Kapittel 11
Gaming and identity construction among immigrant youth in Norway
Convergent glocal contexts

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SAMMENDRAG  Studien utforsker hvordan ikke-vestlig ungdom i Norge navigerer mellom lokale og globale kontekster gjennom dataspill, og hvordan dette former deres identitet. Studien tar utgangspunkt i teorier om transnasjonalisme, kjønn og teknologi. Ved bruk av kvalitative metoder avdekker studien komplekse identitetsmanifestasjoner som er globalt forbundet, men lokalt forankret. I stedet for en ofte brukt dualistisk referanseramme, foreslår forfatterne å forstå dette i lys av en mangfoldig referanseramme.

ABSTRACT  This study explores how immigrant youth in Norway navigate video games between local and global contexts and how this shapes their identities. Drawing from theories of transnationalism, gender and technology, the study employs qualitative methodologies that unravel complex identity manifestations that are globally connected but locally anchored. Rather than an often-used dual frame of reference, the authors suggest interpreting this through a multiple frame of reference.

NØKKELORD  Innvandrere | ikke-vestlig | ungdom | identitet | dataspill | diaspora | interseksjonalitet

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IMMIGRANT YOUTH AND GAMING AS A TRANSNATIONAL PRACTICE

Youth today live in highly digital mediatized spaces – flooded with social media and video games. In fact, video games are making their way into the mainstream of cultural products, now more than ever (Enevold, 2012; Livingstone, 2002). 7 out of 10 boys and 4 out of 10 girls in Norway play video games every day. Youth spend an average of 2 hours playing per day, while boys spend around 2.5 hours, girls spend half that time playing, according to the campaign «Talk about games» (husfred.no). Immigrant youth are no exception when it comes to playing video games (Anguiano, 2011; Dralega & Corneliussen, 2017; Fu & Graff, 2009).

In these concurrent time spaces, the adolescent gamer, like the social media user traversing cross-national communication platforms, may be presenting him or herself as an immigrant in one country, but when s/he moves to another online context, say a global community of diasporic youth, this identity might be re-signified (Anguiano, 2011) by that of a diasporic Palestinian, Ethiopian, Kenyan or Syrian. This chapter aims to explore the gaming patterns of non-Western immigrant boys and girls in Norway to learn more about how they navigate identity.

With periods of extreme growth in immigration to Western Europe from non-Western countries, the emphasis on cultural integration has also increased. In Norway, for instance, a national «Introduction Program» was established in 2005 aimed at facilitating the integration of immigrants into society, a goal that was further emphasised politically through the appointment of a Minister of Immigration and Integration in 2015. Thus, non-Western youth are met with a discourse loaded with expectations that they should be picking up local culture, finding friends and leisure practices in their local host communities. Simultaneously, multiplayer online games and social media platforms provide easy accessible channels for long distance and transnational communication.

Research on the transnational practices of immigrant youth might contribute to our understanding of identity and cultural production in multiple ways. It has been suggested that internet based communication shapes experiences pertaining to both local and global – or «glocal» – communities (Wellman, 2004). Transnational practices may involve maintaining or building anew transnational relationships that reconnect them to the land of their ancestors and establishing social relationships that make them participants in more than one state (Dralega & Mainsah, 2014; Schiller, 2009).

Online video games, as well as other online communication platforms, might serve to build transnational social networks and identities. They open transnational spaces that centre on the flow of ideas, and cultural and material productions (Dralega & Mainsah, 2014; McGinnis et al., 2008) in addition to self-expres-
sion (Shaw 2014). Drawing on notions of transnationalism and diasporic identities this chapter will examine how identities are manifested and reflected in the use of video games.

