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The Politics of Transnational Affective Capital. Digital Connectivity Among Young Somalis Stranded in Ethiopia.

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Introduction

> In Holland, my husband lives there. I use Skype to keep in touch with my husband. We talk like face-to-face, visually. Computers are a big development. There is a big distance between you and that person, yet you are able to hear one another and see through the video. I feel that sometimes I can bridge distance… but the moment you hang up you realize that there is a distance and that kills you. – Ifrah, a 23 year old young Somali woman living in Ethiopia.

Hundreds of thousands of forced migrants across the world live in limbo, unable to return home because of war or the threat of prosecution. As a consequence of over two decades of armed conflict, more than one million people in Central and South Somalia have fled the country and many more have been internally displaced. The majority of Somali refugees live in neighbouring countries, with some 520,000 people in Kenya, 208,000 in Yemen and 190,000 in Ethiopia. In contrast, the USA offers 50,000 resettlement places annually, while Canada offers 7,000, Australia 6,000 and the European Union offers between 4,000 and 5,000 places (UN High Commissioner for Refugees 2011; Amnesty International 2014). Many Somalis who have fled to neighbouring countries live either in overcrowded refugee camps or as 'urban refugees' in informal housing in large cities (Alemayehu, Mengesha and Gulilat 2010). The urban refugees include numerous stranded children and young people waiting to be reunited with parents and family in Europe.

The above quote is from an interview held with Ifrah in March 2013. Two months previously Ifrah was still living in the Somali capital Mogadishu, where she worked for a local radio station, maintaining and updating the station's website with news and events. During her life she had seen many of her friends and relatives flee from Somalia, a country that has struggled with an ongoing civil war since 1991. Ifrah said that she communicates with 'contacts in many different countries' in Europe, for example: 'in Finland, I have family, my brothers'; 'in Holland, my husband lives there'; 'in Italy I have friends'; 'in Saudi, one girl who is my friend'; and remaining 'in Somalia, my colleagues and my friends and family also'. Ifrah hopes to eventually be reunited with her husband. Feeling enabled to temporarily bridge large distances by means of transnational communication illustrates just how much a Skype call is valued beyond simply the audio and visual content of the conversation. The

embodied feelings spurred by such routine exchanges demand further scrutiny.

This article explores the role of transnational communication as experienced by Somali children and young adults while awaiting resettlement. The focus is on stranded Somalis left behind by parents and loved ones in Addis Ababa. I develop the notion of transnational affective capital to consider how transnational communication may alter the mind states of stranded migrants. Furthermore, as transnational affective capital may be one of the few sources of capital available to stranded migrants, I also explore the extent to which it enables subjects torn by anxiety and separation to regain a sense of ontological security. The transnational affective capital case study examines empirical data gathered among young Somalis living in the district of Bole Michael on the outskirts of Addis Ababa. Fieldwork focused on the experiences of transnational communication was conducted through 12 in-depth interviews and a focus group with 6 young men. Describing digital media use to maintain ties with family and friends living in Europe and other countries in the Global North, informants often referenced bodily reactions and sensorial experiences. Two dominant themes emerged while inductively coding the transcripts of the interviews and focus group. First, with expressions such as feeling 'happy', 'good', 'frustrated' and 'excited', the affective responses spurred by transnational communication were highlighted. Secondly, references were made to different notions of spatiality by using words such as 'connected', 'bridging distance', 'together'.

By addressing affectivity and spatiality, the intricate ways in which these subjects seem to be simultaneously uprooted and connected are considered. The stranded Somalis are uprooted from their homes and families, but they cross state borders by using Skype video chat and social networking sites such as Facebook in internet cafes, and messenger applications like WhatsApp and Nimbuzz on their mobile phones. They are therefore living in limbo, and they are also connected. The question that arises is whether this situation is felt to be an enabling contradiction or negative continuity. Is transnational networking experienced as a way to mitigate harsh offline circumstances, or does affectivity associated with transnational communication not outweigh everyday emotional landscapes? In other words, does the affective engagement with transnational communication advance ontological security, defined by Anthony Giddens as: 'the autonomy of bodily control within predictable routines and encounters' (1984: 50) in order to manage anxiety found in trust in ordinary day-to-day routines? Or does transnational communication further exacerbate a sense of ontological insecurity: discomfort, unsettlement and increased anxiety related to unbelonging. In particular, by approaching intense feelings of togetherness originating in transnational

communication as a form of transnational 'affective capital' (Ahmed 2004: 45) I explore how the mobility of transnational communication may temporarily suspend emotional distress resulting from being physically separated, and may fuel the desire for reunification and resettlement. However, the young informants are only connected thanks to remittances sent by close adult relatives, so it can be expected that digital connectivity comes at a cost of dependency and a lack of autonomy. Moreover, borders can be crossed, but only virtually, and only for a limited moment of time.

