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# Chapter 11

## Navigating Affective (In)securities: Forced Migration and Transnational Family Relationships



Johanna Hiitola, Zeinab Karimi, and Johanna Leinonen

### 11.1 Introduction

This chapter explores the emotional and affective dimensions of family separation as experienced by forced migrants separated from their transnational families by Finland's family reunification policy. Most migrants undergo temporary or permanent separation from their family members during the process of migration. For some, family separation is an expected result of a family member's decision to work or study in another country; for others, it is an unwanted – and occasionally unexpected – consequence of the tightening family reunification policies in many countries. Regardless of the specific circumstances, a growing number of migrants (and their descendants) are maintaining family ties across borders. Especially since the 2000s, the vast scholarship on transnational families has examined transnational family constellations, remittances and communication across borders, care practices between migrants and 'those left behind', and the ways in which transnational life moulds gender relations (e.g., Parreñas, 2005; Baldassar et al., 2007; Kilkey & Merla, 2014).

While the early scholarship on transnational families analysed *how* family members managed to maintain a sense of family unity, researchers have more recently started to inquire *why* family members continue to do so across time, space and generations – as Wise and Velayutham (2017, p. 117) ask, what *compels* people to maintain relationships despite distance? Research on emotions in the context of

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transnational families has argued that emotions should be considered a ‘constitutive part of the transnational family experience itself’ (Skrbiš, 2008, p. 236; see also Baldassar & Gabaccia, 2011; Baldassar & Merla, 2014). For instance, scholars have examined the emotional labour involved in transnational parenting, care giving and care chains. Although research has primarily focused on the transnational care work undertaken by women, recent work points out that men perform emotional labour within transnational families as well (Charsley & Liversage, 2015; Schmalzbauer, 2015).

Transnational families are typically studied in the context of the globalization of labour mobility. Scholarship that considers the emotional webs of transnational families formed by forced migration is harder to find (see, however, Tiilikainen, 2020). This is surprising when we consider that the basic functions of family – protection, safety, intimacy, cultural survival – are challenged or made impossible during forced migration (Dellios, 2018). The circumstances of forced migration may require family members to flee at different times or through different routes, separate them along the way, or result in sending one family member first to seek asylum with the hope of family reunion later on. While migrants of various backgrounds and statuses may face involuntary family separation due to strict migration policies – and, consequently, experience stress and anxiety about their family’s future – the situation may be even more difficult for forced migrants. Research shows that a majority of forced migrants end up involuntarily separated from their family members for a long period, which can seriously affect their health and well-being (e.g., Rousseau et al., 2004; Nickerson et al., 2010).

In our own research on forced migrants’ experiences of family separation,<sup>1</sup> we have also found that the consequences of separation can be emotional and traumatic for many forced migrants. While many of the forced migrants we have interviewed felt personally secure in Finland, their emotional and embodied responses to the prolonged family separation they were experiencing pointed to a sense of profound insecurity as a result of their family’s situation, evidenced by signs of significant mental distress (Hiitola, 2019; Leinonen & Pellander, 2020). This observation led us to the present investigation of the role of *affects* when families are coping with family separation. While research on the emotional aspects of transnational family life is an established field, the study of transnational affect is only just emerging (Wise & Velayutham, 2017). We argue that a focus on affects can help researchers understand more deeply the sense of insecurity experienced by separated transnational families. After all, security is, in its essence, emotional. The *affective intensity* of emotion can augment or reduce a body’s ability to act (Murphy, 2012). One can be paralysed by fear and a sense of insecurity, or spring into action, as we will discuss later.

In Finland, most forced migrants face significant challenges in the family reunification process due to legal and bureaucratic obstacles devised to curtail family

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<sup>1</sup>The research presented here is part of a larger project, Family Separation, Migration Status and Everyday Security: Experiences and Strategies of Vulnerable Migrants, funded by the Academy of Finland for the period 2018–2021 and led by Marja Tiilikainen (grant number: 308249).

