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Young connected migrants and non-normative European family life: exploring affective human right claims of young e-diasporas

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Young Connected Migrants and Non-Normative European Family Life
Exploring Affective Human Right Claims of Young E-Diasporas

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ABSTRACT

In the face of the contemporary so-called "European refugee crisis,'" the dichotomies of bodies that are naturalized into technology usage and the bodies that remain alienated from it betray the geographic, racial, and gendered discriminations that digital technologies, despite their claims at neutrality and flatness, continue to espouse. This article argues that "young electronic diasporas" (ye-diasporas) (Donà, 2014) present us with an unique view on how Europe is reimagined from below, as people stake out a living across geographies. The main premise is that young connected migrants' cross-border practices shows they 'do family' in a way that does not align with the universal European, normative expectations of European family life. The author draws on three symptomatic accounts of young connected migrants that are variably situated geo-politically: 1) Moroccan-Dutch youth in the Netherlands; 2) stranded Somalis awaiting family reunification in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia; and, 3) working, middle, and upper-class young people of various ethnic and class backgrounds living in London. Narratives shared by members of all three groups indicate meta-categories of the 'migrant,' 'user,' and 'e-diaspora' urgently need to be de-flattened. To do this de-flattening work, new links between migrant studies, feminist and postcolonial theory and digital cultures are forged. In an era of increasing digital connectivity and mobility, transnational families are far from deterritorialized – boundaries and insurmountable distances are often forcibly and painfully felt.

KEYWORDS

Affect, Ambient Co-presence, Connected Migrants, Cruel Optimism, Digital Materiality, Human Right Claims, Surplus of Sensibility, Transnational Communication, Young Electronic Diasporas

INTRODUCTION

The Internet is a space for the promotion, protection and fulfillment of human rights (Internet Rights & Principles Coalition, 2013, p. 9)
The figure of the citizen cannot enter into debates about the Internet as a subject without history and without geography – and without contradictions. (Isin & Ruppert, 2015, p. 27)

In the face of the contemporary so-called "European refugee crisis,' the dichotomies of bodies that are naturalized into technology usage and the bodies that remain alienated from it betray the geographic, racial, and gendered discriminations that digital technologies, despite their claims at neutrality and flatness, continue to espouse. In this moment of crisis, the digitally connected migrant is currently getting a lot of flak, which is exemplary of "high-tech Orientalism" (Chun, 2008, p. 73). News headlines

and social media tropes commonly question Syrian refugees who arrive in Europe carrying smart phones. For example, a front-page headline on the Dutch daily *Algemeen Dagblad* questioned, "Why do those refugees take selfies all the time?" (Rosman & van Mersbergen, 2016) while *Twitter* users like @DefendWallSt (See Figure 1) more explicitly consider refugees with smart phones as bogus asylum seekers. Included in this 5 September 2015 tweet is a broadly circulating photograph showing a veiled lady wearing a bright orange life-vest accompanied by a young boy wearing a yellow life vest. In the background, we see the contours of what might be the mainland of Turkey, a calm sea and a beached black inflatable rubber boat. Carrying luggage in one hand, she holds her camera-phone and takes a selfie with her other hand. Her expression is ambivalent, she simultaneously grimaces and smiles into the camera. From her face we can tell she is relieved to have arrived on European soil. For other *Twitter* users such as @allseeingeyes10, this evidences people like the lady in the photo have access to luxury goods, "They are all economic migrants," adding "People are calling them refugees when clearly they are not" (05/09/2015). Apparently, people who own a mobile phone are not eligible for help in their attempt at fleeing from miserable war-zones like Syria. Through this discursive othering, refugees are de-humanized. Instead of triggering solidarity, European audience members avoid being affected by what they read and see on the screens of their smart phones.

This is worrisome as Europe has become the deadliest migration destiny in the world (Wolff, 2015) and growing numbers of people still risk their lives in their desperate attempts to reach the continent. An estimated 950,469 people arrived by sea in 2015, and 3,605 people have died or are missing (UNHCR, 2015). So far in 2016, estimated fatalities stand at 2,861 one week before the mid-year point (IOM, 2016). This also raises doubts about the European Union's commitment to open borders and human rights. Of course, although predicated on the idea "Unity in Diversity" (Ponzanesi & Colpani, 2016, p. 7), Europe's sense of diversity and relationship with migration has always been strongly politicized and policed. While highly educated (white) expats – especially those from the 'Global North' are welcomed under "Europe's Highly Skilled Migrant Scheme," (black) asylum seekers are commonly 'othered.' Right-wing social media circuits frame male Syrian refugees not only as barbaric, backward, and posing a threat for European girls, but also as "terrorists" or "cowards" (Walker Retberg & Gajjala, 2015). These frames were also further mainstreamed in the right-wing anti-immigration Brexit campaign prior to the June 23 UK referendum on whether the UK should leave or remain in the European Union.

Tech-writer James O'Malley aptly deconstructed the high-tech orientalist rhetoric in his *The Independent* article: "Surprised that Syrian refugees have smartphones? Sorry to break this to you, but you're an idiot. You don't need to be a white westerner to own a relatively cheap piece of technology" (O'Malley, 2015). Previously, anti-immigrant politicians and protestors claimed migrants were unskilled and were only trying to benefit from North-European welfare systems. Now, the pendulum has swung and xenophobic critics focus on the smart phone as a piece of advanced technology and question whether refugees are actually economic migrants. Shouldn't the helpless poor be the priority? Interestingly, only a couple of years ago Westerners (including many in Europe) commonly celebrated how 'ordinary people' benefited from smart phones in their seemingly democratic struggle against various national regimes during the so-called social media revolutions in the Middle East (O'Malley, 2015). What these examples demonstrate is that European culture is essentialized as an exclusionary ideal of wholeness that builds on a particular grammar of difference. Defining itself against the (non-European) other, Europeanness is bounded by a deemed superior cultural habitus configured around the middle-class, whiteness, and Judeo-Christian secularism. Moreover, the figure of the digitally connected migrant embodies Europe's Janus-faced character as a closed Fortress in an age when the competitive market and technologies are celebrated for increasing speed and mobility within the internal Schengen market (Ponzanesi & Leurs, 2014).