This article is structured as follows: I first review theories on affectivity and spatiality in relation to digital practices and migration. I then describe the fieldwork dynamics and outline the context of Somali migration. Finally, the empirical section consists of two themes: the affective dimensions of transnational digital communication, and the asymmetries of affective communicative capital.

Transnational communication, transnational affective capital and ontological security
The notion of transnational affective capital is developed in this section with a view to providing a new way to account for the unequal flows of migration, feeling and communication. The focus on affectivity first emerged in the field of computing, which has a long tradition of affective computer design and construction (Picard 1997); in economics where affective experiences of brands are generally accepted as an important source of revenue (Pine and Gilmore 1999); and in science and technology studies that focus on feelings of trust and security online (Corritore, Kracher and Wiedenbeck 2003). Feminist and queer theorists have advanced how emotions are political and play a crucial role in a social struggle against gendered, racialized and classed structures (Ahmed 2004). These ideas were recently taken up to counteract prior utopian disembodied understandings of digital culture (Garde-Hansen and Gorton 2013; Paasonen 2012). As previous critical migration scholarship focused predominantly on representation and meaning making, there is today an urgent need to account for affective experiences grounded in the everyday life of migrants themselves. Considering the specifically situated case of young Somalis and their experiences of transnational communication, I seek to theorize further how transnational communication is a source of affective capital that may, or may not, advance ontological security.

A focus on affectivity helps understand what happens when interactions on a screen resonate with the body of a user, a process that cannot be reduced solely to either meanings or bytes (Paasonen 2012). It tends instead to widen the focus from *meanings* toward how

meaning making also involves embodied *affective* responses. Building on Gilles Deleuze (1988), it is understood here as the process where bodies, spurred by interactions on screens, attain a different emotional state. Deleuze theorized the relationship between corporality and the indeterminacy of such passages:

> these image affections or ideas form a certain state of the affected body and mind, which implies more or less perfection than the preceding state. Therefore, from one state to another, from one image or idea to another, there are transitions, passages that are experienced, durations through which we pass to a greater or a lesser perfection (1988: 48).

Affect relates to the passage from one state to another, for better or for worse. Sarah Ahmed unpacked the cultural politics of affectivity and argues that affects are doings that should not only be considered as mental states but as also inherently related to 'social and cultural practices' (2004: 9). Affectivity, seen as an active process, is produced in the interaction between meaningful artefacts, ideas and bodies: 'affect is what sticks, or what sustains or preserves the connection between ideas, values and objects' (Ahmed 2004: 30). Specifically pertinent to migrants, the notion of 'transnational affect' developed by Amanda Wise and Selvaraj Velayutham draws attention to specific configurations of transnational belonging (2006). They describe transnational affectivity as: 'a circulation of bodily emotive affect between transnational subjects and between subjects and symbolic fields which give qualitative intensity to vectors and routes thus reproducing belonging to, and boundaries of, transnational fields' (2006: 3). The concept of transnational affectivity captures dynamics that include shame and pride, symbolic identification, and belonging. Such processes are no longer confined to the offline realm. Transnational affect may involve bodies passing from one state to another as a result of transnational interactions on a computer or mobile phone screen.

Consider, for example, the fact that looking at a photo of a family that has left Ethiopia to settle in the Netherlands can actually move those left behind. The photo may generate affect, spurring those waiting in Addis Ababa for resettlement to go from sad to happy. Such materials published on social networking sites can offer an 'affective feedback loop', circulating affect between the uploader and viewers of the page (Grusin 2010: 4-5). To grasp the political implications of affectivity, the values that individuals can attach to affective passages should be considered. Ahmed argues that these transitions may be appreciated as 'affective economies', in the sense that 'emotions work as a form of capital:

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affect does not reside positively in the sign or commodity, but is produced as an effect of its circulation' (2004: 45-46). As yet we know very little about how migrants living in limbo value transnational affectivity as a resource. However, what we do know is that at best they often have little access to other forms of capital.

To consider transnational affective capital in relation to other forms of capital I follow Pierre Bourdieu's distinction between economic, social, cultural and symbolic capital (1986). Being stranded instead of mobile indicates a lack of economic capital: with little access to formal labour, refugees are not in a position to secure a stable income. For basic necessities such as food and shelter they often depend on remittances from resettled family members, NGOs and government institutions. Social capital refers to a 'durable network' and 'membership in a group' (Bourdieu 1986: 249), which is a crucial resource for migrants, as it is through solidarity with family, friends and others in the diaspora that they might be able to secure knowledge about visas and permits essential to help them resettle and rejoin their families. Cultural capital refers to educational attitudes, skills and knowledge, which usually come to a standstill, since stranded migrants often have little or no access to formal education. Symbolic capital, or those resources available on the basis of status or recognition, is scarce as it is recognition by, for example, governments in European countries that stranded refugees need in order to actually resettle.

