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The multi-sitedness of Somali diasporic belonging: Comparative notes on Somali migrant women's digital practices

ABSTRACT

In this comparative article we offer a critical overview of the articles included in this Special Issue, paying attention to common patterns and distinctive features. We do so by exploring the ways in which Somali migrant women living across different cities in Europe engage in everyday digital practices. The central question that underlines this comparative investigation is how transnational multi-sitedness, different generations and urban localities play a role in contemporary Somali diasporic formations and take shape through digital media. We consider the multi-sitedness of Somali diaspora in light of the emergent transnational potentials of communications technologies, while keeping in focus gendered dynamics and intersectional aspects; how generation plays into processes of diasporic cultural change and continuity; and how spatial relationships of belonging are

KEYWORDS

shaped by the communicative spaces that mobile devices and software platforms afford. Our findings show that to better understand the role of digitally mediated experiences, we need to focus on everyday media environments within contexts of international mobility across continental borders marked by postcolonial traces.

This article offers a comparative framework for the articles published in this Special Issue, identifying the themes and main findings which emerge from the fieldwork the contributors conducted. That fieldwork was carried out among Somali migrant women in the European cities of Rome, London and Amsterdam. The article examines the relationship of the Somali diaspora with digital technologies and the ways in which such technologies become embedded in everyday practices of belonging and networking. It foregrounds the role of Somali migrant women in the diaspora and the ways in which digital technologies help co-shape spaces of belonging and identity networks. It explores how the women manage co-presence at the translocal level, both within their community and across diasporas. Though each specific case study is the reflection of detailed ethnographic fieldwork, specific historical conditions of migration, reception and integration policies, there are common themes and patterns that speak to the general framework of diasporic formations within Europe, gender dynamics and urban cosmopolitanism. This is inflected in specific ways due to the increased role and impact of digital media technologies and widespread use of social media platforms, which have substantially changed the ways in which migrants meet, keep in touch, maintain and share their practices of belonging.

In this Special Issue the focus is specifically on the Somali diaspora, and the ways in which it is established, maintained and remediated transnationally across different cities in Europe. Contrary to the status of guest workers or European post-socialist migrants and on top of a colonial legacy as a former Italian colony (placed under British protectorate after 1941), the Somali share the fragile and vulnerable status of asylum seekers and refugees, aligning themselves with many other immigrants from post-conflict zones (Iran, Iraq, Afghanistan, Democratic Republic of Congo and Sudan, to name but a few). Through the suspension of their rights, they live in a state of exception and in the waiting room of Europe (Agamben 1998; Balibar 2004). The complexity of the Somali diaspora, both historically, as following different phases, and geographically, as scattered across Africa, Europe and North America, is further intensified by the project of reconstruction and national rebuilding to which many of the Somali living abroad contribute and feel committed (Osman 2017).

Our focus is on how the use of communications technologies intersects with gender dynamics in connection with issues of race, religion, ethnicity, clan and education. By focusing on the specificity of major European cities (London, Amsterdam and Rome) and how they relate and connect to other

diasporic sites worldwide, not just the homeland left behind, we analyse the shifting and complex nature of Somali diasporic affiliations. As Osman has emphasized, the technological advancement has not been without its dissymmetries. Even though in theory accessible to all, media communications have operated in an elitist manner, where platforms are provided to those members of the Somali diaspora, and those who stayed behind in the homeland territories, who have certain political, economic and cultural capital. There is, therefore, a sense of non-recognition and non-participation by marginalized groups within the community, where clannism is also an issue. There is a generalized consensus that Somali diasporic media systemically silence Somali women through poor media representation, which is a reproduction of the ways in which women are treated within Somali society, resulting in the media reinforcing sentiments of exclusion and marginalization (Osman 2020: 591).

