

Young Connected Migrants: Remaking Europe from Below Through Encapsulation and Cosmopolitanisation

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Young connected migrants challenge normative understandings of family life in Europe. A better understanding of how migrants digitally ‘do family’ across borders and simultaneously use digital media to establish new local connections is urgently needed. Between summer 2015 and spring 2016, Europeans witnessed Syrian asylum seekers arriving daily on the beaches of Greek and southern Italian islands. Heated rhetoric and polemic often focused on migrant’s use of digital technologies. TV news showed how the freshly arrived migrants took out their smartphones to announce happily their safe arrival on European soil to loved ones elsewhere. In response, prejudices centred on smartphones. Anti-immigrant politicians in the Netherlands, Germany, the UK and elsewhere framed smartphones as luxury consumer goods and propagated the misunderstanding that refugees cannot possibly be too badly off when they own one. Migrants using smartphones were considered bogus asylum seekers.

In a broader context, the EU’s commitment to open borders and human rights has been put to the test. Its policies and practices quickly moved from initial humanitarianism to securitisation. This move resulted in the March 2016 EU–Turkey deal, allowing Europe to outsource the

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management and restriction of the flow of Syrian refugees towards Europe in return for six billion euros to be transferred to Ankara. Of course, although predicated on the idea of ‘Unity in Diversity’ (Ponzanesi and Colpani 2015, p. 5), Europe’s sense of diversity has been strongly policed. For example, while highly educated expatriates—especially those from the ‘global north’—are welcomed, asylum seekers are often unwelcome and ‘othered’. The recent xenophobic reclaiming of Europe as a homogeneous container of secularity, whiteness and western-ness can be seen as an act of what Paul Gilroy terms ‘postcolonial melancholia’: it reveals ‘fantasies of return to an imaginary homogeneity of past whiteness’, where the presence of ‘black bodies’ did not need to be acknowledged (1999). Although Europe is the deadliest migration destination in the world—with 5143 deaths in 2016 and 2925 ‘dead/missing’ recorded by 5 November 2017 (IOM 2017)—it passionately defends itself as an ethical continent and denies the implications of racial discrimination (Wekker 2016). Through anti-refugee rhetoric and protest, European culture is essentialised as a bounded, exclusionary ideal of wholeness, safeguarding and containing a certain normative Europeanness.

The figure of the young, digitally connected migrant embodies Europe’s Janus-faced character in an age when the market and technologies are celebrated for increasing speed and mobility within the EU internal market. The actual use of digital media by young migrants shows how they re-imagine Europe from below, as they stake out a living across nations and continents. Instead of seeing Europe as a homogeneous and stable container, Europe needs to be re-considered ‘as a fragmented and multi-sited societal context, which is co-produced by current patterns of mobility’ of migrants who negotiate new inequalities and hierarchies (Amelina and Vasilache 2014, p. 109). A focus on how Europe is co-constituted through digital practices of migrants is timely because ‘little is known about the impact of new communication technologies on the lives of migrants in Europe or wanting to reach Europe’ (Ponzanesi and Leurs 2014, p. 11). Furthermore, migrant youth seeking to find their place in Europe have to negotiate public suspicions resulting from recent claims about the failure of multiculturalism, anti-immigration sentiments, Islamophobia, fears over rape by refugees, and urban unrest and riots that are sweeping across Europe. This chapter unravels how digital practices allow migrant youth to stake out their positionalities vis-à-vis these discourses, both by turning towards members of their own communities living overseas (encapsulation) and by engaging in intercultural dialogue across cultural differences (cosmopolitanisation) (Christensen and Jansson 2014).

The argumentation will draw from multi-sited qualitative fieldwork conducted with nearly 150 young people inside and at the borders of Europe. The informants consist of three groups: Moroccan-Dutch youth in the Netherlands, young Somalis stranded in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia who aspire to migrate to Europe, and young Londoners of various ethnic backgrounds. The remainder of the chapter is structured as follows. First, the notion of young connected migrants is elaborated in the context of Europe's normative structuring of family life on the basis of co-presence and bounded by nation-states. Subsequently, the locations and different phases of qualitative fieldwork are contextualised. The empirical part of the chapter compares the distinct usage of communicative platforms by migrant youth: in the first case study, using discussion forums is considered as an example of the formation of digital subaltern counter-publics (Leurs 2015); in the second case study, the use of Skype video chat is considered to generate 'transnational affective capital' (Leurs 2014); finally, in the third case study the use of social networking sites (SNSs) is analysed to address forms of everyday digital multicultural urban life (Leurs and Georgiou 2016).

YOUNG MIGRANTS, POLYMEDIA AND NORMATIVE EUROPEAN FAMILY LIFE

Previous scholarship on media and migration has often focused on the representation of migrants. This chapter contributes to the emerging research area of 'digital migration studies', a field that seeks to address the relation between migration and information and communication technologies (ICTs), which studies 'migration in, through and by means of the internet' (Leurs and Prabhakar forthcoming 2017). Aiming to gain a better understanding of how young migrants navigate between different social media platforms currently available, this chapter presents a critical cartography of digital practices of young migrants living in and aspiring to live in Europe by taking 'polymedia' (Madianou and Miller 2013) as a conceptual starting point. In their ethnographic fieldwork with Filipino and Caribbean transnational families in London and overseas, Madianou and Miller emphasise that migrants adopt a wide variety of ICTs for specific purposes, such as calling on landline phones using scratch cards; mobile phones; Voice Over Internet Protocol (VoIP) audio and video chat using Skype, iChat or Viber; texting and WhatsApp on mobile phones; sending emails, instant messaging (IM) and using SNSs such as Facebook. Assessing the choices that migrant technology users make, Madianou and Miller argue that digital media can best be considered 'as a communicative

environment of affordances rather than as a catalogue of ever proliferating but discrete technologies' (2013, p. 169). With the notion of 'polymedia' they highlight that social, emotional and moral dimensions explain the choices between different media, and distinct medium-specific use of affordances allowing connectivity, the maintenance of relationships and identification (Madianou and Miller 2013).