Transnational affective capital advanced through transnational communication may have a specific appeal for migrants. Living in harsh conditions, under stress and with access to few other forms of capital, the passing from a negative emotional state to a positive state for example by regaining 'hope' for betterment (Mar 2005) may be a crucial resource. It may enable those living in limbo to manage the anxiety of being physically separated. The example of stranded migrants looking at a Facebook photo of a family resettled in Europe illustrates how ontological security may today be supported, as transnational communication may allow for innovative ways to manage the everyday 'precariousness of migrant life' (Georgiou 2012: 304). Giddens defines ontological security as:

> the confidence that most human beings have in the continuity of their self-identity and in the constancy of the surrounding social and material environments of action. A sense of the reliability of persons and things, so central to the notion of trust, is basic to feelings of ontological security; hence the two are psychologically closely related' (1990: 92).

In contrast to early utopian grand narratives of globalization, the obstacles migrants face illustrate how globalization is not a universally flattening, homogenizing and time and space annihilating force. Being separated from loved ones, and living in dire circumstances, the situation stranded migrants find themselves in is a painful illustration of how globalization has actually intensified threats to ontological security for substantial numbers of the human population.

With growing transnational migrant flows and the ever increasing widespread use of transnational communication technologies, strategies to manage risk have also become increasingly mediated, as Georgiou observes in her assessment of ontological security supported through transnational television viewing among Arab audiences in Europe: 'individuals have increasingly grounded their sense of ontological security on relational networks, which are often dislocated from the immediate locality' (2012: 307). Transnational affective capital may advance ontological security, though it may also have adverse consequences, and affectivity is highly ambivalent, as: 'affects are not determined in advance' (Ahmed 2004: 362). Below, empirical data showing how relations between scattered people are routinely sustained through transnational communication is scrutinized for its transnational affective capacity to manage anxiety. Before examining the fieldwork data, I first summarize the context of Somalia and Somali migration and examine the fieldwork dynamics.

Somalia and Somali migration

Somalia is a globalized, post-colonial state. The total Somali population is estimated to be 10.2 million. Recent estimates of the size of the diaspora range from 1 million people upwards to 14 per cent of the population believed to currently reside outside the country's borders. A third of the population has migrated or has been internally displaced (Issa-Salwe 2006: 57-58). In contemporary history, three waves of outward migration of Somali people can be identified (Sheikh and Salley 2009: 13-14). The first wave of transnational migration occurred in the late and early 19th century, when Somalis migrated to the homelands of the colonial rulers. Somalis settled around 1880 for example in major UK port cities such as Liverpool, Cardiff and London. A second wave of outward migration followed after Somalia's independence in 1960. Numerous factors, such as long periods of drought and the subsequent loss of livestock; insufficient economic opportunities during the country's transition from a socialist to a market economy; political turmoil and the 1964 and 1977 wars with Ethiopia coincided with the oil boom and growing labour demand in Gulf states.

The third and by far the largest wave of outward migration followed the collapse of the state in 1991. The boundaries and state-formation engineered in the colonial era proved to be an underlying cause for ethnic strife, inter-clan conflict and the subsequent dissipation of post-independence Somalia (Schraeder 2006). Somalia became an independent country in 1960. During the colonial era, the British, French and Italians all claimed colonial rights over parts of Somaliland. British Somaliland was a protectorate from 1884-1960 in what is now north-western Somalia. Djibouti, an independent country since 1977 was a French colony between 1896-1946 and a French overseas territory between 1946-1967. Italian Somaliland was an Italian colony in present-day north-eastern, central and southern Somalia between 1889-1936 and was an Italian protectorate (Amministrazione Fiduciaria Italiana della Somalia, AFIS) between 1950-1960 under United Nations mandate. This tripartite territorial colonial rule was insufficiently addressed after independence (Lombardi-Diop and Romeo 2012; Schraeder 2006). The wave of migrants following the collapse of the state is composed of a heterogeneous subset of people. Three main groups have been identified on the basis of their reasons to migrate. The first subset is made up of first generation of refugees who managed to claim asylum generally after living in refugee camps in countries neighbouring Somalia. A second group consists of children who accompanied their parents when they fled from Somalia and those children born in the diaspora. A third subset consists of the young generation who – mostly economically motivated - migrated outwards through family reunification programmes or irregular channels (Sheikh and Salley 2009: 13-14). Left behind during transit migration from Somalia to overseas, the informants involved in this study fall under the third wave, in between the first and second subset. The diaspora seems to function as a double-edged sword, contributing systematically to both peace building and to further sustaining conflict. Key in this process has been the continued financial support from members of the diaspora to support family and clan ties. Remittance flows are well established, and up to 40% of households in Somalia receive financial assistance (Menkhaus, 2008; Horst, 2008; Lindley, 2008).

