Migrant youth, cyberspace & ‘the well’ of transnational symbolic vocabulary

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Background
Migrancy embeds many of the local and global paradoxes that also pertain to digital media. *Wired up. Digital Media as Innovative Socialization Practices for Migrant Youth* is a research project aimed at studying digital literacy processes of Dutch Moroccan and Mexican American migrant youth. Globalization is one way to render visible the particular in the general, blending globalization and localization. In our case the focus is on mediated lived experiences and identifications of migrant youth in the context of global disjunctive flows. This poster presents a way to study the hybrid (online) identification practices of Dutch Moroccan youngsters within the broader context of mainstream youth culture.

Hypothesis
We hypothesize that in contrast with the first generation of settling migrants, subsequent generations draw more from symbolic vocabularies in their identity work and processes of belonging. Unlike their parents whose feelings of belonging are more directly linked to a geographically defined homeland, the identification processes of these youngsters become less and less geographically grounded. They rather draw from transnational symbolism in the context of mainstream youth culture to express themselves as individuals.

Research questions
- How do Dutch Moroccan youth (Mocro’s, in their terms) use digital media to shape and draw from transnational symbolic vocabularies in order to express their individual identities?
- How does the travelling of cultural historic ‘texts’/objects within the context of transnational online practices help us understand processes of identification among migrant youth?

Theoretical framework
1. Instead of a medium disconnected from physical reality, we will approach online practices as part of a contextual continuum (Christensen 2003, Miller & Slater 2000). Moreover, digital media are not only embedded within day to day offline practices but in some cases are also a continuation of cultural historical conditions, asserting existing socio-cultural boundaries and identities, rather than dissolving them.

2. Elaborating on the theory of transnational imaginary (Wilson and Dissanayake 1996), our concept of *transnational symbolic vocabulary* refers to a ‘well’ of cultural objects stemming from a multiplicity of cultural notions also refers to a well where youngsters can draw resources from while (re)fashioning identities. Transnational symbolic vocabulary as such describes new processes of transnational identification within contemporary youth culture.

Methodological model
Distilling relevant symbolic practices through a combination of quantitative and ethnographic methods

Illustrative data
2/3rd of Dutch Moroccans are of Berber descent. Increasingly, Moroccan youngsters display their Berber background online. Hyves is a Dutch social networking site (> 7 million users), reaching 49.7% of the Dutch population. A striking example is the incorporation of a central Berber symbol on Hyves profile pages and community groups. This symbol, called Aza, derives from an ancient Lybical alphabet. It was later appropriated by the transnational Berber movement and is depicted on the green, yellow and blue Berber flag. Youngsters (see images above) mix the Aza with other expressions of global youth culture. Interestingly also, preliminary data shows that Mocro migrant youngsters use Skype less often than their parents, feeding our hunch that youth dwell on symbolism more.