Indeed, 'the architecture of a particular environment matters' (boyd 2011, p. 39); it does not dictate experience but does configure a specific radius of action. These affordances are specific constellations of material characteristics (opportunities and limitations posed by interface properties), user cultures (how are these properties appropriated), perceptions (how are affordances experienced) and wider ideological processes of meaning making (norms that shape dominant discourses) (boyd 2011; Zhao et al. 2013). Medium-specific affordances intersect in particular ways with the specific desires, expectations and experiences of young people in comparison with adults. Young people find themselves in a state of becoming, beyond childhood; they have yet to reach the autonomy of adulthood. Digital platforms have become key spaces where young people explore questions of identity, belonging and autonomy (boyd 2014). Scholars have, for example, recognised that social media have given new meaning to psycho-developmental 'modes of adolescent connectivity' such as private self-identity and public social identity formations, which resonate very well with private messaging and social networking respectively (Boneva et al. 2006, p. 202).

In general, there is ample evidence of the myriad risks and opportunities experienced by young people using the Internet in Europe (Livingstone et al. 2011). However, as Green and Kabir note (2012), little is known about the specific ways migrant youth make use of the Internet. The specific experiences of migrant youth using digital media, however, demand more attention, as the metaphorical journey of migration and diaspora complicates their search for belonging, identity and autonomy. Durham illustratively argues 'the psychological transition of adolescence, already charged in terms of gender and sexuality', which 'is then imbricated with the conundrums of the other transition—the diaspora identity that demands delicate negotiations of race/ethnicity, nation, class, language, culture and history' (2004, p. 141). Furthermore, these questions also particularly affect the young (descendants of migrants) because migration and transnationalism is not a 'one-generation phenomenon' (Mainsah 2011, p. 203): the main pre-occupation of

first generation adult migrants is often acquiring a solid social-economic position, while identity issues play a large role for their growing up descendants (Berry et al. 2006). As such, taking digital media as an entry point might provide new insights on how migrant youth in Europe negotiate contemporary politics of difference.

More importantly, young connected migrants' cross-border practices shows they 'do family' in a way that does not align with European normative expectations of family life. Families living across nations or continents, as Beck and Beck-Gernsheim argue, contest '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' (2014, p. 2). Transnational connectedness with family members overseas challenges not only European borders but also dominant European normative expectations of family life. Although migrants commonly maintain relationships with family members living dispersed throughout the world, this non-normative way of 'doing family' also remains 'marginalized in family studies debates', (Reynolds and Zontini 2013, p. 234). One can argue non-normative family practices can be seen as 'enacting digital rights claims' (Isin and Ruppert 2015, p. 13), thereby questioning European governmentality. Through conducting themselves online, engaging in transnational Skype conversations or WhatsApp messaging, migrants illustrate that 'the kinds of citizen subjects cyberspaces cultivates are not homogenous and universal but fragmented, multiple and agonistic' (ibid). Transnational migrant connectivity can be considered as specific performances of claiming digital citizenship rights, in particular civic rights including the right to free speech, the freedom to associate and the freedom of conscience. These rights are institutionalised in the European Convention on Human Rights; however, they are at odds with ingrained and exclusionary imaginaries of Europeanness.

Besides transnational communication, there should also be a focus on local connections. Therefore, I consider that digital practices of migrant youth revolve around the dialectic of 'encapsulation' and 'cosmopolitanisation' (Christensen and Jansson 2014). Previous scholarship on migrants and Internet use commonly singles out one or another of these processes. 'Homophily', the assumption that 'birds of a feather flock together' (boyd 2014, pp. 155–156) is popular among those who argue that transnational communication hinders integration and leads to segregation and radicalisation. Others contend that migrants maintain a 'connected presence'

(Diminescu 2008, p. 572). Digitally, migrants connect with the diaspora forming bonding capital and develop bridging, cosmopolitan capital by networking with the receiving society (Codagnone and Kluzer 2011; Leurs and Georgiou 2016). Although contested as an elitist and traditionally western notion, cosmopolitanism is indispensable as a vernacular category, grounded from below (Werbner 2006). It is useful to consider the social, cultural and political implications of everyday acts of reflexive openness between self and other among elite and subaltern subjects (Delanty 2006). Therefore, I call to action and urge media and migration scholars to research digital practices empirically and theorise that encapsulating boundary making and cosmopolitan boundary crossings are not mutually exclusive, rather they happen simultaneously.

FIELDWORK IN THE CONTEXT OF EUROPE

By focusing on the experiences of young connected migrants across various locations in Europe as well as its borderlands, I aim to go beyond ‘methodological Europeanism’ (Garelli and Tazzioli 2013) and de-essentialise the imagination of Europe as somehow homogeneously white, postsecular Judeo-Christian. The empirical data discussed here is drawn from three recent research projects in different geographical locations, each with their own specific socio-political reality. All names included in this chapter are pseudonyms suggested by the informants themselves.