Even through scholars have previously made a plea for the "establishment of a European Research Area on ICT and migrations" (Borkert, Cingolani & Premazzi, 2009, p. 25), there remains "a dearth of nuanced research on digital diasporas in Europe" (Ponzanesi & Leurs, 2014, p. 11). The

Figure 1. "Poverty stricken Syrian migrant takes selfie with her $600 smartphone" @DefendWallSt

gap in the scholarship – especially pertinent for young connected migrants – demands our attention because transnational connectedness with family members' overseas challenges European borders and normative expectations of family governmentality as well as dominant representations of normative (white, western, middle-class) technology use. This article argues "young electronic diasporas" (ye-diasporas) (Donà, 2014) present us with a unique view on how Europe is reimagined from below, as people stake out a living across geographies. According to Donà, ye-diasporas are:

networks of young people who live in the diaspora and use virtual spaces as a platform to connect with other diasporic and nondiasporic individuals for a variety of purposes ranging from political to cultural, social to pleasure. (Donà, 2014, p. 133)

My main premise is that young connected migrants' cross-border practices show they 'do family' in a way that does not align with the universal European, normative expectations of European family life. Although migrants commonly maintain digitally mediated relationships with family members living dispersed throughout the world, this non-normative way of 'doing family' blurs boundaries of classic postcolonial European views of what constitutes the "family" (Reynolds & Zontini, 2013; Beck & Beck-Gernsheim, 2014). I consider digitally mediated non-normative family practices as

"enacting digital rights claims" (Isin & Ruppert, 2015, p. 13) that question European governmentality. Besides the symbolic performativity of digital practices, doing family transnationally is also highly emotional. Attention is needed for the role the senses play in constructing cross-border networks of affinity. For this purpose, I take transnationally mediated sensations as an entry point to theorize the e-politics of affectivity and communication rights of ye-diasporas.

I draw on three symptomatic accounts of young connected migrants that are variably situated geo-politically. The three instances under study range from 1) Moroccan-Dutch youth in the Netherlands; 2) stranded Somali's awaiting family reunification in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia; and, 3) working, middle, and upper-class young people of various ethnic and class backgrounds living in London, but will be brought in a state of equivalence. The myriad differences among the digital experiences of these young people can be subsumed under a sameness: narratives shared by members of all three groups reveal meta-categories of the 'migrant,' 'user,' and 'e-diaspora' urgently need to be de-flattened. At present, they do not adequately represent their complex everyday affective digital routines. To do this de-flattening work, I forge new links between migrant studies, feminist and postcolonial theory, and digital cultures. This way, I develop the notion of the young electronic diaspora to acknowledge dynamism and contradictions within the categories of the migrant, the user, and the e-diaspora and to account for how these three categories relationally shape one another.

The remainder of the article is structured as follows. In the literature review section, I elaborate the notion of young connected migrants in the context of Europe's normative structuring of family-life, which is bounded by co-presence within nation-state borders. Also, I articulate how digital materiality, affective embodiment, and communication rights can be brought together to rethink how new family practices are mediated through transnational digital practices. The empirical section offers three snapshots indicative of the situated ways in which young connected migrants affectively make their right claims digitally.

Theorizing the Affective E-Politics of Ye-Diasporas in Europe

World families differ from the normal single-nation family, which has been the dominant form for so long, especially in Europe, and which has consisted of people speaking the same language, having the same nationality, and living in the same country and in the same locality (Beck & Beck-Gernsheim, 2014, p. 2).

To conceptualize how the affective politics of young electronic diasporas may challenge normative Europeanness, I bring into dialogue discussions taking place within Internet, postcolonial, feminist, and migration studies that rarely intersect. In particular, I connect new media theories that promote a phenomenological and digital material understanding of medium specific sensibilities, postcolonial theories on diasporic identification, feminist theories that raise awareness for the cultural and embodied hierarchical politics of affect, and migration theories that bring into focus transnational border movements. For Ulrich Beck and Elisabeth Beck-Gernsheim, transnational families illustrate the undoing of traditional European family-life that commonly correlated "bonds of place, country and family" (2014, p. 13). Recent studies have documented how transnational families rely on various information and communication technologies for parenting, care, love, and solidarity (e.g. Madianou, 2014; 2016; Donà, 2014; Nedelcu, 2012). Although migrants commonly maintain relationships with family members living dispersed throughout the world, this way of "doing family" that differs from dominant norms also remains "marginalized in family studies debates" (Reynolds & Zontini, 2013, p. 234). The lack of nuanced understanding is problematic given that public discourse draws on family practices of migrant families to draw symbolic boundaries between who counts as European and who does not. These habitual ways of thinking about European life are not innocent. Traditional conceptions of so-called 'European' white, heterosexual, nuclear families are used to construct and police others.

In her recent book *White Innocence*, Gloria Wekker argues hierarchical divisions are embedded in "structures of feeling" that draw from a distinct "cultural archive" (2016). Europe represents itself on the basis of a superior ethical and moral standing – setting benchmarks for other regions and populations. Paradoxically, it commonly avoids acknowledging the ways in which 400 years of imperial domination over external territories impacts upon culture, politics, knowledge production, and its racialized conceptions of self and other. As a matter of fact, as Kringelbach diagnoses:

what characterises the contemporary period is the way in which family practices are explicitly invoked by European Union (EU) states to delineate ever more rigid external as well as internal boundaries. (2015, p. 131)

Thus, we urgently need to question dominant western and Euro-centric views of what constitutes 'the family' and also challenge how such dominant views operate as exclusionary bordering mechanisms.

Digital practices as Human Right Claims

Questioning Normative ideas about family life, transnational Skype conversations or Facebook chats with family members or loved ones can be seen as examples of claiming rights. These digital acts can be considered in the context of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) articles 19 on the human right to free communication across borders: "Everyone has the right to freedom of opinion and expression; this right includes freedom to hold opinions without interference and to seek, receive and impart information and ideas through any media and *regardless of frontiers* (UN, 2015 [1948], emphasis mine), and article 20.1 on the freedom to associate: "Everyone has the right to freedom of peaceful assembly and association" (UN, 1948). Also, of particular relevance for those young connected migrants under 18, the UN Convention of the Child article 8.1 states, "Parties undertake to respect the right of the child to preserve his or her *identity*, including nationality, name and *family relations* as recognized by law without unlawful interference" and article 13.1 says "The child shall have the right to freedom of expression; this right shall include freedom to seek, receive and impart information and ideas of all kinds, *regardless of frontiers*, either orally, in writing or in print, in the form of art, or *through any other media of the child's choice*" (CRC, 1989, emphasis mine). Recently, declarations explicitly mention online practices are to be considered on par with offline dynamics. For example, EU Human Rights Guidelines acknowledge: "All human rights that exist offline must also be protected online" (European Council, 2014).

