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Subverting Racialized Mobility Regimes: Ethical Research with Migrant Youth in an Age of Securitization

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Abstract: In France, minoritized migrant youth—a term encompassing various legal statuses and migration trajectories—are subject to systems of surveillance that include racialized policing, school securitization policies, and programs to counter extremism. These institutional practices are complemented by hostility within everyday public spaces and broader systems of representation. Together, institutional and everyday forms of surveillance constitute racialized mobility regimes for migrant youth within and beyond educational spaces. For researchers who work with migrant youth, such landscapes pose ethical demands—what forms of critical awareness, anticipatory planning, and improvisatory practices are necessary to mitigate harms resulting from participation in their projects? Drawing upon an autoethnographic revisiting of a 16-month digital storytelling engagement with newcomer migrant and refugee youth in two French high schools, I discuss the creation of a "youth researcher" pass in anticipation of the racialized surveillance confronting migrant youth in France. Informed by the works of Walter Benjamin and Michel de Certeau on mobility, storytelling, and facsimiles, as well as political developments in France, I argue that in settings in which migrant presence is deemed a threat, researchers must unapologetically opt for an ethical stance that takes protection of participants' humanity—rather than legality—as its core aim.

Keywords: surveillance; racialization; migrant youth; France; mobility regimes; research ethics; legal status; documentation

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Citation: Shirazi, Roozbeh. 2024. Subverting Racialized Mobility Regimes: Ethical Research with Migrant Youth in an Age of Securitization. *Social Sciences* 13: 684. https://doi.org/10.3390/socsci13120684

Academic Editors: Jill Koyama and Nigel Parton

Received: 22 September 2024
Revised: 27 November 2024
Accepted: 12 December 2024
Published: 18 December 2024

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1. Introduction

It is frequently observed that no one chooses to become a refugee. Refugees are made under conditions of duress, and coerced migration arises from conditions that make ordinary life untenable—systemic oppression, foreign intervention, violent conflicts, fear of persecution, discrimination, environmental degradation, and violations of human rights. The dangers these circumstances pose may compel extraordinary—and extraordinarily difficult—movements and negotiations of securitized borders to reach some refuge.

Yet, refugee and coerced migrant arrivals into new host countries do not necessarily resolve indeterminate conditions of displacement. The migrant's arrival may partially mark the end of one struggle but inaugurates countless new ones. Coerced migration, and the structures that cause it, frequently leave intergenerational imprints that are not easily resolved. Traversing the borders of nation-states often makes more borders more visible—in their host country, the putative refugee finds boundaries drawn around rights, mobility, educational services, advancement, and political legibility. These barriers are more pronounced when migrants are undocumented or are categorized by states in ways that do not offer protections. State documents perform important political work in this respect—the possession of certain permissions, approvals, reviews, and registrations can—but do not on their own guarantee—facilitate movement, access, supports, and protections for migrants. The statuses ascribed by the state to migrants create hierarchies of migratory experience (Gutiérrez Rodríguez 2018). Without the status sanctioned by official documents, however, migrants must improvise, adapt, and build techniques and networks to sustain living in the constraints of the margins.

For researchers who work with migrant and refugee youth and communities in countries of resettlement, the constraints of status and documentation raise vital ethical considerations around participant risk and protection. Demanding participant verification of sanctioned status as a perquisite for participation in a research study ostensibly reduces the threat of harm (or liability) if data confidentiality was compromised, but in practice, stipulating eligibility in this fashion approximates surveillance/profiling practices of the state, which puts the burden of proving 'legality' upon the migrant. In doing so, consent practices stipulate disclosure of vulnerable status without further commitment, thus reaffirming research as a self-interested and extractive practice.

For researchers who eschew extractive approaches to youth and migrant community-based work, merely opting not to verify the status of participants does not resolve risks associated with their participation. Rather, a commitment to working with—rather than working on—migrant youth raises a set of questions with engagements that will vary across sociopolitical and policy settings. First, how do we design and carry out research with these youth that is not extractive nor ignorant of the structural challenges and everyday struggles they and their families may face? Additionally, how do we engage with our participants to identify and interrupt hierarchies of knowledge production and decenter the narrative authority of "the researcher" as hegemonic interlocutor?

My own engagements with these questions have increasingly led my work with migrant youth towards critical participatory methodological approaches that center the co-construction of inquiry and the opening of epistemic possibility (Shirazi 2019, 2022). Working in what Ayhan Kaya (2009) has termed the 'age of securitization,' institutional and everyday surveillance has been a recurring contextual dimension of my scholarship. Navigating these forms of surveillance has directed my attention to potential openings in institutional settings, as well as the informal and ad hoc counterspaces of learning that educators, youth, and community members create in excess of official curricula.

In France, I undertook a sustained engagement with migrant youth by means of a critical participatory research study organized around qualitative research training workshops and a digital storytelling project (entitled "Digital Storytelling for Justice" or DST4J) in two metropolitan Paris high schools in 2018–2019. The DST4J project was realized in part through the creation and participant use of a youth researcher (*Jeune Chercheur*) pass to augment and sanction refugee and migrant youth mobilities within and beyond schools. This pass was marked by prominent usage of the logos and seals of the French Ministry of Education, as well as the name and emblems of the participants' schools, to convey the permission and approval of these institutions for the activities carried out by their bearer.