migration. Forced migrants may be granted one of four different categories of residency: refugee status/asylum, subsidiary protection, residency based on compassionate grounds or residency for victims of human trafficking. Additionally, some migrants may apply for other statuses such as those based on work or studying. Once residency is granted, forced migrants must fulfil various requirements to proceed with the process of family reunification. According to current Finnish legislation (Palander, 2018, pp. 375–380), forced migrants who have been granted residency based on subsidiary protection or compassionate grounds or as a victim of human trafficking must satisfy an income requirement for family reunification, even if they are minors. Furthermore, if a person who has been granted refugee status or asylum on the grounds of persecution does not submit their application for family reunification within 3 months of receiving residency, they must demonstrate the same high income level as any other third-country national who wishes to bring a family member to Finland. For example, the monthly income requirement for a person trying to bring a spouse and three children to Finland is 2900 euros after taxes, which corresponds to a monthly salary of close to 4000 euros. This figure is more than the average monthly income in Finland, and higher than what is required in the other Nordic countries.<sup>2</sup> Many face additional bureaucratic obstacles, such as the difficulty of reaching a Finnish embassy abroad, where family reunification applications must be lodged (Hiitola, 2019). In the following pages, we discuss how families cope in these dire circumstances by bringing into focus the connection between affect and everyday insecurity.

## 11.2 Affect, Everyday (In)security and Family Separation

When interviewing forced migrants, we found that family separation is an intensely emotional experience, which was evidenced by participants' embodied and emotive responses to their situation. This crucial aspect seems to disappear when concentrating theoretically only on the strategies migrants employ to survive. Emotions have the potential to spur action, but can also almost paralyse interviewees into a catatonic state. Feminist scholarship on affect (Ahmed, 2010, 2013; Berlant, 1997, 2011; Sedgwick & Frank, 1995) can help understand why this is the case, as such scholarship allows for the study of emotions, but also delves deeper into the body's capabilities to have an affect or to be affected by other bodies; in other words, affect can 'move' subjects under impossible circumstances. This 'movement' also serves as a link between affect studies and structural analysis: the body's responses to the world tell us about the world and the societies we live in (Berlant, 2011).

In this chapter, we do not systematically separate emotion and affect. However, it is essential to note that as a theoretical concept, affect is more than mere emotion.

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<sup>2</sup>Based on the websites of the Swedish Migration Agency (2021), the Danish Immigration Service (2021), the Norwegian Directorate of Immigration (2021), and the Finnish Immigration Service (2021).

Affect is considered precognitive, meaning that it happens prior to emotions (Coleman & Ringrose, 2013). Emotion, then, is the consequence of a certain affect. However, scholarship on affect has several different ways of approaching the concept, and it is sometimes also used to describe embodied emotions (e.g., Ahmed, 2004b). Walkerdine (2010) distinguishes between three aspects of affect: the sensation (for example, pain), the ideation (the understanding that a feeling is pain), and the defence against pain. Thus, affects can also be grasped through language or through the actions they incite. Following Ahmed (2004a), affect is not about what emotions *are*, but rather what they *do* (in the world or in societies). For example, scholars such as Imogen Tyler (2013) and Judith Butler (2006) analyse various categories of ‘others’ who are stigmatized through affective rhetoric of disgust and danger.

Wise and Velayutham (2017) have extended the analysis of affects into a transnational setting by introducing the concept of *transnational affect*. They connect affective intensities to transnational situations in six ways that also provide a starting point for empirical research: Strategic intensity refers to the act of intensifying affect, such as slapping a table when speaking to amplify the body’s affective engagement with the situation at hand. Moral intensity concerns social codes and norms that are resisted or followed. Embodied intensity can compress time and space and make remembered traumatic incidents seem ‘closer’. Intensity of family ties is maintained through keeping in contact by phone and digital methods. Additionally, material objects such as monetary remittances may intensify affective ties. Finally, Wise and Velayutham suggest that in the absence of family, affective displacement may occur, in which one’s family is replaced by new social ties. Ultimately, Wise and Velayutham (2017, p. 117) argue that it is ‘nonmaterial affective conditions that foster and underpin transnational networks and relationships.’

Transnational affective intensities may become more pronounced when families are forced to stay apart for an extended period. Our research shows that a crucial factor in this is the sense of *everyday insecurity* that family members in Finland and in origin or transit countries experience. We take inspiration from feminist geographers, who have shifted scholarly attention from state-level security to everyday emotional and embodied encounters where security measures are lived, felt and resisted. In particular, feminist scholars have highlighted how geopolitical and everyday securities are ‘interconnected and interdependent’, so that, for example, the securitization of international migration can produce embodied and emotional everyday insecurity for people who are the targets of such measures (Botterill et al., 2019; see also Crawford & Hutchinson, 2016). As Ahmed (2004b) has noted, people’s mobility can be constrained through ‘affective politics of fear’, through which the security of some is enhanced by producing insecurity for others. Our interviewees and their family members are living the embodied and emotional repercussions of security measures enforced by the state, and because of this, their transnational family life is characterized by affective insecurity.

