

Bits of homeland: Generational and gender transformations of Moroccan-Dutch youth using digital technologies

Koen Leurs*, Sandra Ponzanesi**

*Department of Media and Culture Studies, Utrecht University (The Netherlands)

** Department of Media and Culture Studies, Utrecht University (The Netherlands)

Abstract

Generational and gendered specificities of digital technology use within migrant families remain understudied and undertheorized (Green & Kabir, 2012). Digital technologies are used among descendants of migrants to sustain and update networks while simultaneously they allow the younger generation to assert their individuality and circumvent gendered family norms. By analyzing generational specificities and gender negotiations apparent in the use of Internet applications among Moroccan-Dutch youth between 12 and 18 years old, two lacunas in the fields of migration and media studies are addressed. Findings stem from the Utrecht University research project 'Wired Up: Digital media as innovative socialization practices for migrant youth' (<http://www.uu.nl/wiredup>). In particular, the argument draws upon a large-scale survey, qualitative in-depth interviews and a virtual ethnography.

The empirical part consists of two case studies. In the first case study, the focus is on generational differences in digital technology use in Moroccan-Dutch families. In particular, generational aspects of transnational online networking, like instant messaging, Skype and social networking, are discussed. In the second case study, the focus is on the negotiation of gender relations within Moroccan-Dutch households. In particular, the analysis zooms in on gender relations discussed on online message boards. We argue that generational and gender relations are highly intertwined with each other.

Keywords: Moroccan-Dutch youth, Internet applications, migration, transnational networking, generation, gender

Introduction

By carrying out an analysis of Moroccan-Dutch youth' digital media use, we provide new insights on everyday technology behavior of a young ethnic-minority population whose contribution to digital culture is not yet well studied and understood. In this article generation and gender are explored as the primary analytical categories in order to yield new insights into specific migratory cultures and their digital practices. Generational specificities and gender can be considered as sites of struggle where interactions between dominant and minority cultures take place. The situations of young descendants of migrants and their generational specificities and gendered lived realities have not sufficiently been addressed. Prior scholarship has demonstrated that diaspora is not a "one-generation phenomenon". The impact of digital technologies on the articulation of diaspora is particularly marginal in these debates and only partly understood (Mainsah,

2011, p. 203). Similarly, media and migration scholars have observed gendered power relations in migrant households. They found double standards, for example: different expectations, roles and norms surround migrant boys and girls. The ways in which these gender relations are exposed, negotiated or contested through digital media practices remains unclear (Durham, 2004, p. 143).

We aim to address these two lacunas in the fields of migration and media studies by considering how generational specificities and gender relations are digitally negotiated by Moroccan-Dutch youth between the ages of 12 and 18. Not only is the Dutch Internet relatively understudied, a focus on Moroccan-Dutch young people is especially urgent because prior researchers have found this ethnic minority group consisting of avid digital media users (Brouwer, 2006). We aim to achieve greater understanding of digital migratory cultures by presenting findings from our Utrecht University research project 'Wired Up: Digital media as innovative socialization practices for migrant youth' (<http://www.uu.nl/wiredup>). In particular, we draw upon a large-scale survey, qualitative in-depth interviews and a virtual ethnography, and demonstrate how this data speaks back to critical media and gender theories.

This article is structured as follows. First, the context of the study is provided before methodological considerations are discussed. Subsequently, in the first case study generational specificities that emerged from the analysis of our corpus are described. In the second case study, the negotiation of gender relations is considered by discussing experiences using digital message boards. In the conclusions, we argue that generational and gender relations are highly intertwined with each other.

The context of the Netherlands

Consisting of 355.883 people, those of Moroccan-Dutch descent make up some 2.1 percent of the total Dutch population of 16.6 million (CBS, 2011a; Verweij & Bijl, 2012, p. 244). Of this group, 47 percent migrated to the Netherlands from the 1960s onwards as guest workers, while the other 53 per cent were born in the Netherlands, after their parents had migrated (CBS, 2011b). The majority of guest workers who arrived in the Netherlands originate from the Rif area in northern Morocco. They come from places like Al Hoceima, Berkane, Nador and Oujda and their surroundings where a Berber language is spoken. Currently, 75% of Dutch people of Moroccan decent have ties with the Rif area. The Moroccan-Dutch population consists of Moroccan Berbers and non-Berbers, speaking a combination of a Berber language and/or French and/or Moroccan-Arabic and/or Dutch. While the first language of their children, born in the Netherlands, primarily is Dutch (Cottaar & Bouras, 2009; Gazzah, 2010, p. 311).

Moroccan-Dutch youth receive a lot of attention in media reporting, governmental policy-making and scholarly research. They are systematically stigmatized and made hyper visible by right-wing journalists and

politicians, who frame them as anti-citizens posing a threat to Dutch society (Harchaoui & Huinder, 2003, pp. 7-11; Poorthuis & Salemink, 2011; see also Leurs, Midden & Ponzanesi, 2012). Prior academic research has predominantly focused on particular behavior such as juvenile delinquency, radicalization, mental health problems and early school leaving (Leurs, 2012, p. 10-17). Bringing these four themes together, Jurgens speaks of "the Moroccan drama" (2007). These issues are undeniably important and significant, but these foci single out a narrow slice of their experiences. Things are going well for the majority of Moroccan-Dutch youth, but their realities remain largely invisible in contemporary debates (Verhagen, 2010). The present study can be categorized under a fifth strand of scholarship that considers everyday experiences of Moroccan-Dutch youth (Brouwer, 2006; Pels & De Haan, 2007; Gazzah, 2010).

Besides intervening in the discourse on Moroccan-Dutch young people, this article addresses in particular ideological discussions in the Netherlands by focusing on gendered and generational specificities of technology use in migrant families. Addressing gendered dynamics will offer nuances in the inflated discourse which stereotypically frames Moroccan-Dutch boys as religious fundamentalists or troublemakers and thieves and headscarf wearing girls as either backwards or oppressed. The generational angle is important to ground common assumptions on the role of technologies in the lives of migrants. Paul Scheffer, a professor in urban studies, is one of the key figures in the debate on multiculturalism and immigration in the Netherlands. He argues that the current era of widespread communication and information technologies alters the phenomenon of migration (2011). In the past, upon departure, immigrants had to more definitively bid farewell to their home country he notes (calls were costly, and posting letters or audio cassettes took long to arrive), while nowadays in the digital era ties with their country of origin are more easily maintained. Writing about Moroccan and Turkish guest workers and their descendants, Scheffer insists that maintaining transnational contact with the diaspora results in closed off communities and processes of alienation, that in turn erode democratic culture (2007, p. 40). However, as we show in the findings of this article that is not the case and the analysis of generational and gender intersections show a more complex and nuanced vision on integration, transnational networks and the importance of digital technology for the construction of flexible citizenship (Ong, 1999).