For some readers, the informal development of a youth researcher ID featuring governmental and school logos could be seen as ethically questionable, or even tantamount to a "forgery," the possession of which may pose legal risks to its bearer. Indeed, forgery can be considered to be a crime of 'moral turpitude' within the US, a broadly defined category of offense with no statutory definition (USCIS 2024). Such framing may be enough to compel compliance with state classificatory schemes and to dissuade considerations of YPAR research as a means to critically interrogate them. Yet binary formulations of legal ('good') vs. illegal ('bad') are limiting and run several risks: first, they insufficiently interrogate the legitimacy of state authority in illiberal governance regimes, and second, they may overlook the everyday creativity and subversive agency of people living under such regimes. In conditions of racialized and discriminatory governance, uncritical compliance with "legality" may itself pose risk to participants, as does a researcher's acceptance of formal and informal policies that codify oppression. Lastly, from a critical sociocultural inquiry stance, laws and policies are interpreted and situated within complex social contexts. As political scientist Michael Lipsky (1980) has observed, bureaucratic institutions, and the bureaucrats that run them, are not objective arbiters of the law—officials habitually interpret and mediate the law towards stated and unstated aims. These observations remind us that monolithic understandings of "legality" carry serious analytical and theoretical limits. Departing from these observations, I argue that legality cannot be equated with being ethical, and

the development of situated ethics is a vital and urgent task for researchers who work in illiberal, xenophobic, and discriminatory political contexts.

2. Revisiting a Border Crossing

The story of Walter Benjamin, a Marxist German Jewish philosopher associated with the Frankfurt School, provides both a cautionary tale with respect to making legality the litmus test for the ethical and an invitation to think beyond it. Benjamin, born in Berlin in 1892, left Germany in 1933 as Nazi control was being consolidated and the prejudice against Jews was becoming overt. Benjamin, whose work spanned philosophy, history, Jewish mysticism, and cultural critique, spent most of his exile from Germany in France, where he cultivated friendships among intellectuals and German exiles amid the escalation of political tensions in Europe. Benjamin's status in France, however, was also tenuous—he was arrested in 1939 as part of a larger detention of German nationals and spent two months imprisoned near Nevers, France. There, Benjamin gave lectures and organized philosophical seminars and even planned an academic journal exploring prison life from a sociological perspective (The National WWII Museum 2020). Freed in November 1939, Benjamin returned to Paris and resumed his writing. When Germany invaded France in May of 1940 and the collaborationist Vichy regime was installed soon thereafter, France began a program of denationalization (Weil 2017). French militias soon began handing over German and Austrian anti-fascists to the Gestapo and Nazi authorities in accordance with a repatriation agreement. These developments, and Walter Benjamin's own analysis of the political situation in Germany, spurred his attempted escape from France in 1940.

Benjamin, with support from friends in the US, notably Max Horkheimer, was able to get a US visa and, from the US consulate in Marseilles, transit visas to Spain and Portugal, which officially maintained neutrality in World War II. The difficulty of the voyage awaiting Benjamin was not only of a physical nature but of a mental one as well. Michael Taussig (2006), an American anthropologist who authored an autoethnographic account of his visit to Benjamin's resting place, recounts reading historical accounts from Varian Fry, an American writer who went to Marseilles in the 1940s as part of an American rescue committee. Fry recorded that many refugees, even those given money and visas to leave, were too mentally paralyzed to move—"they were jittery with the idea of staying and paralyzed with fear at the idea of leaving" (Taussig 2006).

While in Marseilles, Benjamin met two other Germans traveling to Spain, and together, they took a train to the small fishing village of Port Vendres. There, they met Lisa Fittko, then a young woman from Berlin who led the group through the mountains to cross the border into Spain. Taussig (2006) recounts his conversations with Fittko about this crossing and her recollections of Benjamin's difficulties at the time. Benjamin labored intensely to make the more than 20 km trek from Port Vendres to Portbou, hampered by his asthma, a longstanding heart condition, and a heavy black case he carried, thought to carry his last written work.

Once Benjamin's group arrived in Portbou, they learned that the Spanish authorities had—within the past day or two—closed the border and required an exit visa as part of the condition of entry into Spain. Because none of the group had French exit visas, they were to be returned to France the following day. Benjamin did not have an exit visa. Fearing capture if handed over to the Gestapo, he committed suicide by ingesting a large amount of morphine in his hotel room.

Taussig's (2006) narration of Benjamin's last days is tragic and evocative. His clandestine escape from France over the mountains was not just a physical crossing—it was a literal maneuver around the authority of the state precisely because of anti-Semitic state policies of denationalization and repatriation that would have forbidden it. The terror he felt at the prospect of being captured by the Gestapo and losing his manuscript pushed his 48-year-old physical frame to its limits. Benjamin's willingness to take his own life in Portbou, rather than to face capture by the Gestapo in France, also signaled a determination to live and die on his own terms, perhaps a final act of agency in the tenuous moments of

freedom he had before facing Vichy French officials. The cruel irony was that the next day, through some sort of bureaucratic process—or the shock induced by Benjamin's suicide itself—his travel companions were permitted to journey on into Spain to reach Portugal (Taussig 2006). We are left to ask, what if Benjamin took more time before resorting to his final act? What other maneuvers or tactics, if any, could he have mobilized as a response to the juridical barrier placed in his way? There was no play for him then, but perhaps under less duress, he could have obtained a forged French exit visa to continue his escape from Vichy France. Here, such speculations are warranted, given that Benjamin's work spoke to the political possibilities engendered by the reproduction of original works and documents.

Benjamin (1935) explores notions of authenticity and authority through art and how what he terms the "mechanical reproduction" of art (i.e., copies) divests an original work of its aura by making it less singular and more accessible to the public. Mechanical reproduction emancipates art from ritualistic (i.e., intended) spaces—reproduction puts art in situations in which it would otherwise not be found. Benjamin's discussion of reproduction as the dimming of an aura—or signified authority—is useful for thinking about the informal reproduction and strategic use of symbols of state authority to augment mobility, particularly in/across political settings characterized by violence and repression.