Our research shows that prolonged family separation can produce a generalized state of insecurity, of ‘being unable to predict one’s (and one’s family’s) fate’ (Waite et al., 2014, p. 316), which applies to family members both in Finland and in other

countries. Scholars have described such affective states as *ontological insecurity* (Waite et al., 2014; Innes, 2017; Botterill et al., 2019). The concept of ontological security derives from psychology (Laing, 1960) but has been incorporated into social science research, where scholars have understood it as a ‘psychological need for a sense of predictability and continuity’ (Waite et al., 2014, p. 314). Giddens (1991, p. 92) has elaborated the theory and defined the term as the ‘confidence that most human beings have in the continuity of their self-identity and in the surrounding social and material environments of action.’ Importantly, the concept carries a temporal element; a sense of security involves anticipatory affects and action (Anderson, 2010). Affects can push people to engage in anticipatory acts to improve their and their families’ security. However, if one feels ontologically insecure, this affective state can also diminish one’s ability to act – one can become essentially paralysed by fear or hopelessness.

### 11.3 Methods and Data

The analysis is based on 45 transcribed group and individual interviews with 55 forced migrants in Finland (18 women and 37 men) who were either in the process of trying to bring family members to the country or had eventually been able to do so. Sixteen interviews were conducted with migrants who came to Finland as unaccompanied minors; the rest arrived as adults. All the interviewees had a Finnish residence permit that allowed them to apply for family reunification. The interviews were conducted in Finnish, English, Arabic, Somali or Dari, some with the help of a research assistant. Of the authors of this chapter, Hiitola carried out the substudy as a whole and conducted 41 interviews, Karimi interpreted 6 interviews and translated and transcribed 13 interviews from Dari to English, and Leinonen conducted 4 interviews and participated in designing the research project.

Research ethics were carefully considered and re-evaluated throughout, since most of the interviewees were living in extremely difficult circumstances. All the names used below are pseudonyms. Questions of anonymity have been assessed individually for every story reported in this article. An important ethical choice has been to keep in contact with many of the interviewees after the interview – though, of course, only if they considered it necessary. Recent scholarship on research with refugees stresses that in addition to the ‘do no harm’ principle, it is essential to give back to the community, not just ‘steal stories’ (Krause, 2017; Pittaway et al., 2010). This has been taken into account by trying to influence migration policies through active dissemination of our results outside of academia.

The interviews were emotional, and the interviewees expressed different feelings (anger, sadness, grief, hopelessness, joy). The participants’ stories affected us deeply (see also Knudsen & Stage, 2015) and made us express our own emotions during the interviews (e.g., crying with the participants or expressing sympathy to calm down an interviewee) (see also Blackman, 2012; Blackman & Venn, 2010; Ezzy, 2010). Hearing about experiences of separation from children, sexual or

physical violence, or violent administrative processes invoked emotions in us according to our own vulnerabilities. The intensity of some of the interviews stayed with us and pushed us to write this chapter.

To analyse the data, we first went through the interviews to identify affective intensity (rhythms and peaks) and patterns of circulation of affect in relation to the participants' transnational family life (Knudsen & Stage, 2015). To capture the relational dynamics of affect, we underlined the *everyday flows of forces* (Kolehmainen & Juvonen, 2018, p. 2) that helped us identify the main themes. The themes explained how affects are relational, entangled and embodied in the lives of transnational families (e.g., Blackman, 2012; Blackman & Venn, 2010, p. 8; Seyfert, 2012). In the following pages, we explore the affective dimensions of the everyday insecurity of separated families by focusing on three themes: affective judgement, affective disparity and transnational affect. Together, they bring out how families' insecure futures crucially influence the affective work that family members engage in transnationally. In addition, our discussion brings out how transnational flows of affect are impacted by a family member's intersectional position within the family, the community and the surrounding society.

