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Affective belongings across geographies: locating YouTube viewing practices of Moroccan-Dutch youth

From time to time I watch videos, self-made ones, showing different Moroccan scenes. I kind of enjoy watching those. They make me go back in my mind to Morocco, and every once in a while I like that.

– Nevra, 16 years old

In this chapter we argue that YouTube video viewing practices of Moroccan-Dutch youth provide insights into affective belongings between subjects across local and global geographies. We understand emotions as social and cultural practices. Drawing from a triangulation of large-scale surveys, in-depth interviews, and the analysis of videos, we map out what emotions may be evoked in the bodies of informants as they watch YouTube videos. In particular we explore the workings of two sorts of videos. The two genres of YouTube videos our informants mainly consumed were user-generated videos shot in Morocco that sustain feelings of transnational diaspora belonging, and commercial music videos that produce feelings of attachment to national and global youth-cultural orientations.

13-year-old Ilham (all names are pseudonyms) explains: “you can watch anything you want there, by searching for a key word. You will find video-clips of songs, and real videos.” She juxtaposes “video-clips” and “real videos.” With “video-clips” she refers to professional music videos from American, Moroccan and Middle-Eastern artists she enjoys listening to. With “real videos” she refers to amateur content such as travel videos shot in Morocco. The informants’ distinction between the two genres of “video-clips” and “real” videos echoes scholarly divisions made between mainstream materials uploaded by commercial corporate and/or institutional players, and user-generated video content.¹

Nevra, a sixteen-year-old Moroccan-Dutch girl, states that she travels back to Morocco in her mind when watching videos shot in Morocco on YouTube. She feels moved when watching these videos. Nevra and other informants use YouTube as a way to emotionally reconnect to their childhood histories or past holiday visits. Nevra was born in the Netherlands and thus imaginings of her Moroccan home are mainly virtual and sustained especially through holiday travel, stories and pictures, music and videos. Besides watching Moroccan-themed videos, informants turned to YouTube to access music videos from artists from various parts of the world. When asked why

informants watched these YouTube videos, they commonly stated watching videos shot in Morocco made them feel “less homesick,” “nostalgic,” or “emotional,” while music videos made them feel “good,” “relaxed,” or “happy.” YouTube played these two key roles in the lives of the majority of the informants. The present chapter seeks to explore further the affective workings of migrant youth’ consumption of videos of these two genres: user-generated content shot in Morocco and commercial video-clips.

In recent years, cultural theorists are increasingly taking bodily sensations seriously and a substantial amount of critical scholarship is emerging that probes the cultural politics of emotions.² In the humanities, this development has been recognized to constitute an “affective turn.”³ However, affectivity remains understudied in migration and media studies: Deborah Boehm and Heidi Swank note that most prior research “on migration rarely captures the affective and emotional dimensions of global processes”⁴ while Leopoldina Fortunati and Jane Vincent signal the scarce attention for affectivity in studies on digital technologies: “[w]e are at the infancy of studies on emotion and ICT’s.”⁵ Previously, migration and media studies have predominantly focused on issues of representation such as framing and identity construction. We hope to contribute to these gaps in the literature by taking YouTube video viewing practices as an entry point to address the intersection between affectivity and media use experiences across transnational and local spaces. The affective encounter of bodies with media objects shifts attention from understanding viewing as processes of symbolic meaning making, towards apprehending them as sparking emotions, feelings and experiences that matter.

In this chapter we first review prior scholarship on affectivity, belonging, and digital practices. In the second section, we discuss the context of the study (the Netherlands) prior to considering methodology. Finally, the extended, empirical section of the chapter consists of two parts. In section four, YouTube video viewing practices that spark nostalgic and home-making “rooted” diaspora belonging⁶ are scrutinized, while in the final section, viewing practices that shape feelings of belonging to “rooted”⁷ international/local orientations are analyzed.

Theorizing affectivity, belonging and YouTube use

Many of the local, transnational and global paradoxes inherent to transnational migration also characterize digital media use experiences with their compression of

time and distance.⁸ We use affect theory to chart the sensations that may emerge when these two processes intersect. More specifically, we posit how affect theory may further improve our understanding of the cultural politics of global-local flows of people, technologies, and feelings. By understanding YouTube viewers as audience members that actively engage with content, a focus on affectivity generates insights on what happens in between online content and user signification practices, a process that cannot be reduced solely to either meanings or bytes. Rather it widens the focus from *meanings* toward how meanings are also *sensations*. Bringing affectivity to the study of mediated communication is urgent, as prior scholarship in the field has too often relied on “sociological theories without heart.”⁹

The term affect is a translation from the Greek word “affectus” which can be understood as “passion,” “emotion,” and “desire.”¹⁰ We build on Ahmed’s understanding of affectivity. Her understanding of affectivity differs from Deleuzian renderings¹¹ or psychoanalytic interpretations.¹² Sarah Ahmed theorized the cultural politics of affectivity and argues that feelings are doings that should not only be considered as mental states but also inherently related to “social and cultural practices.”¹³ Theorizations of sensations cover the relationships between meaningful artifacts and bodies, between how these signs “work on and in relation to bodies.”¹⁴ In this way, in contrast with earlier utopian beliefs on the disembodied workings of cyberspace, theories of affectivity re-address relations between phenomenology and technology, semiotics and materiality, the body and the mind.