3. Border Crossings in an Age of Securitization

Passports, visas, and increasingly, digital forms of state identification are restricted documents produced under the control of official institutions. Their bearers are thus afforded mobility and travel possibilities that are not equally available to all. The legitimacy these documents confer is premised in part on the strict controls their holders must navigate to obtain them. One must demonstrate a sanctioned relation to the state to gain permission to enter or exit its borders. In the case of coerced migration, however, fully demonstrating this relationship may not be possible, thus curtailing the possibility of protection from harm. For example, asylum seekers seeking protection from dangers in their home country must provide evidence of eligibility across multiple criteria for seeking additional protections as a refugee (International Rescue Committee 2024). Without such records, they may not be eligible for certain protections or assistance, and their claims for asylum can be denied, even if they face existential danger upon return. Even with correct documentation, as Benjamin's case attests, rapid shifts in migration laws and variance in their enforcement can serve as barriers for otherwise "lawful" border crossings. The turn to biometric data and geolocation surveillance of migrants as part of fraud detection practices has further increased efficiencies of securitized scrutiny and migration controls (Amnesty International 2024). These and other efforts characterize contemporary state migration regimes, wherein outcomes are determined by a confluence of documents, technologies, and discretions on the part of an asylum officer or an immigration court—which may or may not consider migrant testimonies or recollections as credible. Read from a critical sociocultural stance, the vetting process is inseparable from the performance of particular subjectivities, interpretive practices of officials, and implicit bias (Rodriguez Gomez 2019).

These considerations are heightened in settings characterized by xenophobic political discourse, imperialist and colonial histories, and racialized populism, where migrants are caricaturized to be a threat to the social and economic order—contemporary settings such as Western Europe and the United States. In both the US and Europe, deservingness of settlement is overtly mediated along racial, ideological, and cultural lines (Mamdani 2004; Nguyen 2012; Nielsen et al. 2020), and minoritized migrants are increasingly made legible as criminals (Berg and Ramos-Zaya 2015). In France, for example, the "satirical" magazine Charlie Hebdo depicted Aylan Kurdi, the two-year-old Syrian toddler who drowned during an attempted sea crossing to Greece, on its cover with the question, what "would have happened to little Aylan if he grew up?" Underneath the caption, the magazine depicts him as a young man with a pig nose sexually assaulting German women, in reference to reports of migrant men from the Middle East and North Africa allegedly participating in

the sexual assault and robbery of women gathered for the 2015 New Year's Eve festivities in Cologne, Germany.

The absence of documentation and the enduring presence of racialized frames of rightful entry and belonging may therefore necessitate new tactics of mobility on the part of coerced migrants seeking refuge from dangerous situations, including the generation of resources and documents to subvert racialized mobility regimes.[1] Certainly, migrants have long sought to facilitate their movements from precarious situations by seeking or creating supporting documentation (Berg 2017; May 2020). In Walter Benjamin's case, a credible exit visa would have accomplished two interrelated tasks: first, it would have absolved him of the need to seek the benevolence of a (fascist-aiding) state functionary to legitimize his movement; and second, it would have subverted the carceral logic of first detaining and then deporting French Jews to Nazi authorities.

4. Contemporary Migration Debates in France

The legacy of French colonialism is deeply intertwined in contemporary French immigration debates. Immigration, like colonialism, factored deeply into capital accumulation in France and the evolution of France's economy (Ogden 1991; Wilder 2005). In the 19th–20th centuries, France's colonial empire primarily encompassed holdings in sub-Saharan and North Africa as well as Southeast Asia. This empire, which was rationalized as a 'civilizing mission,' was largely dismantled following the major uprisings against French rule in Indochina (present-day Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia) and Algeria in the aftermath of World War II into the 1950s. During this period, France, like several other continental European countries, faced an acute labor shortage and relied heavily on migrant labor from Spain, Portugal, Yugoslavia, Turkey, Tunisia, Morocco, and the Francophone states of sub-Saharan Africa (Musée de l'histoire de l'immigration 2022). This migration was unfolding against latent anxiety about the demographics of migration—infamously expressed by French geographer Georges Mauco's research, which set forth a ranking of the assimilability of different nationalities to French culture (Mauco 1932). France's economic growth during the 1960s was tied to the influx of low-skilled, low-wage migrant workers, whose arrival was also accompanied by growing anti-immigrant sentiment (Ogden 1991). In 1961, French police attacked and killed an estimated 200–300 anticolonial Algerian demonstrators in Paris, drowning many of them in the Seine River (Einaudi 1991). The repatriation of French settlers from North Africa following Algerian independence in 1962, followed by an economic downturn in the early 1970s, marked a more restrictive period in France's immigration policies. In 1974, France ended its labor migration program and banned family reunification for two years (Blanchet 1985). During this time, the overall percentage of France's immigrant population continued to rise, primarily from the arrival of labor immigrants' family members (Ogden 1991), as did its percentage of youth of post-colonial origin (Beaman 2017). Beginning in the 1980s, France's policies have emphasized immigrant "integration" as a stated aim, often in ways that profess universalist rights and commitments but reproduce cultural and racial hierarchies (Guénif-Souilamas 2006).