## 11.4 Affective Judgement in Transnational Families

Previous scholarship has pointed out that affect shapes everyday encounters and relationships through influencing interpretation and judgement. Relationships such as marriage and parent-child relationships are strong 'affective investments', partly because they are valued over other relationships (Kolehmainen & Juvonen, 2018). Several studies show that social norms and hierarchies connected to gender, sexuality, ethnicity and class are maintained and articulated through affective judgement (e.g., Ahmed, 2004a; Kolehmainen, 2012; Tyler, 2013). Affect manifests in connection to structures and hierarchies in intimate relationships through what is seen as desirable, disgusting, pleasurable or dirty, for example (see Kolehmainen & Juvonen, 2018). This also means that affect intensifies as a result of societal and community norms about respectability. Our research shows that affective judgement has a transnational scope, as separated families are under 'the collective evaluative gaze of the transnational community' (Wise & Velayutham, 2017, p. 123). In our study, it was often men who were forced to leave their families, and women and children who stayed behind. Because of gendered expectations regarding men's and women's roles in the family and in the community, women waiting for family reunification for a prolonged period felt affective judgement more often than men. In many cases, the judgement led to experiences of everyday insecurity, from community pressure or ostracism to life-threatening situations.

Lina, an Iraqi woman in her forties, was one of the women who had felt affective judgement from her community. After having waited for family reunification for almost 5 years, Lina had just arrived in Finland to join her husband. Lina's husband, Ali, had been granted a residence permit already in 2015, but had struggled to fulfil

the income requirement. Lina had awaited reunification in several different countries and in difficult circumstances with their three children. She explained how society's judgement intensified her affective responses, such as shame:

Often the woman is stigmatized by the society and ashamed when her husband leaves her for a long period. Many people gossiped a lot. They asked: 'How is it possible for you to live alone?' But we were forced to live that way.

Lina's description, like many other narrations of shame in the data, referenced societal norms by which women living alone without their husbands are considered unrespectable. The community in which the women wait – a refugee camp, a relative's house or society at large – often fails to understand the bureaucratic difficulties that prolong family reunification. Patriarchal norms may guide community members to think that women living without their husbands are not successfully fulfilling their societal roles as wives. These pressures apply to both women and men, but in terms of affective insecurity, the consequences are often more serious for women, especially if there are doubts as to whether the husband will return.

Some women make the courageous decision to stay married even if it threatens their personal security. A 35-year-old Iraqi man, Elias, explained how, as a result of his conversion to Christianity while in Finland, his wife had to flee from her family's home and, later, from the refugee camp she was staying in:

They couldn't stay there [in her parents' home] anymore, because her family was pressuring her to leave me, just to separate from me. They said to her: 'You are done with him. He's gone, and he became a Christian. He is not legally your husband anymore.' My wife has been refusing to leave me. She even had to flee the displacement zone [a refugee camp in Iraq] and to go to live with her friend. Her friend lives 2 h from the displacement zone. Her family told her: 'We would take you to live with us, but you must leave your kids.' And you know, she is a mom, and she cannot leave her kids. They want to insult me by letting my children sleep in the street.

Elias tells the interviewers that his wife's family refused to give shelter to his children because of their connection to him. Here, the community's normative judgement has consequences for his family's safety, as Elias's wife has almost nowhere to go. While certainly affective for Elias, these circumstances are life-threatening for Elias's family. Elias himself was unwell, which highlights the transnational scope of affective judgement and, relatedly, the sense of everyday security. He said that his children's situation was too much for him to bear:

Sometimes I would sit at the park nearby Kela [the Social Insurance Institution of Finland] until 3 am. Because of my psychological state. Thanks to the pills that I am taking, that helped me to relax a little bit. Once I've tried to commit suicide. I can't imagine seeing my kids like that.

While affect pushed some migrants to find solutions to improve their family's security situation, others were paralysed into inaction, like Elias, who described just sitting outside the social insurance office at night. Elias had exhausted his resources and had even attempted suicide. At the time of the interview, he felt he had no possibilities for changing his situation in any way. Elias had received a residence permit based on subsidiary protection, which meant that in order for his family



reunification application to be successful, as a father of three, he would have to earn 2900 euros a month after taxes. Elias was illiterate and had never gone to school. Thus, his possibilities for attaining such a level of income were close to non-existent. The interviewer kept in contact with Elias for a few months after the interview, but then lost touch with him. When Elias was contacted again, about half a year later, he had received the news that the Supreme Administrative Court had also refused his right to family reunification. When contacted again he was angry, still unwell and did not want to have a second interview. One could grasp the hopelessness of the situation.