Young connected migrants claiming the right to communicate, associate, and preserving one's identity and family relations online – across borders and through a set of digital platforms they prefer – can be considered from the perspective of speech-act theory. Drawing on performative speech act theories of J.L. Austin, Judith Butler, and others, Isin and Ruppert underline that people are not only always the object, but also the "subject of power" (2015, p. 44). This means people in blogging, messaging, tweeting, liking, and commenting have room to act upon specifically "embodied conventions" of gender, race, class, and nation either through "obedience," "submission," or "subversion" (Ibid.). By engaging in digital acts that sustain claims for certain rights, digital citizen subjects come into being:

What are digital acts then? When people perform digital acts in or by saying and doing things through the Internet, they become digital subjects. When people perform digital acts in or by saying and doing 'I, we, they have a right to', they enact themselves as citizen subjects; they are making digital rights claims. (Isin & Ruppert, 2015, p. 69)

Interestingly, this way young connected migrants who are often either formally or discursively not recognized as true European citizens, may make claims for universal human or children's rights. So far, across fields like citizenship and legal studies, such digitally enacted singular, plural, or third person claims or denials of rights have mostly been considered from the perspective of representation and meaning making (e.g. Livingstone & Bulger, 2014). This also holds true for migration and (new) media scholars, as Madianou rightly observed "traditionally, most research on media and migration has focused on the question of representation – the ways migrants are (mis)represented in various formats of news and popular culture" (2014, p. 324).

Affectivity and Digital Materiality

However, here I would like to foreground that acting digitally not only involves symbolic processes. Individual human beings using technologies have variously situated feelings, sensations, and affects. Contributing to what is called an 'affective turn,' which is not a neatly organized field but includes a wide variety of sketchy and messy areas of study, Internet researchers have recently expanded their focus from meaning making towards feelings and sensations. For example, in *Networked Affect*, Ken Hillis, Susanna Paasonen, and Michael Petit chart how users engage with technologies and digital networks (2015). In this field, scholars do not commonly touch upon how affect is differently experienced across or between various bodies, race, gender or geographical locations. Influenced by the turn towards affect in other fields, migration studies scholars are starting to take note of the particular bodily sensations of migrant subjects (Boehm & Swank, 2011). How can we develop affect in our toolkit for critical analysis?

The term "affect" is a translation from the Latin word "affectus," which can be understood as "passion," "emotion," or "desire" (Brennan, 2004, pp. 3-4). Deleuze describes how affectivity may involve emotional passages that happen when bodies engage in a relationship with images:

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, p. 48)

Seen this way, affects are pre-emotional, they refer to changes in one's body's experiential state. Consider for example shivering, getting chicken pox on one's arms, sweaty hand palms, feeling a lump in one's throat, or feeling breathless after seeing or hearing traumatic news reports on the news. Emotions refer to how those passages can be made meaningful through one's biographical experiences. Building on Deleuze (1988) and feminist theorizations, I understand affectivity as the process where bodies of technology users, triggered by interactions on their screens, attain a different emotional state. Young e-diasporas, as I will explore below, offer specifically situated instances of how affectivity can be audio-visually "transmitted" from one person to another (Brennan, 2004, pp. 5-6). Social media platforms hosting user-generated content such as diasporic videos or transnational friendship networks become "archives of feelings" full of mediated sensations that "are encoded not only in the content of the texts themselves but in the practices that surround their production and reception" (Cvetkovich, 2003, p. 7). More specifically, inspired by Sara Ahmed's writing on the cultural politics of affect (2004), I apprehend affective digital acts as three-fold: they circulate digital content between situated users, these digital objects may "accumulate" strong affective responses among specifically situated subjects, and they are a response which may or may not "endure" over time and space (2004, pp. 45, 46, 91). Of course, as in representational theory, digital acts such as having a Skype chat do not causally determine a certain feeling, but the affective relationship of an individual with particular digital objects can make them matter at a certain space and time. Media phenomenology and digital materiality offers means to specify further the relationship between people, digital media, and embodied affects.

Media theorists have long debated the relationship between media and the senses. Marshall McLuhan, probably most famously argued that media extend the human sensorium (1964). In *Feed Forward*, Mark Hansen offers further nuance by theorizing that the contemporary "technical distribution of human experience" is marked by a "surplus of sensibility" (2015, p. 66). The surplus of sensibility refers to how 21st century media intensify experiences rather than perception only. Phenomenological media theory emphasizes sensations as relational processes, mutually constituted at the interplay between users and social media platforms. Not determined causally by its technical basis, the differences between affective experiences of various users illustrate Facebook's medium-specific "experiential affordances" (Ibid., p. 73). Digital material architectures have been questioned for their increasing segmentation or "platformization" (Helmond, 2015), but also for possibly facilitating encounters with strangers through "engineered serendipity" (Zuckerman, 2013, p. 131). These structures do not dictate experience, but do configure a specific radius of action (Van den Boomen et al., 2009). Affordances are constellations of material settings, ideologies, distinct usages, and user perceptions (boyd, 2011). Particularly located affective sensibilities should be added to this list.

People invest time and emotion in the messages, videos, photos, and texts they upload and consume online. Today's social media culture industries like Facebook and Twitter capitalize upon such user-generated data. However, their profit-driven focus does not deplete the full rich, heterogeneous "sensory potential" of this data (Hansen, 2015, p. 66). The socio-technically produced intensification of the senses is not only a nexus to grasp the relationship between human agency and economic exploitation of user-generated surplus value. The surplus of sensibility can also take the form of a micro-political digital act. A focus on affectivity and its every-changing character is therefore poignant particularly to understand the conflicting digitally mediated sensations of (forced) migrants. Illustratively, Saskia Witteborn demonstrates how asylum seekers in Germany navigate legal, economic, and political (in) securities through digital practices. Drawing on the concept of "becoming" to understand how forced migrants shift between "moments," "ways of being," and relationships, Witteborn teases out how forced migrants digitally negotiate between perceptibility and imperceptibility:

Becoming visible or invisible through self-presentation, co-presence and mobilization is especially important for people seeking asylum, as they live outside of the nation socially and politically and need to find ways to negotiate and extend their restricted ways of relating. (2015, p. 354)

The becoming of migrants demands us to move beyond the domain of the representational. Seen as affective processes, becoming signal contradictions and potentialities. Thus, affectivity can be operationalized by studying passages of bodily states. Here, I am specifically concerned with young connected migrants, whose bodies may reach a different emotional state, while interacting through the screen with people living close by or at a distance.

