

SOCIAL MEDIA USAGE, TAHRIIB (MIGRATION), AND SETTLEMENT AMONG SOMALI REFUGEES IN FRANCE

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Abstract

Technologies are omnipresent in our society, from mobile telephone systems to satellite television and Internet broadcasting, which shape the way we live, work, and interact. They have also transformed the experience of international migration, making it possible for migrants to maintain strong ties between the host society and the home country. In this article, we examine the precarious situation lived by Somali refugees in France, and we explore their uses of social media during tahriib or their migratory path and settlement in three French cities. The first section discusses the method on which this field study is based, that of critical and multi-sited ethnography. After describing living conditions experienced by Somali refugees in France in the next section, the last section presents the findings of the field study. In doing so, the present research strives to fill a research gap by contributing to the advancement of knowledge on social media use by refugees.

Résumé

Les technologies de l'information et de la communication (TIC) sont omniprésentes et la téléphonie mobile, la télévision par satellite et internet façonnent notre façon de vivre, de travailler et d'interagir. Elles ont aussi transformé la migration internationale, rendant possible pour les migrants le maintien des liens forts entre la société d'accueil et le pays d'origine. Dans cet article, nous examinons le sort précaire des réfugiés Somaliens en France et explorons leurs usages des médias sociaux pendant le tahriib ou trajet migratoire et l'installation dans trois villes françaises. Dans un premier temps, nous allons présenter la méthode

de l'ethnographie critique et multi-sites sur laquelle repose cette présente enquête de terrain. Il s'agit en dernier, après avoir décrit les conditions de vie des réfugiés Somaliens en France, de présenter les résultats. Cette présente recherche tente de contribuer à l'avancement du savoir sur les usages des médias sociaux par les réfugiés.

Introduction

Information and communication technologies (ICT) permeate today all levels of society and undoubtedly contribute to a sense of reduced space and time. The accelerated development of these technologies arises from a radical transformation of a largely globalized capitalist economy.¹ Mobile telephone systems, satellite television, and Internet broadcasting shape the way we live, work, and interact. They have also transformed the experience of international migration, making it possible for migrants to maintain strong ties between the host society and the home country. Many studies have been conducted in this context on the uses of ICT by migrants in host countries.² However, studies focusing on the uses of ICT by refugees during their migratory trajectories and their settlement are limited. In a research report prepared by Linda Leung³ for the UNHCR and published in 2011, the author highlights the fact that there was little consideration of the particular importance technology held for refugees and asylum seekers, individuals who are also affected by problems of migration and marginalization. The present research strives to fill this gap by contributing to the advancement of knowledge on social media use by refugees. In this context, "social media" refers to primarily new media including Facebook and YouTube. There are also supporting instant communication tools such as Skype, MSN Messenger, and VoIP (Voice over Internet

Protocol). In order to do so, the analysis of social media use by refugees should not limit itself by considering technical devices as guarantors of individual autonomy and by taking refugees to be actors in control of their social and economic environment. Consequently, a more critical view is needed of the discourses claiming that society has become more “equal” and “solidary” thanks to ICT. This utopia, as described by Armand Mattelart,⁴ poorly hides relations of domination and exclusion in society, which are based on ethnicity, social class, gender, and age. In this article, we examine the precarious situation lived by Somali refugees in France, and we explore their uses of social media during their migratory trajectory and settlement in three French cities. The first section discusses the method on which this field study is based, that of critical and multi-sited ethnography. After describing living conditions experienced by Somali refugees in France in the next section, the last section presents the findings of the field study.