But how can we understand affectivity in relation to digital media? Affect works as an evaluative orientation, a judgment accompanied by a “physiological shift,” such as a growth of intensity, attention, or attachment. Affectivity coded in linguistic or visual signs can be “transmitted” from one person to another.¹⁵ The impact of digital images on users is not merely technological but an affective, embodied encounter. Bodies operate as the affective medium between information and constituted mental images.¹⁶ For example affect theory has been mobilized to understand user experiences of online pornography: people may develop a “fondness for specific images” that result in particular sensory effects.¹⁷ Other studies show that the affective pleasures of women’s diary blog reading stems from their search for gender, age, race, and education-based “sameness” and “recognition”.¹⁸ Like other Internet applications, YouTube can be considered “an archive of feelings,” a repository of mediated sensations that “are encoded not only in the content of the texts

themselves but in the practices that surround their production and reception.”¹⁹ We would like to emphasize that signs do not determine a feeling, but that the affective relationship of an individual with particular signs can make them matter. Affectivity will be understood here as the transformatory processes of bodies that reach a different state, spurred by sensations arising from viewing digital media. In particular, we explore the ways in which young migrant subjects are moved by videos as they sense connections, disconnections, and feelings of belonging to other groups of people.

Media users share their audiencehood with an “imagined community” of fellow members of the audience, and this relation may span wide geographical distances.²⁰ Employing these ideas to consider transnational affiliations among migrants, Amanda Wise and Selvaraj Velayutham developed the notion of “transnational affect” to signal the role of emotions in forming feelings of transnational belonging. They describe transnational affectivity as a “circulation of bodily emotive affect between transnational subjects and between subjects and symbolic fields which give qualitative intensity to vectors and routes thus reproducing belonging to, and boundaries of, transnational fields.”²¹ Their examples focus on the offline world and include moral economies of shame and pride, symbolic identification and belonging. A focus on digital media use is necessary to begin to rethink the paradigmatic figure of the migrant as “uprooted” to a more accurate figure of “the connected migrant.” Today’s generations (descendants of migrants) especially establish digital “networks of belonging.”²² When migrant subjects take up technologies like YouTube to watch videos shot in their homeland and elsewhere, they may feel they are present in multiple geographical locations.

Consider an example of how *YouTube* allows for the transmission of diaspora attachments. Matteo Vergani and Dennis Zuev observed two ways *YouTube* is used among Uyghur people, a Muslim minority population in northwest China.²³ Music is shared among the group for the purpose of diaspora identification, amusement and fun. However, after the September 11, 2001 attacks in the United States, Chinese discursive framing of Uyghurs changed from “Uyghur separatists” to “Muslim terrorists.” The sharing of Uyghur-themed *YouTube* videos became politicized. Uyghurs then engaged in video productions to cope with the Chinese state attack on their identities. As such, Uyghur videos play two roles, they are consumed in ways that establish “spatial togetherness” as a form of “transnational loyalty” by linking

together members of the community, and at the same time they circulate alternative representations into the public domain, “broadcasting a positive image of the Uyghurs to a wide audience.”²⁴ The circulation of transnational loyalty through videos among Uyghurs in the diaspora can be understood as an example of transnational affectivity.

However, singling out transnational affectivity would leave crucial additional networks of belonging untouched. Prior research on migration has demonstrated that identifications among subjects in the diaspora are not purely geared towards transnational migratory orientations. Paul Gilroy and Stuart Hall, in particular, have unpacked different dimensions to belonging among diasporians. They argue that research on diaspora should expand its focus from essentializations of transnational ties towards traversal imaginaries, multi-locality, circulation, and hybridization. Two positions of cultural identification have been distinguished. On the one hand, affiliations with one’s “roots” concern those feelings of connection with people, artifacts, representations, and ideas pertaining to where migrants imagine to be coming from.²⁵ Imagined belongings to one’s roots, anchored in the past, provide “stable, unchanging and continuous frames of reference.”²⁶ On the other hand, the concept of “routes” acknowledges the active process of cultural identification, acknowledging ongoing dynamic positioning and active encounters with contemporary influences.²⁷ Oriented towards the future, “routes” views belongings also as a “matter of ‘becoming.’”²⁸ Coupling these insights with affective feelings of belonging, we can similarly distinguish between the ways in which “emotions show us how histories stay alive” and how feelings “also open up futures, in the ways they involve different orientations to others.”²⁹

In the empirical analysis (sections 4 and 5) we detail how viewers can feel connectedness to multiple groups of people and assess feelings of rootedness and routed orientations respectively. Prior to this analysis, we provide the context of the study and the methodological framework.

Moroccan-Dutch youth and the context of the Netherlands

People of Moroccan-Dutch descent make up approximately 2.1 percent of the total Dutch population of 16.6 million. Of this group, 47 percent migrated to the Netherlands from the 1960s onwards as guest workers, while the other 53 percent were born in the Netherlands after their parents had migrated.³⁰ Moroccan-Dutch youth receive a great deal of attention in news reporting, policy-making and research.