Presently, 29.2% of immigrants in France hail from Algeria, Morocco, and Tunisia (Musée de l'histoire de l'immigration 2022), while 11.6% originate from sub-Saharan countries (Barou 2023). Approximately 10% of France's population of ~68 million is Muslim, individuals who are themselves immigrants or descendants of immigrants (Drouhot et al. 2023). The presence of French Muslims, or those who are perceived to be Muslim, has spurred ongoing debate about national identity in France for the past half century, a debate in which 'immigrants and their descendants are continually framed as disruptive' (Beaman 2017, p. 10). This sentiment is especially acute in public education settings in France, which have been important sites historically for both instilling France's republican principles and enacting its constitutional commitment to *laïcité*, or secularism. In a widely publicized example from 1989, three girls of Moroccan origin were suspended from their middle school in Creil, a northern Parisian suburb, for refusing to remove their headscarves in class. The principal of the school justified his actions in a letter to parents by saying that

the veil is a religious symbol incompatible with the proper functioning of a secular school (Société 2018). From this individual action, attention to the place of religion in French public life expanded—in 1994, the government published a memo distinguishing between "discreet' (permissible) and "ostentatious" (impermissible) religious symbols in public institutions (Société 2018). In the name of protecting laïcité, the government of France passed legislation in 2004 banning "symbols or clothing that conspicuously demonstrate a pupil's religious affiliation," but this law was widely understood to be targeting the wearing of headscarves in schools. Since then, successive French governments have augmented public bans on Islamic dress, including a ban on face coverings in 2011 and the wearing of the abaya in schools in 2023.

Contemporary anti-Muslim racism in France has been further sharpened both by a "migration crisis" fueled by conflicts and humanitarian crises in the Middle East and North Africa in 2015, as well as by a series of attacks carried out by Islamist militants in the same year. The latter led to the declaration of a state of emergency and the creation of an ongoing military operation, *Operation Sentinelle*, which deploys 10,000 French soldiers around areas deemed to be at risk for terrorism or sites of terrorist activity, including mosques, parks, museums, mass transportation, and schools (Sky News 2017). This militarization of public space has also been accompanied by campaigns to "Stop Djihadisme" and to promote discussions of youth radicalization through artistic performances and public events (Lahnait 2021). Everyday enactments of the militarization of public space and surveillance in public schools result in frequent detentions and police interrogations of minoritized youth—notably Black and Arab youth—in parks, on the street, and onboard public transit. During the course of the DST4J project in France since 2018, for example, student participants recounted similar experiences, and I witnessed no fewer than a dozen of such detentions in the metropolitan area of Paris, notably in metro stations. There is a growing body of scholarship demonstrating that policing in France is racialized and helps undergird structural racism in France despite official proclamations of colorblind citizenship and universal rights (Jobard 2002; Fassin 2013). In 2018, footage of police detaining dozens of high school students by forcing them to kneel with their hands up in the schoolyard at Lycée St. Exupéry in Mantes-la-Jolie went viral after capturing an off-camera police officer chuckling, 'Look, a class that is well-behaved' ("*voila, une clase qui se tient sage*"). The youth at Mantes-la-Jolie—many of postcolonial origin—were protesting proposed overhauls to national exams during a period of sustained nationwide protests (the *Gilets Jaunes* Movement) against neoliberal policies of the Macron government.

The examples above are indicative—but are by no means exhaustive—of contemporary dynamics of racialized surveillance and mobility regimes for migrant and refugee youth in France. These contemporary practices and their historical antecedents are therefore pedagogical for educational researchers who work with refugee and migrant youth. Namely, they are illustrative of how these youth live, work, and go to school within a racialized mobility regime in France, where their experiences of social life are largely conditioned by embodiment. In doing so, these examples push educational researchers to directly engage with the racialization processes and xenophobic currents that shape their participants" everyday lives. To go a step further, when migrant youth participants' everyday lives unfold on harmful terrain sanctioned by formal governance and informal power relations, researchers are ethically called to imagine modes of research that go beyond narrow exhortations to "do no harm."

Without critical attention to the ways in which governance structures enable systemic harm, the institutional threshold of human subject protection—do no harm—is an unspecific injunction that can work as easily to inhibit ethical research as it is to incite it. How, for example, does the researcher mitigate harm to participants as a passive bystander to their institutional discrimination and systematic surveillance? As coercive practices unfold in distinctive ways across different settings, I am not suggesting ready-made solutions or a universal checklist for enacting researcher 'resistance.' However, if educational research is to have a hand in creating more just possibilities for migrant and refugee youth, then

educational researchers must develop their craft in ways that reflect situated conditions and refuse colonial and racist logics that reproduce hierarchies of human worth and dignity that are normalized by institutional practices. Such refusals are vital for creating counterspaces and just methodologies for knowledge-making and for envisioning alternative possibilities to present sociopolitical conditions.

5. Overview of the DST4J Project and Methodological Approach

In March 2018, I was invited to join a delegation to France and Germany organized by the College of Education and Human Development at the University of Minnesota to visit primary and secondary schools in districts that had recently enrolled large numbers of migrant and newcomer youth, notably from Afghanistan and Syria. As France and (especially) Germany had received a large population of migrants, the purpose of the trip was to learn more about how schools and educators in these states were working with these youth and their families during resettlement and to explore the possibilities of collaboration in these areas. The migration of Syrian youth and families, along with Iraqi and Afghan youth, had been coerced by US military interventions in their countries of origin and neighboring countries. These interventions and their aftermaths created unsafe conditions, compelling the influx of over 1 million refugees into Europe in 2015 alone.