Critical and Multi-sited Ethnography

The research is based on data collected during a critical and multi-sited ethnographical study carried out in France, namely in the cities of Rennes, Angers, and Paris. The field study took place between January and April 2011 and centred on the understanding of the role played by social media in the migratory trajectory of Somali refugees in France. The choice of methodology reflects the critical approach and aims at denouncing social and economic inequalities lived by refugees in France. Critical ethnography has for the objective to uncover processes that create iniquity and injustice lived by a specific social group in a specific context.⁵ In critical ethnographic research, the researcher feels that he or she has a moral obligation to attempt to change these processes.⁶ To do so, the researcher must use available resources and skills in an effort to arrive at a deeper understanding of the lived experience of excluded groups and to make their usually hidden experiences and silenced voices accessible to others.⁷ However, critical ethnography is more than a field study on socially marginalized groups; it largely denounces all sorts of domination exerted on individuals.⁸

The ethnographic approach used in this study is also multi-sited. In Rennes, Angers, and Paris, we approached approximately one hundred Somalis, but only thirty-four of them agreed to directly take part in the research, complete a questionnaire on media use and ICT devices, and participate in an individual and a group in-depth interview. The two methods combined allowed us to collect data on the uses of ICT by immigrants as they migrate from Somalia to France and particularly to listen to the voices of those who are not often awarded the chance to speak.

When it comes to studying a community in diaspora and its complex, contemporary migratory trajectories, the multi-sited ethnography method is increasingly becoming the method of choice in media studies, technological sciences, and cultural studies.⁹ While traditional ethnography involves the practice of participant observation for extended periods of time at a specific site (thick ethnography), multi-sited ethnography is committed to studying a spatially dispersed field whereby the ethnographer moves across two or more locations.¹⁰ This epistemological turn was advanced by Georges Marcus who in 1995 demonstrated the inability of traditional ethnography to capture multiple and complex effects of contemporary social systems and structures on individuals. For other authors, the popularity of multi-sited ethnographic research lies in the fact that the researcher is required to follow “the steps” of the individuals under study who are becoming increasingly mobile. The increased popularity of this method also corresponds with the changing work conditions of researchers whose time is split between their field studies, search for funding, teaching duties, and family obligations.¹¹ Therefore, professional, family, and economic needs are increasingly driving the researchers to conduct multi-sited ethnographic studies that take place “here” and “there” and “between” different projects, as researchers are no longer immersed in studying one single site for long periods of time.¹²

Two important factors facilitated the completion of this field study. The first factor is the help received from a Somali family with whom we came into contact in Rennes in 2002 during the participant recruitment campaign. The family has since become a gatekeeper with whom we established privileged ties. The second factor is related to our proficiency of the Somali language spoken by Somalis. In this regard, George Marcus writes:

Just as ‘knowing the language’ guarantees the integrity of traditional fieldwork and gives the bounded field—e.g. a people, an ethnic group, a community, its most coherence as culture, this skill is as important in multi-sited fieldwork and even with more exactitude.¹³

Research participants were selected through the snowball sampling method. We met the first participants in Rennes, who later recommended other Somalis residing in Angers and Paris who they felt were “trustworthy.” Although the snowball sampling method produced non-representative and non-random samples, the participants were chosen with the aim of obtaining various profiles, in terms of sex and age. This method was a preferred method due to the fact that many Somalis are suspicious of inquiries into their migration trajectories since many of them were

seeking asylum as refugees through the French Office for the Protection of Refugees and Stateless Persons.¹⁴ Another reason behind the suspicion expressed by Somalis is the fragile psychological state of many Somalis whose journey since leaving Somalia has been traumatic. In this context, our research first consists of gaining Somali asylum seekers' trust before carefully obtaining data. The snowball sampling method is well adapted for research projects which deal with sensitive topics.¹⁵

Living Conditions of Somali Refugees in France

To our knowledge, there are no studies which focus on Somali refugees in France despite the fact that there are French research specialists who work on issues related to Somalia and its Diaspora.¹⁶ And yet, the number of Somalis living in France has continued to grow in the last ten years, as confirmed by the statistics published by the Office français de protection des apatrides et des réfugiés (OFPRA) (see Table 1). Somalis traditionally settle in a country where a Somali community already exists or, for historical reasons, in countries of former colonizers, such as England or Italy. Many other Somalis choose Scandinavian countries which generously accepted asylum seekers until the 1990s.¹⁷