The scarce body of literature on digital Somali diasporas focuses on Somali community websites demonstrating that Somali diaspora web presence reflects kin-groups (Issa-Salwe 2006). Indeed, the internet has led Somalis in the diaspora to reinvent their clan communities online: 'since the emergence of the Internet and its introduction to the Somali society, there are as many Somali Internet sites as the total number of clans, sub-clans, and sub-sub-clans' (Issa-Salwe 2006: 63). These studies took community websites as an entry point to study diaspora community formation. The role digital technologies play in sending

remittances has also been explored (Horst, 2008; Lindley, 2008). By interviewing young Internet users about their perceptions and feelings, this article is the first to examine everyday transnational digital experiences of diasporic Somalis.

Methodology

Transnational affective capital will be grounded in empirical data focusing on the stories informants shared of being affected by interactions with loved ones on a screen. In winter 2012, I held explorative interviews with officials and refugees in asylum seeker centres in the Netherlands on their use of the Internet. Transnational communication seemed to be routine practice, but I was particularly moved by the many devastating stories of separation that the informants shared with me. Somali parents spoke about leaving their children behind at some point during the resettlement process. These children had to await the outcome of their parents' visa application procedures abroad. Little is known about transnational communication use among those who are stranded. I therefore explored the possibilities to conduct explorative fieldwork with young migrants awaiting family reunification outside Europe. Assisted by Thijs Smit, the Somali immigration affairs attaché at the Netherlands embassy in Ethiopia and Asma Jami, a young female Somali professional interpreter, the opportunity arose to conduct interviews with a modest group of Somali youngsters and young adults who were stranded in Bole Michael in Addis Ababa.

In March and April 2013 I held 10 face-to-face interviews and a focus group with 6 young men. The total group of informants consisted of 6 young women and 10 young men; the average age of the informants is 18 (see Table 1). Reflection is necessary on the painfully steep power hierarchies involved in this study. As a highly educated white man with Dutch citizenship, I was able to fly from Amsterdam to Addis Ababa via Istanbul, effortlessly crossing the borders of Fortress Europe. My Dutch passport enabled me to secure an Ethiopian visa on arrival at Addis Ababa Bole international airport. In stark contrast, the informants experience almost insurmountable difficulties, being separated from family and friends, with few resources at their disposal, and extreme difficulty when going through complex asylum procedures. Somali 'urban refugees' are in the majority in Bole Michael, and the majority only intend to live there temporarily (Alemayehu, Mengesha and Gulilat 2010). Upon compulsory registration with the Ethiopian government as asylum seekers, they would be transported to refugee camps. Wanting to remain in Bole Michael, they chose to live in a status of illegality, which is tolerated by officials. It is a life of shear poverty, characterized by high crime rates, illiteracy and unemployment and little opportunity for

schooling. Most depend on remittances and live in overcrowded spaces. Orphans and young people are particularly vulnerable in these settings (Kendie 2011).

The majority of the informants had no formal education, were unemployed and depended on family remittances. Most were waiting for visa clearance to then be reunited with parents, siblings and sometimes partners living in Europe and other overdeveloped parts of the world. Take, for example, 18-year old Ayanle who describes how he is separated from his siblings: 'my brother is in Norway, another brother in the USA and my sister in Holland. I use the telephone and Facebook with them. I sent them messages with my greetings and that makes me happy'. Ironically, the neighbourhood is literally adjacent to the international airport. Due to financial constraints and complex visa processes, these subjects remain geographically fixed in an area that is constantly audibly and visually pierced with signs of hyper-mobility. The blaring of jet engines was, for example, clearly audible during the interviews.