In our approach we have foregrounded the role of our women participants and their use of digital media in their everyday lives. This does not deny experiences of marginalization within the host country in general, or the Somali community in particular cases, but we put the narrative and experience of diasporic Somali women at the centre of our investigation. Digital practices emerge as integrated in their daily lives; therefore, the focus is on the continuum between online and offline life, more than on the disruptions and revolution that the use of media technologies has brought into the life of these communities. On the contrary, what emerges are strong similarities among the Somali women across Europe, although their engagement with social media, or media savviness, can greatly vary, as well as the intensity of its use, the purpose or choice of specific social media apps, and the level of leadership and visibility reached through digital engagements within the Somali community at the local or transnational level.

The Somali diaspora emerges as very heterogeneous across Europe. This is in part due to the different phases of migrations to Europe (straight after decolonialization, after the fall of Siad Barre and the recent refugee wave post 2005), as well as the different multicultural policies of the host countries. Italy had colonial ties with Somalia, as did the United Kingdom with Somaliland, so the cultural capital needed for integration, including previous knowledge of the language and cultural expectations, varies greatly. For example, the Netherlands has no history of colonial relations with Somalia, yet it has received a significant number of refugees from Somalia in various phases. Its specific multicultural policies have also greatly impacted on the possibilities and forms of integration (see the article by Laura Candidatu in this Special Issue). Also, there has been substantial onward migration of members of the Somali diaspora from the Netherlands to the United Kingdom for entrepreneurial reasons, because of the wider Somali networks and because there is less of a language barrier, though Brexit might change this pattern of onward migration as well in the future. Another factor is the level of education, which varies greatly among the groups approached and studied across the three cities, making comparisons at times difficult or impossible.

This comparative dimension foregrounds an ethnographic approach that emphasizes the everyday aspect of diasporic digitality. It is important not to conceptualize the internet merely as a medium or platform with specific affordances, but to pay attention to the ways in which the digital literally comes to life through the user's participation, focusing on how people experience and contribute to the production of the digital realm. Ethnography can help understand digital media better by situating it in particular contexts and making

visible the socially diverse practices and engagements of different groups and generations, rather than focusing on the abstract capabilities of the internet. As standpoint epistemology has argued, in contrast to technological determinism or media-centric approaches, the positionality of the user of technology is important for understanding what technology does/can do or mean, showing the entanglements between people and machines, and subjectivity and technology, as productively discussed by feminist thinkers such as Donna Haraway (1991, 1997) and Katherine N. Hayles (1999, 2005).

In particular for Somali migrant women, the use of digital media is highly embedded in their gendered roles as mothers, daughters, reunited wives, students and professionals, who keep the ties with the homeland and diaspora communities in diversified as well as collective ways. Yet several common issues emerge that highlight the specificity and dynamics of the Somali diaspora and its engagement with digital practices based on the notion of (1) transnational multi-sitedness, (2) generational differences and (3) urban belongings. We have identified these themes based on a comparison of the key findings of the three original research articles in this Special Issue.

For the sake of clarify we will provide here a brief overview of the three articles discussed and their relation to the main comparative lens and interventions proposed, which will be further explored in the next sections.

Melis Mevsimler's article 'Second-generation British–Somali women: The translocal nexus of London and global diaspora' analyses the digital media practices of second-generation British Somali women living in London. The main focus is the dynamic relationships between digital media and diasporic identity formation. The issue of being second-generation British–Somali is put centre stage in order to explore how connectivity, platforms and lifestyles are articulated differently, not just with respect to the first generation but also with respect to transnational identities. The article elaborates on how the second generation participates in youth-oriented online global cultural spaces while being rooted in the local urban sites of London. This demonstrates that they use the internet and social media platforms to position themselves as urban dwellers in London and as members of the global Somali diaspora at the same time. Here urban belongings and generational differences intersect with multi-sited practices. Mevsimler argues, in fact, that these young women's digital practices create a translocal nexus that intertwines urban and transnational social fields in line with their gendered and generation-specific experiences and aspirations.

