need to play, to some extent, traditionally feminine roles in which domestic work and looking after other members of the family is socially constructed as *their* responsibility. Economic restructures have worsened the situation in most countries, in which welfare states have cut public budgets that financed social services such as kindergartens, the care of the elder and dependant persons (Sainsbury 2002, Young 1999). When the state is not the provider of these services any more, these tasks are transferred to private companies for those who

can afford them, or to women's shoulders .

The race against time is a well known sport for most women of very different socio-economic, ethnic and age profiles. And it has also been a recurrent topic in the narrations of the women I have interviewed during my research on their experiences with the Internet. It was more outstanding in the domestic workers' testimonies, for whom the Internet is not part of their job but it is inscribed in leisure and personal times.

In this sense, it is interesting to point at how many of these women, despite having long working days, find more time of their own for being far away from their families. This “overdose” of personal times might encourage them to take up activities they did not use to conceive before in their tight schedules. Thus Úrsula, said she wanted to take advantage of her free time in Granada because once she is back in Bolivia with her sons she will not have time “for studying or anything”. Socorro, Nicaraguan aged 54, said:

“I have worked all the time while being in my home country, I did not have time of my own, and here [in Spain] I take advantage of the chance I am given”. She also aspires at being a connected mother soon as her main ambition is to keep in touch with his son who lives in U.S. “I have an email account my Spanish friend opened for me, so I write and she tells me *open here, close there* and I put the password (...) I want to do it myself.”

Those immigrant women who live in Granada with their family have to negotiate the time slots and find the free gaps. And of course the energies. Joaquina claims “you cannot spend so much time surfing the web, maximum I would dedicate two hours a day because I have a two year old son and I need to work too”.

In the group of high school classmates Regina happened to find online, she has noticed that men tend to write more than women. She did not relate this directly to time disposition but she did emphasize that in order to write, read and participate online you need to have plenty of time. She often dedicates half hour a day every night, after having dinner, to check her three email accounts or to look for information about Uruguay, especially about “culture, flora and fauna, landscapes, current events and the press”. However, news are not her priority as it is for his husband, who usually tells her the news he reads online. “I do not do it because I get out of work, then I eat, then I do the shopping, cook dinner, and once you realize time has flown away”.

Time in general also fly away from the Peruvian sisters of *Immigrant women's association one=one*: Susana and Jacinta. Susana, aged 52, has been living in Granada for sixteen years now

with her husband, both professionals. She works as an assistant professor at a private college and as a psychologist at her house. She checks emails everyday at her workplace as she does not have time at home:

“[For] the dynamics of my life and job (...) and the routines of housework. I have a person who helps me in the house but as my husband works outside the house I am more aware of all decisions related to it, small details, the food, where to put things. I must say that even if my husband were more at home... we have the older model that woman masters the house, and man adapts to it”.

The Internet is not a priority in her life, except for activities related to a Master course she is taking. She prefers the telephone to communicate with her family. Her sister Jacinta came to Granada in 2005 to improve her economic situation. In Peru, she used to work as assistant in a kindergarten and here she works as full time domestic worker, taking care of an old woman. She has a break every weekend and during week days between 6pm and 9:30pm. While she was alone soon after her arrival, she would walk around the city and nearby villages for hours. After becoming bored of it, she followed a friend's suggestion to attend a centre for employment of the city hall. There she knew about workshops and online courses, a perfect option for her tight time schedule. She already knew something about computers from courses she had had in Peru, and in Granada she took up the Internet, with trial and error on her own and with some help from her sister:

“There [in Peru] I did not have time because I was really busy with my job, the house and my family. I could not access to the Internet but here I can. I used to tell myself *I will do it on Saturday* but then time was gone: Saturday the laundry, Sunday the ironing, Monday all over again. And if I did have the time to go [to the cybercafe] I did not feel like going, I was tired, I felt apathetic”.

In Granada she started to attend online courses in her free time: how to search for a job on the Internet, a course on control of stress and emotions, an English course; some of them lasted for one day, others for several months.