The number of Somalis living in France is estimated to be between two thousand and three thousand.¹⁸ Even though the choice to settle in France is motivated by the asylum acceptance rate, Somali families hesitate to move to France due to limited assistance offered by the French government as well as due to difficulties finding accommodation. According to a study by the French Refugee Integration Observatory,¹⁹ it is estimated that refugees in France, much like other categories of immigrants, experience great challenges in accessing independent accommodation and that they are faced with serious obstacles such as low income, prohibitively expensive rents, and inability to find a guarantor for rent leases, as well as racial discrimination. The study specifies that the issue of limited access to accommodation within the refugee context is common to most of the European countries.

Most Somalis who participated in the present research live in immigrant residences. During the three months that this research was being conducted, we spent entire days, from morning until late evening, in the presence of Somalis living in these residences. The goal was to immerse in the

environment and the daily life as much as possible. In small, one-person, sparsely furnished rooms, three or sometimes even four Somalis occupy the space, lacking any form of privacy. Kitchen and bathroom are shared by the residents living on the same floor. Meals are prepared together, while all administrative matters related to the asylum application process are handled jointly. When they are not in their rooms, Somalis always walk together in groups in parks or shopping centres. The process of adapting to the new environment is undertaken in groups which are formed in accordance with age and their home city or village. As an aside, it is important to note the geographic location of the participants. The majority of participants were from the cities of Borama, Burao, and Mogadishu. Borama and Burao are located in Somaliland which comprises the northern part of the country and has had independence from Somalia since the civil war of the 1990s.

It is in this set-up that the youth gather in groups and live together. The oldest Somalis do not hesitate to socialize with younger ones, producing somewhat of a paradox since in Somalia younger men are kept at a distance by the elders, who hold more decision-making power in the Somali society. Clan affiliation seems to be less restrictive and plays a lesser role in the living arrangements of Somali groups. In her study on the migrants temporarily living in "transit" countries such as Egypt and Sudan, the author Fabienne Le Houérou notes that:

...in exile, clans, without disappearing, become less restricting realities. Somalis belonging to competing clans in Somalia can be found sharing the same residence apartments here—a living arrangement perceived as scandalous back home. What makes sense for the individual is *the shared experience*, and it's rather this principle that guides residential group living.²⁰

In the respondents' profiles (Table 2), it is of interest to note the high number of young people aged between eighteen and twenty-nine. With regard to the gender dimension, there a very limited number of women among the Somalis in France. Additionally, the living arrangements in France (crowded housing and multiple residents) made it even less appealing for women to settle in the country. The few Somali women that we did come across were living either

Table 1. Number of Somali Asylum Seekers in France per Year

Year	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010
Number of Somalis	120	115	91	139	123	57	57	101	776	360

Source: Office français de protection des apatrides et des réfugiés (OFPRA)

alone or with their spouse and it was difficult for them to participate in the interviews due to cultural norms of interaction. Women in the Somali culture are more easily identified as Muslims due to religious clothing. Religion plays an important role in the lives of Somali women. A study found that the increased veiling among the Somali women living in Finland is connected on the one hand to their increased religious knowledge and observance and on the other hand the necessity to preserve their own culture and identity in the Diaspora.²¹ Based on this, we can assume that the Internet is central to their access to their religious knowledge.