The gendered role of Somali women as mothers, daughters and wives is further articulated in the article by Laura Candidatu, entitled 'Diasporic mothering and Somali diaspora formation in the Netherlands'. This article addresses how Somali migrant women living in the Netherlands articulate their participation in digital diaspora formation. Whereas Mevsimler's article emphasizes the issue of generation and in particular its gendered dimension, Candidatu uses the lens of 'diasporic mothering', which is understood as a site where difference and belonging are negotiated through work of cultural reproduction, collective identity construction and stable homemaking. In order to do this, Candidatu focuses on generation, multi-sitedness and urban belonging: first, by analytically distinguishing between two generations of Somali women on the basis of their arrival in the Netherlands (first wave vs. second wave) and their different socio-economic backgrounds in Somalia before their migration; second, by showing how their participation in diaspora formation is shaped by both mothering practices, and local and national Dutch policy

approaches to migration; and finally by looking at how the specificities of the local and national Dutch context favour rather physical and neighbourhood-based diaspora encounters, while de-centring the role of digital media in the initial formation of diaspora networks.

The theme of neighbourhood and digital localization is further analysed by Claudia Minchilli in her article on 'Localizing diasporic digital media practices: Social stratification and community making among Somali women living in Rome'. In her article, Minchilli analyses the relationship between digital media practices, community making and forms of social stratification among Somali women living in Rome. Minchilli explores the different waves of Somali migration to Rome and the different generations that now coexist amidst different migration policies and educational legacies. She explores in particular how Somali migrant women in Rome assumes different positionings within the local community through digital means. Drawing on a critical approach to the study of 'digital diaspora' and intersecting it with sociological theories of 'field' and 'capitals' as analytical tools, the article examines forms of diasporic networking and unpacks women's positioning and their roles online and offline through an intersectional approach sensitive to age, class, literacy and gender dynamics. This reveals internal fractures or forms of solidarity shaping the landscape of the local field of Somali digital diaspora and contributing in specific ways to issues of generation, multi-sitedness and urban belongings as comparative features across diasporas in Europe.

In the following sections we will elaborate in more depth on the overarching themes that cut across the different contributions, pointing out specificities and distinctive aspects emerging from everyday digital media practices. Our basis for comparability across cases was established in the infrastructure of the CONNECTINGEUROPE project.[1]

This project was set up in such a way that the authors of the articles all conducted ethnographic fieldwork for the same duration and over the same time periods, guided by the same methodological principles of doing human-centred digital media research. These research principles foregrounded techniques of in-depth, semi-structured interviewing and online/offline participant observation within diaspora spaces, both within the urban spaces studied and the web spaces frequented by respondents. These methods were complemented by data collection methods specific to digital platforms, such as scraping and visualizing networks of user data. The common methodology created a shared starting point of human users of digital media situated within urban environments across cases. There was also a shared ethical infrastructure that held researchers to common standards regarding research ethics, and key conceptual discussions around digital diaspora, gender and digital media practices that informed the analytical frameworks of each of the sub-projects, albeit in a variety of ways. Finally, the common focus on women offered a narrower area of interest than diaspora processes as a whole and drew the separate research project towards similar areas of scholarship with relation to gendered migration patterns and the ways in which cultural formation processes relate to issues of gendered social roles.

TRANSNATIONAL MULTI-SITEDNESS

Like many diasporas, migrating Somalis have settled in multiple urban locales as communities that are visible to a greater or lesser extent. Yet relative to other migrant groups, Somali diasporic links of mobility and imagination

between different sites of settlement appear to be particularly pronounced. For instance, Somali diasporic interconnectivity has been discussed in terms of the dreams that those living in the Kenyan Dadaab refugee camp have of resettlement in western cities where other Somalis they are in touch with are living (Horst 2018). This interconnectivity has also been analysed with relation to young Somalis living in the 'triangle' of Somalia, the Netherlands and the United Kingdom, within which unique forms of mobility and relations to citizenship have emerged (van Liempt 2011). Furthermore, links between different diaspora locales have been discussed within the African continent, where Johannesburg and Nairobi are 'interconnected cities for the Somali diaspora' between which (bi-directionally) and through which (as a stop in the onward migration to the United Arab Emirates or western countries) Somalis are mobile in ways that 'give rise to strong social networks linking these two cities' (Ripero-Muniz 2020: 75).