However, prior academic research has focused predominately on behavioral issues, such as juvenile delinquency, radicalization, mental health problems and early school departure.³¹ The combination of these four themes adds up to what has been called “the Moroccan drama.”³² These issues are undeniably important and significant, but these foci stress negative experiences. Although language acquisition, upward mobility, and educational achievements are steadily improving among the majority of Moroccan-Dutch youth, such everyday realities remain largely invisible in contemporary debates.³³ Moroccan-Dutch youth are systematically stigmatized and made hypervisible by sensationalist journalists and right-wing politicians who frame Muslims as backward or oppressed or as absolute others that pose a threat to Dutch society. In contrast with such dominant and essentialist research on migrants and ethnic minorities, this study considers the rich textures of everyday digital experiences as a valuable source of situated knowledge³⁴.

Methodological framework

The fieldwork for the study was conducted in the context of “Wired Up,” a collaborative, international research project funded by Utrecht University in the Netherlands. “Wired Up” brings together scholars from the humanities and social sciences to gain greater understanding of the roles of digital media as innovative socialization practices for migrant youth. The empirical data analyzed in this chapter were gathered in three phases: 1) questionnaires among 1408 Dutch youth (including 344 Moroccan-Dutch youth) 2) in-depth interviews with 43 Moroccan-Dutch youth, and 3) ethnographic participant-observation online, which included the archiving of videos.

The online survey was conducted at seven secondary schools in the Netherlands among students age 12 to 18 of different ethnic backgrounds including representative samples of white Dutch youth and youth from the four largest ethnic minority groups in the Netherlands: Turkish-Dutch, Moroccan-Dutch, Surinamese and Antillian-Dutch. For seven out of 10 of all the respondents YouTube is one of their top five favorite websites. However, the frequency of YouTube use is significantly higher among youth with a migration background. Additionally, to measure feelings of attachment, respondents were asked to what extent they would miss Internet applications if they would no longer be available to them. The reported levels of attachment among Turkish-Dutch, Moroccan-Dutch, Surinamese and Antillian-Dutch

to watching videos online are significantly higher in comparison with white Dutch youth.³⁵ By unraveling the affective workings of YouTube among Moroccan-Dutch youth we gain greater understanding in the particularly strong appeal of YouTube video practices among migrant youth.

The vast majority (77%) of the Moroccan-Dutch survey participants report turning to YouTube four days per week or more. Additionally, they report a strong attachment to the platform. Two-thirds of Moroccan-Dutch young women and over half of young men reported that they would miss using YouTube very much if they were not able to use it any longer (see table 1).

Attachment YouTube use	Completely not	Somewhat	Very much	Total
Young women	8.3 %	32.6 %	59.1 %	100 %
Young men	11.0 %	36.8 %	52.2 %	100 %

Table 1 Would Moroccan-Dutch youth miss YouTube if they could not use it any longer? (n= 344).

As a follow-up to the survey research, semi-structured in-depth interviews were held with 43 Moroccan-Dutch youth. This group consisted of a sample of 30 students between ages 12 to 16 who took the survey and 13 informants who were 17 or 18 years old were contacted through snowballing methods. The group of interviewees consisted of 22 young women and 21 young men, with the average age at 15. From these interviews we learned that informants predominantly turn to YouTube to look up music videos, and they also access videos pertaining to Morocco. Five interviewees did not engage with YouTube at all. Watching music video-clips was the predominant practice among the 38 interviewees who engaged with YouTube, and 12 informants specifically mentioned viewing videos shot by people traveling in Morocco.

During the interviews, informants were invited to draw a “concept map” to illustrate how they perceived the Internet. Concept mapping is a way to capture different “ways of experiencing” technologies. The methodology aims to acknowledge “variation in the ways people see, experience, think about, understand and conceptualize the phenomena they encounter.”³⁶ In practice, informants charted the Internet applications they frequently visited on a piece of paper together with keywords they associated with each platform. When interviewees reported their uses

of YouTube, they were asked to write down the titles of videos they frequently looked up, and did so by variously listing one to six videos. Also, interviewees were asked to provide background information on listed music videos. During the conversation, informants were prompted to situate the artists in terms of genre, gender, language use and geographical location. Thus, the informants explicitly mentioned the videos discussed in this chapter.

Rooted belongings: transnational affectivity

This section focuses on the use of YouTube among the informants for continuous orientation on migratory affiliations and “rootedness.”³⁷ The affective search for rootedness emerged as a theme when we analyzed the ways in which the informants spoke about user-generated YouTube videos shot in Morocco. Moroccan-Dutch youth shared that they felt “less homesick,” “happy,” “emotional,” and “nostalgic” from watching videos shot in Morocco. Stuart Hall describes rooted cultural identification as a way to maintain membership and belonging to a community: “within the terms of this definition, our cultural identities reflect our common historical experiences and shared cultural codes which provide us, as ‘one people’, with stable, unchanging and continuous frames of reference and meaning, beneath the shifting divisions.”³⁸ In line with this definition, feelings of rootedness can be said to provide a sense of a cohesive collective beyond the constraints of time and space. By exploring the links between affective community and transnational affectivity, we note that videos shot in Morocco operate in two ways: diasporic home-making in response to alienation and nostalgic desires for shared cultural codes and feelings.