Theories on transnationalism, diaspora and migration studies (Levitt & Schiller, 2004), along with studies on gaming culture (Anguiano, 2011; Shaw, 2014) and Feminist and technology perspectives (Corneliussen 2011; Cheryan 2013) provide frameworks for considering the relational aspects of youth identities, gender and transnational practices. Together these areas provide a framework for examining the intersection of geographical, gendered, social-cultural, diasporic and even religious contexts. This framework recognizes that the intersection of local and global contexts has effects on identity formation practices. These perspectives emphasize that youth identities should not be seen as isolated practices, but as linked with the local and global social contexts in which they are embedded and which they help to shape. This study therefore aims to gain insights into the following research questions: What are the patterns of gaming among non-Western youth? How do these youth interpret their own experiences of gaming in relation to identity, socialization and belonging? Through interviews with 10 youth we analyse their gaming situation with a focus on intersectional social categories, such as gender, location, ethnicity, national belonging, and religion.

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK: INTERSECTIONAL PERSPECTIVES TO GAMING

YOUTH, GAMING, IDENTITY AND DIASPORA

«Youth» and «diaspora» are terms that both invoke the metaphor of a journey of constant transformation, with issues of border crossing, dislocations, time-space passages, and growing-up as well as reorientations. When youth and diaspora occur in tandem, identity formation becomes a complex process (Braidotti, 2011; Durham, 2004). These nomadic identities, as Rosi Braidotti suggests, render immigrant youth experiences fragmented, complex and multiple (2011).

In Durham’s (2004) explanation, the psychological transition between adolescence and adulthood already charged in terms of gender and sexuality, is then imbricated with the conundrums of the other transition, the diaspora identity that demands delicate negotiations of nation, class, language, culture and history, as well as ethnicity, which in games are expressed for instance in bodily forms, skin colour and face (Durham, 2004; Langer, 2008). Understanding the experience of immigrant youth calls for a sophisticated grasp of cross-cultural dialectics and the dimensions of Otherness that marks their lives (cf. Ahmed, 2004). Stuart Hall
reminds us of the necessity of rethinking the concept of cultural identity and diaspora away from the essentialized subject:

The diaspora experience is defined not by essence or purity, but by the recognition of a necessary heterogeneity and diversity; by a conception of «identity» which lives with and through, not despite difference. Diaspora identities are those which are constantly reproducing themselves anew, through transformation and difference (Hall, 1990, p. 235).

Hall’s perspective here is significant because it historicizes ethnic, diasporic and cultural identity. It recognizes the fact that diasporic identities, as all other cultural identities, are never fixed but always in the process of production – something we will return to later. According to Durham, for diaspora youth, the interior and psychological dimensions of gender, ethnicity, religion and class are intimately connected with issues of transnational identity. Here, the modes of identification emerge within a «mediascape» of popular images and texts, including video games that are increasingly accessible to contemporary teenagers (Durham, 2004). As Shaw (2014) and Appadurai (1996) have noted, gamers use games to imagine their lives in complex ways; most games offer «strips of reality» that are deeply implicated in the ways we understand ourselves and others.

The need to rethink societal engagement beyond the bounded framework of the nation has been taken up in the international migration research. Research on international migration and immigrant incorporation has successfully highlighted the need to understand immigrants’ experiences in host societies beyond a straightforward notion of assimilation and integration. Research on immigrant incorporation into multicultural societies has increasingly turned to notions such as transnationalism and third space to understand the various kinds of global or cross-border connections that are sustained or created among diasporic individuals living in multicultural societies, and how these individuals negotiate their identities within social worlds that span more than one place (Levitt & Schiller, 2004; Orellana, 2007). Others have adopted notions such as bifocality (Vertovec, 2004) or dual frame of reference (Guarnizo, 1997, p. 311; Suárez-Orozco, 2001, p. 114) in analysing the cultural practices and relationships across countries. Biofocality refers to the ways in which transnational forms of exchanges, communication and activities impact upon the cognitive, social and cultural orientation of diasporic populations. Dual frame of reference refers to the ways in which diasporic populations compare life experiences, events and situations from the dual points of view of their native societies and their adopted society. This study proposes a third
strand: multiple frames of reference, which is a more accurate interpretation of findings in this study.