First, the data on digital practices of Moroccan-Dutch young people originate from ‘Wired Up: Digital Media as Innovative Socialization Tools for Migrant Youth’, a Utrecht University High-Potential research project. With 368,838 people, the Moroccan-Dutch community amounts to 2.2% of the total Dutch population of 16.7 million. Roughly half migrated to the Netherlands as guest workers after the 1960s, while the other half was born in the Netherlands (CBS 2014). In recent years, anti-immigration sentiments and Islamophobia in the Netherlands especially target the Moroccan-Dutch community. Spearheaded by right-wing politician Geert Wilders and his Party for Freedom (PVV) as well as sensationalist news reporting, ‘Moroccan youth’ are often framed as a problem. Moroccan-Dutch boys are often depicted as troublemakers, ‘street-terrorists’ or fundamentalists, while girls are being constructed as either unemancipated and backward or oppressed and in need of being saved from their Muslim culture. As part of Wired Up, I, together with a Moroccan-Dutch research assistant, conducted 43 face-to-face in-depth

interviews with Moroccan-Dutch young people in schools and cafés in five cities in the Netherlands, between autumn 2009 and autumn 2012. This group consisted of 22 females and 21 males, ranging in age from 12 to 18 years old. I also engaged in a virtual ethnography of the most popular communication platforms. The young Moroccan-Dutch informants shared everyday experiences of using digital media. These experiences generated empirical insights on their subjective micro-politics of ethnic, gender and religious identification in response to a polarising socio-political climate in Europe in general and the Netherlands more specifically.

Secondly, as part of a Royal Dutch Academy for Arts and Sciences Council for the Humanities stipend funded project, ‘Technology as a Refuge?’, I, together with a local Somali research assistant, conducted ten face-to-face interviews and a focus group with six young Somalis left behind in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia about their affective experiences of transnational communication. Although expanding in an era of transnational flows and global connectivity, Europe paradoxically remains a fortress with borders that are heavily guarded against certain undesired subjects (Ponzanesi and Leurs 2014; Amelina and Vasilache 2014). Most informants were waiting for visa clearance to be reunited with parents and loved ones, including especially countries in north-western Europe. They were living outside Europe but were simultaneously digitally connected with contacts living inside its borders. Resulting from over two decades of armed conflict, more than one million Somalis have been forced to flee their country and many more have been internally displaced. The informants were stranded in the area of Bole Michael near Addis Ababa’s international airport. The group of interviewees included five young females and 11 young males, ranging from 13 to 26 years in age.

Thirdly, as part of an EU Marie Curie funded postdoctoral study called ‘Urban Politics of London Youth Analysed Digitally’, I have conducted fieldwork in London. As a global nodal point in the transnational flow of migrants, this city is characterised by a situation of ‘super diversity’ (Vertovec 2007). In the most recent 2011 census, 45% of its inhabitants described themselves as ‘white British’, and it can be argued ethnic minorities are now in the majority (ONS 2012). I have held interviews in the London Borough of Haringey’s Tottenham area, which is one of the most culturally diverse areas in the metropolis. It is also where the 2011 ‘BBM’ London riots took place,¹ following the escalation of a peaceful protest in response to the police shooting of Mark Duggan, a local black young person. Besides having informants from working-class families in Tottenham,

I interviewed young people from middle-class families in Hammersmith-Fulham and upper-middle-class families in Chelsea-Kensington. Politicians and journalists emphasised that issues of race and digital technology use had fuelled the London riots. Navigating post-riot London, the question arises about how young Londoners live in the co-presence and close proximity of cultural difference. In the in-depth interviews, I focused on experiences of transnational communication with loved ones living elsewhere, as well as digitally negotiating localised forms of cultural, ethnic and religious otherness. The group of informants consists of 41 young males and 43 young females ranging in age from 11 to 21 years.

In particular, I took a mixed methods approach, drawing from recent developments in ‘creative’ (Gauntlett 2007), ‘participatory’ (Gubrium and Harper 2013) and ‘digital’ (Rogers 2013) methods. As an example of a creative and participatory approach, all informants were invited to draw a map on a piece of paper to visualise the spaces they visit on the Internet. This participatory research technique of ‘image based concept mapping’ has been recognised as a successful way to gather children’s perceptions about digital practices (Clark et al. 2009). The websites and applications included in the maps were used to structure the remainder of the interview to elicit platform-specific narratives of self-positioning. As an example of a qualitative digital methods approach, the young Londoners’ visualisations of personal Facebook friendship networks were generated to prompt reflections about the politics of encounter and cultural difference on the platform. Digital methods as such can be used to ‘diagnose cultural change and societal conditions by means of the internet’ (Rogers 2013, p. 21).

MOROCCAN-DUTCH YOUTH AND FORUM DISCUSSIONS

This first case study focuses on encapsulating migrant youth connectivity practices. I will explore how migrant youth engage with online discussion forums to establish safe collective spaces. In their own space, instead of being the minority they can become the majority, forming digital ‘subaltern counterpublics’ (Fraser 1990, p. 67). The notion of the counter-public was developed in response to Jürgen Habermas’s ideal of the ‘bourgeois public sphere’. In Habermas’s view, private persons can come together to discuss societal issues in a singular, all-embracing public sphere. In her critique, Fraser rightly noted that this conceptualisation is too limited to capture the reality of contemporary stratified societies. In contrast, she argues that a multiplicity of competing publics provide communicative

arenas for subordinated groups. By circulating ‘counter-discourses’, participants of these various publics can engage in ‘discursive contestation’ (Fraser 1990, p. 62). Across the world, ethnic minorities use online discussion forums to form counter-publics; below the radar of the mainstream these sites operate as safe ‘hush harbors’ where group solidarity can be expressed and hegemonies can be contested (Byrne 2008, p. 17). In particular, Moroccan-Dutch youth congregate in discussion forums to establish their own space and counteract dominant Dutch secular culture, anti-immigrant media reporting, and community, plus parental versus peer norms about proper gendered behaviour.