For example, 13-year-old Anas brought up the video *Marrakech City Drive* (see figure 1). He recalled watching the video before he went on holidays to Marrakech, the city where his parents were born. *Marrakech City Drive* is a clip shot from a moving car on Avenue Mohammed V in Marrakech by the Moroccan-American adult male YouTube user “eMoroccan.” The video consists of one single 78 second shot, filmed in a first-person perspective with a digital hand-held camera. Only synchronous, diegetic sounds are included; the engine of the running car the filmmaker is in can be heard as well as the noise of a passing motorcycle and birds chirping in the palm trees as the car passes. The first-person point of view of the video adds to Anas’ feeling of being able to immerse himself in the scene. In the video,

following the single trajectory of the road, the viewer gradually approaches the city's fortifications. Although the Koutoubia Mosque is featured in the distance, the video mostly shows the journey of driving through the streets of Marrakech. For Anas, various elements in the video are familiar. These familiarities create a feeling of transnational affection and strengthen his symbolic attachment to the city.

I looked up the YouTube video Marrakech City Drive. A while back I was really looking forward to the holidays and by coincidence I spotted that clip on YouTube. I had not been to Morocco for some time back then. That's why I looked up some videos. [In that video] with the two of them they are in a car, and they film the city. I recognized many things; I saw all the famous things in my city.

– Anas, 13 years old

[INSERT FIGURE 1 HERE]

Figure 1 Still *Marrakech, Morocco City Drive* uploaded to YouTube by eMoroccan (October 8, 2010).³⁹

Nostalgia and notions of home are central notions in migration studies. In migrant literature, the “poetics of home” operate as symbols for stability, belonging, and safety.⁴⁰ Home-making practices are organized around patterns of inclusion and exclusion. Homelands are exclusive, and therefore they establish difference. Home, alongside axes such as gender, sexuality, and class “acts as an ideological determinant of the subject.”⁴¹ Home-making concerns the human desires all humans share: boundedness, stability, and belonging. People long to belong.

Another participant, 15-year-old Meryam, expresses how she imagines Morocco: “you think of the country like I would want to stay there forever, because yeah my parents are from there, and a piece of it is in you.” For members of diasporic communities, longing for home concerns feelings of having a safe place elsewhere in the world. Feeling able to occupy a welcoming location, in the presence of significant likeminded others, it concerns an individual as well as collective idea based on ideas of origins. “As an idea it [a home] stands for shelter, stability, security and comfort.”⁴² And for the informants, this idea may be based on feelings of connectedness with the house and areas where they or their parents grew up. On YouTube, imaginings of one's home can be actively re-constructed.

Diasporic videos can be consumed as symbolic anchors of migratory affiliations. For Moroccan-Dutch youth, apart from stories told by their parents and their holidays, YouTube is one of the few other ways to experience Morocco.

Abdelsammad, a 15-year-old boy, explains this dynamic as follows:

I watch movies about where we come from. On YouTube there are movies about where we lived, that is nice to see. There is much to find about Nador. Many, many movies. For instance, clips that show the roads, the shopping malls, the boulevard. Lots of things that you are familiar with. I was born there and lived there until I was three years old, but I know it better from holidays. [Moroccan-Dutch] people from the Netherlands, who go there on holidays, when they get back they put the video they took there online.

eMoroccan, a Moroccan-American adult male, is a major producer of the genre of videos that Abdelsammad and other informants takes pleasure in. With over 260,000 people having viewed one of his 46 movies, eMoroccan appears to play a key role in producing and circulating videos for Moroccans in the diaspora. His videos include *Athan (Call to Prayer) in Morocco*; *Autoroutes du Maroc*; *Casablanca Street View*; *Taghazout, Morocco beach*; *Hassan II Mosque*; *Landing in Morocco onboard Royal Air Maroc*; *Marina Agadir*; *Traditional Berber Folklore Music*. His main aim is welcoming YouTube users to “virtual Morocco.” In an interview conducted via YouTube’s personal messaging system, eMoroccan articulated his motivations for contributing to YouTube with videos shot in Morocco:

A common theme among Moroccans living abroad is their continual attachment to their country (l'blad) and their hometowns. Some have been living abroad for years and haven't been able to return to Morocco due to several reasons. I wanted to create a virtual outlet for these individuals so that they may experience Morocco visually and hopefully fill some void. But I also enjoy making videos in general and have a keen interest in Morocco. By using the Internet a Moroccan individual becomes an ‘eMoroccan’ who can experience ‘virtual Morocco.’

The video producer eMoroccan touches upon the issue of user-generated video being consumed by people in the Moroccan diaspora as a way to connect to their homeland, literally, “visually experiencing” the country when physical travel is unattainable. YouTube allows Moroccans living abroad the means to become “eMoroccans.” Watching videos such as *Landing in Morocco onboard Royal Air Maroc* provide Moroccans living in the diaspora an opportunity to re-live prior experiences they’ve had travelling to their home country. These videos can spark affective transnational belongings, making digital visits so that users can become “electronic Moroccans.”

Such diasporic videos can be recognized as a separate YouTube video genre, with their particular subject and aesthetic choices. The subject matter reveals a particular topical preference and aesthetics that may appeal to those in the diaspora more than Western tourists, for example. The diasporic videos do not conform to the mainstream tourist imagery of beaches, handicraft markets, camels, exotic desert oases. People who do not share the habitus of migratory affiliation will thus experience these videos differently.