GENDER AND GAMING

Intersectionality and focus on gender is central in this study, as it tackles the challenges of hegemony, power, inclusion and exclusion when it comes to women and technology (Braidotti, 2011). In Norway and across the globe, technology education and work are strongly male dominated (Charles & Bradley, 2006; Corneliusen, 2011). Gaming is associated with young, white males (Ask et al., 2016; Corneliusen & Mortensen, 2006). These studies indicate that girls and women’s positive relationship with gaming is often overlooked, because of perceptions that they either are absent or have little interest in playing computer games. Such cultural assumptions give rise to low expectations of girls’ interest in computer games, and at the same time the effect that girls can undermine or even hide their interest in computer games (Hommedal, 2014; Håpnes & Rasmussen, 1998). The ways in which games can work positively in identity building will vary according to the identity categories and social contexts that players negotiate with. There are fewer studies on gender and gaming habits among immigrant youth in Norway, making this study an important step on the way of building knowledge about this group of youth.

ANALYTICAL FRAMEWORK

The central theory underlying the analytical framework of this study is discourse theory of Laclau and Mouffe (1985), which interprets the social world as a product of social constructions limited by what we perceive through discourses. Discourse theory was used to analyse the informants’ understanding of themselves and their meaning-making of the social and cultural space they enter when they play games. Several studies have suggested that video games can be a place for positive experiences in which the gamer can escape from real life, or explore different identities (Shaw, 2014; Turkle, 1996). However, video games have also often been framed in a negative cultural discourse about addiction and other negative characteristics of violence, social isolation, etc. (Pallesen et al., 2014). Negative discourses have been studied among Norwegian gamers in general (Ask, 2011; Børsum, 2012), showing how gaming has been stigmatised as both «dangerous» or «unhealthy».

Gaming can potentially activate different social categories simultaneously. Thus, the intersectional perspective where we see how the combination of social
categories converge will be central in the analysis. The goal is to establish knowledge about how this group understands and negotiates with identity categories through video games.

METHODOLOGICAL FRAMEWORK
Given that the project focuses on participants’ gaming habits, we needed to adopt a research design that could permit us to examine all relevant contexts or sites of interaction. Instead of following specific games as point of departure for the analysis, we decided to make our participants the central point of focus of the study. We took an approach similar to that of Green (1999), who argues that Internet technologies are best studied through a flexible method where the researchers follow people and the stories about and by them. Therefore, our approach consisted of selection of 10 youths between 16–19 years of age that fit our constructed category of «youth with non-Western immigrant background» and have been gaming for at least one year. To include the gender perspective, we aimed for 5 girls and 5 boys. Participants were recruited at school through school administration and other after-school meeting places and networks in Oslo, Stavanger, Sogndal and Jølster. The sample therefore consisted of participants from both urban and rural areas. It must be noted that, recruiting girls was more difficult than boys.

The composition of our sample is not representative of the diverse population of ethnic minorities in Norway. Consequently, the results from this study can be said to be culturally typical, rather than universal. Rather than opting for a statistically representative sample, we selected a smaller sample that would enable the study to examine the issue of gaming and identity adequately and in-depth (Corbin & Strauss, 1990).

THE INTERVIEWS
To examine the reflections of ethnic minority youth on their gaming habits and what it means to them, we carried out in-depth interviews with all 10 participants. The interviews lasted approximately an hour each. The research methodology was informed by the need to ensure that we adequately give voice to the research participants (Kvale, Brinkmann & Anderssen, 2009). Drawing also from cultural studies approaches, this study operated on the principle that each person’s voice and their reflections on the meanings of their actions matter. Interviews provided information and reflections about the participant’s game choices, motivations for their choices and experiences with these games and what these meant to them.
Before each interview we gave the participants information about our research, our contact details, and sought their consent in addition to explaining issues of confidentiality and anonymity. Three of the interviews were undertaken on skype and telephone. An interesting methodological note is that girls were generally very difficult to recrute. Several studies have identified that women and girls often hide the fact that they game, even to such a degree that girls and women themselves do not expect other girls and women to play video games (Agdestein, 2009; Enevold, 2016). Therefore, we decided to change our recruitment strategy, by asking if the girls used mobile phones and games on social media instead of asking them if they played video games – a strategy that finally produced results.