Methodological considerations

The fieldwork was conducted in the context of Wired Up, a collaborative, international research project operating at the interface of the humanities and social sciences, aimed at understanding the multifarious implications of digital media use among migrant youth. A large-scale survey was developed for the purpose of the project. A total of 1408 young people contacted through seven secondary schools in five Dutch cities,

completed the questionnaire in classrooms or computer labs. This article principally considers data from the group of 344 Moroccan-Dutch students who participated in the questionnaire; this group consists of 181 girls and 163 boys. On average they are 14.5 years ($SD=1.7$) old, and when prompted 98.5% describe themselves as Muslim. More than three-quarters (76.2%) of these young people speak Dutch at home with their parents. Two thirds do this in combination with a Berber language (66.9%) and half with Moroccan-Arabic (52.6%). Survey findings will be used throughout this article to provide a general impression of digital media use frequencies, attachments to applications and online self-presentation practices.

From those young people that participated in the survey, a selected group of 30 students aged 12-16 was invited to join the second phase of the study, which consisted of in-depth interviews. In order to include 17 and 18-year olds and diversify the group of informants further, 13 Moroccan-Dutch youth were contacted using snowballing methods in three cities. In total, in-depth interviews were carried out with a group of 43 Moroccan-Dutch individuals, 21 girls and 22 boys, between the ages of 12 and 18 years, their average age was 15 years. Except for four informants who migrated themselves, the majority of the interviewees was born in the Netherlands from parents who had migrated to the Netherlands as guest-workers. In the third and final phase, digital media texts, images and videos circulating in online forums, instant messaging, social networking sites and *YouTube* were gathered with the use of online participant observation. By combining large-scale questionnaires with ethnographically inspired fieldwork across online/offline spaces including semi-structured, face-to-face, in-depth interviews and digital data gathering, we join differently located and situated, but complimentary "partial views" (Haraway, 1991, p. 183). In this article, in particular the practices of instant messaging, Skype, social-networking sites and forum discussions are considered. Generational particularities especially emerged from our analysis of data on the use of instant messaging, Skype and online social networking sites. The focus on online forum discussions is guided by finding many instances of explicit engagement with gender norms in the descriptions of such discussions by female informants: out of the total 43 informants, 17 girls and five boys spoke to us about their message board use. In particular, the analysis centers on [Marokko.nl](#) because those 22 informants who spoke about their engagement with Internet forums all reported to frequent this online discussion forum.

Case study 1: Generational transformation: from transnational conversations to affiliations

In this section we tease out the generational particulars of digital media use in the Moroccan-Dutch migrant family. Digital generations are communities of their own that get constituted online through specific use of digital technologies. Transnational diasporic networking allows those living in the Moroccan diaspora to articulate reference frames and cultural codes to continue building and demarcating a distinct digital

diaspora community. The use of technologies among our informants who were born in the Netherlands differs from their parents who were born in Morocco and migrated to the Netherlands as guest workers. Below we focus on distinct technology usages that sustain transnational networks. Parents were found to make use of voice over IP and webcam services to communicate with family members and friends living in the diaspora and Morocco, while the younger generation contrastingly mostly uses Internet applications to mobilize their migratory background as an important identity marker.

Conversations with contacts in Morocco and the diaspora

Instant messaging is a social media technology that allows users to privately exchange short text messages in real time. Increasingly, IM applications such as MSN Messenger¹ allow users to socialize with contacts using voice-over audio and webcam video-chat services. Wired Up survey findings show that Moroccan-Dutch young people have more people in their IM contact lists in comparison with ethnic majority Dutch youth. Moroccan-Dutch youth list an average of 231 contacts while ethnic majority Dutch youngsters list 205 contacts (Wired Up, 2012). The higher average can partly be explained when considering that teenagers with a migration background may maintain contact with family and friends in the diaspora using IM.

For instance fourteen-year-old Loubna describes how her whole family lives in Tetouan, in Morocco, except the people in her household and two nephews who also live in the Netherlands. She shares: "I cannot do without Morocco". "Everyday" she has contact with her family members in Morocco using *Skype*. "We talk to them", she argues, together with her mother she sits in front of the computer, "especially now that my grandmother is ill". Loubna and her household use digital technologies to remain connected with family members in Morocco. They offer a way to express transnational emotional support and care (Madianou & Miller, 2012). Informants mention the huge financial advantage of using digital technologies to communicate freely, 14-year-old Ayoub emphasizes that "having to call all the time, and having to pop up your [calling] card, that is a pain".

Sixteen-year-old Faruk² explains that he has family members living in the Netherlands, France, Spain and Morocco in his MSN list of contacts. However, Faruk does not use MSN to communicate with contacts in the diaspora himself but he mainly brokers access to contacts from abroad for his parents:

"We just use MSN. My parents don't really know how it works. Yes I log in for them; I will click on my aunts' name when she is online. I set it up for them. I will put my parents in front of the webcam and have them communicate. Actually I enjoy it because my mother eyes the webcam with

¹ MSN has recently been renamed Windows Live Messenger, but all the interviewees keep referring to the platform as MSN.

² Names are pseudonyms (mostly suggested by informants).

a real look of amazement on her face. It's nice because in the past I can say they would have never been able to do that. They are astounded".

Sixteen-year-old Naoul similarly states that in her family "the children have to start up everything, and my dad will sit in front of the camera and he will talk. He does not know anything about it". Informants note that parents cannot manage using IM on their own. The difference in the numbers of contacts that surfaced in analyzing the survey findings in this way thus not necessarily indicates Moroccan-Dutch young people themselves engage in transnational instant messaging, audio or webcam video conversations with contacts living outside of the Netherlands. Most use their own accounts to facilitate their parents' use of digital technologies for transnational conversations.

Indeed, the majority of informants note that it is especially their parents who are concerned with such forms of transnational networking. Badr, a 14-year-old who lives in 's- Hertogenbosch, notes his family has spread out from Morocco across Europe, from Belgium, Germany, France, Spain to Denmark. He describes how he sometimes talks to his nephews who live in Belgium and Germany, but "it's mostly my parents" he says, that make use of *Skype*³ to talk to family members in Morocco. They do not know how the program works, "they cannot setup the connection themselves", so he assists by starting up the computer and logging in to the application. 15-year-old Hajar also states she does not use *Skype* herself, but facilitates the use of the application in her household: "I arrange everything for my mother".