My interest in youth from these communities was rooted in both professional and personal reasons. First, having worked with educators and youth in secondary schools in Jordan first in 2007–2008, and then with Jordanian university students from 2014–2016, I had met many displaced Syrian youth during my research in Jordan. Similarly, I had worked in Afghanistan on several educational development and research projects from 2004–2005 and encountered many Afghans who had been displaced by decades of violent conflict and foreign military intervention there. Having witnessed the US government rationalize these displacements as unfortunate collateral damage in its global 'War on Terror,' I was interested in better understanding these youths' experiences of migration and schooling, given the rising tide of anti-Muslim racism in France and across the European Union more broadly. Secondly, as a diasporic Iranian with a complex family migration history to the US, I was interested in these youths' experiences of adjustment and their dialectical processes of holding connections to home while encountering and negotiating sociopolitical norms and xenophobia in France. I am the son of displaced Iranian activists who grew up in the US in the aftermath of the Iranian Revolution. My family's migration story confounds the benevolent narrative of the US as an inclusive land of immigrants because it was not a story of voluntary immigration and was set in motion by US interventions in Iranian politics. I found resonances of my own childhood memories and experiences with newcomer Syrian and Afghan youth, and these provided openings into establishing our connections and relationships.

During these initial school visits, I learned that the migrant youth served by these schools hailed from other countries as well—not only the countries represented in anti-Muslim moral panic discourses on migration. Most educators and administrators that I encountered described integration as the aim of refugee education in their countries. They narrated integration as not only having a requisite linguistic competency to successfully complete their schooling, but also to acquire understanding of the social, cultural, and political norms of their host countries. As Jaffe-Walter (2016) has observed in the case of Denmark, the educational officials I met with in France and Germany assumed that the cultural practices and social relations of migrant students and their families often served as barriers to social mobility and political membership. Thus, schools were described as vital sites for creating 'integrated' youth subjects.

My conversations with newcomer youth in these classes—carried out in English, Persian, Spanish, and, less fluently (by me), in French and Arabic—also revealed the ongoing specter of surveillance and assumptions about cultural practice that they face from their peers and educators, as well as everyday strangers. Walking into stores, riding the metro, throwing away trash, and other acts of everyday urban life often invited unwanted

scrutiny and unsolicited feedback. When speaking with educators and administrators about these anecdotes, however, most characterized these encounters as locals' cultural unfamiliarity with migrants, or the unfamiliarity of the students themselves with local norms, rather as symptoms of a more systemic and discriminatory way of seeing and being seen. In France, efforts to speak openly of systemic racism are often seen as divisive or identitarian, which threaten the putative universalism of French politics.[2]

My critical engagements with these discursive constraints, France's history of anti-Muslim racism, and the insights about legibility and mobility shared by migrant youth in this initial trip to France were consequential for how I proceeded to envision and develop my digital storytelling project. Notably, I realized the possibility to critically inquire into how these youth were adjusting to their new lives, how they were fashioning relationships to place, community, and peers, were regulated by official and institutional expectations of their gratitude and hostility to their critique. This echoed a dynamic of conditional hospitality and hostility I had observed in my work with minoritized migrant youth in the US (Shirazi 2017), which, in practice, meant that there was little if any room for these youth to speak and think freely on what it meant for them to be and live in a place. Similar to the role that US exceptionalism plays in policing anti-racist and anti-imperialist critique, France's steadfast commitment to regarding itself as an egalitarian and colorblind state constrains possibilities for minoritized migrant youth to critically counternarrate the sociopolitical realities of life in France. Accordingly, any attempts at knowledge-making in these conditions would necessitate techniques and maneuvers to create epistemic and physical spaces for them and anticipate the harms and limitations that are bound up with contemporary political terrain in France.

Methodological Considerations of Racialized Movement

From this understanding, I did not want to rely upon a more traditional ethnographic engagement with these youth that I had previously relied upon in my research, wherein I would be an immersed-yet-removed observer, interpreter, and interlocutor of the happenings in these students' schools. If the possibility to collaborate with any of the youth I had met during my initial visit was to materialize, I wanted it to emerge from a process of ongoing dialogue and from a process of collective thought. With extensive support from a French teacher trainer in the suburbs of Paris, I was able to connect with a cadre of teachers who worked with newcomer French language learners.[3] In June 2018, I received an expression of interest from two French teachers to explore developing a project with their students. After securing institutional review board (IRB) approval from my institution, as well as a letter of support from the regional offices of the National Ministry of Education, I returned to France in November 2018 to conduct a three-day qualitative research methods workshop with 25 newcomer migrant youth who worked with these teachers and attended two high schools in the suburbs of Paris. This was the first of four workshops I co-organized with educators in the 2018–2019 school year, and the basis for developing the DST4J project with them.

The research workshops, which I have described in detail elsewhere (Shirazi 2022), emerged as an improvisational, multilingual space that centered the transgressive capacity of counternarratives and images to challenge hegemonic knowledge claims and beliefs about the world. While the focus of the students' projects was on them narrating their own stories through generative prompts, each student was free to commence and narrate that story as they saw fit. I began our first workshop by sharing my own family history and migration story as a counterpoint to US accounts of the 1979 Iranian Revolution, as well as my reflections on displacement and disdain for nationalism—the realities that most powerfully characterized my relationship to the US. I followed by connecting this history to my later professional experiences as a public school teacher and to the research questions that animate my inquiry work in educational spaces. I used my personal history as a springboard to explain why I remained ambivalent about my relationship with the US—well into my adulthood—with a place that is ostensibly my home. These personal

disclosures resonated with the workshop attendees and helped to create space for others' critical reflections. Hearing from one another early on aided the youth in developing practice interview guides and, in the process, connecting them with peers they would have otherwise not met.