Such imaginations of other Somali diaspora communities, onward migration desires, or hopes for a future return to Somali territories are part of complex transnational formations of cultural belonging. They are also increasingly shaped by new forms of media and communication that are ever more embedded within the everyday practices of migrants' lives. Hence the uptake of digital media within an already interconnected set of diaspora sites raises important questions about how mobilities, imaginations and intimacies within the various parts of the Somali diaspora and Somali 'homeland' locations might be reconfigured through digital media uses. For instance, Cindy Hort's notion of 'multi-sited embeddedness' highlights the multiple sites of belonging that young Somali migrants in different national contexts relate to through their civic engagement. Horst's work has been instructive in understanding how young Somalis make claims to and experience belonging within multiple national contexts simultaneously rather than having competing binary loyalties to nations they and/or their families have lived in. How does this 'multi-sited embeddedness' take shape under conditions of ubiquitous digital media practices?

Our endeavour of tracing some of the connections between sites of dispersion is, therefore, partly also a project of understanding media flows that fall outside the historical North–South colonial directionality of mass communications. Nevertheless, the project's findings suggest that a digital enhancement of interconnections between diaspora sites is not taking place in any straightforward way. More specifically, the study looking at Somali women's everyday digital media practices found an absence of websites, social media pages, hashtags or accounts shared across the research cases in Rome, London and Amsterdam. While this lack of overlap can partly be explained by the ethnographic focus that developed in specific directions in each field case, it is also produced by the divergence in digital practices across spatial locales and social groups. As we argue in what follows, this reveals the importance of understanding people's everyday digital media practices as the practices of users with divergent experiences of migration from the same place, and as embedded within specific histories of migration.

In Rome, Somali women's digital practices are strongly shaped by the different experiences of migration produced by changing postcolonial Italian citizenship and immigration policies, as Claudia Minchilli illustrates in her article. These policies give shape to migration flows to Italy and the ways in which migrants organize themselves and feel belonging within their locations of residence. Minchilli's analysis demonstrates the tensions in the sense

of togetherness experienced between different groups of Somali women in Rome. Rather than a shared national culture producing a desire to connect with one another through convenient and low-cost spaces for online social-izing and networking, these women group themselves socially according to their specific experiences of migration in a particular decade, at a particular age and as women. These shared elements of migration experience shed light on the variety of everyday digital media practices *within* local diaspora groups, thus helping to understand why there is relatively little overlap between the platform spaces accessed by different Somali diasporic groups and subgroups on an everyday basis. This is an apparent testament to the essentially situated nature of diaspora formation and the rich variety of positionings that emerge within Somali diasporic digital media practices. On the level of everyday media practices, mass engagement with the same digital *content* online seems rare across locales of diaspora settlement.

However, imaginative processes that produce communities are not based purely in the consumption of shared content. Rather, as Benedict Anderson's influential theorization of the modern nation suggests ([1983] 1991), media *forms* play an important role in people's experiences of a diasporic Somali nation as a collective whole. Messaging applications and mobile networked devices play a significant role in Somali women's everyday lives across all three cases. And while they exhibit important differences with regard to the deployment of content and communicative spaces, experiences of digital media usage in everyday situations may nevertheless create a shared aware-ness of the widespread use of smartphones and messaging apps for the crea-tion of transnational family spheres and local diasporic networks among fellow Somalis. The importance of the smartphone as a media form that plays a key role in day-to-day sociality is underscored by one of Minchilli's respond-ents when she says, '[i]f I forget my phone, it's as if I have forgotten my life'. The significant use of smartphone-based messenger apps across the three featured cases is on the one hand indicative of the shared reliance of Somali women migrants on digital communications for positioning themselves both locally and transnationally within diasporic social spaces, while on the other hand the ubiquity of the smartphone within urban spaces suggests the rela-tive invisibility of digital transnational communications in comparison with older forms of migrant media such as satellite television and ethnic broadcast-ing, which are defined more by their infrastructural and institutional difference from mainstream media in the settlement countries, simply due to their form.