Online forums, also known as message boards, are digital spaces where users can engage in conversations by publicly opening ‘topics’ and posting typed comments in response to each other.² As 13-year-old Amina described, ‘there is one site, which is called Marokko.nl, and I’m serious it’s buzzing with Moroccan youths there’. In its look and feel, but also in the norms visible among site participants, the discussion page foregrounds the shared ethnicity of Moroccan-Dutchness. Indeed, for example, Bibi (16-year-old) felt at home on the forum because there she experienced ‘that proper Moroccan atmosphere’. For example, the forum did not only include images of minarets on its main page, but also it was likened to a digital equivalent of a mosque, according to several respondents. As Soufian, a 13-year-old mentioned: ‘I find it very important to go to the mosque, because there I feel I am among likeminded people’. On Marokko.nl, users also congregate with like-minded peers. Bibi continued: ‘it is your own circle’ and ‘the people there are like you, that’s nice’. Byrne wrote that Internet forum discussion pages are valued among minority groups to generate a shared sense of belonging, as they are ‘relatively free of *mass* participation by ethnic outsiders’ (Byrne 2008, p. 17).

The informants perceived Marokko.nl as a safe space, and they used the space mainly for three purposes: to negotiate religious dictums, exchange knowledge about gender and sexuality and contest negative media reporting. Firstly, forum discussion pages are taken up to negotiate the cultural politics of the permissible, what is ‘*halal*’ or ‘*haram*’ (respectively, ‘allowed’ or ‘forbidden’ in Muslim viewpoints). In the words of Sahar, a 14-year-old girl, ‘it is a good place to discuss about things you should and you should not do’. For example, as Ferran, a 14-year-old boy, said: ‘whether you may have a boyfriend and so on’. As described by Meryam, a 15-year-old, she ‘noses around’ in discussions on Islam. She explained that she did so to negotiate both the meanings given to Islam by the imam (religious leader

in her mosque) as well as her parents. On the one hand, she believed that ‘on the Internet, you can learn much more. In the mosque you have to listen to an imam who exposes you to topics you might not want to learn or that you know already’. On the other hand, Meryam explained that being born in the Netherlands, in contrast with her Moroccan born parents, had also shaped her religious views:

I think the habits of my parents are just very old-fashioned, even though they do try to learn the customs of the Netherlands. My parents were raised much stricter in terms of religion. My parents do teach me many things about our belief, but most of the time I go on and look up things about Islam myself. This is different from what they did: listening to the stories of their parents and copying those.

Meryam’s experience exemplified how bottom-up digital practices may reconfigure previously pervasive ‘religious authority models’ (Bunt 2009, p. 17). Forum discussions operate as a counter-public and enable the informants to discuss among like-minded Moroccan-Dutch young peers the ways in which to straddle various religious and cultural expectations, including sometimes-strict demands asserted by their parents and the wider Muslim community, with Dutch liberal youth culture.

Secondly, Moroccan-Dutch girls are sometimes seen as gatekeepers in maintaining family honour, with expectations to show modesty and inhibition. Online discussion boards have been recognised as an important outlet to express freely their voice: ‘Dutch-Moroccan girls are more restricted in their freedom of movement than boys, and thus, the Internet widens their horizons’ (Brouwer 2006, np). Young female informants have stated feeling less restricted on discussion forums mostly because of anonymity and, because of that, they dare to bring up personal experiences they struggle with and cannot share elsewhere. Sites like Marokko.nl are considered safe enough to speak about gendered taboo issues that might transgress the limits of dominant parental and community standards. Bibi, 16 years old, expressed that she discussed religious rules about whether married wives should comply with their husbands’ sexual desires during the first night of marriage. She felt she would rather turn to the online community instead of bringing up such an issue with her parents: ‘they say, “yes” because with the Muslim faith when you have the first day you are not to oppose your husband and just do “it”. And [with] these things I’m definitely not going to my parents “Mom, dad, listen is that the

case” Yes it is *hchouma* (“shameful”) you know, I am shy to tell my parents about these things’. Amina, a 13-year-old girl, expressed a similar perception: ‘you perhaps dare to say more on the Internet. You know, you do more, usually you are anonymous, if you want to at least, and then you share your experiences’. She added that sharing experiences might generate helpful comments by like-minded users: ‘then you see what people on the Internet have to say about it. And that might help you’. Having a space to discuss issues that are difficult to speak about with parents is of the utmost importance. Moroccan-Dutch girls take advantage of the affordances of Internet forums to express themselves in ways they cannot always do so in their usual offline social-cultural spheres.

Thirdly, Moroccan-Dutch youth appreciate discussion sites such as Marokko.nl because of the alternative voices that can be found and articulated there. ‘Their’ corner of the Internet is used to discuss dominant news media frames. Ideally, national news media mirror society, including multicultural life. Yet religious and ethnic minorities, including many Moroccan-Dutch youth, often feel that news coverage is negatively skewed. Thirteen-year-old Salima’s opinion about mainstream news media is an illustrative case in point: ‘they speak about Moroccans very often. If it would be a Turk or someone else, than it is not immediately news or so, but when there are Moroccans involved, it is immediately like: all right, these are Moroccans, instantly on the news’. Nevra, a 16-year-old, similarly asserted, ‘there is often negative talk about Moroccan youths’, while ‘different stories’ can be shared on Internet forums.

In the Netherlands, as elsewhere in Europe, democracy and Islam are often presented as ‘irreconcilable discursive categories’ through emphasizing a binary view between secular ‘good people’ and Muslim ‘bad people’ (Sunier 2012, p. 125). Moroccan-Dutch Muslims have been found to experience great external pressure ‘to take sides’, feeling ‘caught between a Muslim and a non-Muslim “camp” that both claim definitional power’ (Buitelaar and Stock 2012, p. 170). On the forum, interviewees feel more secure and confident to speak up because in their view, Marokko.nl operates off the radar. Senna, 14 years old, states: ‘I don’t know, I think that half of the [Dutch] people do not even know that it exists.’ Thirteen-year-old Ilham added that’s why she feels there ‘you can express your opinion and just put everything up and you hear that others are similar to you’. Participants hold common views that also bind them together. They all counter the polarising brought forth by the Dutch right-wing politician Wilders. According to Inzaf, a 15-year-old, this helps them to cope with

the negative stereotypes: ‘we speak about various Moroccan things, but we agree about one thing. For instance about Geert Wilders, all of Marokko.nl agrees that he is no good’.