Our survey findings provide another indicator of the distinct role of *Skype* in the lives of Moroccan-Dutch young people. When considering the frequency of use of various internet applications, survey findings show that Moroccan-Dutch young people most frequently make use of *MSN Messenger*, *YouTube*, *Google*, e-mail, social networking sites, downloading, *Skype*, online-solo games and discussion forums (see figure 1). Moroccan-Dutch youth report to find a different set of internet applications important. In our survey, we asked the respondents to what extent they would miss applications if they were not able to use them anymore (see figure 2). In order of decreasing importance they mention *MSN Messenger*, *YouTube*, *Google*, downloading, e-mail, social-networking sites and forums. Thus, even though respondents report to frequently make use of *Skype*, the vast majority does not consider the application very important themselves. The difference between frequency of use and attachment can be explained by acknowledging that Moroccan-Dutch youth often set up *Skype* connections to allow their parents to communicate with their family and friends living abroad in Morocco and elsewhere in the Moroccan diaspora.

³ *Skype* is a software application that enables users to conduct voice, video and typed conversations over the Internet. *Skype* users can have voice and video conversations free of charge, while credit has to be paid for to call landlines or mobile phones.

Figure 1. Frequencies internet application usage among Moroccan-Dutch youth (graph shows means on a 5-point-scale, n=344).

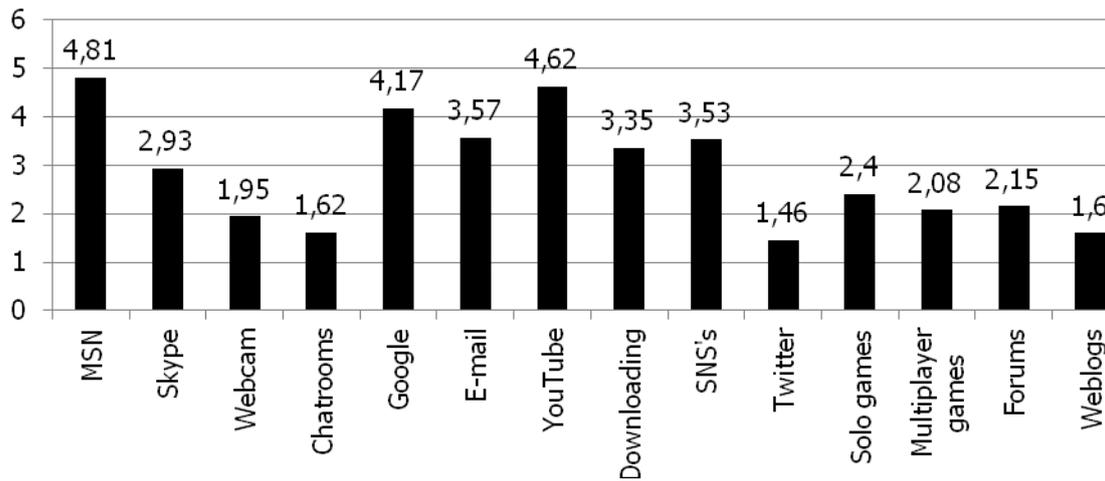
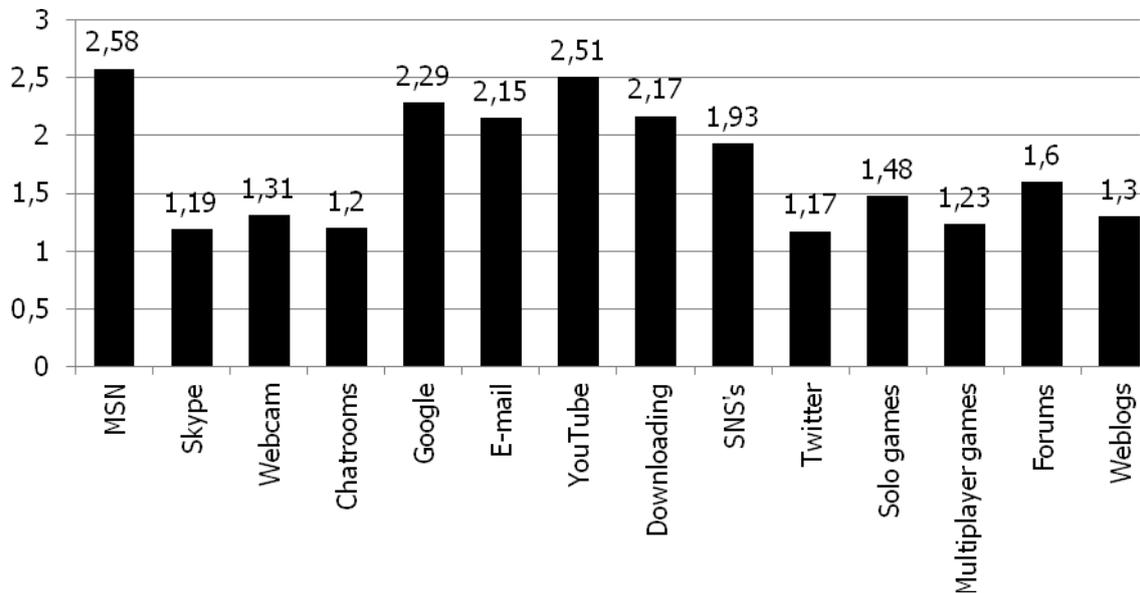


Figure 2. Attachments to internet applications among Moroccan-Dutch youth (graph shows means on a 3-point-scale n= 344).



In sum, the majority of the informants report they personally do not consider *Skype* conversations important, including those with family members that live abroad. The analysis of the interview transcripts

also provides cues why young Moroccan-Dutch people do not perceive transnational chat, webcam or messaging sessions important. Having grown up learning to speak and write in Dutch, the informants mentioned they lacked the capacity to participate fully in transnational Skype sessions. Sixteen-year-old Bibi for example describes that she could understand what was being said, but speaking proves to be difficult: "I can pretty much understand everything that is said in Arabic. However I can speak a little bit also, but only in broken Arabic. It's a bit clumsy". Sadik, 17-year-old, also shares that when a conversation is in Arabic "I do not really understand it very well". Bibi and Sadik are unsure of their Arabic and/or Berber language skill sets. As such, these remarks attest to the fact that transnational use of technologies is influenced by language barriers existing between the younger and older generation in the Moroccan-Dutch migrant family.

The generational difference can be further specified when considering detailed intricacies of instant messaging practices. While most parents engage in voice chat using MSN Messenger and Skype, the young people interviewed prefer text-based exchanges. Fifteen-year-old Ryan describes in using MSN he "only uses Dutch, except when I talk to people from Morocco, than you have to speak Moroccan. But most often when I type Moroccan, I won't type it correctly, I will type it weirdly. They will say 'what are you typing', because I'm doing it in a weird way". He adds: "from listening I do know some Moroccan, but when I have to type it, I have to do it with Dutch words and build up something from there". Thus, a different technological standard complicates the matter further. In the Netherlands, the dominant keyboard standard is based on the Latin alphabet, while in Morocco, another standard based on Arabic is also used. Ryan explains: "you know, the Arabic language is very different, they write from the right to the left. And they have different keyboards and so on. So we have to type very differently" in the Netherlands, in comparison with Morocco.