Diasporic media forms have become formally more indistinguishable from other urban media practices in the three field sites in question due to the overall ubiquity of smartphones. However, connections between the three sites analysed in this project remained oblique, such that there were very few expressions of multi-sited belonging linking them. Yet this did not rule out indications of diasporic multi-sitedness altogether, which appeared to be clearest among second-generation Somali migrants. Thus, as Melis Mevsimler's article demonstrates, young Somalis in London produce online spaces for Somali diasporic youth to create and consume cultural productions that relate to their experiences of navigating religious, gender and life-stage dynamics with an awareness of a wider public of similar young people with Somali migrant backgrounds in other global capitals, for instance in North America. In the following section, we elaborate on the effects of genera-tional differences and suggest how the notion of generation can be effectively

conceptualized and problematized in order to fit the cases of Somali diaspora we foreground in this comparative discussion.

Here, our focus is on understanding how digital media has influenced configurations of the multi-sitedness of Somali diaspora; it suffices to say that the nature of multi-sitedness in the Somali diaspora appears to be strongly related to a collective awareness of step-wise migration as a path to progressive advancement or upward socio-economic mobility. In other words, Somali women's uptake of digital media in each of the three diaspora sites appears to primarily reflect considerations about social positioning within local spaces and transnational networks that potentially support their advancement, for instance by accessing education and resources for their children, and/or gaining social support from others in similar situations, as the articles in this Special Issue each show in detail. Digital media does not seem to challenge the significance of these important motivations behind diasporic imagination and transnational mobility and communication. However, it is also significant that as new diasporic generations imagine the Somali diaspora in changing ways, the cultural productions and communicative spaces they create give rise to reconfigurations of the transnational multi-sitedness of Somali diaspora in ways that are heavily reliant on the digitally mediated connections between different parts of the Somali diaspora worldwide.

DEFINING MIGRANT GENERATIONS IN THE CONTEXT OF TRANSNATIONAL HISTORICAL CHANGES

The second generation of Somali migrants has emerged as a significant segment in the growing international Somali diaspora. These are the children of migrants who were born and/or raised from early childhood in the country in which their parents settled. However, with a perennially unreliable stability in the 'homeland' giving rise to consecutive waves of migration, migrants with Somali backgrounds within the same age cohort and even within the same settlement location may be either first-generation or second-generation migrants. Furthermore, as also touched on above, both sending and receiving societies are subject to historical changes that shape both the reasons for migration and the environment within which each first generation of migrants settles. Therefore, the emergence of significantly sized groups of second (and third) generation migrants in different settlement locales relies on there having been relatively well-defined waves of migration comprised of a demographic of migrants who were of similar ages and in the position to start and/or raise young families in the new country. Due to particularities in consecutive waves of migration, differing prevalence of return migration among first-generation migrants, and other factors that we discuss further in this section, the second generation of Somali diaspora takes on different forms in different settlement locations.