Moroccan diasporic clips, mostly filmed with camera-phones and hand-held digital cameras, generally include low resolution, unedited shots taken while driving around the country in cars showing the roads, traffic in all its variety, cities and towns, and seemingly random living areas and structures. There is no sound added; viewers overhear people speaking in the taxi or airplane interspersed with the noises of traffic and car engines. Videos generally include scenes taken from everyday life that can have an important social meaning for diasporic subjects. As such, the main tourist highlights of sandy beaches, palm trees, museums, luxury and splendor are not included in these pieces.

During the interviews, informants explicitly mentioned turning to YouTube when they felt “heimwee” – the Dutch word for homesickness or nostalgia. Videos shot in Morocco helped them to combat feelings of homesickness. 14-year-old Kenza shared that she highly values YouTube in order to look up videos that make her think about Morocco “because sometimes I do get quite strongly filled with a feeling of nostalgia, because I’m missing Morocco.” Watching videos such as *Marrakech, Morocco City Drive* has affective nostalgic workings, as physiological shifts take place in the bodies of the viewers – the videos make the migrants feel better.

Johannes Hofer coined the word “nostalgia” in a medical dissertation to describe sad moods that can arise from desires to go back to one’s native land. The word “nostalgia” combines two words with Greek roots, “nostos” meaning “homesickness” or “returning home” and “algia” meaning “longing” or “pain.” Svetlana Boym notes that nostalgia now stands for “a longing for a home that no longer exists or has never existed. Nostalgia is a sentiment of loss and displacement, but it is also a romance with one’s own fantasy.”⁴³ Feelings of nostalgia can become especially pertinent among descendants of those who have migrated: “[f]irst-wave immigrants are often notoriously unsentimental, leaving the search for roots to their children and grandchildren.”⁴⁴ Looking up videos shot in Morocco evoke feelings of

happiness in second-generation informants, and this practice illustrates how transnational affectivity may work.

The specific materialities of the videos are valued among diasporic youth as they generate affective relations of nostalgia. Similarly, Hamid Naficy found that nostalgic music videos that show Iranian streets and bazaars are enjoyed among Iranian exiles in the United States because of their shared “live ontology” that creates an alluring “reality effect.”⁴⁵ Consisting of low-resolution, unedited, single camera position shots, without the addition of non-diegetic sounds and music, the videos construct a sense of authenticity. The viewer can follow the footsteps of the video producer who has been present in the filmed location. These features serve as reminders that filmmaker and camera were actually present in Morocco and bestow these videos with authenticity, trustworthiness, and power as emotionally touching, transnational diaspora objects that carry a sense of subjectivity-in-place.

Nostalgia may be conceived of as a “return to” one’s origins or as an “escape from” the pressures of one’s host country. Roger Aden specifies that for many people who are disenchanted with aspects of their surroundings, find in nostalgia and communicating feelings of nostalgia, an escape to a temporary secure place of oppositional belonging. Aden suggests that “nostalgic communication provides individuals with a means of symbolically escaping cultural conditions that they find depressing and/or disorienting.” Nostalgia can be experienced as “a sanctuary of meaning,” as migrants can sense being “safe from oppressive cultural conditions.”⁴⁶ Nostalgic diasporic affinity provides informants with a temporary escape to the sanctuary of an affective, imagined community. When she misses Morocco and feels “nostalgic,” Kenza explained, she looks up music videos of Moroccan artists, and also sometimes watches highlights of the national Moroccan football team as well as user-generated content. After feeling down, she adds that viewing such videos make her feel “happy” again. 14-year-old Ayoub mentions that he lifts his mood by looking up videos in which his Moroccan dialect is spoken: “most often I watch funny videos in Berber, my own language.” Similarly, 16-year-old Nevra noted that user-generated videos make her “go back in my mind to Morocco, and every once in a while I like that.” As members of an imagined, wider audience, interviewees experienced a sense of belonging and feelings of reassurance they are not left on their own.

Holiday travel and thinking back about the good times spent on Moroccan beaches or in the mountains may work as a coping mechanism to deal with the

polarizing tensions in Dutch society. Traveling to Morocco entails going about daily life without being constantly singled out as a Moroccan-Dutch youngster or as a Muslim.⁴⁷ 15-year-old Ryan describes that his parents were born in the low-profile coastal city of Kenitra, however, he adds that “we do not often go there [to Kenitra], when we go on holidays we go to other places [in Morocco] where the nature is beautiful, in the mountain areas and so on.” In this case holiday travel is adjusted to meet a desired exoticized imagination of one’s homeland, rather than an actual, historical homeland. 14-year-old Badr shared that he enjoys visiting Morocco: “but only for two or three weeks, after that I want to go back, because I’m more used to being here” in the Netherlands. Back in the Netherlands, Badr shared that he wants to hold on to the images of his holiday experiences, for instance by posting pictures on his personal social-networking site profile page. In the utopian fantasies of their homeland, informants can imagine commonality with inhabitants of Morocco and their everyday life, however, once they are traveling there, nostalgic imaginings of their Moroccan “home” may prove to differ greatly from the everyday realities on the ground.