In sum, their encapsulation in a digital space of their own allows these migrant youth to engage in acts of digital citizenship (Isin and Ruppert 2015). These three examples show that a collaborative Moroccan-Dutch habitus is developed at the intersections of top-down authority (parents, the mosque, mainstream media) and bottom-up interpretations of ethnicity, religion, gender and youth culture circulating among like-minded peers. Together with fellow Moroccan-Dutch young people, the informants intervene in the public sphere by circulating alternative representations of Moroccan-Dutchness based on their personal re-interpretations of believing, ideas about gender and sexuality, as well as the countering of stereotypes.

TRANSNATIONAL COMMUNICATION AMONG YOUNG SOMALIS STRANDED OUTSIDE EUROPE

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

This second case study, also focusing on migrant connectivity as encapsulating, details how young Somali migrants stranded in neighbouring Ethiopia stay in touch with loved ones abroad using Skype. In particular, the focus is on their emotional investment in transnational connectivity. The quote included above is taken from an interview held with Ifrah in March 2013. Two months previously, Ifrah was living in Somalia’s capital, Mogadishu, where her job involved updating a local radio station’s website with news and events. Many of her friends and relatives had already migrated away from Somalia, as the country has been crippled by an ongoing civil war that began in 1991. Ifrah remains in touch with ‘contacts in many different countries’ across Europe, as she explained: ‘in Holland, my husband lives there’; ‘in Finland, I have family, my brothers’; ‘in Italy I have friends’; ‘in Saudi, one girl who is my friend’; and remaining ‘in Somalia, my colleagues and my friends and family also’. Ifrah has strong hopes that eventually she will be reunited with her husband in the Netherlands.

The affective sense of being able temporarily to bridge large distances through transnational communication illustrates that VoIP software such as Skype, Nimbuzz and Viber are highly valued. The medium-specific affordances, such as instantaneous exchange of audio, moving images, typed messages and shared files together affect young Somalis in various ways. While inductively coding transcriptions of the interview and focus group audio, two dominant themes emerged. First, with expressions such as feeling ‘happy’, ‘good’, ‘frustrated’ and ‘excited’, informants emphasised affective responses to transnational communication. Secondly, by using words including being ‘connected’, ‘bridging distance’ and ‘together’, informants made reference to shifting and suspended perceptions of spatiality.

As a white 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. Contrastingly, the informants experience almost insurmountable challenges in accessing economic, social, cultural and symbolic capital (Bourdieu 1986). Living in overcrowded spaces and heavily depending on remittances, their life is one of sheer poverty, characterised by high crime rates and unemployment. Orphans and young people are especially at risk in these settings. Social capital is essential, but is often only accessible via transnational communication: they are separated from close family members on whom they rely to navigate complex asylum procedures. The development of cultural capital comes to a standstill, as they have no access to formal education. These young refugees also lack status and recognition, which are key elements of symbolic capital: upon entering Ethiopia, migrants are obliged to register with the government as asylum seekers. Registered migrants are moved to refugee camps. However, the informants have opted to live in a status of semi-illegality in Bole Michael, a situation tolerated by officials. Aiming for resettlement, they are in search of recognition by overseas states, which is needed for visa clearance (Alemayehu et al. 2010).

At the moment of fieldwork, the informants thus found themselves in a precarious situation of immobility, as they had to make do with severely limited forms of capital. Unable to move physically, they could only digitally connect with parents, family and friends living elsewhere. Based on in-depth interviews, a focus group and concept maps drawn by informants, the ambivalent dynamics of affect are explored below. In particular, the strong feelings of togetherness originating in Skype video chat can be

theorised with the notion of transnational affective capital—one of the only sources of capital the informants have. The ambivalence of transnational affective capital can be unpacked by considering whether communicative routines may mitigate harsh offline circumstances by promoting ‘ontological security’ (Giddens 1990, p. 92) or whether they further aggravate feelings of anxiety.

The concept of transnational affective capital provides an innovative lens to address unequal flows of migration, communicative practices and feelings. Affectivity is used here to address the ways in which interactions on a computer screen trigger certain responses in the body of a user. The emotional state of the user may change by being affected. In other words, affect concerns ‘the passage from one experiential state of the body to another’ resulting from an encounter with another body (Massumi 2004, p. xvii), while emotion ‘is the biographically specific meaning ascribed’ to that passage (Jones et al. 2014, p. 2). In particular, affect is produced through three interrelated processes: ‘circulation’ (affect flows through people, text and objects), ‘accumulation’ (it grows through repetition) and ‘endurance’ (responses stick to people, texts and objects) (Ahmed 2004, pp. 45, 46, 91). Affectivity emerging from frequent transnational communication may be a crucial resource for these young migrants, as an innovative way to manage anxieties of being physically separated by regaining ‘ontological security’ (Giddens 1990). Ontological security refers to the ‘confidence’ emerging from routines and ‘the constancy of the surrounding social and material environments of action’ as well as ‘the reliability of persons and things’ (ibid., p. 92).