As Claudia Minchilli's article discusses, the two main social groupings of Somali women in Rome are those who migrated before the civil war started in the early 1990s vs. those who migrated after the start of the civil war. These two main social groupings include the three main migration waves to Italy. The first wave comprised those migrating during the 1950s and 1960s under training and education agreements with Italian universities; the second wave from 1969 to 1991 consisted mostly of political refugees fleeing the Siad Barre regime and its downfall; and the third wave that emerged in late 2000s was characterized by migration after the fall of the regime and the country's

political collapse and slide into civil war and domination of the Al-Shabab militia group. Laura Candidatu describes a similar situation in which the Somali women in Amsterdam reflected the same social awareness of the different composition of the groups of migrants fleeing before the war or in its early stages, as opposed to those who had spent significant proportions of their lives under a failed state. In Rome, the Italian colonial past in Somalia helped bolster the cultural capital of earlier Somali arrivals, who were also already more skilled/educated, creating a stark distinction between earlier and later migrant cohorts. In Amsterdam, the same cohort distinction exists but is less pronounced, partly due to the absence of the colonial historical backdrop to the earlier wave, and because that wave is known to have migrated onward to the United Kingdom from the Netherlands in significant numbers. From the comparison perspective, we found that any definition of migrant generations need not suggest uniformity of experiences across the same 'waves' arriving in different locations.

Nevertheless, differences between the first and second generations are important when they suggest shifts in social group dynamics within the diaspora and/or between the diaspora and the wider populace in settlement locations. This can be seen in how diasporic sub-groups diverge from one another, relate to one another and offer different experiences of diasporic cultural belonging. In London, specific modes of digital media practice among younger Somali Londoners show how the second generation comes to feel a belonging to a global Somali diaspora that is English-language oriented, references notions of postcolonial diasporic blackness and draws on pop cultural tropes. This second generation in London, which has emerged as an important part of the Somali diaspora population in the city, also demonstrates specificities that embed it within the local places, urban subcultures and digital cultures typically practised within multicultural London. While drawing distinctions between migrant first and second generations is complicated by continuous migration flows, intergenerational differences in modes of diasporic Somali cultural production are nevertheless important. Divergent digital practices enhance the distinctions between how belonging is experienced for Somalis who have been born and/or raised outside the Somali territories and are also further distanced temporally from the experience of (British) colonial rule in Somalia. Despite their temporal distance from direct experience with colonial subjecthood, as well as from the violence of the postcolonial independence experiment that immediately followed, the ways in which the second generation of Somalis in London engage with the Somali past appears to take shape via narratives of this generation's own making.

These collectively produced narratives about the past not only help redefine Somali diasporic belonging through Twitter, Snapchat, Instagram and YouTube publics, they also operate by staking out claims to an imagined future for their own generation. Such second-generation dynamics have elements in common with other second-generation and youth diasporic digital media cultures (Leurs 2015; Alinejad 2017), exhibiting divergence from the everyday media worlds of their parents' generation. As has been noted in research discussing intergenerational dynamics of diasporic social media usage, experiences of 'homeland' differ across generations, not just because of different migration experiences but also because of different media practices (Costa and Alinejad 2020). Through Mevsimler's article, we come to understand how the collective memory of war for the first generation compounds the experiential distance between the first and second generations of Somalis in London, thus

creating the impetus for the younger generation of relatively highly educated and digital platform-literate Somali Londoners to seek out information about a Somali homeland through channels that reflect the media ecologies of their everyday lives. These tend to include accessing western news outlets, international humanitarian sources and other second-generation-produced content rather than the diasporic media channels they grew up being exposed to via their parents' media consumption practices.

Conversely, Laura Candidatu's analysis focuses on the perspective of Somali mothers raising children in the Netherlands, and reflects the interest in cultural transmission on the part of mothers, while also articulating the barriers and tensions that emerge within familial relationships. These tensions are often attributed to the interventions of the outside forces of local state officials in their capacity as social and child services workers and the reputation that authorities have acquired among many Somali women due to collective memories of past cases in which children were removed from their familial homes as parental custody was overruled by the authorities because of concerns about female genital cutting and/or physical violence. The level of scrutiny early waves of arrivals of Somali families had experienced in their encounters with state authorities gave rise to a general atmosphere of distrust among the community in Amsterdam towards local authorities, especially with regard to openness about domestic affairs.