Nickname	Gender	Age	Place of origin	Current location
In-depth interviews				
Lucky	Male	20	Mogadishu, Somalia	Addis Ababa, for 8 months
Lovehunter	Male	17	Mogadishu, Somalia	Addis Ababa, for 2 years
Nasteexo	Female	14	Puntland, Somalia	Addis Ababa
Rayaan	Female	13	Puntland, Somalia	Addis Ababa for 2 years
Mursi	Male	21	Hargeysa, Somalia	Addis Ababa
Badle	Male	26	Somalia	Addis Ababa
Miss Lonely	Female	21	'From Somalia, born in Saudi-Arabia'	Addis Ababa, for 5 years
Canjex	Male	21	Mogadishu, Somalia	Addis Ababa, for 3 months
Ifrah	Female	23	Mogadishu, Somalia	Addis Ababa, for 2 months
Princessa	Female	23	'Identifies as Somalian, born in Yemen'	Addis Ababa, for 8 years
Focus group				
Ali	Male	16	Somalia	Addis Ababa for 3 years
Yusuf	Male	13	Somalia	Addis Ababa for 1.5 years
Qaalid	Male	13	Somalia	Addis Ababa for 1 year
Basry	Male	15	Somalia	Addis Ababa
Ayanle	Male	18	Somalia	Addis Ababa for 2 years
Moh Iddle	Male	15	Puntland, Somalia	Addis Ababa for 1 year

Table 1: The informants

The interviews were held in an Internet café and a computer club. Gaining access was hampered by feelings of distrust towards state officials, journalists and aid workers.

However, trust was gained with the assistance of Asma Jami, an interpreter and a neighbourhood local. Two young Ethiopian Addis Ababa University graduates in computer engineering set up the volunteer-run computer club. They wanted to give young local Somalis an opportunity for a better future by providing basic training in technology use. Located along an unpaved road, the club was housed in a small single-window room, and 6 donated computers were available. The club was open to local Somali children and young adults for courses on word processing and various Internet applications. A small fee was asked for, but students who were unable to afford it were also allowed to participate. In contrast, the Internet café was profit oriented. Tamrat, the café owner, saw the business potential of providing Internet access to local Somalis: 'even if they don't have money, they like to use the Internet. They do not have anywhere else to go'. Tamrat has adapted payment schemes to attract Somali users, allowing them to make use of his services on credit: 'they have family members abroad', its 'mostly European countries they are in contact with, so they get money from them. And when the month ends, they will have money, so they can give me the credit they have used'.

All informants signed consent forms. Consent from parents or guardians could not be obtained for the minors involved in the study. One schoolteacher attended the focus group and interview sessions that involved minors, and he signed additional consent forms. The majority of the interviews were conducted in English. For those who preferred to speak Amharic, Asma Jami translated what they said into English. Interviewees were given a small compensation for their participation, in the form of an allowance amounting to 4 hours Internet use in an Internet café. Besides the on-site fieldwork in Addis Ababa, follow-up email correspondence with several of the research subjects took place until September 2013. All audio recordings of the interviews were transcribed verbatim.

As a participatory research technique, at the beginning of the interviews and focus group session, informants were invited to draw two concept maps. Concept mapping is a productive technique to elicit reflections from young people on the various ways they experience, understand and negotiate technologies (Clark, Logan, Luckin, Mee and Oliver 2009). Participants were first invited to draw an Internet map, to learn more about which sites and applications informants consider important. The informants were then asked to map out the geographical locations of important contacts living abroad, together with the specific digital media they used for the different countries mentioned.

Figure 1. Contact map Lucky, 20-year-old male

Figure 1 shows a contact map drawn by Lucky, a 20-year-old male. By drawing Internet and contact maps, the informants researched their digital experiences with me. The digital platforms and geographical locations of the contacts mentioned were used to structure the interview, enabling the informants to control the direction the conversation would take. The interview transcripts were analysed using NVivo 9.2, a qualitative data analysis software package. Following a grounded theory approach to data analysis, I inductively looked for structures, categories and themes in the interview data rather than superimposing a pre-formed framework. In the empirical sections below, first the production of transnational affect is discussed before asymmetries of transnational affective capital are considered.

Transnational communication and the production of affect

> Like for example my brother and my sister they live in the US, and they use Viber. Also my brother, he lives in Sweden he uses Viber. We talk together maybe daily. We talk together. Just about our lives. I feel very happy to hear about these things, that is good. Sometimes my family, we come together, and we open the speakers, also my mother she is there, I think it is a good feeling - Miss Lonely, a 21-year-old young female