Beyond generational differences in the use of instant messaging and Skype for transnational conversations among parents and the lack of use among the younger generations, the findings discussed above attest to a generational divide in ICTs knowledge and skills existing in some migrant families. It should be noted that some parents – especially Moroccan mothers of Berber descent who migrated to the Netherlands – were illiterate or had received little formal education at the moment of immigration (Pels & De Haan, 2007, p. 72; Brouwer, 1992, p. 76). Having grown up with digital technologies that their parents are unfamiliar with, Moroccan-Dutch youth may act as technology brokers. They assist their parents to cross a digital divide by brokering diasporic connections. Complicating intergenerational relations, the hierarchical roles of parent as educator and child as learner get reversed. This practice resembles other instances of invisible work multilingual migrant teenagers may have to engage in. Other examples documented in the literature include "culture" and "language brokering" when having to translate for their parents across private (e.g.

filling in financial documents) and public domains (e.g. medical consults) (Orellana, 2009, pp. 19-21; De Haan, 2012).

Alongside long distance phone calls or satellite television viewing, the use of *Skype* and instant messenger software illustrate how a diaspora community can sustain itself as a distinct group. In the next section, specific attention will be paid to how the generation of Moroccan-Dutch young people uses digital technologies to express their affiliation with Morocco as a distinct identity marker.

Morocco as an identity marker

Moroccan-Dutch youth engage with transnational networking practices in generationally specific ways. Instead of participating in transnational conversations, they use digital technologies to publish their affiliations with Morocco, infusing digital practices with symbolic meanings. Among Moroccan-Dutch young people, instant messaging is for example not chiefly used to speak with contacts living in Morocco or in the diaspora, but with contacts living nearby in their neighborhood or that they know from school. However, instant messaging and other Internet applications use among Moroccan-Dutch young people does reveal another way transnational networking occurs in migrant families.

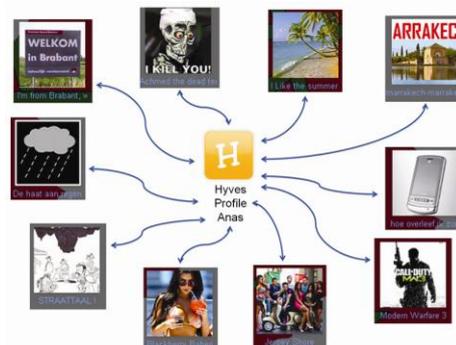
Consider for example the distinct usage of display names in MSN Messenger that informants shared during the participant-observation phase of the study. Display names are the semi-public stage where users can express affiliations to a wider public of befriended other instant messaging users. The friend list of IM users aggregates all the display names of befriended people. As Naoul describes, a display name "as a matter of fact tells a sort of a life story". Many display names used by the informants include references to Morocco as an identity marker. Examples include "Maroc", the French word for the country of Morocco, "mocro chick" and "mocro-boy", where "mocro" has gained meaning as a Dutch honorary nickname for Moroccan-Dutch youth. Other examples include the use of Berber or Moroccan-Arabic words, typed using the Latin alphabet. For example 18-year-old Khadija logs in with a display name in which she combines Dutch and Moroccan-Arabic words: "❤️ Sommige mensen!!!- Li Tmenit Lqito Fik". 'Sommige mensen' is Dutch for 'some people', while 'Li Tmenit Lqito Fik' is Moroccan-Arabic for 'what I hoped I found in you'.

As the examples of "mocro chick" and "mocro-boy" already show, display names that make reference to transnational ethnic ties are often written in English. This dynamic can be explained as follows. In her display name, 15-year-old Inzaf expresses her affiliation with El Hoceima, the city in Morocco where her parents were born in English: 'El Hoceima is the bom, that's the place where I come from so just tell everyone thats the city number ONE'. Explaining its significance, she shares: El Hoceima "means a lot to me because that is the town in Morocco where I am from and I want to show that I am proud of it". She added that "it rhymes in English", it "sounds cooler"; it is "nicer to say it in English than in Dutch". Inzaf

signals transnational affiliations with the city of El Hoceima in Morocco where her father was born, but she symbolically mediates them through the vocabulary of English-language, global hip-hop youth culture. The display name becomes a way to emphasize her individual migration background to her contact list with friends of different backgrounds, but by using English she provides a room of commonality, to connect with others similarly invested in hip-hop.

Our analysis of self-profiling practices on online social-networking sites yields similar results. After joining a group on the Dutch social networking site *Hyves*, a clickable icon appears on the user's personal profile page. In figure 3 the interest groups Anas, a 13-year old rap fanatic, has joined are shown. On the top right the group "Marrakesh" is included. His parents were born in Marrakech in southwest Morocco. By joining this group, Anas shows he is proud of his migration background. However, besides Morocco, other place-based identity markers are mobilized, such as the group "I'm from Brabant where the fuck you from?", a group referring to the province in the south of the Netherlands he is from. As such he combines local and transnational place-based markers. He also connects with global (youth) cultural forms with the groups "how do I survive without a mobile phone", "Modern Warfare 3", "Jersey Shore", and "STREETLANGUAGE!". The first shows his attachment to his mobile phone, the second to a first-person shooter video game, the third to the *Jersey Shore* MTV TV series and the fourth to slang and urban youth culture. "Blackberry Babes" is a page where photos are published of girls and their mobile phones. The site is used for dating purposes, as it is dedicated to exchanging *PingChat* messenger contact details. The image is exemplary for the stereotypically gendered images young people circulate, and the dominant perspective of the heterosexual male gaze in the group. Hyperlinking – as a way to signal identity affiliations – offers users of SNSs the means to highlight a bit of their Moroccan homeland as an identity marker, as one of the elements to representing one's multiple self and distributed belongingness (Leurs & Ponzanesi, 2011).

Figure 3. *Hyves* groups 13-year-old Anas links to on his *Hyves* profile page.



Inspired by distributed attachments observable in-group self-profiling on social networking sites, the Wired Up survey was designed to capture differential profiling activities that stretch across and mix local, migratory and global affiliations. More specifically, respondents were asked whether they show food, music and celebrity preferences on three locality dimensions (host, migrant or transnational cultures) on their profile page (see table 1).

Table 1. Cultural self-profiling (n= 344 Moroccan-Dutch and 448 ethnic majority Dutch respondents).