Imagined dreamscapes serve to construct many different “Moroccos of the mind.” 14-year-old Mehmet Ali, who was born in Nador but migrated to the Netherlands at the age of four, reveals the double-sidedness of nostalgic affectivity. On the one hand he emphasizes that while in the Netherlands he misses being in Morocco: “you miss everything that’s there.” Watching YouTube videos with images of the homeland may help alleviate such feelings. While the experience of visiting Morocco and being in Nador during the holidays differs from his fantasy of home that may have been sustained through watching videos: “it is really really hot, most of the time, and busy, very very busy in the city.” Everyday realities can differ from the affective nostalgic sanctuary. Nostalgic longings may continue to “haunt” diasporic subjects.⁴⁸

Finally, ethnic outsiders can also perceive virtual tourism to Morocco on YouTube as a threat. The sanctuary of transnational affectivity is not safe from disruption from outsiders who might feel excluded by material they perceive as different. Upon encountering vernacular diaspora videos, outsiders might not understand the content or aim of the videos. As Wise and Velayutham noted, transnational affectivity may produce boundaries.⁴⁹ Nostalgic diaspora videos can operate as inclusionary and exclusionary mechanisms. Interviewees share how

flaming and trolling, as acts of hostility, can abruptly punctuate nostalgic feelings. 16-year old Naoul reports “they shout ‘cunt-Moroccans’” in the YouTube comment section while 14-year old Ayoub notes that “similar to how some people give me a dirty look outdoors, under videos dealing with Morocco, they write ‘get out of the country’ and so on. It does not really bother me; there is not much I can do.” Notwithstanding, as the informants are being touched by vernacular videos of nostalgia, transnational affectivity enables them to renew and re-imagine bonds with their diasporic identities. In the next section, we shift our attention from videos shot in Morocco towards music videos.

Routed affective belongings across geographies

Next to watching videos spurring affective “rooted” geographical referentialities, informants engaged in viewing practices that indicate affective connections with local/global contemporary orientations or “routes.” The concept of “routes” acknowledges dynamic positioning and active encounter.⁵⁰ “Far from being eternally fixed in some essentialised past, [cultural identifications] are subject to the continuous ‘play’ of history, culture and power.”⁵¹

The YouTube platform is a preferred space to access music for the majority of the informants. From a total of 43 interviewees, 23 youths (53%) report they visit the platform mainly to watch and listen to music videos. With the advent of YouTube, and its growing database of (sometimes pirated) music videos that can be played on demand, music videos have become easily accessible. YouTube music video consumption, as an affective landing point of youth cultural texts, can be a source of agency for young people to redefine who they are and with whom they want to affectively affiliate. YouTube as an archive of feeling becomes politically meaningful when considering youth engagement in viewer practices that span across nations..

Interviewees employed language-specific and geographic labels to describe their music video viewing practices. For example, they used categories such as “American,” “Moroccan” and “Turkish” when describing the music videos of their favorite artists they search for and view on YouTube.