Table 2. Demographic Variables

Age	Percentage %
18–29	76
30–39	12
40 or more	12
Total	100

Sex	Percentage %
Female	12
Male	88
Total	100

Most of the time Somalis eat two meals per day and sometimes even only one meal. Those individuals who have submitted their asylum application receive a welfare supplement, the so-called “*revenu de solidarité active*,” which amounts to about 300 euros per month. However, those individuals whose fingerprints have been clearly or partially identified by the Eurodac²² database are not entitled to assistance and must wait several months before receiving the final decision regarding their asylum application. In the meantime, they are hosted by the Red Cross housing centres where meals are provided, or are housed by churches. Some of the respondents confided that they sometimes sleep on the street when they are not able to find accommodation. The asylum application process can last up to two years, and during this waiting period refugees do not have a permit to work or to take French classes. Based on the income data of our participants, we were able to calculate that 41 percent of our respondents earned an annual income of 1,000 to 5,000 euros and that 29 percent of them had no income, numbers which are significantly below the poverty line which is at 11,400 euros per year, according to French government statistics.²³

Such dire conditions in which Somali refugees live are a result of the toughening of asylum regulations in France

and of the will “to show asylum seekers that we know how to dismiss but not how to expel.”²⁴ These initiatives are similar to those recently taken up in Canada where in April 2012 the federal government proposed to reform health benefits available to refugees. This government proposal, which sparked an outcry and a collective protest by Canadian doctors, social workers, and lawyers, was intended to take away refugee health benefits that include access to medication, care, and non-urgent treatment such as pregnancy care and chronic illness care.

Tahriib, Migratory Trajectories, and Usage of Instant Communication Tools and Social Media

Tahriib refers to a recent phenomenon and can be translated from Somali into English as “illegal entry” into European countries. The word *tahriib* is used by Somalis²⁵ living in Somalia, Djibouti, and Ethiopia. After the fall of President Siyaad Barré’s regime in December 1991, large numbers of Somalis abandoned their country as it was being ravaged by a civil war. They ran from armed militia which, in the absence of a central government, was terrorizing famished populations. In the last twenty years, the main cities in the South have been shaken by fierce fighting between a number of opposing groups. Close to a million Somalis have since been forced to leave their homes.²⁶ Consequently, many Somalis are trying to join the Somali Diaspora which formed in Scandinavian countries (Norway, Denmark, and Sweden), Netherlands, the UK, and North America. In this sense, *tahriib* is the only means of entering Europe.

Seventy percent of Somali respondents admitted to having lived in at least three European countries before coming to France. In the late 1980s, migrants’ linear trajectories that would originate from one point (in the South) and end in another (in the North) began to transform into diverted, circular, or even zigzag trajectories.²⁷ To come to France, Somali refugees had three possible routes to take:

- (1) starting their journey in the United Arab Emirates, they obtain a tourist visa for Russia from where they cross countries like Ukraine, Hungary, Romania, and Austria to finally arrive in Western Europe;
- (2) after a long and perilous journey through countries such as Eritrea and Sudan, refugees arrive in Libya, where they board makeshift boats destined for Italy and Malta;
- (3) from Djibouti, they take a flight to Morocco with a stopover in Paris, where they submit a request for asylum immediately upon arrival. This route is no longer possible since France introduced an airport transit visa (VTA) in 2008 for passengers coming from Djibouti, reducing the number of Somali asylum seekers.²⁸

The majority of participants stated that during their entire journey they would use cybercafés in order to gain access to the Internet and telephone. The respondents who provided the most descriptive accounts of social media use were those who crossed African countries. While staying in an African “transit” country, Somalis regularly frequent cybercafés which they call *Somali staag*.²⁹ Telephone and Internet booths proliferate in urban neighbourhoods of African cities and offer numerous services such as access to high-speed Internet, telephone communications, and the possibility to receive money sent by families, as well as the possibility to purchase cigarettes and other food products. Cybercafés are not only places with access to ICT but also a space for socialization. In this way, cybercafés provide a space where Somalis are able to meet with others to talk, exchange useful information, and offer support to each other as they face the fear of being arrested in the “transit” country. One respondent comments:

Somali Staags are very important places for us because thanks to the Internet they allow us to stay in permanent contact with the members of our families who’ve stayed back in Somalia or are living in other European countries or in North America. It’s also a place where we can find all kinds of information concerning rental accommodation, smugglers’ contact information, pending departure for another country, and news about friends who’ve crossed the border and into another country.