Ye-Diasporas

It should be noted that the bulk of media and migration scholarship on "digital diasporas" or "e-diasporas" apply these terms to describe transnational community formation among migrants. Illustratively, Victoria Bernal argues Eritrean migrants' digital practices "reterritorialize the diaspora, locating them in Eritrea" (2015, p. 32). More attention is needed however for the dialectical and relational "co-presence" practices that migrants engage in "to be here [in a country of arrival] and there [in their homeland] at the same time" (Diminescu, 2008, p. 572). Indeed, while it is important to acknowledge the significance of the ways in which digital practices enable migrant and marginalized subjects to feel at home in a non-hostile environment and secure among like-minded individuals in digital spaces, singling out only these continuous practices – as postcolonial theorists have argued twenty years ago – risk glossing over dynamism and change. In their work on diasporic identification, Stuart Hall (1990) and Paul Gilroy (1993), emphasize its two-fold character: it involves both feeling attached to one's "roots" and a sense of a shared history and stable community but also

future-orientation, transformations, and new intercultural "routes." Diaspora may be conceived as an "in-between" or "third" space, where differential individual and collective positionings can be articulated and contested (Bhabha, 1994; Brah, 1996). Therefore, e-diasporas – rather than constituted only through a vertical unidirectional relationship to a distant homeland or a horizontal connection to a scattered transnational community – may be understood as reconfigured through medium-specific digital network configurations. Multi-platformed digital materiality coalesces with earlier postcolonial understandings that emphasize diaspora spaces and encompasses senses of boundedness, stability, anchoring, and reterritorialization but also operates as site of contestation, encounter, exclusion, and solidarity. My focus on affect and human right claims provides another partial perspective on e-diasporas. Transnational exchanges are not only performative representations, but also involve *sensations*. In this sense, the analytic perspective of affectivity should be understood as a compatible toolkit. Engaging with the affective turn does not mean we ought to turn away from representational dynamics; attention for corporeal sensations gives us a richer understanding of how young connected migrants through their digital practices claim their right to transnational communication, identification, and association within and across the borders of Europe. In the next section, I operationalize my understanding of "migrants," "users," and "e-diasporas" further. I introduce methodological structures and data-sets and offer my rationale for comparing a wide-range of ye-diasporas.

Methodological Considerations

The critical theoretical framework sketched above is grounded and developed further in dialogue with data gathered through multi-sited qualitative fieldwork with 143 young connected migrants living inside and at the borders of Europe. By doing so, I aim to go beyond "methodological Europeanism" (Garelli & Tazzioli, 2013) and question the imagination of European normative family life as homogeneously white, Christian post-secular, and middle-class. More specifically, the argumentation connects snap-shots of affective digital technology use among three geo-politically distributed groups: 1) Moroccan-Dutch youth in the Netherlands; 2) young Somalis stranded in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia who aspire to migrate to Europe; and, 3) young Londoners of various ethnic backgrounds. For the purpose of this article, I thematically analyzed through the prism of affectivity and communication rights previously unconnected data-sets. Analyzed data includes interview transcripts, maps hand drawn by informants, and archived digital materials such as YouTube videos, and Facebook postings network visualizations. Of course, the physical/digital experiences of these young people varied greatly. After sketching the fieldwork contexts, I elaborate why I have chosen to compare these three instances of ye-diaspora formation.

Fieldwork Contexts

First, data used for the first snapshot originate from doctoral studies conducted as part of *Wired Up. Digital media as innovative socialization tools for migrant youth*, an Utrecht University research project (2008-2012). Moroccan-Dutch youth present a specifically situated case of young connected migrants, because in the Netherlands, in recent years, anti-immigration sentiments and Islamophobia especially targets their community. Moroccan-Dutch people constitute roughly two percent of the total Dutch population of 16.7 million. Spearheaded by right-wing politician Geert Wilders and his Party for Freedom (PVV), racist social media memes, and sensationalist news reporting, Moroccan youth are seen as a problem. Moroccan-Dutch boys are often depicted as troublemakers, 'street-terrorists,' or fundamentalists who are especially susceptible to online radicalization, while girls are being constructed as either un-emancipated or oppressed and in need of being saved from Islamic culture. Together with a Moroccan-Dutch research assistant, I conducted 43 face-to-face in-depth interviews with Moroccan-Dutch young people between 2009 and 2012. This group includes 22 young women and 21 young men ranging in age from 12 to 18 years old.

Second, I present a snapshot drawn from narratives of young Somalis left-behind by their parents and loved ones in Addis Ababa, capital city of Ethiopia. Resulting from over two decades of armed

conflict in Somalia, an estimated 500,000 civilians have been killed; more than one million Somalis have fled their country and many more have been internally displaced. As part a Royal Dutch Academy for Arts and Sciences Council for the Humanities stipend funded project *Technology as a refuge?*, I conducted face-to-face interviews and a focus group together with a local Somali research assistant. The second distinctly situated case of young connected migrants included five young females and 11 young males, ranging from 13 to 26 years old, living in Bole Michael, Addis Ababa's 'Somali' neighborhood. Even though they are deprived from most conventional forms of capital, they commonly do own smart-phones and affectively maintain transnational networks.

Thirdly, as part of the European Union Marie Curie funded postdoctoral study called *Urban Politics of London Youth Analysed Digitally* (UPLOAD), I present a third snapshot drawn on a study with 41 young males and 43 young females ranging in age from 11 to 21 years old in London. London, as a global nodal point in the transnational flow of migrants, is characterized by a situation of "super diversity" (Vertovec, 2007) where ethnic minorities are in the majority. I held interviews in Tottenham, which is one of the most culturally diverse areas in London. Tottenham is also where the 2011 'Black Berry Messenger' London riots took place following the escalation of a peaceful protest in response to the police shooting of Mark Duggan, a local mixed-race youth. Besides interviewing informants from working-class families in the Tottenham, Haringey area, I interviewed young people from middle-class families in Hammersmith-Fulham and upper-middle class families in Chelsea-Kensington between 2013 and 2015. Politicians and journalists commonly singled out issues of race and digital technology in their analysis of these riots. Navigating post-riot London, the question arises how young Londoners make do with living in the co-presence and close proximity with cultural difference while also maintaining in touch with loved ones living abroad.

Research Rationale

Paradoxically, after analyzing individually and comparing these three disconnected data sets, it occurred to me that the sheer complexities of everyday lived reality among young connected migrants cannot be sufficiently acknowledged through the flat meta-categories of the "migrant", "user," and "e-diaspora." First, I argue, there is a need for more nuanced understandings of "who migrants are" (Fechter & Walsh, 2010, p. 1198). Below I seek to problematize the general category of 'the migrant' by contrasting experiences of (children of) guest-laborers (Moroccan-Dutch youth), refugees (young Somalis stranded in Addis Ababa), postcolonial migrants and international expats (young Londoners of various class backgrounds). Additionally, although relatively absent in the literature, children and young people are an inherent part of migration circuits and especially understudied digital practices of young migrants are a productive entry point to explore migration from the perspective of migrants themselves (Wilding, 2011). These subjects are variously located in intersectional grids of privilege and power and their affective engagement with digital technologies offers a new way to foreground continuities and discontinuities along the lines of age, generation, ethnicity, gender, location, and nationality.