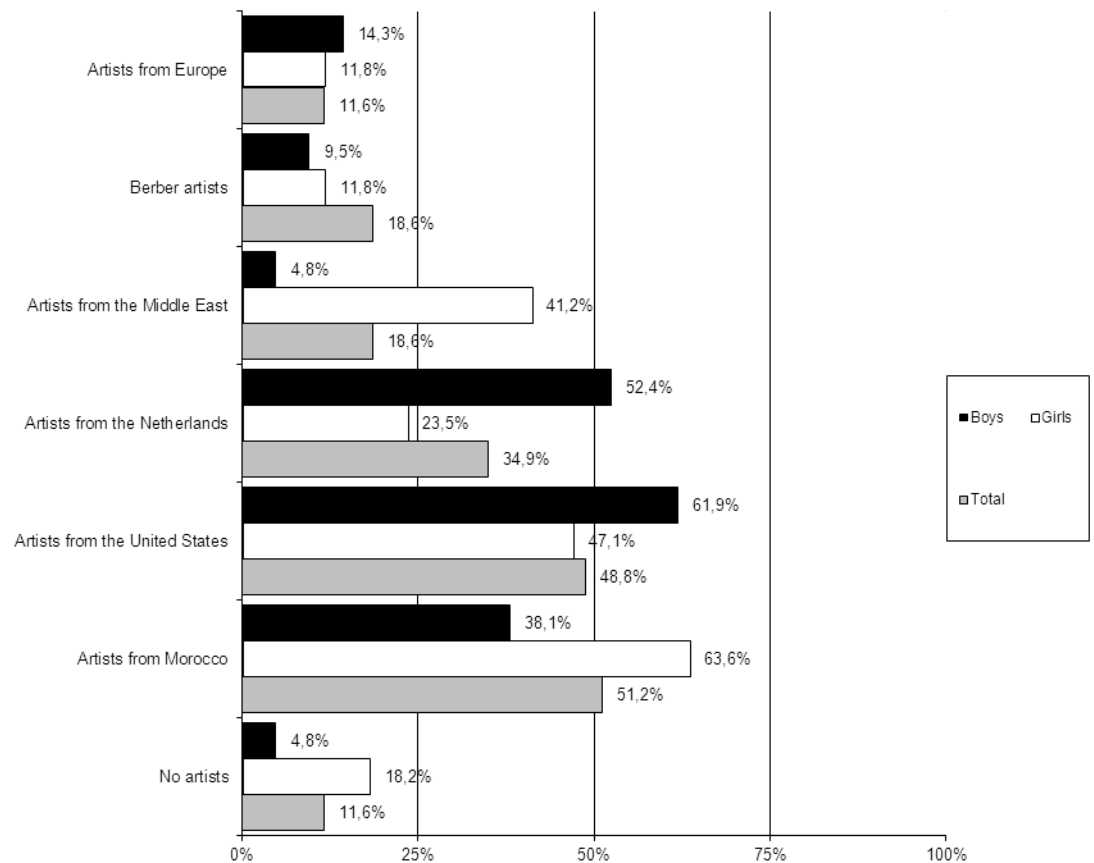


Figure 2 Geographical locations of music artists interviewees look up on YouTube (multiple answers possible, graph shows percentages, n = 43).

In figure 2 an overview is given of the geographic backgrounds of the music artists mentioned by informants. More than half of the informants – especially young women – watch videos of Moroccan artists. These videos may also spur feelings of nostalgia. 14-year-old Ziham explains “most of the time I listen to Moroccan music, I prefer that sort. Especially Mohamed Sami, Morad Salam, Laila Chakir and Amazine. They sing about love stories.” 14-year-old Mehmet Ali discusses his inclination towards looking up Moroccan videos: “most often I look up Moroccan songs,” the artists sing “about love, about the country Morocco itself, about its cities and its history, by artists that are famous in Morocco.” CD’s of these artists are difficult to find in Dutch shops.

Amir shared that consuming music videos of two Moroccan rap groups gives him a feeling of being unique, as it is an original way to stand out from others: “I listen to H-Koije and Fnaïre, these are two Moroccan rap groups. They only have shows in Morocco, and they rap in Arabic. They are famous in Morocco, [but] I

haven't heard anything about them here [in the Netherlands]." H-Koije and Fnaïre are rap crews who create music that is not part of the mainstream global circuits of youth culture (yet), and these groups have not been embraced by most fellow Moroccan-Dutch youth. Knowing these groups gives Amir a sense of being special. This knowledge is a form of subcultural capital that allows him to mark out his individuality as he discovered the rappers' music while on holidays in Marrakech, the city where his parents were born. These connections are suggestive of the ways in which the affective practices of music video and "real video" consumption are interwoven.

Showing his affinity with American forms of youth culture, 16-year-old Ryan prefers to listen to international, English-language music: "Dutch music for instance, I find it so boring, I always fall asleep by that. Moroccan music I also don't really like, as a matter of fact only English, international music." Ryan's self-positioning and musical preference is indicative for a belonging that goes beyond the nation and diaspora. 13-year-old Inas is a devout Muslim and during our interview she highlighted that she also feels connected to global youth culture. She shared her attachment to international youth icon Justin Bieber, while beginning to giggle she said, "Justin Bieber, I like him. Just to watch videos of him, yes him especially." To download his songs from YouTube to her Samsung Wave mobile phone she uses the website YoutubeConverter.org. Engaging with Justin Bieber music videos she becomes part of the global affective community of fellow Justin Bieber fans that consists mostly of young women. Next to artists from Morocco, and the United States, Inas and other young women prefer videos from artists hailing from countries in the Middle East and the Netherlands. Next to artists from the United States, young men preferred music videos that feature artists from the Netherlands, from Morocco, and to a small extent, other countries in Europe. However, singling out emotional attachment to artists from one of these geographical locations does not do justice to the multi-geographical complexity of the informants' favorite music videos. Affective belongings are both transnationally rooted as well as routed across global youth cultures.