Fabienne Le Houérou³⁰ notes that in “transit” cities forced Somali migrants can be distinguished from migrants of Abyssinian origin, who thanks to their “inexhaustible ingenuity” and “creativity” devise strategies for finding cheapest possible communication with the use of the Internet and even establish cybercafés. Communication has always been central to the Somali identity, creating and cementing relationships both personal and professional. Somalis are often referred to as “a society of poets” because poetry served, and still serves, as a traditional form of communication. The Polish linguist and literary scholar B. W. Andrzejewski³¹ explored and documented the intense love of poetry and language that has in one form or another underpinned Somali culture for at least a century and a half.³² From poetry as a traditional form of communication, Somalis have transitioned on to new forms of communicative tools based on the Internet. For example, a recent study found that Somalis often watch past Somali plays based on poetry on the Internet.³³

In what follows, we describe the different uses of the Internet by Somalis in *Somali Staag* or cybercafés. Most of the respondents confirmed that their use of the Internet was

essentially for the purpose of communicating and that they use the phone for emergency situations.

MSN Messenger

MSN Messenger allows migrants to maintain contact with others by sending emails via Hotmail and by chatting online with family members in Somalia, Europe, and North America in order to keep them updated on the situation. This direct link with the family is crucial because in cases where Somalis are arrested by the police in “transit” countries or where the smuggler’s price is too high, they are still able to receive money sent by the family via *Hawalas* or through money transfer companies which are sometimes located inside the cybercafé. MSN Messenger is also used for receiving information from friends³⁴ regarding the next step in the journey, making it possible to plan in advance and to adapt to potential new obstacles. Somalis also use MSN Messenger to look for information on the European country that they are trying to reach and that accepts asylum applications by refugees coming from Somalia. They contact their friends whom they have met while crossing the “transit” countries to learn of the different options possible once they arrive in Europe. This constant search for information on European asylum policies continues once they arrive in Europe and after their asylum application is denied. They engage in so-called “asylum shopping” in an effort to apply for asylum following a rejection so as to increase the chances of obtaining asylum in a given country.³⁵

Skype

Among the wide array of technologies used by Somali refugees, Skype figures as yet another option. Skype makes videoconferencing possible with friends living in Europe and family members in Somalia. However, parents of refugees are often less familiar with the technology than the youth, and due to the lack of access to Internet connection at home, they rely on cybercafés in Somalia to see their children and hear their voices. Often, cybercafé employees or their children assist them with setting up the connection and videoconferencing. In his research on the uses of ICT by Ecuadorian migrants, Jacques P. Ramírez stresses that among all other modes of communication videoconferencing produces the “strongest emotional and affective effects,” and “the possibility of seeing ‘the loved one’ on the screen allows families to meet again, for a moment, and to observe each other despite the distance.”³⁶

For those participants who do not use Skype, they remain in contact with their families through communication using “Voice over Internet Protocol” (VoIP). VoIP telephone communication, originally designed to support communications between computers through software, is a method

of making phone calls via the Internet. Developments in telecommunications systems revolutionized communication. Somali telecommunications companies like Telesom-Albarakat, Telecom, Olympic, and others have adopted VoIP and now offer the service to their customers. Participants reported that their families choose often subscribe to VoIP through local telecommunications company. With this option, Somalis in France can make international calls at a lower cost.