OBSERVATION

Given that the concern of this study was linked to users’ experiences, we tried as far as possible to visit the informants in their environment to gain understanding of the social contexts surrounding their gaming activities (Spradley, 1980). The immediate methodological outcome of this approach is the ability to identify and gain access to the different contexts in which the participants were active. Thus, we asked the participants to invite us to their homes to observe them gaming, and all together we visited 7 homes.

ANALYSIS

The analysis was done through the triangulation of the data collected from the interviews and observation. The interview guide started with demographic and background data, which is presented below. The triangulated data were analysed within a discourse analysis framework, looking for how meaning, categories of self and others, gaming and related everyday activities, were constructed in the youth articulations (Stubbs, 1983).
FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

BACKGROUND AND BASIC GAMING PATTERNS AMONG INFORMANTS

TABLE 11.1 Demographic information and basic gaming patterns among the informants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sex</th>
<th>Family</th>
<th>Country of origin</th>
<th>Arrival in Norway</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Platform</th>
<th>Favourite games</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>Boy</td>
<td>8 siblings single mother</td>
<td>Somalia</td>
<td>2014</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>PS4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B</td>
<td>Boy</td>
<td>2 siblings</td>
<td>Kenya</td>
<td>2012</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>PS4, Xbox</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C</td>
<td>Boy</td>
<td>3 siblings</td>
<td>Syria</td>
<td>2016</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>PS2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D</td>
<td>Boy</td>
<td>3 siblings</td>
<td>Palestine</td>
<td>2015</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>Laptop</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E</td>
<td>Boy</td>
<td>3 siblings</td>
<td>Somalia</td>
<td>2012</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>PS4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F</td>
<td>Girl</td>
<td>2 siblings</td>
<td>Ethiopia</td>
<td>2012</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>PS4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>G</td>
<td>Girl</td>
<td>9 siblings</td>
<td>Somalia</td>
<td>2014</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>iPhone, PS3, Laptop</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>H</td>
<td>Girl</td>
<td>2 siblings</td>
<td>Uganda</td>
<td>2004</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>Laptop</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I</td>
<td>Girl</td>
<td>2 siblings</td>
<td>Vietnam</td>
<td>2010</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>PS4, laptop, Wii, Mobile phone</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>J</td>
<td>Girl</td>
<td>0 siblings single mother</td>
<td>China</td>
<td>2015</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>Mobile Phone</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As Table 11.1 shows, the interviewed youth have Somali, Kenyan, Syrian, Palestinian, Ethiopian, Ugandan, Vietnamese and Chinese backgrounds as their countries of origin. The table also shows that the earliest immigration to Norway happened in 2004 and the latest in 2015. In addition to the age group of 16–19 and their sex, the table also shows what platforms they play on. We see a difference between boys’ preferences for gaming consoles, while the girls are playing on more diverse platforms. The games they enjoy the most also vary. Most of the boys enjoy Massively Multiplayer Online games (MMOs). Two of the girls stand out, both as playing on consoles (PS) and as playing MMOs and Role-Playing Games (RPG). These same two girls consider themselves to be gamers.
The time spent on video games varies too between the girls and boys. The boys spend between 0 and 5 hours playing during weekdays, and between 6 and 18 hours during weekends.

**TABLE 11.2 Medietilsynet’s categories of players**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Hours gaming daily</th>
<th>Comments</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Small time gamers</strong></td>
<td>Up to 1 hour</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Average gamers</strong></td>
<td>1–4 hours</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Big gamers</strong></td>
<td>4 or more</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Problem gamers</strong></td>
<td>Over 4 hours</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The girls, even those referring to themselves as gamers, play far less than the boys – showing similarities to findings among Norwegian boys and girls (husfred.no). The girls are however divided, with three girls playing 1–5 hours during weekdays, and between 5 and 11 hours during weekends, while two of the girls play less than one hour any day of the week. If we relate this to Medietilsynet’s profiling of categories of gamers based on gaming habits of 500 boys in Norway aged between 12 and 17, as shown in table 11.2, four of the boys qualify as «big gamers» in terms of hours spent.