Second, as is for example evident from Hansen's *Feed Forward*, in digital culture studies 'the user' is often an unquestioned, flattened category that presumes equivalence between all those who have access (Gilbert, 2010; Sims, 2013). This also holds true for information and communication technology for development (ICT4D) initiatives that champion the neutral potential of digital technologies as enabling. UNHCR programme coordinator Daniela Ionita illustratively states, "We must use new tools and technologies to empower refugees, given the importance of the internet, social media and distance learning" (2011, p. 32). However, technologies that are envisioned as 'saviors' for vulnerable groups can also end up becoming technologies that mark them as inauthentic and undeserving. Digital practices of migrant and minority youth have been repeatedly considered as emblematic unacceptable technology use during various 'crisis' moments. Online discussion forums frequented by Moroccan-Dutch youth are questioned for causing online radicalization. Young Londoners using the Black-Berry Messenger app are equated with rioters, while most recently, selfie-taking has become a signifier of

the European invasion of 'bogus-asylum seekers.' Thus, migrant and minority youth are often at the center of heated debate on technologies. However, their own voices are often neither sought out and included, nor heard. Their use of technologies is repeatedly distinguished from normative use through interpreting it as dangerous, foreign, exotic, and alien. For this purpose, I have developed creative and non-oppressive digital methodological structures to encourage informants to have a say over their own self-representation. Informants were invited to use pens and papers to produce individual hand-drawn maps of what their Internet looks like and what transnational contacts they maintain through digital media. Also, we collaboratively visualized and analyzed Facebook friendship networks. Therefore, without bringing into account the kind of granularity of subjectivity, identity, and affectivity that feminist and postcolonial theory and research praxis affords, migrants' (and other non-mainstream users') experiences of hierarchical digital culture are easily overlooked (Leurs & Shepherd, 2016).

Thirdly, uncritical or unspecified use of the notion of e-diasporas/digital diasporas risks dismissive, but rightful criticisms for its "technophilia" (Andersson, 2013) and "fluffiness" (Creswell, 2010). For this purpose, ye-diasporas will be empirically grounded not only as specifically situated communities and transnational families invested in multi-geographical connectedness and affinities, but also as distinctly domesticated and electronically mediated through the digital-material "platformization of the web" (Helmond, 2015). As part of my medium specific focus, I consider platforms as assemblages of digital material affordances that are domesticated by physically and digitally situated users in relationships with interfaces, codes, and community norms (Van den Boomen et al, 2009). I take the specificity of digitality seriously by contrasting migrant youths' engagement with the digital materiality of three platforms: the use of YouTube by Moroccan-Dutch youth to exercise e-nationalism; stranded Somali youths' emotional investment in transnational voice-over-internet-protocol (VoIP) audio-video chat software such as Skype; and, young Londoners ambient co-presence sustained on Facebook.

Diasporic Video Consumption and Affective Nostalgia

A common theme among Moroccans living abroad is their continual attachment to their country (l'blad) and their hometowns…I wanted to create a virtual outlet for these individuals so that they may experience Morocco visually and hopefully fill some void. By using the Internet a Moroccan individual becomes an 'eMoroccan' who can experience 'virtual Morocco'. (eMoroccan)

eMoroccan, the Moroccan-American adult male vlogger, uploads his videos to YouTube. His videos, which are all shot in Morocco, are consumed in the worldwide Moroccan diaspora. With over 485,000 people having viewed one of his 39 movies, eMoroccan plays a key role in "circulating" transnational affectivity (Ahmed, 2004, p. 60). Watching videos such *Landing in Morocco onboard Royal Air Maroc* or *Autoroutes du Maroc* provide Moroccans living in the diaspora an opportunity to relive prior experiences they had travelling to their homeland. "Accumulating" value in the body of viewers (Ahmed, 2014, p. 91) these videos may trigger affective transnational belongings; making digital visits to Morocco users can become "electronic Moroccans." Such diasporic videos can be recognized as a separate *YouTube* video genre, with their particular subject and aesthetic choices.

As audience members, Moroccan-Dutch youth exemplify how sensibility may be technically produced. For Moroccan-Dutch youth, both those born in the Netherlands and those born in Morocco, YouTube is an important means to experience Morocco. Besides (early) childhood memories, stories told by parents, uncles, aunties, and grandparents, as well as holiday visits, consuming videos offers an individual and emotional means to revalue their ethnic heritage. For example, Abdelsammad, a Moroccan-born 15-year-old boy, shared:

I watch movies about where we come from. On YouTube, there are movies about where we lived. That is nice to see. There is much to find about Nador. Many, many movies. For instance, clips that show

the roads, the shopping malls, the boulevard. Lots of things that you are familiar with. I was born there and lived there until I was three years old, but I know it better from holidays.

Besides using Facebook to keep in touch with family members living in Morocco and across Europe including Belgium, France, and Spain, Abdelsammad takes pleasure in viewing videos shot in Nador. Meryam, a 15-year-old Netherlands-born girl described, "I always say Morocco is the country of my dreams." She explained, "My parents are from there, and a piece of it is in you." Meryam confirms the affective capacity of mediation to enable "second and third generation diaspora members to become familiar with and connect to the experience of diaspora" (Turan Hoffman, 2014, p. 143). The affective optic on video consumption sheds light on how migrant youth experience digital travels across online and offline geographies.

The young informants turned to YouTube for such videos when they felt "*heimwee,*" the Dutch word for nostalgia. Sixteen-year-old Nevra's parents migrated from Rabat. Besides remembering Rabat by including the name of the city in her email address, she watches diasporic videos. She said, "I kind of enjoy watching those. They make me go back in my mind to Morocco." Amounting to an archive of accumulated affect, videos shot in Morocco help youth to alleviate feelings of homesickness. Fourteen-year-old Kenza shared that she highly values YouTube videos like the one made by eMoroccan "because sometimes I do get quite strongly filled with a feeling of nostalgia, because I'm missing Morocco." The impact of this viewing experience cannot completely be understood on the basis of perception only.

Indeed, the medium-specific affordances of YouTube mediate "the sensory basis for such experience" (Hansen, 2015, p. 47). In this specific case the affective affordances can be located in the soul-searching of particular viewers, as well as in the materiality of these diasporic videos. The videos address the senses; as a sign of authenticity, they are marked by non-professional, but realistic standards such as diegetic sound only, low-resolution, and unsteady, unedited single position shots. They have the power to move viewers in the diaspora, as they are able to follow the footsteps of the maker who was present in the captured setting. This imagery largely does not correspond with dominant tourist renderings of exotic Morocco, but does hold a specific appeal for migrant youth from Morocco.

Members of the young Moroccan e-diaspora distinctively domesticate YouTube. Their engagement with YouTube underlines how the digital materiality of the platform co-constructs affective user engagement. For example, the 'subscribe' interface features functions as a "binding technique" (Dean, 2015, p. 90); eMoroccan's channel brings together an imagined and numerical audience of like-minded individuals. The number of views and likes further offers an "affective nugget" (Ibid.) for users sharing an affinity with Moroccan e-nationalism. By enjoying transnational videos, the Moroccan-Dutch youth I interviewed claim their right to affectively become an "eMoroccan." This experiential, embodied process reflects digital right claims to maintain one's identity and to freely associate across borders and across geographical distance. Besides positive cultural identification, the videos also operate as sites of contestation. Although they also function as a sanctuary to affectively connect to one's homeland, Ayoub, a 15-year-old Netherlands-born boy laments that the diasporic videos' comments sections are full of verbal abuse and discrimination "similar to how some people give me a dirty look outdoors, under videos dealing with Morocco, they write 'get out of the country.'"