Facebook

The social media tool Facebook is the second preferred tool used by the Somalis. As a media platform, it allows its users to search for childhood friends with whom they lost contact when they left their homeland, with friends living in Europe, and with those individuals with whom friendships were formed while in exile in Sudan, Eritrea, and Libya. Facebook is also an ideal tool for finding one's "soulmate." According to young Somali respondents, Facebook can help to establish romantic ties with Somali girls successfully settled in Europe and with a European citizenship. In this light, the possibility of marrying a European citizen represents for a Somali migrant a way out of the precarious situation he is in. Moreover, several respondents³⁷ that we met in Angers had gotten married to Somali women living in other European countries just a few weeks before our meeting. Once in France, Somalis continue to use MSN to get in touch with their friends or family members for the purpose of verifying the accuracy of the news reported on websites regarding political events that took place in their region. The participants explained that despite the proliferation of news media and the almost instantaneous availability of a wealth of news on Somalia, most of the sites publish exaggerated stories in order to generate considerable online traffic and thereby earn money from advertisements. A young Somali man explains:

Somali media do not produce accurate reporting and television shows. Also, the information broadcasted by Somali media is biased. For these reasons, I rarely go to Somali outlets. All the information I need I can find on Facebook. My contacts living in Somalia give me the latest news. Sometimes, I call my family or my friends to obtain additional information on the situation in the region I am from. Then, I compare these news with the news broadcasted on the Somali websites, and so I am able to filter fabricated news from real news.

Even though Somali refugees consult Somali websites, they remain very critical of their country's media, and the majority of them stay informed by reading a variety of news sources so as to avoid reading only biased interpretation of

events. In regard to Somali websites, Bjork³⁸ suggests that these websites can contribute to the strengthening and even recreation of sub-national identities which are most often clan-based.

YouTube

Some 85 percent of respondents stated that they watch YouTube videos posted by the Diaspora or by Internet users in Somalia. Some of these videos are old theatre plays and songs that were broadcast on national television under the former president Syaad Barre's regime, as well as films made by young Somalis in diaspora and especially podcasts from different Somali websites and television stations owned by the Somali Diaspora such as Somali Channel and Universal TV. Some of the podcasts are taken from Al Jazeera's websites and the Somali-language BBC website. Sometimes these podcasts are recovered, posted on YouTube, and discussed by Somali migrants. The popularity of YouTube may be based on that fact that is easy to use from being able to view videos, comment, and search for additional content.

The use of social media by Somalis and their knowledge of computer technology paint a contrast with the stereotypical and sordid images that are usually associated with refugees. Somalia, with its hordes of refugees, is often portrayed by the media with a plethora of negative terms, calling it the most dangerous country in the world and the greatest failed state in recent history. Images depicting chaos, famine, violence, and anarchy flash across television screens around the world. However, the Independent Institute, cited by BBC,³⁹ states that:

far from chaos and economic collapse, we found that Somalia is generally doing better than when it had a state [and] urban businessmen, international corporations, and rural pastoralists have all functioned in a stateless Somalia, achieving standards of living for the country that are equal or superior to many other African nations..

These observations were confirmed by researchers Benjamin Powell, Ryan Ford, and Alex Nowrasteh⁴⁰ who, basing their work on the data collected by the World Bank and United Nations agencies, indicate that Somalia is doing noticeably better without the state than when it had a state and that the standard of living has generally improved compared to many other African countries. Following the same line of argument, they note that in the area of telecommunications there has seen considerable progress. The authors highlight the fact that the country is ranked eighth out of a total of fifty-four African states for the number of telephone lines, sixteenth for mobile phones, eleventh for Internet users, and twenty-seventh for the number of households

with television. In a stable country such as Kenya, it takes several years for a telephone line to be installed, while it generally takes only three days in Somalia.⁴¹ Indeed, four telecommunications companies operate in Somalia, out of which three are in the South (Telcom, Nationlink, and Hormuud) and one (Somtel) in the self-declared independent region of the North (Somaliland). These telecommunications companies are taking advantage of the no-tax environment and are offering Internet access, mobile phone and landline services at record-breaking low prices. Such conditions have sparked a proliferation of cybercafés in all neighbourhoods, bringing ICT access to the Somali population and even mobilizing the civil society in order to ensure people receive training on how to use these technologies. Two participants recount:

I was in Mogadishu. The city was at war. You know, even if there's war, life goes on. I wanted to learn how to use a computer, so I took a training course offered by an NGO. When fighting was going on in the neighbourhood where we were supposed to have training, we would move all the equipment to another, safer neighbourhood. In Mogadishu, at the height of the war, people had iPhones, sometimes even the latest models. Others use phones on Android or Galaxy tablets.