Being a «big gamer» is more than just the number of hours spent playing. Also in this respect, the boys qualify, as they mostly play combat and violent games. In Table 11.3, we see who the youth play with and where their playmates are located. Apart from one boy (A) who plays with his sister, most of the boys play with boys. One girl (F) plays exclusively with boys while the others play either with mix of girls and boys, alone or with random counterparts – especially in online games.
TABLE 11.3: Who they play with and their location

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Local friends or from school and their nationalities</th>
<th>Friends/Country-mates in diaspora</th>
<th>Unknown online</th>
<th>Sex</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Boy A 6 Ethnic Somalian 5 Ethnic Norwegian 1 Sister</td>
<td>5 live in Oslo, Forde, USA</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>All boys apart from sister</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Boy B 8 Ethnic Norwegian</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>All boys</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Boy C 7 Ethnic Norwegians</td>
<td>5 Saudi Arabia</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>All boys</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Boy D 0</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>All boys</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Boy E 4 both Ethnic Norwegians and from other nationalities</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>Random</td>
<td>All boys</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Girl F 5 classmates from Slovakia, Belgium, Iran, Eritrea, Somalia</td>
<td>3 (USA, Ethiopia, Sweden)</td>
<td>Random</td>
<td>All boys</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Girl G 0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>Random</td>
<td>Random boys</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Girl H 0</td>
<td>Siblings, mostly brother</td>
<td>Random</td>
<td>Random/brother’s friends</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Girl I 5 Ethnic Norwegian, 1 of them girl</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>Random</td>
<td>Mixed, mostly boys</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Girl J 1 girlfriend/classmate</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>Random (rarely)</td>
<td>Mostly plays alone or with girlfriend</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

None of the informants play video games with friends still living in their country of origin, but rather connect with friends in the diaspora. The boys also mostly play with «known» or «close» friends both near and online. The informants clearly fit descriptions of the «global gaming culture» patterns (Linderoth & Bennerstedt, 2007; Steinkuehler & Williams, 2006). They also fit the images of Norwegian youth’s consumption of video games (Agdestein, 2009; Ask, 2011; Børsum, 2012), as they admit to gaming as an everyday activity (husfred.no).

In terms of motivation, both boys and girls said they played video games for many different reasons: to pass time, as a hobby, to socialise, to compete, gain skills or to learn something – i.e. football, language, competence, ancestral history, or to do homework; because of lack of extracurricular activities in their neighbourhood for those in rural areas; to escape or indulge in fantasy, or because they did not have local friends.

Equally, we find gendered patterns of gaming, in choices of games as well as in who the youth game with. When playing with friends, boys mostly play with other
boys, but girls usually play alone or with boys because of lack of girl-friends who
play games, or they play with random gamers in online games. The lack of girls who
(admit to) play games, we should emphasise, is not hindering two of the girls (G &
I) claiming the label of «gamers» for themselves. They both have a passionate
relationship to games, as we will see below.

FANTASY, ESCAPISM, ANCESTRAL CONNECTIONS AND SOCIAL
NETWORKING

Through this study, we saw how gaming provides for a complexity of identities
and experiences. We found that playing video games can be a way to connect to
your origin, history, and social group and at the same time bind minority users to
their host countries. Several of our informants manifested aspects of longing for
and belonging to their countries of origin, through their characters in the games
but also through the games they chose to play. Although a majority of the inform-
ants pointed out that the skills and competences of any given character was para-
mount in their choices regardless of sex, ethnicity etc., often and when possible –
perhaps even subliminally – they created characters that looked just like them-
selves. The boy from Somalia specifically emphasised this, saying «I like the col-
our of my skin (dark brown) and whenever I create my character in a game, I make
them look like me». Usually, these self-generated characters were often superim-
posed to plush surroundings, with expensive cars, fancy homes, weapons and
things that obviously are out of their reach in real life. Thus, we find illustrations
of what researchers like Turkle (1996) have argued, that games are indeed fantasy
zones where one can explore who you want to be and express identities free from
judgement.