Candidatu suggests that while state interventions may typically have been motivated by fostering greater intergenerational cohesion, they seem indirectly to have left a lasting memory among the first-wave Somali women of these interventions as a form of unwanted control over their private lives, not as relieving intergenerational tensions. However, newcomers migrating in more recent waves seemed to have been relatively impervious to this distrustful atmosphere, and to have relied on their own (relatively positive) personal experiences with the authorities. It remains to be seen how the intergenerational dynamics between these different migrant cohorts and their children develops over time. In what follows, we further discuss the dynamics of the spatial environment of different urban spaces, and how the online environments in which the Somali migrant women participate on an everyday basis relate to the offline social dynamics within the respective urban spaces of Amsterdam, London and Rome.

URBAN BELONGING: PHYSICAL SPACES AND DIGITAL DIASPORIC SOCIALITY

Some of the most significant forms of digital media usage within the context of everyday practice take place as part of local community formation and the kinds of sociality that are produced on the scale at which everyday life activities occur. This is what the cases discussed in the articles of this Special Issue cumulatively suggest. The offline social spheres in which Somali women live their lives have a primary influence on the forms of sociality that emerge from their digital media practices. These include, for instance, media practices related to the social, emotional and cultural practices of diasporic mothering, as Laura Candidatu's article discusses. Such practices, she explains, closely reflect the interpersonal communications of Somali women within their localized networks, as well as their engagement with family members in Somalia. Similarly, in Claudia Minchilli's analysis, local social networks for the maintenance and exchange of intimate friendship, social capital and material

resources within the city of Rome reflect how the local site of settlement develops as a crucial factor in how diasporic formations take shape through digital media. In a comparable way, the discussion Melis Mevsimler presents in her article (mentioned above) also demonstrates the role of the local spaces within the city when it comes to how digital communications are used to engage with questions of Somali cultural belonging. These parallels across cases show how physical spatial relations emerge as an essential force driving how digital practices shape diasporic formations.

However, what these analyses also reveal are the significant differences in the processes through which 'the local' comes to take on meaning in the context of people's everyday lives. Hence, we see locality not as a limited and unchanging geographical circumference around the user but a scale at which social life becomes experienced as meaningful, and which therefore guides the processes through which belonging is experienced and claimed. In London, for instance, the spaces of city neighbourhoods configure the ways the young women Mevsimler discusses move between neighbourhoods that have been shaped by city planning, urban ethnic identities and the city's multicultural image and policies. Whereas in Amsterdam, it is predominantly multicultural policies at the national level that define how the meaning of the local takes shape for Somalis. Their local self-organization takes shape in response to the effects of institutions that developed within a national historical framework of pillarization but played out on a municipal level, making these local diaspora formations contingent on national dynamics. And in the case of Rome, the significance of the local spaces that constitute a relevant social force that brings people together, as discussed by Minchilli, is strongly shaped by colonial historical relations and the shifting international relations framework that has developed in the postcolonial context. The many differences between the Rome-based Somali diaspora and the London diaspora demonstrates not only the distinctions between the Italian and British colonial regimes but also how postcolonial migrancy is a divergent and changing condition, one that is forged anew with each emergent legal, political and historical event and as each new cultural reference point takes on meaning and coheres as memory for a generation and/or migration cohort.