All the communication technologies that we can see here and in the rest of the world also exist in Somalia. Phones and computers are sometimes much cheaper there than here [France]. I find this surprising. If, for example, a family member asks me to send them a computer, I prefer to send them money so that they can buy a computer there, because it's much cheaper. Ethiopia is one country, for example, that imports computers and mobile phones from Somalia.

ICT use by Somali refugees stands in contrast to stereotypical and dark images that often go hand in hand with refugees. What is more, our data show that the majority of our participants in France own a computer despite their low incomes.

Internet Access, ICT Equipment, and Media Practices in France

Once arrived in France, Somalis extend their usage of media to include traditional forms, particularly television. It is worth exploring as they settle into the country, the conditions under which they have Internet access and ICT equipment, as well as the presence of French television.

The questionnaire distributed to our participants specifically asks the respondents to indicate how many technological devices they own (laptop or desktop computers, television sets, subscription to a cable package, DVDs, VCRs, radios, and digital cameras) and to describe their Internet access. The data collected reveals that 62 percent of the youth, aged eighteen to twenty-nine, and all interviewed adults, aged thirty to thirty-nine, own a laptop (see Table 3). In France, the price of a laptop varies on average between two hundred and three hundred euros, which is significantly higher than Somalis' monthly salary. Those who are not able to purchase a computer go to cybercafés for Internet access. Others find solutions by going to municipal public libraries where Internet access is free of charge. It should be noted, however, that individuals who wish to use a computer at a public library are required to show an identity card with a valid address if they are to receive a library access card. Somali refugees resort to different strategies in order to obtain the library card. It can also be noted that our data highlight a gap that exists between the Somalis aged eighteen to thirty-nine and those aged forty and above in terms of the ownership of ICT equipment. This gap points to a technological divide that separates two different age groups of Somali refugees.

In terms of Internet access or TV sets, Somalis who own an Internet connection or digital television in their room through subscription are Somalis whose asylum application was accepted and who received housing in the immigrant residences. Out of the thirty-four participants, only three were in this situation. The vast majority of Somalis find other ways such as going to residence rooms of their fellow Somalis and taking turns to connect their or borrowed laptops to their friends' Internet.⁴²

Television is the second most used technology after the computer. Somalis generally watch French television:

Table 3. ICT Equipment and Devices

Age	Computer/					
	Laptop	TV Set	DVD	VCR	Radio	Camera
18–29	62%	69%	4%	0%	0%	0%
30–39	100%	75%	25%	25%	25%	25%
40 and above	0%	25%	0%	0%	0%	0%

When I see television images, I realize that the French have a different culture. There are great differences between my culture and theirs. Besides television, when I am outside, I observe French people. I see that they are workers who always have something to do. They are people who work all the time, who try to improve their lives and bring progress to their country.

Like my friend, I watch television. I see that the French are really different from us, especially in terms of poverty. The French are rich. You could say that there is a great gulf between us and the French. But, let's not forget that they've also had war and poverty like us. We know history and what happened. In this region where we are, people have fought to have bread. In terms of human relations and culture, the French know how to live with others. They are people with whom you can live.

French television is a companion to the Somalis, even if they do not fully master the French language; it stays on all day and serves as an introduction to the French culture. It is a showcase of the West. When they were in Somalia, they watched through satellite channels. It is no longer a distant dream, the West. They constantly compare television fiction to reality of French life. Somalis, as large consumers of news, often compare major television networks such as BBC World News and Al Jazeera with BFM TV and LCI.