On the second day of the November 2018 workshop, one of our activities consisted of a walking tour at one of the high schools, where students narrated the spaces that felt welcoming (*accueillant*) and unwelcoming (*pas de accueillant*) for them. This spatial mapping of where students felt they could comfortably be and not be in their schools was an important facet of the broader project, in that it enjoined movement to critical awareness and narration. Preceding the first walk, I provided a short presentation on the concept of the *flaneur*, or the individual who utilizes walking in the city to study and better understand it.[4] The practice of being a *flaneur*, or *flânerie*, departs from the premise that movement in the city is pedagogical, in that one's observations of urban social space entail engagement, interpretation, and critical reflection. These practices generate greater awareness of the breadth of a city's social codes, shared rituals, and everyday practices. For De Certeau (1984), movement is also vital to storytelling—storytelling is an outcome of movement—stories begin with footsteps, and the acting of walking is "a space of enunciation" (p. 98). Where we may go constitutes what we may see and experience, and those experiences constitute our situated accounts of a place.

The examples I shared with the students to explain being a *flaneur* were drawn from the many walks I had taken in New York City over the years. The mini portrait of the city I offered was an aggregate of different moments of people-watching: weekend roller skate disco in Central Park, school kids hopping the turnstile to ride the subway, older residents feeding pigeons from their stoops, the illicit sale of 'loosies' (individual cigarettes) in bodegas, and the long queues formed at lunchtime at halal food carts to get chicken and yellow rice. These images/memories helped me convey some of the subversive energies and everyday leisure that I associate with New York, all the while knowing that accenting other images/memories could construe an entirely different New York.

The students were then invited to practice a kind of *flânerie*, to be a *flaneur* within their school and outside of it as well. I asked them to reflect on the everyday routes they took to school, the spaces they avoided, and how they anticipated and planned for social interactions. Participants were encouraged to take photos or short videos with their phones to create visual records to later share and discuss in small groups with their peers.

This activity was revealing. As students shared their initial photos, we learned that many of them generally did not deviate from precise routes that took them where they needed to be in a given moment. For seven participants across both schools, or more than 25% of the workshop participants, the most welcoming space they reported was their French UPE2A class, where they chose to spend their free time, instead of the schoolyard or lunch canteen. Conversely, most students agreed that most school spaces did not feel welcoming to them, citing exclusion, ridicule by peers, and their anxiety about speaking in French. Moreover, the discussion of welcoming spaces in schools led to some students sharing about off-campus spaces and experiences that made them feel unwelcome. Anisa,[5] a 16-year-old girl from Morocco, recounted that she now avoided a market near her apartment because she did not like the way the store clerk stared at her mother, who wears a headscarf. Marwan, a 16-year-old boy from Syria, volunteered that he had been followed around stores by employees because they thought he was there to steal, and that he now avoided going to those stores as well. Other students spoke about the *prefectures* (government administrative buildings) as unwelcoming and the employees being needlessly punitive to migrants seeking services or necessary forms of documentation (field notes, 27 November 2018). In aggregate, the coercion these youth experienced felt palpable in their stories. Moreover, the colorblind notion of the *flaneur*—the free-wandering, unencumbered, pensive observer of society—seemed to recede as a viable researcher stance when considered against students' experiences of surveillance and their anticipated and actual interactions in their everyday movements.

These and other student disclosures during the workshop echoed the statements of surveillance made by the Syrian and Afghan migrant students I had met with in my initial visit to France in March 2018. Together, these anecdotes were instrumental in highlighting the racialized regime of mobility that constrains the movements of minoritized migrant youth in France. By asking youth to designate and categorize their everyday spaces as welcoming or not, a highly regulated and harsh landscape came into view—one characterized by several recurring venues and practices that constructed borders for them in France. Their initial testimonies gestured towards the formal and informal ways in which many minoritized migrant youth in France are made to feel out of place. The aggregate effect was that several participants avoided 'unnecessary' movements as an anticipatory technique and to avoid unpleasant and potentially harmful situations. At the same time, this exercise illustrated that their experiences constituted emergent counternarratives, that they possessed oral testimonies that challenged the imagined colorblind universality of the law and public life in France, as well as the presumed humanitarian magnanimity of French society for their integration practices.

As a researcher, these youths' disclosures were necessary reminders that individual movement is subject to power relations and disciplinary regimes. Mobility is classed, raced, and gendered—as such, scholars of migration and racialized mobilities must place asterisks alongside the unmarked figure of the *flaneur* and acknowledge that any practice of *flânerie* must be situated and enacted in relations of power. This is not to say that the notion of the *flaneur* is inapplicable to minoritized migrant youth, or that their movements—however restricted—do not have narrative force. Rather, their mobility experiences demand a retheorizing of the concept to account for racialized surveillance and hegemonic social and political norms that delimit movements for different bodies. The legibility of minoritized migrant youth in racialized regimes of surveillance in France—notably those read as Muslim—has implications for how researchers invite these youth to participate in research and how researchers develop the parameters and methodologies of their studies.

6. The Youth Researcher Pass as a Mobility Intervention

By what means then may researchers anticipate and possibly intervene in the risks and forms of surveillance that their participants will encounter, and perhaps encounter to a greater degree due to their participation in their research projects? Here, I return to the political work of documents, and creative documentation as a possible theater of subversive mobility practices. Prior to starting the November 2018 workshops, I met with the collaborating teachers and a graphic designer working for a French educational media company to discuss steps to anticipate possible challenges that participants could face. Our discussion touched upon how to protect students' privacy, as well as the racialized surveillance and possible harassment from French police or the public that participants could face for being in spaces where they seem out of place or 'suspicious.'