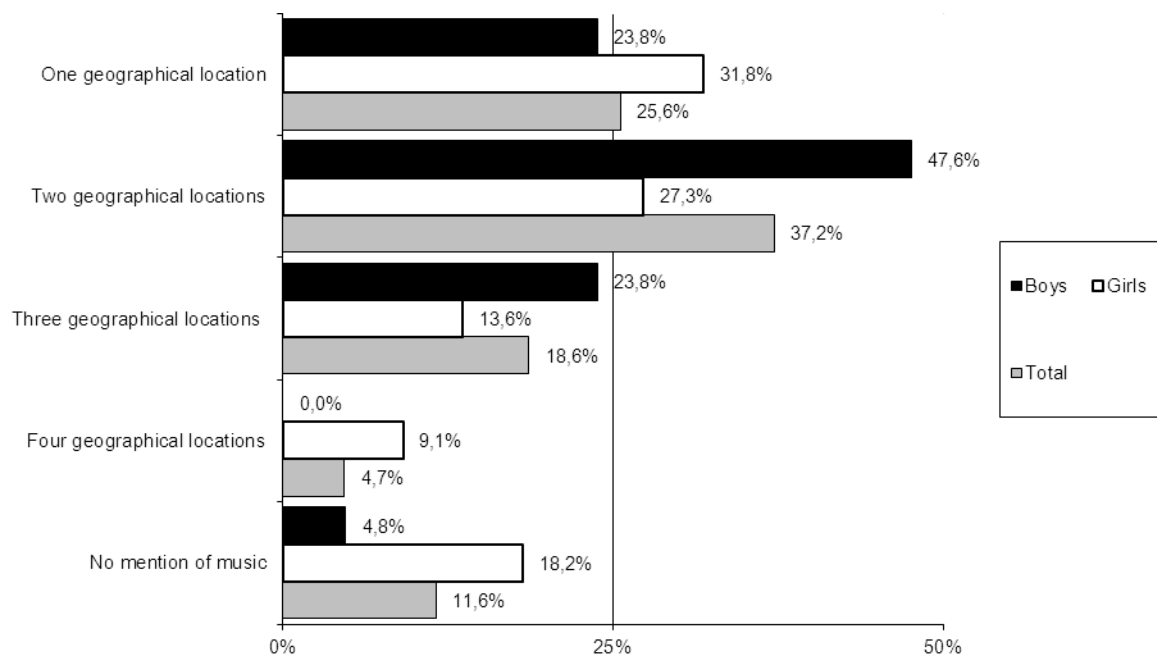


Figure 3 Geographical locations of artists interviewees combine in their YouTube viewing practices (graph shows percentages, n = 43).

As figure 3 displays, the articulation of belonging to a singular geographical location remains observable, as one-fourth of the interviewees report to look up music videos from recording artists coming from one geographical location. This includes looking up videos by artists from either Morocco or the U.S. that were considered in the prior section. However, the viewing preferences of the majority of the informants surpass the singular. The group that views only music by artists from one of the above mentioned geographical locations is smaller than the group of informants who turn to YouTube to listen to music by artists from at least two different geographical locations. Moreover, almost one out of every four interviewees reported to listen to artists from three or more areas across the world. For instance 15-year-old Hajar said, “I listen to all sorts of things, Moroccan and English. Just a mix of all these things.”

Bibi, 16-year-old, mentions her favorite artists are from four different locations across the world. Her description is indicative for attachments to a multiplicity of geographical affinities:

I’m addicted to the new song by Rihanna, ‘What’s my name’ or something like that. I’m fully hooked, with Drake, I listen to it 24 hours [a day]. Other artists are [Moroccan] such as Daoudi or Douzi or Sabah and Rola, you know, from ‘Yana yana’, from Mourad Salam, from Laila Chakir. Just those really famous artists.

A variety of affiliations are combined. Rihanna is an American R&B artist from Barbados, while Drake is a Canadian rapper of mixed African-American and Jewish descent. Both sing in English. Daoudi is a Shaabi musician singing in Darija (Moroccan-Arabic). The genre Shaabi (Arabic for “off the people”), concerns popular Moroccan folk music that may give rise to feelings of nostalgia. Douzi is a Moroccan rapper singing in English and Darija, and he collaborates with the Moroccan-Dutch rapper Appa. Sabah and Rola are Lebanese singers singing in Arabic, while Mourad Salam and Laila Chakir sing in Berber. Bibi signals affective relations with different geographies and groups of people. She combines Berber, North American, Middle-Eastern and Dutch artists, English, Darija, Arabic and Dutch languages, genres of R&B, Shaabi and rap. Bibi moves beyond singular affective attachments to either nationalism or diaspora affiliation, her preferences bring together different geographies, languages and genres,.

Similarly, Amir argued that his attachments go beyond singular notions of affective group belonging:

I just have my own style, I think. I don't belong to any group. Everyone is different, [people say] someone is Turkish, the other is a Moroccan and another is Dutch, but for me it's not like that. It's not really like I [fit] in one particular group, it's more multiculti I think.

– Amir, 16 years old

The multiple geographies enable layered affective identity construction beyond expectations of narrowly defined, stereotypical Moroccan-Dutch identities. Consider Inas for example, a 13-year-old young woman who feels strongly about covering her hair in public and strongly values YouTube to look up Justin Bieber music videos. Her affective engagement with global girl culture does not meet the expectations of dominant stereotypical Orientalist discourses of headscarf wearing Muslim women as backward and/or oppressed.⁵² Furthermore, YouTube music video consumption may counter ethnic absolutism, as it is in the consumption of music from different youth cultural scenes that young people of various backgrounds – as audience members – can convivially connect.⁵³

Conclusion

By considering affectivity as the potential of digital media artifacts to spark feelings, this chapter explored how Moroccan-Dutch youth video viewing enables affective belongings across geographies. We detailed transnational “rooted” and the multiple geographies of “routed” belongings.⁵⁴ This way, the argument is situated in the “affective turn.”⁵⁵ The viewing of Moroccan diasporic user-generated content was interpreted as a form of transnational affectivity, taken up in order to foster home-making and nostalgic belonging. Videos may provide an alternative but contested location of familiarity for Moroccan-Dutch young people to work through their feelings. Watching music videos of recording artists coming from cross-national locations, informants land youth cultural material as a source for hybridity and multiplicity. As a political form, the affective belongings of Moroccan-Dutch youth’s viewing of music videos are multi-geographical and thereby counter ethnic absolutism and nationalism. In these myriad ways, the affective optic on digital videos sheds light on how digital practices implicate an active re-embodiment of the user across online and offline geographies.

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