Affect as a result of judgement manifested at the intersection of gender and class, as well as in other positionings. A 28-year-old Afghan man, Qasim, who had been successful in bringing his wife and two children to Finland, described the relationship between affect, social position and moral judgement as follows:

This separation among Afghans is normal and does not affect their life, because in Afghanistan there are many people who are apart from their family for five or six years when they go for work. This is almost a normal matter. (...) There are people in some places that cannot be away from their wife and children even for one night. Because being by family's side is very sweet. (...) When a child makes a joke or laughs, this means the whole world. In Afghanistan, women do not get upset about being away from their husband, but they get upset because of other's judgements. People say, 'Your husband does not think of you or about you being alone here.' This bothers her but being apart is not difficult for her. Only people's gossip is bothering.

Qasim's description of affect is telling. First, affect manifests differently depending on what you are used to. For Qasim, a poor farmer, it was a norm that men in the family would work abroad. In his opinion, separation, though not pleasant, was not very affective. He brought up the community's judgement, 'gossip', which in his words was the only thing 'bothering' his wife. However, it should be noted that to be away for work and to flee persecution are distinctly different circumstances of family separation. For Qasim, who had escaped persecution, there was no possibility of visiting his family in Afghanistan. This undoubtedly intensified the community's judgement.

In most of our cases, women were waiting for reunification decisions abroad without their husbands, while men were waiting in Finland with their wives and children abroad. It was uncommon for mothers to be separated from their children. However, there were two women in this situation. One of them, Amira, an Iraqi woman in her late forties, described the difficulties she faced while her husband and two children were living in temporary housing in Turkey. She said: 'When I received a negative decision, my husband became psychologically tired. So he said, "I will figure out my own problems and I will take the children and go back to live in Iraq."' Patriarchal norms allowed Amira's husband to live alone with his children, since in Iraq children often go to live with their father after a divorce. Women did not have similar possibilities for rearranging their lives, as they were often dependent on their families or husband's families for protection while waiting for family reunification decisions abroad.

The affective response to family separation is gendered in complex ways. It is connected to societal norms and even laws that treat men and women differently. In addition, affect is connected to gendered expectations that lead to affective judgement. As a result, women waiting abroad may experience intensified affect that also results in feelings of insecurity. Furthermore, other differences, such as class, contribute to affective responses. The lack of economic resources or everyday security in a material sense may force women to become more dependent on the support of their families and communities, which further intensifies affective judgement. Poor families, families from certain areas, or those practicing certain trades may be more used to family separation. Thus, the norm of a nuclear family living together may not be as significant for them as it is for others. These patterns of affective insecurities are, again, complicated by class, ethnicity, sexuality and age.

## 11.5 Affective Disparity

Research on transnational families typically highlights how families strive to stay in touch despite distance (e.g., Wise & Velayutham, 2017). Emotional labour performed by family members may involve remittances, phone calls and other exchanges, and these transnational flows contribute to family unity. However, what has perhaps received less scholarly attention is the *affective work* involved when migrants and their family members purposefully *avoid* sharing certain information with each other. Baldassar et al. (2007) points out that exchanging support transnationally always involves negotiation – some things bring the family together, but others are better left unsaid. We found that migrants often compared their situation in Finland to that of their transnational family members. Alternatively, they compared their own circumstances to those of Finnish citizens or permanent residents. The result of these comparisons was often perceived as disparity in terms of everyday resources and security. To avoid clashes between family members, many sponsoring migrants performed affective work to shield their families from suffering as a result of these inequalities. As noted above, ontological security involves a sense of predictability and continuity of identity and the surrounding environment. Our participants were in a situation where the continuity of family unity was in jeopardy. In these circumstances, affective work to maintain family ties involved selectively choosing what information to share.

Nasir, an Iraqi father of seven children, had an 18-year-old son living in dire circumstances in a refugee camp in Greece. His three older daughters were already married and living in Iraq, and three minor children lived with him and his wife in Finland. Nasir described his attempts to shield his son in Greece from affective responses to disparities between family members:

Nowadays, I have three sons living with me. I prohibited them from posting any pictures on their Facebook. They are also not allowed to post any photos on their Snapchat. The reason I prohibited them is that I don't want my son in Greece to see their pictures, how happy they

are here. Because then he would be sad. He has complained to his mom twice, saying: 'You have a luxurious life in Finland, while I'm living in such circumstances.'

Nasir's affective work had the goal of limiting affect. His younger children were not allowed to post on social media because these posts could cause affective responses and suffering for their brother. Another Iraqi man, 34-year-old Ras, also told us about affective work. He attempted to lift his wife's spirits while she waited with a strategy opposite to that of Nasir. Ras had two children who were waiting for reunification with his wife.