This led to the development of a youth researcher identification card for youth participants, a document to associate their movements with the production of 'scientific knowledge' when/if approached by an authority figure (see Figure 1). The document did not feature personal information or images, so that it would not personally identify its bearer—but it featured the project name, the logo of the participating schools (covered below), the administrative zone in which it was located, and the logos of the French Ministry of Education itself (blacked out below). In other words, the pass made opportunistic use of state symbols and logos placed alongside the research project to constitute its bearer as a sanctioned *jeune chercheur* (youth researcher). The aim of this was to use state symbols of authority to potentially amplify possibilities of movement within a racialized mobility regime. This move was an intentional detournement of symbolic authority rather than a liberal attempt to 'gift' equal rights or equal standing to youth participants—strategic use of the symbols of authority of an (increasingly) illiberal racist state does not equate to an eager embrace of its racialized ideologies. The passes were distributed to students during the workshops to provide opportunities to practice using them to take photos, move

around the school, and invite peers and educators to be interviewed in their schools after the collective school walk exercise. The idea was that youth participants could display the pass (as needed) as a means to preempt and parry unwanted queries and carry out their research-related activities in public spaces.

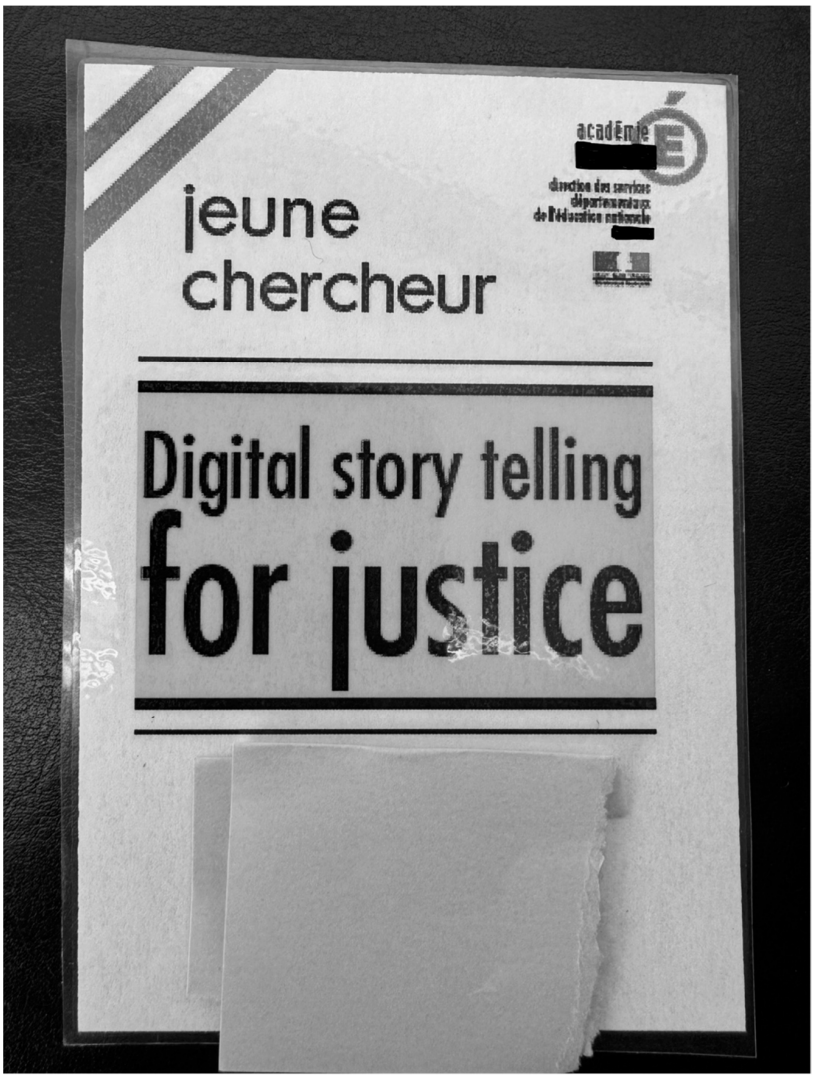


Figure 1. Image of the Jeune Chercher pass used in the DST4J project in 2018–2019.

As I have explored in more detail elsewhere (Shirazi 2022), students made divergent uses of the pass during the DST4J project. During the workshops, for example, several students shared that they had made use of it to enter hitherto restricted school spaces—such as the teachers' lounge or principal's office—and how those experiences changed their working knowledge of what those spaces resembled and represented in their school. Others reported using the pass as a basis to approach classmates in school and strangers outside of school to pose questions or conduct impromptu interviews. In these ways, we can observe how augmented mobilities are vital for migrant youth knowledge production and for challenging hegemonic accounts of authority and racialized difference.

At the same time, as I learned during individual interviews with participants, there were students who did not use the pass during their participation for different reasons—some lost the pass and did not request another, and then some simply chose not to use it. While we did not have many opportunities to debrief collectively about the different ways that students used (or did not) the pass, it would have been important to learn more from students about how and to what extent they understood the pass as a tactic to augment their mobility.

Such conversations would have provided additional insights into how researchers can make research a site of solidarity in unwelcoming sociopolitical contexts and creatively intervene in institutional constraints, as well as how the introduction of these measures can themselves become a basis to facilitate critical conversations and interrogations of racialized mobility regimes and spatial practices. Certainly, more could have been carried out on these counts, and the onset of the coronavirus pandemic in early 2020 posed additional constraints to developing such dialogues.

7. Discussion and Conclusions

In this article, I revisit the DST4J project I developed in France to explore historical and contemporary bases for researchers to think beyond passive conceptions of "do no harm" when developing research with minoritized migrant youth in illiberal and xenophobic settings. My creation and use of a youth researcher pass featuring the logos of the state represents an experimental foray into making informal use of symbolic capital to augment migrant youth participants' mobility in France's contemporary racialized mobility regime.