Miss Lonely shared how she and her fellow family members can plug into the everyday life of siblings living in the United States and Europe, making them feel good. This section examines how transnational communication produces affect. Describing their use of video or audio chat applications such as Skype, Viber, Nimbuzz and social networking sites like Facebook, informants strongly referenced bodily and sensorial experiences: in their words, usage makes them feel 'happy', 'good', 'connected', 'together', 'exciting', 'awesome'. Lovehunter, a 17-year-old male describes how he regained contact with his brother living in Norway: 'for example now I have seen the photos of my brother's wife, and his children, they have seen my photos in Facebook, so that is a great thing. Seeing him, how he looks like, and also the wife he married there, and the children he got while he lived in that country'. Also a good example is Moh Iide, a 15-year-old young male who describes how he feels while calling his family members: 'so maybe I call them on the phone, I really really feel great and awesome when I'm contact with them'. Mobile phone and video chat conversations and sharing photos discussed exemplify how digital media technologies can produce and

transnationally circulate affect between those living in Ethiopia and overseas. Transnational affect does not reside in the communicating subjects, the content or in the internet application; it tends to emerge from the circulation between bodies interacting on and with the screen. Besides illustrating how affectivity can function as a 'vehicle from one dimension of time to another' (Clough 2012: 23) it can also span geographies. The statements made by Miss Lonely, Lovehunter and Moh Iide reveal that their emotional states may be positively altered: transnational affective capital therefore 'moves across or between subjects, objects, signs and others' (Ahmed 2004: 348), potentially advancing ontological security.

Informants reveal a strong attachment to the intensities of transnational communication. However, transnational affective capital demands that informants make investments: 'to be invested means to spend time, money and labour on something as well as to endow that something with power and meaning' (Ahmed 2004: 349). The desire to remain connected is restricted by infrastructural situations and limited financial resources. Most informants access the Internet on their mobile phones using 3G (third generation mobile telecommunication networking, usually with a speed of 200 kb/s or more). Although often living in poor conditions, making do with a bare minimum of resources, all informants owned shiny smartphones, such as *Nokia Screen Touch*, *Nokia Asha 302*, *Samsung Wave* and *I-Phone 4*. These mobile phones are difficult to obtain and are overpriced in Ethiopia, but informants mentioned that family members living abroad had sent them. These devices are highly sought after, and informants said that they needed to take special precautions against theft by using them only indoors. Indeed, Canjex, a 21-year-old man, said he now relied on an internet café, after his smartphone had been snatched in Bole Michael: 'since my mobile has been stolen I am a customer of this particular café'.

The frequency of contact with family members living abroad differs from 'everyday', 'twice a week', '3x per week', 'twice a month' or 'sometimes'. As most do not personally own a desktop or laptop computer, the majority of informants also use Internet cafés in addition to calling by phone and using 3G-connectivity. For example, Lonelygirl uses voice-over-Internet-Protocol applications Viber and Skype on her mobile phone to talk to family members abroad. She explains the cost of using prepaid top-up scratch cards: 'for 5 Birr you can use Viber for about an hour. There is a difference between Viber and Skype. I think Skype uses 3G a lot, the speed is very good, but it is very costly. So for 25 Birr you can use maximally half an hour for Skype'. At the time of the fieldwork, 30 minutes of Skype on a mobile phone amounted to 25 Birr or 1 Euro, the standard cost for an hour of Internet access in an Internet café was four times cheaper, 12 Birr (50 euro cents).

To remain connected, informants depend on smartphones and remittances they receive from family members abroad. Lovehunter explains: 'I go to internet cafés, and I pay all the costs at the end of the month when I receive the remittances. I spent around 50 USD per month using the Internet'. Tamrat, the internet café owner mentioned previously, has strategically adapted his business model to allow users access on credit and to pay off their debts when they receive remittances. The costs involved are a source of considerable frustration. Ali, a 16-year-old male admits: 'my father lives in Switzerland, I talk via my mobile phone. My father pays for that. It makes me happy, but we talk 3 times a month, I like to talk more often'. Even though the costs of transnational communication have steadily decreased, they still constrain transnational connectivity. The affective relationship is hierarchical; the young migrants left behind in Addis Ababa are in a position of dependence, as communication is only made possible and therefore is also limited by the financial assistance from adult relatives abroad.

Besides the financial limitations, network connectivity is not as stable and dependable as it is in Europe. As an actor in the 'migration industry of connectivity' (Gordano, this special issue), Tamrat explains that he and his customers benefit from more stability:

> with two hours, I can get 24 Birr (1 euro), if they get a good connection, they are using long hours, so I can benefit from them. Connectivity is not a given. Per month, 10 days there is a problem, but Somalis, they understand, you know.

There is a discrepancy in communication flows between Addis Ababa and countries such as Somalia and other developing African countries and Europe. Lovehunter says that Skype conversations with the Netherlands and Norway pose no problems at all, but: 'for example, you can't use Skype with someone in Somalia, because the connection is poor'. So due to visa constraints he is unable to physically cross the borders into Europe, but digitally, access to Europe is much easier than to neighbouring African countries. The politics of transnational affective capital are discussed in the next section.