From the divergences between the cases, we see that the local is part of a social process in which the realm of the physically proximate takes on different meanings as a social space in each context. While locality relates to other scales in each case, *how* it relates is a matter of historical context and everyday practices. Understood in this way, the social impacts of locality on how Somali women take up digital media within their everyday practices are expressed through different social processes. Hence, as Laura Candidatu also argues, the fact that the local exerts itself through the way in which Somali women organize the sociality of their digital communications does not necessarily tell us something about what is typical of Somali diaspora in general, nor something that necessarily specific to a single local site. This requires in-depth contextualization, comparison and understanding of the meanings that the situated media practices have for users. As Mevsimler suggests, the notion of 'translocality' is most illuminating for understanding the case of young Somali women's digital media practices in London. This is largely due to evidence for a strong connection between popular genres of digital media use that connect local media practices to urban styles that are shared within circuits of global youth culture production on digital platforms. The city becomes imagined as an oppositional space to the more homogenously imagined space of

the nation. This process mirrors diasporic dynamics that have characterized earlier socio-technological formations of diaspora that are engendered by the contradiction between producing alternative political spheres in order to seek representation/self-representation that challenges the media mainstreaming of the national order (Georgiou 2008) while their diasporic media practices also reproduce and contribute to global capitalist circuits of media production (Karim 2003).

CONCLUSION

In this introductory article to the Special Issue on Somali migrant women and everyday digital media practices, we have outlined some of the main points that make it especially important to better understand the Somali diaspora in the context of everyday digital media ubiquity from a gendered and intersectional perspective. In introducing the analyses that ensue in the Issue's articles, we have teased out some of the most significant comparative insights that have emerged thus far from the CONNECTINGEUROPE research project. The central question that has guided us in our discussion here is: how do Somali migrant women contribute to contemporary diasporic formations in multiple locations of settlement and how does this take shape through digital media? What might this tell us about how to better understand the role of digitally mediated experiences, media representations and everyday media environments within contexts of international mobility across continental borders marked with postcolonial traces? We have identified three central areas of convergence and productive divergence between the three cases discussed in the articles that feature in this Special Issue, and suggested how each area might help advance understanding and future research directions on the role of digital media in the formation of Somali diasporic belonging. That is: how to think about the multi-sitedness of Somali diaspora in light of the emergent transnational potentials of communications technologies; how generation plays into processes of diasporic cultural change and continuity; and how spatial relationships of belonging are shaped by the communicative spaces that mobile devices and software platforms afford.

First, we contend that the multi-sitedness of the female Somali diaspora appears to be manifest through much the same processes using digital media as was the case through longer-running, everyday forms of communication and mobility between different sites in this diaspora. The multiple yet deep sitedness that seems to characterize the diaspora practices of communication and identification that we have focused on suggests the sustained significance of, and further need for, in-depth research looking at digital practices in the context of ordinary life scenarios, routines and social worlds. Second, we have demonstrated how the cross-generational and intergenerational dynamics found in the case studies within the CONNECTINGEUROPE project indicate important ways in which styles and genres of media usage that take on meaning within generational socialization have an impact on how new and shifting group boundaries are produced and reproduced, and imaginations and experiences of 'homeland' are given shape. This makes it particularly important for the study of diaspora culture to take into account how processes of everyday cultural practice include digital media usage.

Such study can provide further understanding of how such media usage bleeds into digital cultures that extend beyond the ethno-national/ethno-tribal, diasporic or minoritized markings of migrancy and tend to be, for

instance, oriented towards (multicultural) urbanity, popularly recognizable brands of identity politics, and claims to (gendered) pan-ethnicity. Third and finally, we have shown that the significance of the local as a socially organizing force extends into the ways in which everyday digital media practices give rise to communicative spaces. Thus the institutional media forms historically associated with multicultural inclusion become less visible as diasporic belonging is produced through much the same social processes as other niche media formations online that rely on participatory publics.

We suggest that the complexities we have discussed are a testament to the diversity of meanings that digital media practices have among women of Somali background. These have implications for their feelings of belonging, how social groupings and subgroupings are shaped within Somali diaspora populations, and how imaginations of diasporic community are afforded that are cross-cut with differences of gender, socio-economic class, education, race and religion. The research articles in this issue present the foundations of our comparative analysis in greater depth, bringing to light the insights that emerged in the respective field sites.

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