I emphasize my use of the term "experimental" here because the creation of the pass itself was an emergent response to the repressive policies and racialized state surveillance that are part of contemporary governance in France. This response was both a refusal of existing racialized logics of governance in France and an attempt to maneuver around them. While the pass itself did not resolve the racialized surveillance and hostility that students encountered, it was significant as an attempt to reimagine research ethics in illiberal and xenophobic sociopolitical conditions and to think beyond compliance with institutional entities in such conditions as the ethical horizon for research. What possibilities, for example, could emerge if our ethical compass moves research beyond the floor of harm reduction to also aspire to knowledge con-constructions that critically intervene in repressive systems and the coloniality of knowledge more broadly (Quijano 2000)?

Given that the exercise of power and tactics of resistance are enacted distinctly in situated contexts, such aspirations in unjust conditions invite collective discussion and speculative endeavors in the face of uncertainty. Still, there are historical examples that can serve as useful provocations for these discussions. As Benjamin (1935) observed, the act of reproducing 'art'—or what I extended to forms of symbolic capital of sovereignty—dislocates it and diminishes its unique aura (or authority). In the context of a critical migrant youth participatory digital storytelling project, the detournement of state symbols is a transgressive act that potentially expands migrant mobility and access to authoritative symbols that often elude and exclude them. In this way, research with migrant youth can be a staging ground for solidaristic moves and for bringing critical collective attention to unjust regulatory and governance practices that adversely impact them.

It is important to note that my use of institutional symbols to create the pass was not tantamount to an official authorization won from bureaucratic petition—as several participants mentioned during the workshops, official requests in the service of minoritized migrants often die from bureaucratic inertia or explicit refusals to accommodate them. Nor was the pass quite a 'forgery.' As the pass was developed in collaboration with participating educators and a graphic designer who worked for a French media production company serving public schools, it was not a clandestine move solely introduced into the project by me. In this sense, the pass emerged from collective discussion and brainstorming as a possible tool for student use. Also, in an age of biometric databases and surveillance, it is unlikely that a laminated pass with state symbols would be mistaken for a passport or an official residence card. Rather, the research pass reflected an improvisational subversion of a larger asymmetry of power relations and experimentation with state and institutional symbols to claim (some) justification for the youth to participate in project activities in public spaces.

This experimental intervention, while modest, can nevertheless be understood as significant as a gesture towards a radical research praxis with migrant youth. Here, "radical research praxis" refers to the interplay of critical reflection and intentional action to imagine

research design and practice beyond frames of compliance within an unjust racialized social and institutional order. When working with migrant youth to co-produce knowledge of their everyday lives and educational experiences in the current political moment in France—where xenophobic discourses are normalized and anti-Muslim policies are codified by law—a researcher's compliance with these developments or silence in the face of the violences they enable is itself a betrayal of participant protection. The persistent nature of these social realities and the mainstreaming of xenophobic politics in France (and elsewhere in Europe and North America) therefore signal that researchers who work must critically realign how they imagine and enact work with migrant youth and communities in hostile institutional settings.

In the context of this study, my subversion of racialized mobility regimes was iterative, informed by historicizing racist state practices of disciplinary surveillance of minoritized migrant communities and by listening to youth participant stories of surveillance and harassment in France. Through these reflections, I drew connections about possible methodological and conceptual ways forward. Notably, xenophobic politics—and anti-Muslim politics in particular—extend beyond media representations, political campaigns, and electoral politics in France. Existing legislation, institutional policies, and contemporary security and policing practices are indicative of a racialized mobility regime in France, as well as heightened surveillance of migrant bodies.

These everyday realities have implications for critical migrant youth participatory research. If movement is vital to the practice of storytelling, and participants are to be asked to produce visual artifacts of their everyday interactions and social spaces, then the success of the project rests on two conditions: first, participants' desire and ability to move across heterogeneous social spaces; and second, to be able to record and document spaces and their social happenings therein. Simultaneously, because student participants shared an understanding of their movements being conditioned by appearance, dress, accent, and the biased perceptions of those around them, their participation in the project necessitated creative interventions to augment their mobility. The creation of the pass was therefore an intentional act emerging from these understandings of the unjust racialized social order in France. It reflects an anticipation of racialized surveillance that participants would likely experience from taking photos, asking people to speak with them, and shooting video in public spaces. Leaving room for the unscripted and indeterminate nature of social interaction, this anticipatory stance is 'just in case' flexible, rather than one that expects an already-determined outcome.

Funding: This research was funded by a Grand Challenges Research Grant from the Office of the Provost at the University of Minnesota. The APC was waived as this was an invited submission.

Institutional Review Board Statement: The study was conducted in accordance with the Declaration of Helsinki, and approved by the University of Minnesota Institutional Review Board Study (protocol code 00004793 on 26 October 2018).

Informed Consent Statement: Informed consent was obtained from all subjects involved in the study.

Data Availability Statement: The data presented in this study are available on request from the corresponding author due to ethical and privacy concerns.

Conflicts of Interest: The author declares no conflict of interest.

Notes

1 By 'racialized mobility regime', I am referring to the idea that possibilities of mobility are available or withheld due in part by racialization processes that operate in a given setting. The idea of a mobility regime has been discussed in greater detail by Glick Schiller and Salazar (2012).

2 The case of a 2017 French government investigation into antiracism workshop developed by members of a French teachers union, SUD 93, illustrates these discursive limits clearly. See (Libération 2018).

3 These classes are known in French as the *unit pedagogique pour élèves allophones arrivantes*, or UPE2A.

[4] While the original usage of the term generally denoted a young, presumably affluent man who walks the city for personal enrichment or learning (Baudelaire 1995), the figure of the flaneur, and of walking as a mode of knowledge-making, has been theorized by other writers, including Benjamin (2002) and De Certeau (1984).

[5] All participant names listed here are pseudonyms to protect the anonymity of participant identities and confidentiality of their responses.

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