But it is not just fantasy at work. Gaming also opens the opportunity to escape.
As the boy from Kenya explains: «When I play (FIFA), I forget all that is bothering
me – It is easy to forget how time goes so fast because you get lost in the
game».

Engagement with ancestral history and language was an aspect that garnered
weight for some. For instance, the informant from Palestine exalted the game «Bat-
tlefield» for its invocation of Arabic history: «I get to learn a lot about Arabic his-
tory, experience Arabic architecture, language through this game – something we
do not get enough of from the classroom». In addition, he still holds contact with
his old friends in the diaspora and they speak Arabic together while playing online.
This sentiment was shared with the boy from Palestine and one of the boys from
Somalia, who enjoyed being able to use their language, Arabic and Somali.
Language versatility among the informants was perhaps the most fascinating. All the informants could speak their native languages i.e. Somali, Arabic, Luo, Vietnamese etc. They all also encountered English through the games. In addition, they all spoke fluent Norwegian, with their local friends. Norwegian was the most used language by the informants. The ability to navigate games through multiple languages and identities was not only evidence of improved language competence but also socialization.

Navigating identity through a «multiple frame of reference»

In this study we suggest that identity among the subjects was constructed and navigated through «multiple frames of reference». This contests one of the conventional narratives about immigrants’ lived experiences within diaspora and transnational studies on digital media use as seen through a dual frame of reference (Orellana, 2007). A good example is the boy from Kenya. He only plays FIFA17, and through his gaming experience he has multiple identification points, as:

1. a Kenyan: He has sought out and played Kenyan national football team on FIFA17. He has also looked for Luo, which is his native language, however, that option was not available in FIFA17.
2. an Arsenal football fan: something we could call a glocal (Wellman, 2004) identity as he often plays as Arsenal on FIFA17 with his friends.
3. a «Sogning», the local and regional identity: He not only speaks the local dialect proficiently, he also plays in the prestigious local junior football team, something he abides by and tremendously prides in. The latter is not only a source of social capital, as he considers himself one of the «cool kids», but he also attributes his successful integration in Norwegian culture to football both in real life and through the game.

This is what he has to say about how he acquired the local identity of a «Sogning»:

«Football has saved my life, if it wasn’t for it, I would never have had friends. I was miserable when I first came to Sogn, I couldn’t speak the language, I had no friends, so I thought, okay, let me play football and play well, then I can get friends and can learn the language, and that is what happened».

He acknowledges that he no longer has friends in native Kenya. But then we see him trying to connect to his ancestral home through the gaming activity he loves,
FIFA17, signalling the complexity of the concept of identity and belonging for diasporic youth. This is reminiscent of Hall’s (2006) notion of «new ethnicities» that challenge and reinterpret the meaning and boundaries of «nation» and «belonging» from a diasporic perspective.

The notions of «bifocality», and «dual frames of reference» are as well challenged here as it becomes more appropriate to apply terms such as «multifocality» or even «multiple frames of reference». In line with Somerville (2008) and what other studies of migrant transnationalism, such as Portes (2001) and Rumbaut (2002) show, this informant’s experiences remind us that the level of transnational attachments to the homeland even among the first generation is relatively limited compared to that of their parents, suggesting that transnational activities might be a one-generation phenomenon. In this case, the youth we have interviewed who themselves migrated as children might (also) have different patterns of transnational attachment and networks from their parents and they might not necessarily prioritize connections with the mythical homeland in the same way as their parents – not even in video games which allow them to create and live fictional identities.

We agree with Hall’s (1990) argument that diasporic identities must be understood as dynamic and contrapctual, emerging from tensions across points of cultural difference and experience as seen with the boy from Kenya, for whom the game is part and parcel of his real-life experiences, from surviving to thriving.