Jacinta has two adolescent sons, one in Peru and the younger is with her in Granada. She told me how she used to run, literally, from her workplace to the computer place to her own house where her son lived almost alone. On the weekends, the boy would cook for both and she would have more time for her courses. When I interviewed her, she was studying to become a nurse assistant and a few weeks ago, her husband had arrived from Peru to live with them in Granada:



“In the last period I have quitted [the course] because my husband has just arrived. If he had been here for more time, it would not have been a problem as he could do his stuff. But I feel sorry that our son is busy studying while my husband stays alone. I used to study both at my workplace and at my own house, but now I cannot do that while my husband sits down over there. I do not like to quit but, what can I do? I also need to dedicate time to my husband”

## Chapter 4. Conclusions

In recent times, it is possible to notice a change of emphasis in some academic approaches to the Internet, especially from the Humanities and Social Sciences. It is a qualitative and socio-constructivist turn that aims at counterbalancing and challenging techno-determinist and quantitative paradigms that prove unable to grasp the complexities and dynamism of current societies. From the multiple and intertwined folds this turn may have, my research has focused mainly on three of them. First, it considers the Internet as a changing cultural process, produced by and producer of multiple meanings, taking distance from previous utilitarian and monolithic definitions. Secondly, it makes an effort to understand how the Internet articulates with the everyday life of diverse groups and people, at the micropolitic level of personal and sociocultural issues, going beyond macropolitic abstractions and generalizations on the impacts and effects of the Internet on society. Thirdly, and tightly intertwined with the points mentioned above, my research holds a renewed interest to understand these processes at the level of Internet users, that complement studies focused mainly on access and infrastructure of the network.

All this is especially relevant for Feminist Internet Studies as a political project of critique and deconstruction of hegemonic discourses that circulate around ICT, as well as to produce alternatives that make visible the complex mesh of powers at stake and how it interacts with the situation of particular women in their multiple identities: ethnic, socio-economic and generational. With these working premises, I have developed a qualitative research based on a case study on the experiences of a group of Latin American migrant women living in Granada, Spain. My choice was inspired by the belief that the diasporic situation works as a strong force of instability of stereotypes regarding technoscience. The fact of approaching, at least partially, the women's perceptions, expectations, fears and motivations to become Internet users in the diasporic space is a rich empiric evidence that confirms but also questions many assumptions about the space in which technoscience, migration and sexual difference intersect each other.

This emergent space of analysis and reflection feeds on many schools of thought, theoretical and methodological approaches, political discourses and economic interests I have referred to throughout these pages. This last chapter is an attempt to provisionally close the tour, articulating the testimonies provided by my interviewees with that dense material and discursive fabric that have proven complex as well as contradictory. My ambition has been to contribute to the pluralization of debates on the Internet and to propose future lines of research in which gender perspective and intersectional analysis of the interactions between technoscience, subjectivities and

social structures acquire greater relevance in the context of globalization.

The specificity of my case study does not pretend to translate itself into inductive generalizations. Analytic categories of scientific knowledge are mainly dynamic, performative and contextual so that a similar study may offer comparative parameters the most, but always constrained by the limits of its own specificity. In this sense, my research could be read as a manifesto for the deconstruction of generalizations on women, migration and the Internet. I do not want to be a relativist but to engage with problematizing ideologic and common sense assumptions that simplify the mechanisms of meaning production through which we live the everyday.

One of the common features of the different chapters and sections of this piece of work has been the questioning of borders and dichotomies at various levels. In the first chapter I have argued for the need to transcend the outlines that contain optimist and pessimist attitudes towards technoscience, to abandon every dramatic approaches and look for those that take into account the human interaction in complex terms. The word technoscience works as a hybrid of technology/science and both with culture and society. I have also questioned geopolitical borders of nation states, following postcolonial approaches that throw light on and contextualize historically current dynamics of circulation and flows of people, capital and imaginaries. I have also tried to highlight the nuances of conceptual frontiers of academic disciplines, putting into dialogue the traditions of New Media Studies, Migration Studies and Gender Studies.

At the methodological level, my choices are an attempt to evidence the limits of quantitative studies, with their levels of abstraction and generalization, and the need of complementing them with qualitative nuances that offer a toolkit to produce situated knowledge, embodied in particular subjects and contextualized in the everyday life. The micropolitics of the Internet looked under the light of particular migrant women's experiences problematizes the political and economic terms in which the so called information society has been conceptualized, and its construction of Otherness through the digital gaps.

I have argued that Latin migrant women are defined as Others in three related ways at the level of identity that fix them into categories different from the universal masculine subject, the European native and the image of the typical Internet user. Feminist interventions in the debates on gender and technoscience have made evident the lack of women in the production of technoscientific knowledge and the predominance of a subject that defines itself as universal but is basically man, white, Western, heterosexual, middle or high class. Far from disappearing, this profile has predominated until the XXI century, embodied in the typical user of ICT in general and the Internet in particular, from public policies to advertising and videogames. Statistics show the

gradual raise of groups of users who used to be “running behind”, but their quantitative approach leave crucial sociocultural dimensions unattended, ignoring their influence on the different attitudes and uses of those who remain outside the universalizing model.