Self-profiling cultural affiliations		<i>Moroccan-Dutch girls</i>	<i>Moroccan-Dutch Boys</i>	<i>ethnic majority-Dutch girls</i>	<i>ethnic majority-Dutch boys</i>
Self-profiling <i>Dutch</i> culture	Food	6.6	12.9	31.4	41.6
	Music	4.4	4.9	19.7	19.1
	Celebrities	8.3	12.9	24.7	19.1
Self-profiling <i>migrant</i> cultures	Food	40.3	48.5	16.3	18.2
	Music	61.3	61.3	17.2	24.4
	Celebrities	48.6	51.5	7.1	12
Self-profiling <i>international</i> cultures	Food	30.9	36.2	32.6	34
	Music	61.9	40.5	82.8	71.3
	Celebrities	30.9	28.2	40.2	34.4
I do not include the following preferences	Food	16	23.3	55.2	44
	Music	48.6	41.7	21.2	14.2
	Celebrities	37.6	36.8	48.1	53.1

Firstly, the table shows that compared to Moroccan-Dutch respondents, (white) majority Dutch respondents participate relatively more in all three strands of Dutch self-profiling. More than girls, boys list Dutch food preferences, while girls list more Dutch music and celebrities. Conversely, Moroccan-Dutch respondents are more active in all three forms of migration oriented cultural self-profiling. Moroccan-Dutch boys list migrant food and celebrities preferences more than girls, while they equally participate in migrant-background music profiling. Migrant self-profiling allows informants to highlight the transnational, migratory or diasporic element of their identity. One way to do so is joining a group related to food, celebrities or music. The search for identity affirmation is common among Moroccan-Dutch as well as white Dutch young people who report to include Dutch cultural food, music and celebrities on their page. It should thus be noted that opportunities to manifest ethnic dimensions of one's identity are taken up by both Moroccan-Dutch as well

as white, ethnic majority Dutch youth. Singling out migrant affiliations among Moroccan-Dutch youth and Dutch affiliations among majority Dutch youth does however not paint the full picture.

The differences between the groups in terms of their self-profiling global cultural affiliations are generally smaller and more ambiguous. The results indicate (printed bold in the table) that international affiliations constitute the space of convivial intercultural encounter for ethnic majority Dutch and Moroccan-Dutch young people (Gilroy, 2005). At least almost one third of every Moroccan-Dutch boy or girl and ethnic majority Dutch boy or girl participates in profiling international food and celebrities preferences. The category of music preferences is a more prominent space of commonality as two thirds of Moroccan Dutch girls and 40 percent of boys and over two thirds of ethnic majority Dutch boys and girls selected it. These findings attest to intra-generational similarities showcasing how peers of the same generation, but from different ethnic groups (Dutch and Moroccan-Dutch) go about the same applications and engage in similar profiling practices, while the differences are indicative of transnational ties, marked by diaspora and global affiliations.

These quantitative and qualitative findings demonstrate that rather than a straightforward continuation of migrant cultural legacies the informants actively hybridize and transform those in ways that resonate with the dominant local and global youth cultures in which they grow up. These findings provide ground to challenge binary thinking that opposes modes of cultural continuation versus assimilation of minority cultures.

Case study 2: Reconfiguring gender identities: "I follow my own path"

Besides the axis of generation, the category of gender impacts differentially in the lives of Moroccan-Dutch youth as they grow up. In this second case study, we will focus on the everyday, lived practices of Moroccan-Dutch girls to give a nuanced glance at the negotiation of gendered identity formation in migrant families. By zooming in on the use of Marokko.nl, an internet discussion forum setup and frequented by Moroccan-Dutch youth, we shift our focus away from the digital technologies of instant messaging, Skype and online social networking sites.

Double standards: gender dynamics in migrant families

Discussing issues such as love, relationships and sexuality happens away from their parents' eyes, as the great majority of Moroccan-Dutch survey participants connect to the Internet from their bedrooms. Almost three out of four Moroccan-Dutch girls for instance log on from their own room and connect to the Internet at their friends or families' homes (Leurs, 2012, p. 89). These findings suggest that Moroccan-Dutch girls

might be able to enjoy a significant level of privacy while engaging with the Internet. During the interviews, informants also explained they can strategically negotiate more freedom in choosing where they log in to the Internet. Thirteen-year-old Sousie explains, "It depends on where I take my laptop, when I am in my room, nobody will enter. When I'm sitting downstairs, on the couch, and my mother sits next to me she will occasionally have a glance" at the screen.

Trees Pels and Mariëtte de Haan note that Moroccan parents are said to emphasize cultural and religious dictums of modesty especially towards their daughters, as boys are traditionally allowed a "wider radius of action outside the house" (2003, p. 61) at the onset of puberty. Generational specificity is thus also gendered, as Moroccan-Dutch girls are sometimes seen as gatekeepers "to maintaining the family honour", and Pels and De Haan recognize "they still face the most restrictions, and they spend much of their leisure time with female family members and friends in domestic settings" (2003, pp. 52-61). Moroccan-Dutch parents are sometimes found to be more prohibitive about direct contact with the opposite sex than ethnic majority Dutch parents. Under supervision of their parents this contact may be monitored, for girls this may imply they have to "shame" themselves in the presence of boys, "i.e. to behave timidly and modestly and to refrain from any looseness in appearance or expression" (ibid, p. 58). In short, in puberty, Moroccan-Dutch girls often spend a small amount of their spare time outdoors in public space, while Moroccan-Dutch boys spend a lot of their time there (Nabben, Yeşilgöz and Korf, 2006, p. 27).⁴

This observation has parallels with gendered spatial practices in Morocco. Fatima Mernissi has noted that in Morocco, gender norms hierarchically govern space. "Space boundaries divide Muslim society into subuniverses: the universe of men, (the *umma*, the world of religion and power) and the universe of women, the domestic world of sexuality and the family" (1987, p. 138). Although the situation is changing, these observations still hold as gender relations dichotomously structure space in Morocco, where public space (such as the street) is reiterated as masculine, in opposite to the private space of feminine domesticity (such as the kitchen) (Sadiqi, 2003, pp. 85-86). Perhaps because they spend more time indoors, Moroccan-Dutch girls have been found to turn to the Internet more than boys (Nabben, Yeşilgöz & Korf, 2006, p. 46). Digital technologies are used among descendants of migrants to reinvent traditions while simultaneously seeking to assert their independence and circumvent gendered family norms (Bouwer, 2006; De Leeuw & Rydin, 2007; Green & Kabir, 2012, pp. 100-101).

Coming of age concurrently with digital media, the literature suggests that Moroccan-Dutch young people in their articulation of digital identities can negotiate the gendered reputation-management dichotomy of

⁴ Several parallels can be drawn from the literature on sexual and gender dynamics of diaspora families. For instance "family honor" among South-Asian Brits in London "ultimately depends on the chastity of daughters" (Gillespie, 1995, p. 152), while among South-Asian-American families in New York, "a gendered double standard that is more lenient on males than females" (Maira, 2002, p. 155) was found, while different adolescent gendered roles among families who migrated from Latin- American countries are also documented: "while males are often encouraged to Americanize rather quickly, females are more frequently expected by their families to maintain traditional roles and virtues" (Goodenow and Espin, 1993, p. 174).

masculine public versus feminine private space. During our fieldwork it quickly became obvious that such general notions of gender relations are negotiated and subverted in a variety of ways. For example 16-year-old Naoul shares: "I follow my own path". Similarly Loubna, a 14-year-old interviewee, illustrates that sweeping remarks should be treated with ambivalence. She reports a variety of experiences in her personal autonomy and radius of action: "in terms of culture, my background is Moroccan, but I do go out and visit the cinema, I go to the city and buy clothes. Those are things I also love".