THE GENDER PARADOX – HIGHLIGHTING THE CHANGES AND CONTINUITIES IN GAMING

This study’s focus on gender is interesting because of the paradox of gender in Norway. Norway ranks high regarding gender equality in almost all areas. However, within technology education and professions, men are still a majority and gaming is associated with young men (Ask, 2011; Ask, Svendsen & Carlstrøm, 2016; Corneliussen, 2011). This is evident in this study of young immigrant girls and boys when it comes to gaming in Norway. It is also emphasised by the challenge in recruiting girls for this study, while the boys readily availed themselves as subjects to the study.

As we saw earlier, all the boys played almost exclusively with fellow boys, and it seemed unnatural for them to play with girls: «No, I have never gamed with a girl, I think it is because girls do not like gaming», one of the boys explained. However, he also used to play FIFA17 with his sister, though he did not consider this as «playing with girls». One of the boys from Somalia expressed the same
argument for not playing with girls, adding: «It is not because I choose not to play with them, but I think girls do not play video games». He also tells that his two sisters do not play video games. The boy from Syria had a little experience playing with girls, however, he seems to have been challenged when finding resistance in a girl gamer: «I do not have problems playing with girls, as long as they do not laugh at me when I lose».

Interestingly, three of the interviewed girls (F, G, & I) defined themselves within the category of «gamers», a label strongly associated with boys, and often with unhealthy interest in games (Ask et al., 2016). The girls, however, took this label to mean «interested in» and «skilled in playing» video games, and they were proud of associating themselves with this category. They did not have negative associations with the gamer label – they did not play «too much», they explained. All three gamer girls emphasized that they restricted their playing during the week because of school. However, one of them claims she would «always be a gamer» – e.g., she would always keep her deep interest and love for games. Her biggest frustration, though, was that she was not invited to play with the local gamer boys. In their world, she explained, girls were not gamers: «The biggest challenge is that it is almost only boys who game, and they do not let me in, they do not think girls can play video games».

One of the gamer girls, on the question of whether her girlfriends liked games, said «no», but simultaneously defend them, saying: «My girlfriends do not play video games – they are also nerds, but with other things than video games». Thus, she creates an almost similar category for her girlfriends, even though they do not game, they are described in terms often used for boys as computer nerds (Agdestein, 2009).

Several of the informants’ reflections around gender are a confirmation of what Hommedal (2014) and Håpnes & Rasmussen (1998) warned us about – that girls and women’s positive relation to video games is often relegated or excused as absent or uninterested in gaming. Such assumptions not only perpetuate the stereotypes that girls do not game but also hinder interested girls from gaming. As shown earlier, the games played among the informants were also typically gendered. The boys played games that have been found to be popular among boys, characterised by fighting, battle, and sports (Hommedal, 2014; Medietilsynet, 2013).

The two girls who referred to themselves as gamers and played varied games like MMO, RPG and indie games, were quite aware of the gender stereotypes in games and the sexualization of female characters. Both also mentioned that they do not mind the gender of their characters, whether they are women or men – skill
sets and ability to win was paramount. The third girl who also played quite a lot, enjoyed playing less abrasive games, like snooker, surfer games and FIFA: In her own admission: «I do not like violent games, the kind my brother plays (GTA5, Destiny)». Although, two of the girls did not admit to gaming, they indeed played video games. The girl from Uganda played, but only when she was together with her younger brother on holidays, and only then for limited timeframes. The girl from China played card and board games and quizzes on her mobile phone, mostly as pastime on the bus, in between classes and so on, and she emphasises that games «is not an important part of my life».

As shown here, the conscientious methodological decision to study (interview and observe) not just the boys but also girls yield fresh insights into the workings of gender from migration and gaming contexts. Here we are able to understand the challenges and resistances that young immigrant girls face but also see how they (some of them) are challenge conventional stereotypes by pushing for a narrative of resistance against the dominant hegemonic paradigm that pits them as ‘outsiders’ not just as immigrants but also as non-gamers. This was a small research project i.e. 5 girls and 5 boys as our informants. The composition sample is obviously not representative of the diverse population of ethnic minorities in Norway. Consequently, the results from this study can be said to be culturally typical, rather than universal. Despite this, we still believe that the option of exploring a statistically representative sample, did enable the study to examine the issue of gaming and identity adequately and in-depth (Corbin & Strauss, 1990).