Studies have shown that the media in host countries play the role of mediators for newly arrived migrants⁴³ and especially for refugees who do not speak the language.⁴⁴ However, this role is not always positive. A study by Ridjanovic⁴⁵ on the place occupied by the media in the adaptation process of Bosnian refugees in Quebec City showed that refugees, due to their painful experiences in their home countries, are particularly sensitive to negative media representations of immigrants and foreigners. In this regard, during the interview, we asked questions about the representation of Somalis in French television and they strongly criticized the projected images:

The French media often talk about terrorism and piracy. When they are not talking about that, they are broadcasting news about disappeared or kidnapped journalists in Somalia [...], when people ask us what country we're from, we say we're from Somalia and immediately, they say to us: "You are the Somali pirates!" People think that all Somalis are pirates. Before, people didn't used to associate us with piracy. No one's interested in Somali history and identity.

As shown above, Somalis employ social media as much as traditional media. However, these two types of media do not fulfill the same function, as social media are strongly linked to mobility and are used for the purpose of finding a

safe refuge, while traditional media serve as a window into France and French culture for Somali refugees.

Conclusion

Studying the way refugees use social media may appear trivial when compared to the dire and increasingly worsening living conditions of refugees. Collectively, these two notions, of social media and refugees, serve as the prime example of the technological divide which separates social media users living as citizens of rich countries and those living as refugees, lacking equipment and technology training. This study strove to show that refugees know how to employ social media, contrary to prevailing clichés, because social media play a crucial role in their navigation of the migratory trajectories and also allow them to find a place where they feel accepted. International organizations and governments should facilitate access to ICT for refugees and asylum seekers. Nevertheless, in the words of Dominique Wolton, "having the same keyboard and the same information is not enough to create equality."⁴⁶ Or, in other words, we need to distance ourselves from the utopian idea that would have us believe that easier access to ICT could improve the refugees' living conditions.

NOTES

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20. Fabienne Le Houérou, *Passagers d'un monde à l'autre, migrants forcés éthiopiens et érythréens* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 2004), 103 (my translation).
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25. "Somali" refers both to the citizenship of the people of Somalia and to a specific ethnic group (Pérouse de Montclos, "Des diasporas africaines en construction"). Somalis are Cushitic nomads spread over four countries: they form the dominant ethnic group within Somalia (between six and seven million people); they also represent two-thirds of the Djibouti population (500,000 people) and constitute important minorities in Ethiopia (more than a million individuals in the Haud and Ogaden regions) and in Kenya [300,000 people in the northeast region; François Piguet, "Des nomades entre les villes et le sable" (Paris: Karthala, 1998)]. In other words, Somali ethnicity is not coterminous with borders of Somalia. However, this study concerns the Somali citizens from Somalia.
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28. Anafé-Gisti (L'association nationale d'assistance aux frontières pour les étrangers et le groupe d'information et de soutien des immigrés), Visas de transit anti-tchétones: annulés par le Conseil d'État, rétablis cinq jours plus tard par décision ministérielle, 2008, <http://www.gisti.org/spip.php?article1183>.
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31. B. W. Andrzejewski, "The Literary Culture of the Somali People," *Journal of African Cultural Studies* 23, no. 1 (2011): 9–17.

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33. Often, Somalis will plan their escape and travel in groups, either with friends from Somalia or with new-found friends whom they meet while on their journey.
34. Marie-Claire S.F.G. Foblets, "Europe and Its Aliens after Maastricht: The Painful Move to Substantive Harmonization of Member-States' Policies Towards Third-Country Nationals," *American Journal of Comparative Law* 42, no. 4 (1994): 783–805.
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36. The participants who got married thanks to Facebook shied away from expressing themselves on the subject. We learned about it from other respondents who talked about how some of their friends met their spouses.
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