Transnational Video-Chat and Cruel Optimism

The second case-study details how young Somali migrants stranded in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia feel about staying in touch with loved ones abroad using voice-over-internet-protocol (VoIP) audio-video chat software like Skype, Nimbuzz, and Viber. Lucky, a 20-year-old young man, maintains connections using Nimbuzz and Skype. The map includes contacts in countries including the United Kingdom, Sweden, Norway, Italy, the United States, Libya, Djibouti, Somalia, Uganda, Ethiopia, and Kenya. Lucky "was born and bred in Mogadishu," the capital city of Somalia, "and lived there for 20 years." He "had never went to another country before leaving." At the moment of the interview, he

had been living in Addis Ababa for eight months. Many of his family and friends had already fled from Somalia. As a result, he shared "the people are abroad. Somalis are living all over the world." This is also reflected in Lucky's contact lists on various social media accounts; he had "roughly 200 contacts on Nimbuzz" who "mostly live in Europe, America, and Africa."

Lucky mostly described his emotional digital connections with the two most important women in his life: his girlfriend and his mum. Keeping in touch with them enabled him to emotionally cope with living in a situation of hardship. He chats with his girlfriend every night. He said, "I would like to chat, because I love her, and she loves me." They have to make do with a long-distance relationship: "my girlfriend she stayed in Somalia. She hasn't got internet on her laptop, but she has a mobile phone with internet connection." Living in a neighboring country, they are physically separated from each other, but as Lucky mentioned, "she's online so it does not matter." Lucky's mum "uses the computer at home" and lives in Norway:

My mother is very happy when she sees me. It's very good, because my mother, it was a long time when we saw each other. We only meet on Skype, and I see her face, so I'm very happy.

Like most of the informants, Lucky was awaiting visa application procedures to reunite with family members in Europe. However, by using Skype he already regularly crossed the borders of Fortress Europe.

Several medium-specific affordances have an impact on the experiences of the young stranded migrants, such as being able to see faces of loved ones and hearing them speak live, as well as being able to share files such as photographs. Two themes emerged while coding the transcriptions of the interviews and focus group. First, with statements such as feeling "very happy," "good," "frustrated," and "excited," informants emphasized affective responses to transnational communication. Secondly, informants often mentioned feeling "connected," "bridging distance," and "together," referencing shifting sensations of a temporary suspension of distances.

As a white, university educated man holding Dutch citizenship, I was able to fly from Amsterdam to Addis Ababa via Istanbul, and I could effortlessly cross the borders of Fortress Europe obtaining a visa on arrival at Addis Ababa Bole International Airport. In stark contrast, the informants were awaiting reunification with their parents, siblings, and loved ones, mostly in other overseas destinations including Europe. Most stranded Somalis live in Bole Michael, the 'Somali neighborhood' in Addis Ababa, which is situated next to the international airport. The roar of jet planes is a constant reminder of their immobility. Indeed, the informants experience difficult challenges in accessing economic, social, cultural, and symbolic capital (Bourdieu, 1986). Living in overcrowded spaces, their life is one of sheer poverty, characterized by high crime rates and unemployment. The development of cultural capital comes to a standstill, as they have no access to formal education. These young refugees also lack status. Upon crossing the Ethiopian border, migrants are obliged to register with the government as asylum seekers. Registered migrants are moved to refugee camps. However, like many others, the informants chose to live in a status of semi-illegality in Bole Michael, a situation tolerated by officials. Access to economic, symbolic, and social capital is often only possible through transnational communication; migrants are separated from close family members on whom they rely for a level of social interaction and trust in humanity, remittances, and to navigate complex asylum procedures. The sense of togetherness explains the strong emotional investment in digital connectivity, which may be theorised with the notion of transnational affective capital. The workings of transnational affective capital can be teased out by considering whether everyday communicative routines are felt to mitigate challenging offline circumstances. Can transnational video-chat promote what Anthony Giddens describes as "ontological security" or does it perhaps further add to "existential anxiety?" There is no absolute agreement on "what creates a sense of ontological security that will carry the individual through transitions, crisis and circumstances of high risk," but a certain "emotional" trust in "persons" and "things" is considered key (1991, p. 37-38).

Figure 2. Contact map Lucky, 20-year-old Somali living in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia
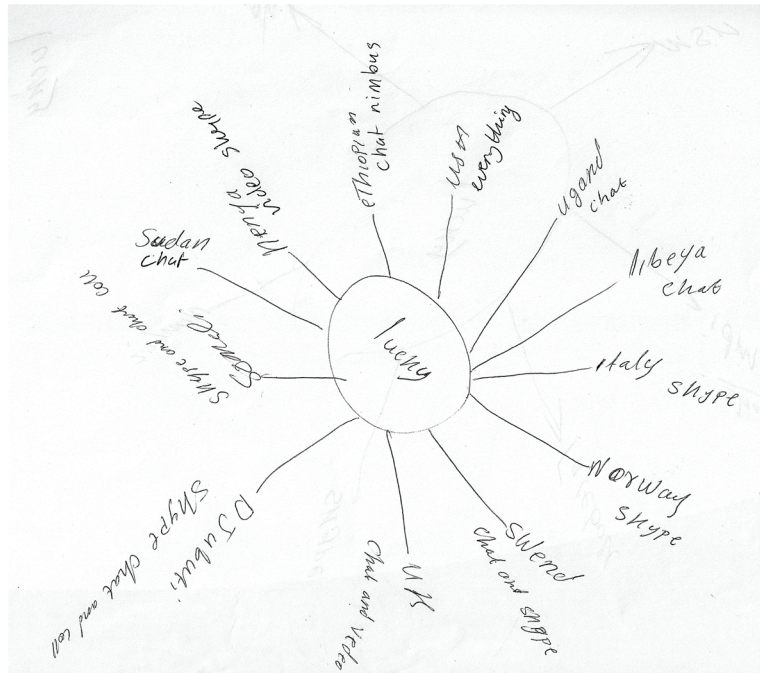
Communicative routines depend on money to pay for mobile phone top-up cards or credit at Internet café's. Tamrat, who offers Internet access on 12 terminals in his Internet café in Bole Michael, said young Somalis in the neighbourhood "do not have anywhere else to go. So they always want to have Internet connection." He charges 12 Ethiopian Birr per hour (roughly 0.50 euro/dollar at the moment of fieldwork). During my focus group with six young men aged between 13 and 18, informants mentioned they were in contact with their parents using video-chat anywhere between "everyday" to "twice a week," "twice a month" to "sometimes." Experiences shared by informants indicate highly ambivalent feelings. The medium specific "sensory affordance" of seeing and hearing loved ones on their screens can be said to function as "bodily supplementations" (Hansen, 2015, p. 45). Seventeen-year-old Lovehunter shared, "Seeing them through video feels like I'm already there" and 21-year-old Mursi explained that for him, "being apart or living at long distances apart is not a problem, you can use video calls in which you can see each other while talking and sometimes somewhere in the world you can meet again, face-to-face." This way, transnational communication functions as a coping strategy, providing a temporary sense of ontological security.