As a researcher, I have also fixed my interviewees into categories such as women, Latin American, migrant and Internet users. I did it consciously, following some “strategic essentialism” (Spivak 1984 quoted in Ashcroft *et al.*1998) with the aim of looking for common elements into the diversity of their profiles and experiences, in order to trace a pattern for the sake of the analysis. This is only the previous step to the much richer, more restless and multiple terrain of subjectivity, in which each person adapts, appropriates and changes their possibilities and restrictions as subjects immersed into power relationships. It is at the level of subjectivity that discourses of Otherness offer possibilities and spaces for tactics of negotiation, resistance and production of new meanings. In the second chapter I proposed an analytical space to inhabit that I called “tactic digital Otherness”. This concept is inspired by Haraway’s “inappropriate/d otherness” (1992:300) that problematizes the negativity with which Western thought has traditionally conceptualized difference, and it feeds itself on the digital Otherness, a space that vindicates the right to be Other to the universal user of the Internet.

Women’s migrant identity and their place in the diasporic space, far away from their families, friends and home countries, reveals how many of them felt motivated to overcome fears, to negotiate the lack of time and to build their own sense regarding the Internet. In its liminality, in its hinge work, the diasporic space articulates diverse spatial and temporal experiences that simultaneously question and continue deeply rooted behaviours and beliefs, and reveals to have the capacity to produce many changes at several levels. In most cases, the interviewees’ migratory projects have produced a substantial change in their relationship with computers and the Internet. Changes occur in multiple directions but in their different narrations, we can find some common tendencies in which there is a moment before and after migration. In their new geopolitical location, the interviewees feel a stronger need for more fluent, multimedia and cheap ways of communicating with their families and friends who stay in their countries of origin. The Internet allows for the exchange of text, voice and images at very low costs in comparison with, for example, the telephone that has been the most used device. This functional advantage has resulted in little big achievements at the level of subjectivity, in terms of self-esteem, personal realization and the imagination of new possibilities. In this sense, I find in women’s narrations an autopoietic exercise of creating themselves as legitimate agents in the use of computers and the Internet. They invest time and efforts in something they need now for communication and work, but their words reflect,

more or less explicitly, the dynamic processes of their construction as subjects always on the making.

In their testimonies, I have identified a double movement of erosion of stereotypes linked to technoscience: 1) they have challenged the image of the typical Internet user in terms of gender, age, ethnicity and socioeconomic class, and 2) they have projected themselves as Internet users and through this process, they have overcome their own personal barriers, fears and insecurities, revaluing the time of their own and their cognitive capacities. I prefer not to describe this movement as a break in the gender system but to be more cautious and refer to it as erosion or crack, as many of their practices and expectations on the Internet are linked to roles of mothers, wives and housewives. Thus they fit into the trends of feminization of the Internet as a market nest that targets women as online consumers of beauty sets, house gadgets and products for babies, just to mention a few.

As we have seen in the third chapter, the women's testimonies reflect their positive understanding of the Internet as something modern they need to integrate to the world, to improve their labour and educative conditions and to dynamize their affective relationships. Those women who recognized to have some difficulties with computers and surfing the web did so for reasons of age but not as women. Thus there is not a feminist consciousness that makes visible their subordinated position, constructed by cyberdiscourses of the patriarchal system and how it affects their interaction with the Internet, at the practical level of having time for it, or at a more abstract level of cultural valuation on what for or who uses computers and the Internet.

The act of making sense of our practices is not unidirectional nor homogeneous, but a diverse, multiple and dynamic process in which each subject articulates her own experiences and symbolic universes with socially shared knowledge. Thus, the meaning of the Internet does not inscribe itself in some space alien to the everyday life, but it is constructed by subjects both as continuity and in contradiction with traditional roles such as those of mothers' or unexplored roles such as online education or electronic commerce, to mention some of the examples provided by my interviewees. This line of thinking and research suggests multiple paths to explore in a future project on minoritarian uses of the Internet in which the terms of discussion are not constricted to the fact of who has a PC, how many Internet users there are or if the girl in the song opens her email.

In this sense, I hope to contribute to current debates on the Internet, from a standpoint that emphasizes the need to consider technology not as a priori good nor an end in itself, but as a collection of processes that build and are built by people and social groups. This could counteract,

or at least make evident the nuances in the techno-optimistic discourses that highlight the potential for emancipation and democratization the Internet may have (especially boosted by multinational telecom companies and other economic interest groups), as well as the techno-pessimist discourses that dismiss different people and groups' abilities to appropriate technology and adapt it to their own needs.

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