Informants frequently mentioned their embodied, sensorial experience of using VoIP applications: in their words, using these makes them feel ‘happy’, ‘connected’, ‘together’, ‘exciting’, ‘awesome’. Fifteen-year-old Moh Iide, for example, said ‘I really really feel great and awesome when I’m in contact with them’. Informants communicate with family members living elsewhere anywhere between ‘everyday’, ‘twice a week’, ‘three times per week’, ‘twice a month’ or ‘sometimes’. Most go to Internet cafés in addition to calling by phone and using 3G-connectivity. At the time of my fieldwork, 30 minutes of Skype on a mobile phone amounted to 25 birr, or roughly one euro; the standard cost for an hour of Internet access in an Internet café was four times cheaper, 12 birr (50 euro cents). The costs involved remain a source of considerable frustration, as Ali, a 16-year-old male shared: ‘my father lives in Switzerland, I talk via my mobile phone. My father pays for that. It makes me happy, but we talk three times a month, I like to talk more often’. The circulation of feelings is hierarchical; the young

people left behind in Addis Ababa are in a position of dependence, as communication is only made possible and therefore is also limited by financial assistance from adult relatives abroad. The young informants have all been sent mobile phones from overseas, and they feel empowered by being able to be in touch with their parents even though they are left behind. Simultaneously, their autonomy is limited resulting from the surveillance opportunities the device gives the parents.

Lovehunter described his desire to join his family in the Netherlands, Norway and the United States. Physically he has not been able to do so, but he said: 'seeing them through video feels like I'm already there'. Digitally, informants share being 'connected', 'close', 'logged in' and 'together' with their family and friends far away. However, interviewees reminded me time and again of the uneven affective capital of online interactions. The sensed digital permeability of geographical boundaries that accumulates in Skype remains a temporary suspension; once the Skype or mobile phone conversation has ended the affective capital produced fades away very quickly. Young informants mention that financial dependency as well as poor connectivity also restricts them in their transnational digital communication. Such limitations make Moh Iide wonder: 'sometimes I ask myself, in some instances am I [really] together when I am contacting them'. Ifrah, who is in contact with her husband in the Netherlands emphasises this affective sense of 'being together' (Nedelcu and Wys 2016) endures only for a brief moment: 'I feel that sometimes I can bridge distance', but added the painful sentence: 'it is only the few minutes that you are on the phone that you feel that way, but the moment you hang up you realize that there is a distance and that kills you'.

Transnational affective capital, or the positive sensations triggered by transnational communication, do not fully compensate the felt hardship of the everyday lives of stranded Somalis, as can also be understood from the affective connotations of the pseudonyms the informants chose like Lovehunter and Miss Lonely. Transnational communication, however, fuels the imagination and keeps the hope for betterment alive, as Bosry emailed me after his successful reunification with his family in Norway in summer 2013. He felt 'it was really amazing' that he had moved, underlining that 'It's true that the youth in africa much worthy likes to live in Europe, usa and England that's why there risking the lifes crossing oceans and deserts to have a much better life' [sic]. Doing family across the borders of Europe, their transnational connections challenge dominant normative ideals of the bounded European family which is located within the nation-state and structured on the basis of geographical co-presence.

YOUNG LONDONERS AND THEIR GEOPOLITICS OF COSMOPOLITAN BELONGING ON FACEBOOK

The third case study focuses on the local cosmopolitanising dimensions of young connected migrants. This section explores the experiences of everyday multicultural life among young Londoners of various ethnic backgrounds on Facebook. To date, there has been little attention given to the everyday urban experience of living in the co-presence and proximity of cultural difference: ‘A deficit remains in the public discussion of multicultural life with regard to a capacity to represent unspectacular ways in which multiculturalism works as a daily routine of life in cities like London’ (Back and Keith 2014, p. 22). As the majority of its inhabitants are of migrant descent, London is a particularly apt location to study how youngsters digitally negotiate a situation of ‘throwntogetherness’ (Massey 2005). This concept underlines that urban space is relationally constructed resulting from the ‘contemporaneous existence of a plurality of trajectories’. As inhabitants claim their position in the city, cultural difference is present in a ‘simultaneity of stories-so-far’ (ibid. 2005, p. 11). In particular, my focus is on whether experiences of young Londoners using Facebook confirm pan-European fears over the so-called failure of multiculturalism or whether their experiences showcase conviviality and everyday cosmopolitanism.

The medium-specific affordances of SNSs have been contrastingly theorised to promote connections with a narrow, homogeneous as well as diverse heterogeneous network. Sceptic internet researchers argue that online social networks operate as homogeneous, encapsulating ‘filter bubbles’ (Pariser 2011). In social networking analysis, the notion of homophily—‘birds of a feather flock together, and personal social networks tend to be homogeneous’ (boyd 2014, p. 155)—is used to describe human tendencies to maintain connections with like-minded people. Homophily is referred to as a way to criticise how transnational communication among migrants may result in encapsulation and isolation (i.e. Scheffer 2007). According to Barbrook and Cameron, optimistic Internet researchers highlight that the material affordances can facilitate ‘side-by-side-ness’ (as cited in Rogers 2013, p. 50). Every user and page may be connected through hyperlinks, bridging distances between them, and therefore ‘the metaphor of hypertext insists on making connections as practice’ (Haraway 1997, p. 130). The affordances can be ‘rewired’ to promote ‘engineered serendipity’: SNSs potentially enable cosmopolitan chance encounters between strangers (Zuckerman 2013, p. 131). Migrants are noted to benefit from networking

opportunities, allowing them to become enabled ‘to be here and there at the same time’ as they maintain local connections and connections with elsewhere (Diminescu 2008, p. 572)

David, 18-year-old, is a Jamaican-born young man who migrated to the UK at a young age: ‘I was born in Jamaica’ but ‘home is London, here’. Upon seeing the visualisation of his Facebook friendship network, he described the locations of the different clusters of contacts, see Fig. 2.1. The freely accessible but commercial Facebook application TouchGraph was used to generate a visualisation of the informants’ Facebook networks. During the interviews, I invited informants to log into their Facebook account and run the application. The applications’ algorithm first processed their complete Facebook network and subsequently grouped and colour-coded mutual Facebook friends into clusters.³ The informants were then asked to research the different clusters they saw on their screen; during this exploration, for example, I prompted informants to research the location, interests, gender, age, race, social class and religious dynamics of these groups of friends.