I was trying to push my wife away from feeling hopeless and desperate and frustrated, so I began to tell her that now my life has become stable, and I hope that you come. Finland is a beautiful country. I started to see it myself. I felt that my view has been changed since I became a refugee compared to the time when I was still an asylum seeker. I've been telling her that the life here is beautiful.

Because Ras had received his residence permit as a refugee, his family reunification application had no income requirement. Ras was confident his application would be successful, as he and his family were able to arrange the travel and visas needed for the process. During our research, it became apparent that the ability to arrange such matters was also dependent on social class (see also Hiitola, 2019). Financial, cultural and social capital offered the possibility to reaffirm positive affects transnationally. Ras's affective work was also connected to his own sense of security and faith in the future: 'I started to see it myself.' In contrast to Nasir's situation, where his son had little hope of regaining control over his destiny, Ras was able to plan his family's future. The affective work performed by these men shows that the transmission of transnational affect depends on the specifics and intensity of the precariousness of the family. It also illustrates that migration status and its related requirements crucially shape the kind of affective work migrants feel compelled to do transnationally.

Disparities also caused affective responses when the interviewees compared their own situations to those of Finnish citizen or resident families who were able to live together. Liban, a 45-year-old Somali man, and his 19-year-old daughter Sahra reflected on their family members' responses to their different living situations. Liban and Sahra lived in Finland together and had already attained Finnish citizenship. The mother of the family and five younger siblings were living in Kenya at the time, in temporary housing paid for by Liban. Their residence permits had been refused by every level of the courts. In response to the researcher's definition of the violence of administrative barriers, Sahra reflected on her younger siblings' affective responses:

Johanna H.: Because many people don't understand that it can also be violent if you can't have your family come to Finland. It can be as hurtful as many horrible things before.

Sahra: Because they have not experienced anything. They eat and drink. They have their own house, and everything is alright.

Liban: Yes, sometimes when I speak to my children, they say that everyone is leaving for Europe, but maybe you don't want us to come. They don't understand what ...

Sahra: Because they are children. They don't know. They think that all of this is in the hands of our father.

Johanna H.: Because the father is so important to them.

Sahra: Because all of their neighbours have left. Not to Finland, but to Holland or... Everyone has left and stayed in those countries for a long time.

Liban: But here if one has one job, it's not enough. You should have two jobs to support [to reach the income requirement]. I do two jobs, and everything is expensive here.

Sahra compared her family's situation to other families in Finland who are able to be together, to 'eat and drink' together. Affective disparity may intensify children's experiences of exclusion as they compare their family life to that of their peers (Wise & Velayutham, 2017). In addition, Sahra discussed her younger siblings in Kenya, who compared their own family reunification process with others who had been able to be united with family members in Europe.

The affective work required of the sponsoring migrant in order to maintain a sense of unity and faith in a joint future was often demanding. This shows how one's ontological security is intimately intertwined with the security of one's family members. For many interviewees, it was impossible to enjoy their physically and materially secure life in Finland or make any plans for their future because of loneliness, social isolation and the constant worry over family members. In some cases, family members who had waited abroad to be reunited commented that the sponsoring family member probably suffered *more* than them, despite the material benefits of living in Finland. This excerpt is from an interview with the recently reunited family of a 35-year-old Iraqi man and his wife:

Johanna H.: I have to say, because we did two interviews with your husband before, and he was – you were very, very sad about the decisions [addressing the husband] – and then when he wrote me about the decision that you will get here to Finland, I have never seen a man that happy [interviewer laughs] and when I talked to him on the phone...

Mina: So, he probably had suffered more than us, because he was left here alone and his children were far away from him, and he had to cope living here.

This quote shows how disparities are not only about material circumstances but also about social relationships and the security they provide. As acknowledged by Mina, the sponsor may suffer more and feel insecure because of loneliness. In addition, the affective labour of the sponsoring migrant may become pronounced when family members are waiting in desperate circumstances. Thus, affect is context dependent and intersectionally intensified.

## 11.6 Transnational Affect

The transnational circulation of affect has become more intense in recent decades as communication technologies have become more widely available (Wise & Velayutham, 2017). The forced migrants in this study kept in touch with their family members with varying frequency. Some interviewees called their families every day or were in contact 'almost all the time', as one interviewee described. Others were in touch weekly and a few only sporadically because their family members did not have regular access to a phone or the internet. Some family members were missing

at the time of the interview. Individual circumstances were crucial in influencing how affect circulated transnationally via communication technologies. Nonetheless, we found that flows of emotions or other manifestations of affect had a tremendous effect on experiences of insecurity.