The negotiation of gender identities on Marokko.nl

This section represents the empirical data for the second case study. We will concentrate here on the use of the message board Marokko.nl to elaborate upon how girls negotiate Moroccan, Muslim, Dutch and global youth-cultural gender expectations. Wired Up survey findings indicate a distinct preference for engaging with discussion boards among ethnic minorities in the Netherlands: Moroccan-Dutch youth report to visit online discussion boards more than ethnic majority Dutch youth. One in every five respondents visits an online discussion board at least four days per week, while only one in every ten white, ethnic majority Dutch respondent report doing so. Moroccan-Dutch respondents also report being more attached to visiting online discussion boards than white, ethnic majority Dutch survey respondents. These results indicate that there seems to be a specific interest in engaging with online discussion boards among Moroccan-Dutch youth. More specifically, our survey findings indicate that Moroccan-Dutch girls participate more in forum discussion than boys, nearly one in three (29.2%) of the female respondents report to visit forums four days per week or more, while only one in ten (11.6%) of the male survey respondents report to participate 4 days per week or more (Wired Up, 2012). Also, Moroccan-Dutch girls report to feel more attached to the communicative space than Moroccan-Dutch boys do (see table 2).

Table 2. Would Moroccan-Dutch youth miss online discussion forums if they would not be able to use them anymore? (n= 344).

<i>Attachment to using forums</i>	<i>Not at all</i>	<i>Somewhat</i>	<i>Very much</i>	<i>Total</i>
Girls	58.6 %	23.2 %	18.2 %	100 %
Boys	76.7 %	19.0 %	4.3 %	100 %

13-year-old Amina describes Marokko.nl as follows: "there is one site, which is called Marokko.nl, and I'm serious it's buzzing with Moroccan youth there. Also people from other cultures and origins, but Moroccan

youth are the majority. They have founded the site themselves. It is very active, everyone goes there to talk to one another, and there is something for everyone there.”

Almost 220.000 accounts have been registered on [Marokko.nl](#)⁵. The amount of lurkers⁶ is expected to be much higher. [Marokko.nl](#) is estimated to reach a remarkable 70 to 75 percent of Moroccan-Dutch youth in the age category between 15 and 35, while roughly one-third of the total Moroccan-Dutch population visit the site on a weekly basis (Knijff, 2009). Everyone with access to the Internet can read messages that are posted; however, in order to contribute one has to become a member by registering with an e-mail account and one's date of birth. To give an impression of the topics discussed on [Marokko.nl](#), the following discussion rubrics are most active: "Moroccan youth and current events", "Tea lounge", "Nonsense corner", "Moroccan youth, love and relationships", "Fashion and beauty care", "Moroccan weddings in the Netherlands and Belgium", "The world of the Moroccan woman", "Islam and I", "Sports", "Moroccan pop culture" and "Story rubric".⁷ On every page on the forums of [Marokko.nl](#), the slogans "virtual community" and "La maison du Maroc" (French for "The home in Morocco") appear. Upon opening the site, one of a number of different background images appear, including romantic pictures of deserts, ancient cities and beaches that appeals to the visitors' image of Morocco.

From the safety of their own or their friends' bedrooms where parents are not allowed to enter, girls note they turn to discussion forums where they find it easier to discuss "hchouma" topics. "Hchouma is a label applied to virtually everything considered transgressive, taboo, unconventional, provocative, or progressive by the cultural order in Morocco. Slightly more charged than the concept of 'shame,' hchouma is the master socio-cultural code into which the Moroccan individual, and women in particular have been and still are socialized" (Skalli, 2006, p. 96). The hchouma mechanism is based on social obligations, Islamic rules of conduct and familial norms, and governs reputation, "fear of losing face in front of others" (Sadiqi, 2003, p. 67). During the interviews, it became apparent that online discussion forums are considered a good space to speak about gendered taboo issues that might transgress the limits of dominant community standards. Bibi (16-year-old) reports that she turns to [Marokko.nl](#) to discuss issues of intercourse and sexuality in the context of marriage, stating she would rather turn to the online community instead of bringing it up with her parents; "you don't dare to go to your parents, because you find it really embarrassing":

"Yes, for example about the (silence) sex or something and the marriage and then 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 [about] these things I'm definitely not going to my parents 'Mom, dad, listen, is that the case'. Yes it is hchouma you know, I am shy to tell my parents about these things."

⁵ On January 20, 2012, [Marokko.nl](#) lists 219.163 members had joined the community. On [Marokko.nl](#) 1.073.058 discussion topics have been started, while 30.139.221 comments have been left.

⁶ "Lurkers" are people who read postings but do not leave comments themselves.

⁷ As of September 30, 2011, those rubrics have received more than 1 million comments.

Participating in online forums, girls report to experience a greater sense of freedom to discuss the sometimes-stringent social-cultural codes of socialization of their parents and wider community. Moroccan-Dutch girls turn to message boards to engage with topics such as health, meeting new friends, intimacy, romantic relationships and sexuality. Amina, a 13-year-old girl, summarizes the relevance of online message boards in the lives of Moroccan-Dutch girls as follows:

“You perhaps dare to say more on the Internet. You know, you do more; usually you are anonymous, if you want to at least, so you recount your experiences. At home you can usually not talk about these things, otherwise you would have done that a long time ago. Then you can tell it online. And you see what people on the Internet have to say about it. And that might help you”.

On Internet forums, some Moroccan-Dutch girls appear to feel less restricted and because of that they dare to bring up personal experiences they struggle with and cannot share elsewhere. Having a space to discuss issues that are difficult to broach in conversations with parents is of the utmost importance. This enables Moroccan-Dutch girls to express themselves and discuss behavior that is not possible in their usual social-cultural spheres. The barriers such as sanctions and repercussions to disclosing hchouma aspects of the self are not as strongly felt on message boards. However, significant parts of Moroccan-Dutch girls' socio-cultural spheres are present in the form of fellow anonymous discussion participants.

Sixteen-year-old Nevra holds a similar opinion: “it is nice, because at home you cannot talk about them, and now you can talk about them [online]. Also, you can learn more about the topic”. New ideas and insights are shared that may benefit the personal development of the young persons involved. 15-year-old Sousou describes, “you have a special rubric about sexuality and those kinds of things (laughs)... Yes these things you normally don't talk about them”. Among the informants, message boards are used to discuss and share views on intimacy and sexuality. Sousou describes further: “especially when something has happened or so, yes you can talk about it, just as an anonymous person, you get all kinds of reactions and so on, that is fun (laughs)”. Issues that are difficult to discuss in face-to-face contexts are considered in the digital realm. This holds true for conversations with parents but also with peers. On the message boards, as 13-year-old Inas thinks, girls are less inhibited in their conversations in comparison with discussing their experiences with friends outside of the Internet:

“If you have a problem, and you would like to talk about it with someone. I think it is easier than like [talking] with my girlfriend, because people usually give a different name... [online] they talk about these things more casually.”