Online/offline geographies and asymmetrical affective capital

This section explores the power relations involved in the production of transnational affective capital. Considering the context of the young Somali men and women in Addis Ababa separated from family and friends living, for example, in Europe, the question arises as to how digital connectedness is experienced in a situation of physical immobility. What do the

pseudonyms Princess, Miss Lonely and Lovehunter as chosen by the informants actually indicate? I learned during the interviews that the medium-specific characteristic of Skype with its video and audio communication together spur affective feelings of digital togetherness across large geographical distance. Mursi, a 21-year-old male stated: 'being apart or living at long distances apart is not a problem; you can use video-calls in which you can see each other'. Miss Lonely explained that this kind of communication allows for a richer orientation towards the everyday life of the person living at a geographical distance:

> For example I know how the houses of the siblings and cousins who live abroad look like. They just rotate the camera to show you around the kitchen, the living room, how they look like. They even show the corridors of when they have hallways. You see those latest technologies make us feel as if there is no distance anymore.

Lovehunter described his desire to join his family in the Netherlands, Norway and the United States. Physically he has not been able to do so, but he said: 'seeing them through video feels like I'm already there'. Digitally, informants share being 'connected', 'close', 'logged in' and 'together' with their family and friends far away. The feelings brought about by digital togetherness become an affective resource. Access to this affective capital is limited, as the lack of financial resources curbs opportunities to sustain digital togetherness among the young informants. One of the creative solutions the research subjects mention to make do without constant Internet connections are to save screen shots of Skype conversations and to print photos downloaded from Facebook. Lovehunter explains why he prints Facebook pictures of his brother, who lives in the United States: 'I have seen my brother only a long time ago, when I was very young. It is also a great memory. You can print the photo and put it in your room'. The printed photographs, as tangible objects, as well as the routine views via Skype into the everyday lives of transnational contacts provide a sense of ontological security. The circulation of the photographs between Lovehunter and his brother has imbued them with an affective value.

Transnational communication is not necessarily only experienced as an empowering resource. The digital crossing of physical geographies allows for the maintenance of emotional relationships, for example in the case of parents who live at a distance from their children. When asked, the younger informants in particular explained that either their father or mother living abroad had given them their smartphone. Moh Iide, a 15 year old, described

how his mother who lives in England, checks up on him after she knows he is not at home: 'for example when you are in the town, your mother sometimes worries about you, if you are in danger, so she calls you if you're alright or in danger. So, hmm, she figures out whether you are alright'. Although contact frequency differs widely, parents and siblings are able to contact their children and siblings when needed. Younger informants' experiences of smartphone use in this study resonate with Mirca Madianou and Daniel Miller's findings on how Filipino migrant mothers living in the United Kingdom use mobile phones as a surveillance tool, monitoring their left-behind children (2011). Moh Iide observed: 'after leaving she wants to know if you get back at home'. Young informants feel empowered by being able to be in touch with their parents even though they are left behind in a distant location, but at the same time their autonomy is restricted resulting from the surveillance opportunities the device gives the parents.

Other experiences reveal the passion the informants put into transnational communication, reflecting a desire to escape the hardship of their offline everyday lives. Take the example of being constantly on the lookout on social networking sites for family and friends who have migrated overseas. Interviewees all said they used Facebook to get back 'in touch' with lost loved ones. Nasteexo, a 14-year-old girl described Facebook as follows: 'it's where you chat, communicate with your friends and families, those you have lost or those you have not seen in a long time'. Lost family members and friends can be located through Facebook. The medium-specific configurations of the site, such as the real name policy, the option to publish questions on one's profile wall that can be circulated further by befriended contacts, being able to browse through contact lists of friends, forming Facebook groups dedicated to regions, cities, clans or schools in Somalia, and the option to search for friends are all used strategically. For example, Miss Lonely said: 'I use my real name on Facebook, because now, a lot of my cousins they live throughout the world like America and Europe, and they can find me'. For these reasons, informants explicitly mention that they use their real names in order to increase the chance that contact can be regained with lost loved ones overseas. In line with previous research on young women in Ghana in search for foreign partners (Burrell 2012) online dating is also seen as a possible way to migrate overseas. For example Princessa, a 23-year-old woman says she feels: 'it's good to have the internet'. She mostly uses a Muslim online dating site: 'I use this website to get to know foreign people who live in different parts of the world and just maybe I will find my soulmate on it'. Princessa is still in Addis Ababa, because 'until now I wasn't successful, I didn't get married yet'. As an affective resource, transnational communication is imagined to offer

opportunities for material relocation.