David’s network combines connections with Jamaican family members living overseas in Jamaica and the United States as well as in London. However, the majority of his contacts are friends living in close geographical proximity, in Tottenham as well as east London. He describes his Tottenham friends as including ‘loads from Jamaica’, ‘from Africa’, ‘Mauritian’, ‘mixed’ people of various backgrounds. He appreciates the heterogeneous character of his network: ‘it’s linked, you know it’s actually a nice thing’. David’s description is illustrative for the majority of informants who—as ‘connected migrants’ (Diminescu 2008) and descendants of migrants—combine in their SNS network a small (but important) cluster of contacts living overseas in diaspora with a large group of contacts living at close geographical proximity.

Most informants were in touch with family members living overseas. Illustratively, 15-year-old Connor, who said that ‘I have like family members living scattered around the globe’, described quite ‘a mixed background, part of my family comes from Turkey, the other part comes from Ireland’. Facebook and other digital media are used for transnational communication. Bob, a 17-year-old who ‘came up to this country [meaning England] when I was five’ shared that his family lives ‘everywhere’. Among other applications, he uses Facebook to keep in touch: ‘I don’t wanna be that person that can only fly out and see them for a couple of weeks and fly back. I like to be in contact with them constantly’. Enabling family

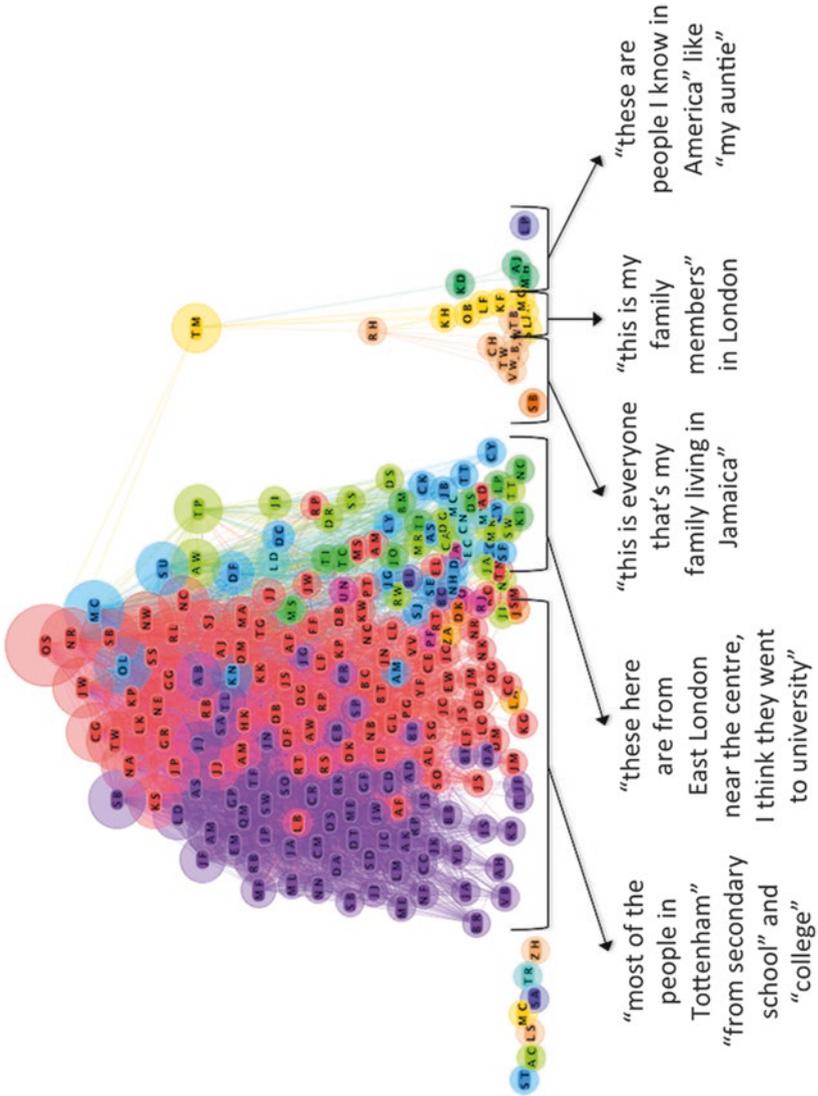


Fig. 2.1 Visualisation of David's Facebook friendship network made with Touchgraph

practices at a distance by ‘being’ and ‘doing together’, such transnational communication practices have become ‘ordinary co-presence routines’ in the lives of many migrant youth (Nedelcu and Wyss 2016).

Seventeen-year-old ‘UK born’ Sarah ‘from Kashmir’ agreed, ‘most of my friends are like, they are not from the same ethnicity or same background’ adding that ‘it depends again on what school environment you are exposed to’. Multiculture is an unproblematised everyday-lived experience and practice. When talking about intercultural friendships, Lee, a 13-year-old boy who described himself as ‘Scottish’, said ‘I don’t care, I have a friend who is Somalian, big deal, wow, it’s cool he goes to a mosque and I go to a church; there is no reason for us not to be friends’. In contrast with the built environment, Facebook friendships across difference are forged voluntarily. Digitally negotiating throwntogetherness implies that one may encounter cultural difference on one’s profile wall as friends post status updates, photos and videos.