There is another dimension to the popularity of discussing hchouma aspects of the self on Internet forums such as Marokko.nl, as research has shown that Moroccan-Dutch teenagers do not always feel addressed by sex education initiatives in the Netherlands. Pauline Borghuis, Christa de Graaf and Joke Hermes argue

that compulsory sex education in Dutch secondary school settings is not always considered appropriate by (religious) minorities and migrant groups. Furthermore they note that digital sex education initiatives aimed at Moroccan-Dutch youth miss their target as they "feel their voice is not heard; they cannot identify with the [existing] sites but rather feel repulsion and rejection" (2010, p. 235). Internet forums are taken up as an alternative space for circulating knowledge and education pertaining to sexuality. Bringing in sexuality in the public digital space of discussion forums, they demonstrate to successfully breach the dichotomy of masculine public and feminine private space that is noted to exist in Morocco (Mernissi, 1987; Graioud, 2005; Sadiqi, 2003).

Ilham, 13-year-old, states, "it is fun to know for me what people have to say when I have put something online". But, learning from others is also of great importance, especially also to receive peer-group verification from other girls which is central during adolescence. Ilham explains "I just want to know what 'the real deal' is so to say, but for instance when I have put something on Marokko.nl I want to know what people think of it". Fellow discussion board participants offer advice, support, and information, all from the relative safety of their computer screens. They assist a number of our informants to decide upon action. "If you want to get something of your chest, yes if you want to know something, than you just open [a topic]... and everyone reacts and they can give you advice" (Loubna, 14-year-old).

Message boards are especially popular among Moroccan-Dutch girls for voicing struggles they experience in their efforts "to negotiate strict Muslim demands placed on them with liberal youth culture" (Brouwer, 2006, np). Girls may find in message boards a space with particular socio-cultural dynamics that allow for acquiring new positions vis-à-vis certain notions (of gender relations) upheld by their parents or fellow community members and in dialogue with both Western and mainstream Dutch conceptions of sexuality and relationships. Paul Geense and Trees Pels note that the availability of such communication channels offers Moroccan-Dutch young people "more autonomy and an expansion of their radius of action" (2002 p. 11). Following Homi Bhabha who argues that in taking an in-between position, subaltern subjects can find agency to mark out "an interstitial future" (1994, p. 313). Online discussion forums assist Moroccan-Dutch youth in staking out a position in-between claims of rooted familial, religious and community norms and routed youth cultural expectations.

Conclusions

By carrying out an analysis of the use of digital technologies among Moroccan-Dutch youth, this article provides new insights on everyday technology behavior of a young ethnic-minority population whose contribution to digital culture is not well understood. We have explored generation and gender as the

primary analytical categories in order to yield new insights into specific migratory cultures and their digital practices.

We acknowledge migratory affiliations are not a "one-generation phenomenon" (Mainsah, 2011, p. 203).

In the first case study we demonstrated how transnational networking transforms from the generation of those people who have migrated themselves and those born in the diaspora. From having conversations with contacts in the diaspora and the homeland among the older generation, among the young generation who were born in the Netherlands specific bits of the homeland are published online as identity markers. Subsequently, these markers are combined with other local and global forms of self-fashioning that include contemporary global youth cultural orientations, which create intra-generational commonalities and differences. It is in the common ground of youth culture that intercultural encounters take place and the ground for convivial cohabitation becomes apparent (Gilroy, 2005).

In the second case study, the focus was on the reconfiguration of gendered identities. Acknowledging that Moroccan-Dutch young people have to actively negotiate between opposite motivations of continuity and change in identification vis-à-vis their parents, family members and community norms and expectations, the category of gender draws out another dimension of in the lives of Moroccan-Dutch youth. On message boards evidence can be found of the interstitial future of Moroccan-Dutch girls. There, these doubly marginalized girls may work against both simplistic stereotypes of Muslim girls as being passive and oppressed that persist in Dutch society while they also negotiate their individual gendered positionality in the context of the sometimes strict demands of Islam, their parents and their families.

The analysis also shows that generation and gender differences in digital technology use by Moroccan-Dutch families are highly intertwined. Gender matters for the definition of generational differences as well and the re-organisation of knowledge and power within the family structure. For example, girls are more technology savvy than their fathers and through that they help their parents not only to stay in touch with their distant homeland, they also create a space of their own away from parents' surveillance, which is connected to many other national and transnational ties. Similarly, generation matters for gender differences as well as mothers and daughters are divided by the digital gap but united in the expectations towards the upholding of certain values and beliefs in the public sphere. The use of digital technology for achieving more autonomy and breaching the dichotomy of masculine public and feminine private sphere helps younger girls not only to avoid parental surveillance but also to create lines of connection and support for their grandmothers, mothers, aunts and sisters, who do not necessarily subscribe to the same traditional male hierarchical order. Though this would be the topic for a different article we wanted to mention here the complexity and validity of an intersectional approach while also focusing on the specificity

of generational and gender differences as in need of further attention and study within the field of digital media and migration.

References

Bhabha, H. (1994). *The location of culture*. New York, NY: Routledge.

Borghuis, P., Graaf, C. de & Hermes, J. (2010). Digital storytelling in sex education. Avoiding the pitfalls of building a 'haram' website. *Seminar.net*, 6(2), 234-247. Retrieved from: <http://seminar.net/index.php/home/75-current-issue/148-digital-storytelling-in-sex-education-avoiding-the-pitfalls-of-building-a-haram-website>.

Brouwer, L. (2006). Giving voice to Dutch Moroccan girls on the Internet. *Global Media Journal*, 5(9), np. Retrieved from: http://lass.purduecal.edu/cca/gmj/fa06/gmj_fa06_brouwer.htm.

Brouwer, L. (1992). Binding religion. Moroccan and Turkish runaway girls. In W.A.R. Shadid & P.S. van Koningsveld (Eds.), *Islam in Dutch society*, (pp. 75-89). Kampen: Kok Pharos.

CBS. (2011a). Population; sex, age, origin and generation. *Statistics Netherlands Statline*. Retrieved from: <http://statline.cbs.nl/StatWeb/publication/?DM=SLN&PA=37325ENG&D1=0&D2=0-4,136,151,214,231&D3=0&D4=0&D5=139&D6=a,10-8&LA=EN&VW=T>.