GAMING, RELIGION AND THE DOMINANT RHETORIC

While gender is one of the identity categories intersecting with gaming and ethnicity, religion is another category that we were prepared to find relevant. Five out of the ten informants interviewed were Muslims. Although all belonged to a religious denomination, and indeed some were pious, none of them thought religion was and should play an important role within the games. An example is the 18-year-old Muslim boy who prays five times a day as the Koran demands, and doing so even when he visits his non-Muslim, ethnic Norwegian friends’ homes: «they usually offer me a space to pray, either a room in the house or in the loft or basement». «In fact», he adds, laughing, «I have some Norwegian friends who exclaim; ‘Allahu Akbar’ when they kill an opponent, in a combat game». «So, how does that make you feel, as a Muslim?», we ask. «Nothing, I know that they are just joking», he replies.
The dominant rhetoric within the Western media is indicative of polarisation of Muslims, especially after the escalating of terror attacks in Europe over the last years. The negative rhetoric that often problematize Muslims as extremist and a danger to the Western way of life was indeed hypothesized at the outset of this study to affect religious youth in a negative way. The assumption was that Muslim youth are defensive and excluding about and against other youth that do not practice their faith and that they embrace the creative opportunities games offer to uplift their marginalised identity, beyond the restrictive and negative real-life realities. The results from this study show us the opposite – it is a picture of tolerance and acceptance to a point that religious affiliation is not only de-problematised, it is embraced and demystified with jokes. In this case, close friendship between non-Western and ethnic Norwegian friends wins.

CONCLUSION: FROM GLOCAL TO LOCAL GAMING

The aim of this paper was to establish the gaming patterns of non-Western boys and girls and explore how they navigate issues of identity from an intersectional perspective.

The gaming patterns indicated from the study are that the immigrant youth use video games as normal extracurricular activities; boys seem to spend more time playing games than the girls and they play typical boy games. Girls play with boys or on their own mainly because their girlfriends do not play video games. Time spent varied between 0–5 hours during school days and up to 18 hours during weekends and public holidays. The youth mainly played with their local friends, mostly classmates. They also connected to an international gaming arena. While some of them played with their friends in the diaspora, none played with friends from country of origin. The common explanation was lack of internet, access to video games, displacement because of war, etc. It became clear that the local anchorages in sports, with close friends and classmates, as well as the Norwegian language, were the most significant factors for the youth in their identity formation processes.

Identity and belonging was a more complex dynamic if we look at their relationship with the avatars. To several of the gamers, identity aspects such as bodily and facial expressions of ethnicity and gender attributes were less important in character choices than the competences of the selected characters. In short, the performance attributes of a character were a decisive factor in choice of characters rather than gender or ethnicity, etc. as several of the informants mentioned. This does not mean that they were not aware of the race and identity – because some of them often expressed their identities through the characters they created.
This study illustrates that the non-Western immigrant youth were able to navigate multiple identities in and through gaming, in a combination of online and offline contexts. A notable expression of this was their multi-lingual capabilities – their ability to speak Norwegian, English, Arabic, Somali, Luo, Chinese, and so on, to socialize and connect not just with their local friends from school, but also with fellow countrymen in the diaspora as well as international gamers through the knowledge of English. Even though most of them did not emphasise as much as we had expected the international aspects of gaming, including the possibility to connect to a culture that they had left behind when moving to Norway, they illustrated glocal identity constructions that were bridging far more than two contexts. We therefore suggest that, opposed to the dual frame of reference conjectured in transnational studies, a multiple frame of reference is a more accurate way of describing the construction of the complex identities we found among the non-Western immigrant youth.

REFERENCES