Furthermore, many informants mentioned the use of profile pictures on social networking sites that were made in local Addis Ababa photo studios. Some chose this strategy because public Facebook postings enable a strategic performance of online/offline spatial crossing. Miss Lonely described this strategy as follows: 'they use Photoshop to beautify the background, the sea, where you are. It's not where you actually are. That is why people go to the studios. Like the Paris tower, or the Big Ben of London, like standing there. Pretending to be in places you are not. So they can trick people that they live abroad'. Interviewees observed that the strategic performance of being abroad, often meaning inside Fortress Europe, was chosen by some who were hoping it would provide another way to develop connections and improve chances of being able to physically travel away from Addis Ababa. However, none of the informants knew of anyone who had successfully done so as a result of using these images. Charpentier also describes the use of professional photographs taken with artificial backgrounds among refugees in Ethiopian refugee camps. She found these social-networking site users display opulence to fit in with wealthy European users and therefore post only little information about their situation in Ethiopia (2013). Such images can perhaps also be read to reflect the desire of Somali diaspora subjects to escape from the material hardship and reunite with loved ones living in Europe and elsewhere.

Interviewees reminded me time and again of the uneven affective capital of online interactions. The sensed digital permeability of geographical boundaries remains a temporary suspension, once the Skype or mobile phone conversation has ended the affective capital produced fades away very quickly. As mentioned above, young informants mention financial dependency as well as poor connectivity that also restricts them in their transnational digital communication. Such limitations make Moh Iide wonder: 'sometimes I ask myself, in some instances am I [really] together when I am contacting them'. Ifrah, who is in contact with her husband in the Netherlands said: 'I feel that sometimes I can bridge distance', but added the painful: 'It is only the few minutes that you are on the phone that you feel that way, but the moment you hang up you realize that there is a distance and that kills you'. The asymmetrical, yet still alluring and important affective capital of transnational communication can be illustrated with the cheerful emails I received from Bosry, during the process of reuniting with his family in Norway in August 2013, four months after I had interviewed him in Addis Ababa. On 20 August, he wrote:

It's true that the youth in africa much worthy likes to live in Europe, usa and England that's why there risking the lifes crossing oceans and deserts to have a much

better life. I'd like to tell you if lord says that it was my birthday on 10 august 2013 and that i will complete a move to Norway in 27 august , very much happy :).

On 2 and 7 October he wrote about his successful move, adding: 'it was really amazing' to have moved. Being able to use 'internet in a free way and at high speed' has made it possible for his desires to be fulfilled: 'I also met some of my friends whom i used to chat on the Internet especially on facebook and twitter'. Although they do not eliminate its asymmetrical nature, such stories of 'hope in motion' (Mar 2006) will continue to fuel the imagination of transnational communication as a crucial source of affective capital among those migrants living in limbo in Ethiopia and elsewhere.

Conclusions

This article presents an explorative case study of how 16 young Somali migrants stuck in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia use Internet-based transnational communication (Skype, Viber, Facebook, long-distance mobile phone calls) to stay in touch with family and friends abroad. In particular, the focus is not on processes of meaning making but on how the use makes them feel in relation to their personal circumstances of geographical immobility. Resonating in various ways, transnational communication does something to stranded young Somalis; they are affected in various ways. As a result of transnational interactions on a computer or mobile phone screen, transnational affect may be spurred which involves bodies passing from one state to another. The potentialities of transnational communication use for regaining a sense of 'ontological security' (Giddens 1984) were found to reside not necessarily in the content of the exchanges, but particularly in the affects screen-based interactions spur in the bodies of migrant users. Migrants depend heavily on 'relational networks' beyond their physical location to establish ontological security (Georgiou 2012: 307), however the role of affect in this process has remained largely unaddressed. More research is needed to understand better how affects spurred by transnational communication may advance or be detrimental to feelings of bodily control, reliability, constancy, and autonomy.

Transnational affective capital may accumulate through the circulation of feeling in transnational communication. The feelings spurred by transnational communication are a scarce, valuable good as stranded refugees are often deprived of most other forms of capital. Focusing on the under-explored group of left-behind forced migrants and developing an innovative concept-mapping approach to the affects of transnational communication, the article expanded interpretations of the contemporary 'connected migrant' (Diminescu 2008) who is affectively circulating his/her subjectivity in-between the here and there. However,

nuancing the early utopian rhetoric of digital technologies as 'tele-technologies' (Wilken 2011), which supposedly enables users to bridge distances without problem, insights were given on the felt material, financial and emotional power relations and obstacles involved. The positive feelings associated with online communication do not fully compensate for the emotional landscape of their offline everyday lives, as can be seen in the affective connotations of the nicknames the informants chose like Lovehunter and Miss Lonely. Although they are regularly temporarily digitally together with loved ones living overseas, the constituted transnational affective capital does not outweigh the felt hardship of their precarious lives.

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