Jamila from Somalia was 20 years old at the time of the interview and 16 when she came to Finland as an unaccompanied minor. She narrated how her biggest hope was for her family to be safe, as they were currently living in a refugee camp. Jamila described how her mother's phone calls incited bodily responses:

Johanna H.: So how do you think your life would be different if your mother and brothers were here?

Jamila: Really different. I would be always happy and hanging out with my friends. Go somewhere, travel in vacations. I would be happy even if they would get a good place elsewhere. Not only from Finland, any place where they could have a good life. I would be so happy. I would always be happy for them. I would go to work and live my life. Not always think that if I don't pick up the phone, something has happened to, for example, my mother. It's really hard to get a phone call, 'Hello, hello?', in the middle of the night. Sometimes my mother calls and I ask quickly: 'Hi, is everything alright?' Every time she calls, I think: 'Has something happened?' My heart says boom, boom, boom.

During the interview Jamila held her phone in her hand, showing it to the interviewer as she described her heartbeat. For Jamila, transnational affect manifested through her body. She *felt* the insecurity as intensified heartbeats. Though phone calls maintained affective ties, Jamila also associated her phone with fears about her family's situation, an example of how affects tend to attach themselves to objects (e.g., Hemmings, 2005).

For many interviewees, news from countries where family members resided also incited strong affective responses. Affect was intensified for participants whose family members were missing. Twenty-year-old Azin, who came to Finland as an unaccompanied minor, described feeling his everyday security affectively when hearing news from Afghanistan. In response to a question about feeling secure, he said: 'I feel that I won't die here, but I am really anxious when I hear news from Afghanistan.'

For young refugees, the worry was often insurmountable. Twenty-year-old Habib from Afghanistan described how he suffered from severe anxiety due to constant worrying:

I have been seeing a psychologist. I can't sleep at night since I came to Finland. I can't sleep. When I want to sleep, I close my eyes, but everything comes to my mind: What me and my brother are going to do? What my parents are going to do? I don't know if you know this or not, that when there is someone very dear to you, they are much more important than yourself. If it would be possible, you change your life for that person, and it's like guilt, or not guilt, but that instead of me, my two brothers should be here.

Strong responses to severed affective ties often resulted in psychological struggles, such as insomnia. When closing his eyes, Habib travelled transnationally and was together with his family members. The shrinking of space and time is one of the qualities of transnational affect (Wise & Velayutham, 2017). Many also felt guilty for being safe while their family members were in harm's way. Another

unaccompanied minor described how he had ‘forgotten himself’ and was unable to think of himself as a deserving human being who had the right to feel positive emotions despite his family’s difficult situation.

Some interviewees were in constant contact with their family members when possible. When interviewed, Husain, a 30-year-old Iraqi man, had just received a positive family reunification decision, but his wife and three children were still in Turkey. He told us about his transnational communication during their separation:

Johanna L.: How often do you talk with your family?

Husain: Every day.

Johanna L.: Through your phone or... ?

Husain: My phone. Every day, through Viber, WhatsApp, Messenger. (...) After meeting them, three and a half years I didn’t see them. When I returned back to Turkey and we met there, I started to see there is a big connection between me and them. So when I left them, the kids started to feel really bad. So I was trying every day to send a message for each of them: ‘Hi, how are you? (...) What are you doing? Do you still think about that? Blah, blah, blah ...’ Trying to show them that I am really thinking about them. I will not leave like before. Because they thought I will leave them again for three years. Even I promised them: ‘No, it will not be like that. I will travel again soon. Just three months after finishing the course, I will be back there.’ But they don’t believe. So it was a big challenge for me and hard to send them a message every day telling them: ‘I will be there. I will be there.’

Husain tried to maintain his parental bond with his children through phone calls and travelling to Turkey. Nonetheless, Husain’s children had a difficult time understanding the reasons behind the separation. Another Iraqi interviewee said: ‘It is not only me who is psychologically tired, but the kids as well.’ Children’s sense of security was often damaged in the long waiting process. The sponsoring migrants often went to great lengths to perform affective work to maintain the spirits of their transnational family members.