Twenty-three-year-old Ifrah was waiting to join her husband who made an asylum claim in the Netherlands. The surplus of sensibility is useful to acknowledge the importance of being able to listen to and see her loved ones on Skype. She said, "We talk like face-to-face, visually. There is a big distance between you and that person, yet you are able to hear one another and see through the video." She described temporary suspensions of distance ("I feel that sometimes I can bridge distance."), but also described the painful reminder of the physical separation after finishing the exchange "the moment you hang up you realize that there is a distance and that kills you." Thus, on a personal micro-level, a sensibility of "becoming" is transmitted and circulated (Witteborn, 2015). A sense of trust in a more positive future is sustained through relying on technologies (hardware, software).

More poignantly, the ambiguous affective experiences of the informants reflect a sense of "cruel optimism" (Berlant, 2011). Their fantasies, which are almost solely digitally sustained, revolve

around desires for outward and upward mobility. In articulating their daily routines, it seems their subjectivity is completely future oriented. They feel stuck, their life is at a standstill, and they live in total dependency of loved ones and strangers abroad who may offer them a chance "to look forward to being in the world" (Berlant, 2011, p. 21). This "phantasmatic intersubjectivity" (Ibid) is evident from their choice of pseudonyms such as Miss Lonely, Lucky, and Lovehunter. Cruel optimism can also be witnessed in the various digital practices informants describe. Twenty-three-year-old Princesa frequents 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. They are Muslims, but in different parts of the world, they can be white like you for example from Canada, they can be from Japan, the interest for me is forming a real relationship.

Princesa was still living in Addis, as she hadn't been able to find a partner yet. Lovehunter shared he "would like to get married" while adding "I don't want to get caught in the unknown in the future." He too feels the Internet is a place to possibly find a marriage partner and said, "I have a passion to reach the end of these intentions, that's why I'm taking classes" to be better at using computers.

Princesa and Lovehunter project their hope on digital platforms; the Internet they domesticate is fundamental for imagining and actualizing a different life. They invest hope in contacting white foreigners in their desires to avoid being "caught in the unknown." Additionally, informants mention going to local Addis Ababa photo studios to stage and manipulate photographs. For example, Miss Lonely notes fellow stranded youth "go to the studios… they use Photoshop to beautify… where you are. It's not where you are." This way, you can be "pretending to be in places you are not or [show] things you don't have." People she knows use it to "trick people that they live abroad. So to be liked, haha." Cruel optimism is a lens to acknowledge on the micro-scale the affective experiences of young dislocated migrants and to make the jump between universal, law-like theorizations on affect and human rights law, which generally is devoid of any situated affect. For these young migrants who lack formal citizenship-status, their affective optimism reveals a digital imaginary that is indeed extremely cruel when understood against the backdrop of the agonizing hardship they encounter in their everyday lived realities. On a macro-scale, these narratives demonstrate that young connected migrants digitally traverse the borders of Fortress Europe continuously. As such, networking the periphery in the Global South to the metropolitan centre, transnational families problematize traditional conceptions of European family life, evidence the suspended non-citizenship status of some migrant groups and contest EU's human rights record.

Ambient Co-Presence on Social Media

The third case study considers implications of transnational "ambient co-presence" (Madianou, 2016) sustained in the everyday use of social media among young Londoners. Madianou developed this concept to elaborate upon the specific migratory experience of 'always on' or ubiquitous connectivity, "the peripheral, yet intense awareness of distant others made possible through the affordances of ubiquitous media environments" (Ibid, p. 1). The majority of contacts Catarina (Figure 3) keeps on Facebook are fellow young Londoners of diverse backgrounds, evidencing her sense of belonging. She said, "If someone would ask me where I was from I would say I'm from England but my family is Portuguese." However, similar to most young people I interviewed in London, she also uses social media to keep connected to family and friends living overseas. Transnational connectivity is an important part of their transnational lifestyle. As part of her everyday routine, she plays casual Facebook games like Candy Crush with her cousins who live in Brazil "where our family is based from my dad's side, like where my grandparents were and their brothers and sisters. But then their kids all spread out to everywhere." Also, she frequently sends Facebook messages and tags her Portuguese friends in photos; the cousins live locally as well as in Portugal. Similarly, Bob, a 17-year-old Jamaican-

born young man who "came up to this country [meaning England] when I was five," shared he has "got family all around the world" meaning countries such as the UK, Jamaica, Canada, and America. He uses What's App, Instagram, Snapchat, Facebook, and Twitter to "kind of keep in contact:"

It makes me feel happy, cos I don't wanna lose contact with my family. I don't wanna be that person that can only fly out and see them from a couple of weeks and fly back. I like to be in contact with them constantly. Every time I like to see what's up, what's new with them... And I just got used to that really.

In the absence of physical co-presence, Bob and Catarina mobilize social media applications and their smart phones to do family across distance. The ordinariness of this ubiquitous transnational connectivity is the distinctive feature I would like to unpack further here. Ruby, a 17-year-old girl who describes she "was born here" in London, but feels she's "from Portugal," is always on her phone "like most of the day, while I'm going places, or when I'm waiting for something." She aptly described her routine instant connectivity with cousins who live in Portugal:

I use it to speak to them, every day, as in if you are having a normal conversation with someone who you text who's in the same country as you…because even though you don't see them every day, some of them are just as close as people who you do see every day, and if you don't talk for ages, when you see each other next, it kind of feels like you are more distant than you were.