For example, 17-year-old David, who was ‘born here in the UK, [and] my parents were born in Nigeria’ hopes to inform his friends through his posts about Nigerian culture: ‘I love my country; say when my mum is cooking like really nice food, from my country, I might take a picture of it and put it up, and then people will see like your national food and delicacies’. There are two reasons for David to do so: ‘to show like you are happy and proud of it, and like inform people, cos people might stereotype it’. Comments and likes are important, as 13-year-old Tammy (‘my parents were born in Nigeria’) shared: ‘it makes me feel happy ... because it shows that someone is taking an interest in your culture, in your background’. Besides peer verification, informants also mentioned that others can learn about cultural practices.

Twenty-one-year-old ‘mixed-race’ Chenise drew out the learning potential of encountering difference on one’s personal Facebook wall: ‘if you’re from this country, and someone else is from that country ... someone can put up something about another country and, it’s just, what do we have today, we have a multicultural society, so sometimes Facebook can be good, cos you can learn each others’ culture, other religions and stuff like that, from it’. Tammy mentioned that she previously thought that, ‘all Asian people are the same’ while through engaging with Facebook posts she altered her views: ‘I realized many sorts of difference [exist], and that kind of changed my mind-set’. Such unspectacular everyday encounters empirically sustain abstract theories on ‘vernacular cosmopolitanism’ of non-elites (Werbner 2006). Cosmopolitan sensibilities—defined as desires

‘to see the world from a variety of Others’ perspectives’ (Christensen 2012, p. 902)—were expressed, as the informants shared that they learned and affectively felt that their mind-sets were transformed as a result of being receptive to cultural difference. Digital throwntogetherness, as such is an innovative entry point to understand how young people in contemporary European urban settings use SNSs to learn to live with ‘super-diversity’ (Vertovec 2007). This focus reveals that scholarship on the use of ICTs among migrants should not attend only to transnational communication, because it runs the risk of ignoring other more dominant communicative practices such as relating to ethnic and racial others living in close proximity.

CONCLUSIONS

Seeing migrant youth in Europe as drivers of change through acts of ‘digital citizenship’, this chapter shows how young migrants digitally articulate their presence in Europe on their own terms vis-à-vis resurgent discourses about the failure of multiculturalism, anti-immigration sentiments and Islamophobia. The argument presented three case studies based on multi-sited, creative, participatory and digital methods fieldwork conducted with 143 young people inside and at the borders of Europe. Contributing to the emerging field of ‘digital migration studies’, this chapter takes ‘polymedia’ as a starting point by considering why and how young migrants choose certain applications from a wider communicative environment, the focus was on how each group appropriated medium-specific affordances of one platform: Internet discussion forums, VoIP audio and video chat, and SNSs. Contemporary young connected migrants chose between a polymedia of media affordances. By differentiating distinct digital media practices, I have showed that migrant youth revolves around the dialectic of ‘encapsulation’ and ‘cosmopolitanisation’ (Christensen and Jansson 2014).

In the first case study of migrant connectivity as encapsulating, the use of Internet forums by Moroccan-Dutch youth was considered as a key safe, social stage to stake out individual identities by narrating themselves in various ways. Allowing like-minded youth to form a subaltern counter-public, these processes operate under the radar but are recognised as fostering agency. Contesting the authority of parents and community leaders, the Moroccan-Dutch informants expressed ways in which they resisted hegemonic renderings of Moroccan-Dutchness, gender relations and

Islam. Their practices (and the present analysis) counter the dominant conservative narratives of the contemporary European debates about the revival of religion, which tend to single out Muslims as a challenge to democracy and progressive European values.

In the second case study of migrant connectivity as encapsulating, the potentialities of affective capital generated through transnational Skype conversations were explored on the basis of fieldwork with stranded young Somali who were awaiting family reunification in Addis Ababa. Affectivity was used to acknowledge the ways in which bodies may pass from one emotional state to another in response to interactions on a screen. The focus was on how young Somalis who desire to migrate overseas experienced the affordances of VoIP audio and video chat in relation to their personal circumstances of geographical immobility. The circulation of positive feelings through transnational communication was recognised as a valuable good, as the immobile refugees are deprived of most other forms of capital. Although they regularly feel to be together with loved ones living overseas through their screens, the accumulated transnational affective capital does at best only temporarily alleviate the felt hardship of their precarious lives.

The third case study addressed migrant connectivity as cosmopolitanising by accounting for digital networking experiences of migrant youth living in urban settings in Europe. The interviewees—young people of various backgrounds living in London following the 2011 riots—do choose to negotiate digitally being in the proximity of otherness through publishing and engaging with Facebook posts. These young migrants and descendants of migrants used SNSs to engage in transnational communication with family members scattered around the world. However, networking with local contacts was a more prominent practice, shedding light on contemporary digitised politics of encounter and difference.

Although dominant discourse and normative understandings of European family life discard migrant practices, the present intervention showcases the need to acknowledge migrant connectivity involves both turning inwards (encapsulation) as well as turning outwards (cosmopolitanism). The latter displays how migrant youth themselves counter ethnic absolutism through digitally engaging with cultural difference. In addition, policy makers may find inspiration in encapsulating—transnational forms of doing family—especially as post-Brexit-vote Europe is seeking to reinvent its role in the global economy. In order for Europe to thrive as a ‘network society’ (Castells 2005), it can re-imagine itself by coming

to terms with the contemporary reality where it is common for family members to be living apart from one another inside and outside the borders of Europe.

NOTES

1. 'BBM' refers to Black Berry Messenger, the smartphone of choice which purportedly fuelled the riots.
2. On 3 September 2014, 205,833 people were registered to the site, and 1,290,713 topics had been opened.
3. The complexity and fleeting nature of digital mediation and digital methods demands scrutiny. In April 2015, shortly after completing fieldwork, Facebook changed its Application Programming Interface (API) and data retrieval policy and as a result Touchgraph, the visualization application we used, was not able to access and process individual user data any longer.

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