Interviewees whose family members had gone missing suffered severe psychological consequences. Mohammad, originally from Afghanistan, had to leave his wife and five children behind in Turkey when he was forced onto a smugglers’ ship at gunpoint. He ended up in Finland, where a social worker helped him find his family through the Red Cross’s missing persons service. He found out that his wife and children were in Iran as undocumented migrants. At the time of the interview, Mohammad’s family had already been found and brought to Finland through successful family reunification. Mohammad’s daughter Alya described what it was like to be reunited:

Alya: It was like, we didn’t even know whether we’ll get a residence permit or will we get to see our father. It was like a feeling of living in ignorance, that we didn’t even know how it would all happen. First of all, we did not even believe that it was true. Could we get there or not, it was a feeling of not knowing. Yes, we were happy. Yes, we were happy. Dad was alive and there and... but it was like happiness and confusion at the same time.

Mohammad: But before I found them [the rest of the family], I didn’t know where they were. Almost a year and a half. That whole time I said many times that I want to go back to Afghanistan.

Johanna H.: Yes, of course.

Mohammad: And the social worker told me: ‘Where do you want to go? We haven’t found your family yet.’

Johanna H.: How were you able to withstand this? [The father starts crying.] Yes, I know these questions are really hard.

Mohammad: I can't think about it [continues to cry].

As the interview progressed, Mohammad became very emotional as memories of the separation resurfaced. In fact, here again, it seems that the family members living in extremely precarious circumstances were shielded from some of the psychological harm, as they still had each other's support. Unlike his daughter, Mohammad could not even talk about his feelings about the separation. We found out that Mohammad had been hospitalized for ill mental health in Finland before finding his family. He was still, 4 years after the family's reunification, unable to sleep alone and had frequent night terrors remembering the violent separation.

## 11.7 Conclusion

It is evident from the results of this study that the consequences of family separation are wide-ranging and serious for many forced migrants. We investigated how affect and everyday insecurity were intertwined in the lives of the interviewees and their transnational families. Murphy (2012), in an examination of the affective dimensions of security, has described security as an 'affective atmosphere' that is precognitive and not knowable, a 'background' emotion. However, Murphy points out that changes in the affective atmosphere can make security or insecurity more intensely present, bringing it into the affective foreground. These changes can occur suddenly, for example, when someone is unexpectedly threatened, or build over time, as is the case with the people we interviewed. Many of them had faced difficulties during their journey to Finland and in the processes of seeking asylum and family reunification – not to mention the reasons that had forced them to seek asylum. Their family members often waited in dire circumstances. Scholars have pointed to the significance of emotional and affective ties for one's sense of security (e.g., Innes, 2017). Our chapter provides new knowledge on the nexus between transnational family separation, forced migration and everyday security and insecurity by showing that the material security found in Finland was insufficient to negate the emotional and embodied effects of ontological insecurity linked to the experience of prolonged family separation. Our analysis of forced migrants' family relationships adds to the existing literature on transnational families and emotion (e.g., Skrbiš, 2008; Baldassar & Merla, 2014) by suggesting that affect flows transnationally and is intensified when family members are in the midst of a conflict or otherwise challenged by their surroundings.

We found two ways in which affect and insecurity were intertwined with structures and norms. First, affective judgement influenced the sense of security of transnational families, especially for women separated from their husbands. Previous research has also pointed out how norms are maintained through affective judgement (Kolehmainen, 2012). We conclude that affective investments in gendered

norms and the maintenance of gendered rhythms in intimate relationships may become more intensified when living amid conflict and war or in other precarious conditions. Insecurities are amplified if women are dependent on their extended families, husbands or communities for support. Second, we found that transnational disparities incited affective responses. Emotions, such as guilt over being the one who was 'saved' or a sense of inequality perceived in everyday environments, inflicted insecurities. Many interviewees engaged in transnational affective work to maintain their family members' sense of security. This affective work was often performed by men who lived alone in Finland. This is an important observation, as the feminist concept of emotional labour (Hochschild, 1983) and scholarship on the gendered caring subject (Skeggs, 1997) highlight women's embodied work to maintain emotions. We found that men's role in affective work was also prominent when families faced forced separation.

Finally, we discussed how affect is circulated transnationally via news sharing and digital communication. The sponsors may appear to have a safe life after being granted residency, but their sense of security is affected by the circumstances of their transnational family members. We found that everyday insecurities were entangled with flows of information. Affect manifested through interviewees' bodies and sometimes resulted in severe psychological distress. We see that ontological insecurity (Botterill et al., 2019), manifesting when a sense of continuity is severed, describes well the affective consequences of family separation for forced migrants. We also found that how insecurity is *felt* depends on people's intersectional positionalities. Affective insecurities were intensified when entangled with and attached to individual circumstances.

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