In contrast with young Somalis discussed in the previous case-study, young Londoners do not rely on transnational communication as a scarce resource to (re)gain a fragile sense of ontological security, rather for them it can be said to function to sustain a peripheral awareness of "what's new" in the lives of their peers who live overseas. Consider for example the situation of Gabriel, a 15-year-old girl from Malawi who has lived with her mum in London for two years. She finds it "awesome" to be able to use Skype and Facebook to speak with her dad and her four sisters who live in Malawi:

It's kind of like living in one mode and then the other people living in another world and there's a big huge gap between those two worlds so you can't actually see each other for a long time. I normally see them every August, for one month, and it kind of feels like you're in their world and you can finally see them and talk to them and hear their voices and everything so it's…really good.
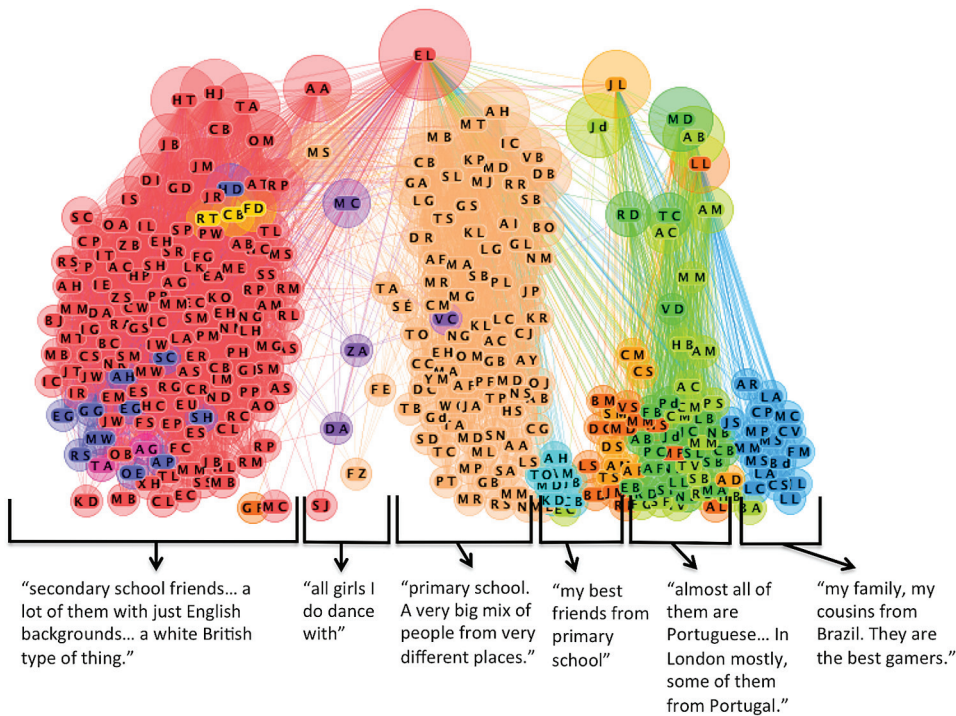
Affordances including immediacy, visuality, and mobility of social media and smart phones add to a new sensibility, allowing these young people to combine various "modes" of living and belonging across geographies. Rather than having to re-establish bonds during sparse face-to-face encounters, their everyday communicative exchanges across social media platforms add up to a "transnational habitus" (Nedelcu, 2012), which they can call upon instantly. The emotional reassurance that comes with this lifestyle highlights the importance of the right to communicate and identify across borders. Of course, rather than considering this socialization across borders as a threat to narrowly defined European traditional family life, this habituation is more banal rather than spectacular, radicalizing, isolating or hindering integration.

CONCLUSION

This article maps new articulations of European family-life as digitized and affective transnational processes, in the face of forced and voluntary migration and dislocation. Particularly, the article questions and contextualizes the "increasing anxiety around 'immigrant' family practices in European states" (Kringelbach, 2015, p. 131). It does so by rendering visible how the notion of Europe is actively remade from below by acknowledging the micro-political potential of young connected migrants'

Figure 3. Visualization Facebook friendship network; 14-year-old London-born, Portuguese Catarina

"secondary school friends… a lot of them with just English backgrounds… a white British type of thing."

"all girls I do dance with"

"primary school. A very big mix of people from very different places."

"my best friends from primary school"

"almost all of them are Portuguese… In London mostly, some of them from Portugal."

"my family, my cousins from Brazil. They are the best gamers."

everyday practices. For migrants who maintain their family life across state borders – a process which takes place through digital platforms such as Skype and Facebook commonly used within the private domain of the home – their digital transnational connectedness has emerged as new site of contestation in the public domain.

Inflated political rhetoric and heated social media discussion on refugees taking selfies upon their arrival on the shores of islands in the European Mediterranean or the use of Black Berry Messenger among young black Londoners is indicative of the paradox that accompanies the geography of discrimination fueled by the Information & Communication for Development (ICT4D) impulse where the 'have not' is afforded the celebration of technological access only as long as it remains distant, foreign, alien, and exotic. The entry of this 'have not' bearing the markings of digital technologies – indeed, sometimes enabled by these markings – to escape her contexts and risk mobility signals a crisis, and the technologies which were supposed to be their 'saviors' end up becoming technologies that mark them as inauthentic and undeserving.

The non-normative digitally mediated practices of the young electronic diaspora that is arriving in Europe as a part of the 'refugee crisis' becomes a space to question and analyse digital human rights claims made through affect. Through conducting themselves online, Moroccan-Dutch youth watching diasporic videos (empirical snapshot 1), stranded Somali youth living in Addis Ababa engaging in transnational Skype conversations (empirical snapshot 2), or young Londoners using social media to keep up with their loved ones overseas (empirical snapshot 3) were shown to affectively claim rights of communication, association, and identification. This does not mean that in the current era of digital connectivity, transnational families are free-floating nor completely deterritorialized – boundaries and insurmountable distances are often forcibly and painfully felt. Indeed, paradoxically, the myriad differences among the lived experiences of these young connected migrants reveal meta-categories of the 'migrant,' 'user,' and 'e-diaspora' urgently need to be de-flattened. To do this de-flattening

work, the article establishes new links between migrant studies, feminist and postcolonial theory, and digital cultures. As a key entry-point I take political affect to understand questions of human rights and mobility to argue there is urgent need to conceive of new units of social and political governance in the re-building of 'post-Brexit' Europe through the transnational 'refugee crisis.'

The dominant focus on formal politics and European family life favors a sense of rationality which is associated with western, white, male, middle class and bounded, place-based experiences. Young migrants find themselves at a wrong intersection. However, transnational migrant connectivity can be acknowledged as a distinct form of e-politics. It may include performing digital citizenship rights, in particular civic rights including the right to free speech, freedom to associate, and freedom of conscience and identity. These rights are institutionalized in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the UN Convention of the Child. However, they are at odds with post-colonial exclusionary imaginaries of white, middle-class, European family life. The empirical data raise attention for ambiguous relationships between inclusive and exclusive processes of globalization and display EU's difficult self-positioning in the human rights – securitisation nexus. Although the article focuses on distinct "ye-diasporas," there is certainly cross-cultural relevance in the argument on the affective dynamics of making digital right claims. For example- as evidenced in Dhoest's article in this special issue – little is known about the e-politics in the senses of (diasporic) LGTBTQ communities.

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