CBS. (2011b). Population; sex, age and nationality. *Statistics Netherlands Statline*. Retrieved from: <http://statline.cbs.nl/StatWeb/publication/?DM=SLNL&PA=70798NED&D1=a&D2=0&D3=1-5,21,39,51,116,171,186&D4=1,6,l&HDR=T,G3&STB=G1,G2&VW=T>.

Cottaar, A. & Bouras, N. (2009). *Marokkanen in Nederland. De pioniers vertellen*. [Moroccans in the Netherlands. The pioneers tell their stories]. Amsterdam: Meulenhoff.

Durham, M.G. (2004). Constructing the 'new ethnicities': Media, sexuality and diaspora identity in the lives of South Asian immigrant girls. *Critical studies in media communication*, 21(2), 140-161.

Gazzah, M. (2010). Maroc-Hop: Music and youth identities in the Netherlands. In L. Herrera & A. Bayat (Eds.), *Being young and Muslim*, (pp. 309-323). Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Geense, P. & Pels, T. (2002). Allochtone jongeren op het Internet. [Allochthonous youth on the Internet]. *Migrantenstudies*, 18, 2-19.

Gilroy, P. (2005). *Postcolonial melancholia*. New York, NY: Columbia University Press.

Graiuid, S. (2005). Social exile and virtual Hrig: Computer-mediated interaction and cybercafé culture in Morocco. In M. Wilberg (Ed.), *The interaction society: Practice, theories and supportive technologies*, (pp. 57-92). Hershey, PA: Information Science Publishing.

Green, L. & Kabir, N. (2012). Australian migrant children: ICT use and the construction of future lives. In L. Fortunati, R. Pertierra & J. Vincent. *Migration, diaspora and information technology in global societies*, (pp. 91-103). London, Routledge.

Haan, M.J. de (2012). Immigrant learning. In K. S. Gallagher, R. Goodyear, D. Brewer & R. Rueda (Eds.), *Urban education: A model for leadership and policy*, (pp. 328-341). New York, NY: Routledge.

Haraway, D. (1991). *Simians, cyborgs, and women: the reinvention of nature*. New York, NY: Routledge.

Harchaoui, S. & Huinder, C. (2003). Inleiding. [Introduction]. In S. Harchaoui & C. Huinder (Eds.), *Stigma: Marokkaan. Afstoten en insluiten van een ingebeelde bevolkingsgroep*. [Stigma: Moroccan! Excluding and including an imagined community], (pp. 7-22). Utrecht: Forum.

Jurgens, F. (2007). *Het Marokkanendrama*. [The Moroccan drama]. Amsterdam: Meulenhoff.

Knijff, C. (2009, November 06). Marokko.nl: Nuttige kijk op de onderbuik. *Volkskrant*. [Marokko.nl: A useful glance at gut feelings]. Retrieved from:
<http://www.volkskrant.nl/vk/nl/2694/Media/article/detail/364713/2009/11/06/Marokko-nl-Nuttige-kijk-op-de-onderbuik.dhtml>.

Leeuw, S. de & Rydin, I. (2007). Migrant children's digital stories. *European Journal of Cultural Studies*, 10(4), 447-464.

Leurs, K. (2012). *Digital Passages. Moroccan-Dutch youth performing diaspora, gender and youth cultural identities across digital space*. Dissertation Utrecht University, <http://igitur-archive.library.uu.nl/dissertations/2012-0614-200543/UUindex.html>.

Leurs, K., Midden, E. & Ponzanesi, S. (2012). Digital multiculturalism in the Netherlands: Religious, ethnic, and gender positioning by Moroccan-Dutch youth. *Religion and Gender*, 2(1), 150-175. Retrieved from: <http://www.religionandgender.org/index.php/rg/article/view/36>.

Leurs, K. & Ponzanesi, S. (2011). Mediated crossroads: Youthful digital diasporas. *M/C Journal*, 14(2), Retrieved from: <http://journal.media-culture.org.au/index.php/mcjournal/article/viewArticle/324>.

Mainsah, H. (2011). Transcending the national imagery: Digital online media and the transnational networks of ethnic minority youth in Norway. In E. Eide & K. Nikunen (Eds.), *Media in motion: Cultural complexity and migration in the Nordic region*, (pp. 201-219). Surrey: Ashgate.

Mernissi, F. (1987). *Beyond the veil. Revised edition. Male-female dynamics in modern Muslim society*. Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press.

Nabben, T., Korf, D.J. & Yesilgöz, B. (2006). *Van Allah tot Prada. Identiteit, leefstijl en geloofsbeleving van jonge Marokkanen en Turken*. [From Allah to Prada. Identity, lifestyle and religiosity among young Moroccans and Turks]. Utrecht: Forum.

Ong, A. (1999). *Flexible citizenship: The cultural logics of transnationality*. Durham: Duke University Press.

Orellana, M.F. (2009). *Translating childhoods: Immigrant youth, language and culture*. Piscataway, NJ: Rutgers University Press.

Pels, T. & Haan, M.J. de (2007). *Socialization practices of Moroccan families after migration: A reconstruction in an 'acculturative arena'*. *Young*, 15(1), 71-89.

Pels, T. & Haan, M.J. de (2003). *Continuity and change in Moroccan socialization*. Utrecht: Verwey-Jonker Instituut / Utrecht University.

Ponzanesi, S. (2002). Diasporic subjects and migration. In G. Griffin & R. Braidotti (Eds.), *Thinking differently. A reader in European women's studies*, (pp. 205-220). London: Zed Books.

Poorthuis, M. & Salemink, T. (2011). *Van harem tot Fitna. Beeldvorming over de Islam in Nederland 1848-2010*. [From harem to Fitna. Representation of Islam in the Netherlands 1848-2010]. Nijmegen: Valkhof Pers.

Sadiqi, F. (2003). *Women, gender and language in Morocco*. Leiden: Brill.

Scheffer, P. (2007). *Het land van aankomst*. [The country of arrival]. Amsterdam: De Bezige Bij.

Scheffer, P. (2011). *Immigrant nations*. Cambridge: Polity Press.

Skalli, L.H. (2006). *Through a local prism: gender, globalization, and identity in Moroccan women's magazines*. Oxford: Lexington Books.

Verhagen, F. (2010). *Hoezo mislukt? De nuchtere feiten over de integratie in Nederland*. [Failed, in what way? The bare facts about integration in the Netherlands]. Amsterdam: Nieuw Amsterdam.

Wired Up. (2012). *Research report*. Retrieved from [http://www.uu.nl/wiredup/pdf/Wired Up -
_Technical survey report.pdf](http://www.uu.nl/wiredup/pdf/Wired_Up_-_Technical_survey_report.pdf).

Verweij, A. & Bijl, R. (2012). Monitoring integration in the Netherlands. In R. Bijl & A. Verweij (Eds.), *Measuring and monitoring immigrant integration in Europe*, (pp. 239-252). The Hague: The Netherlands Institute for Social Research.