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Review

Muslim Young People Online: "Acts of Citizenship" in Socially Networked Spaces

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Abstract

This paper reviews the current literature regarding Muslim young people's online social networking and participatory practices with the aim of examining whether these practices open up new spaces of civic engagement and political participation. The paper focuses on the experiences of young Muslims living in western societies, where, since September 11, the ability to assert claims as citizens in the public arena has diminished. The paper draws upon Isin & Nielsen's (2008) "acts of citizenship" to define the online practices of many Muslim youth, for whom the internet provides a space where new performances of citizenship are enacted outside of formal citizenship rights and spaces of participation. These "acts" are evaluated in light of theories which articulate the changing nature of publics and the public sphere in a digital era. The paper will use this conceptual framework in conjunction with the literature review to explore whether virtual, online spaces offer young Muslims an opportunity to create a more inclusive discursive space to interact with co-citizens, engage with social and political issues and assert their citizen rights than is otherwise afforded by formal political structures; a need highlighted by policies which target minority Muslim young people for greater civic participation but which do not reflect the interests and values of Muslim young people.

Issue

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1. Introduction

Muslim young peoples' internet use has become a focus in Australia, with a range of policies and associated research—notably focused around "social cohesion" and "social inclusion" initiatives (DIMIA, 2006; Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet, 2010b; Collins et al., 2011; Al-Momani, Dados, Maddox, & Wise, 2010), digital citizenship and participation (Harris & Roose, 2013; Hopkins & Dolik, 2009) and counter-terrorism (Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet, 2010b)—bringing attention to the online practices of young Muslims in terms that highlight opportunities for civic participation *and* risks to social cohesion. Given this dual policy focus, it is important to think about the dif-

ferent knowledge being produced, and the way such knowledge shapes and constrains the ability of young Muslims to participate in the civic and political life of western societies on their own terms, and in ways which facilitate meaningful experiences of citizenship and social inclusion.

Addressing these issues requires paying close attention to the gaps that exist between policies which identify young Muslims as "objects of public anxiety…whose citizenship and expressions of civic commitment must be carefully managed and monitored" (Harris & Roose, 2013) and the often under-explored "acts of citizenship" (Isin & Neilsen, 2008) that occur in the everyday, unmanaged interactions of Muslim young people in online spaces. These practices are defined using Isin

and Neilsen's concept "acts of citizenship", reflecting the ways in which the internet, and social media in particular, have enabled young Muslims to break with normative accounts of citizenship that identify citizenship as a set of rights, obligations, norms and practices which serve to integrate actors into the nation-state (Marshall, 1973; Schudson, 1999). By focusing instead on citizenship as "acts" or performances that create new local and global "scenes" in which individuals and groups can "act and react with others", assert rights and make claims that produce them as citizens (Isin & Neilsen, 2008, p. 39), we are able to gain new insight into the way Muslim young people use the internet to open up boundaries of participation, and negotiate their identities and civic commitments in ways that subvert and transform existing political orders and structures.

This corresponds with work being done in the Youth Studies and Media and Communication fields, where definitions of citizenship are being broadened in accordance with young people's use of internet and social media to forge new social connections and engage with "civic life" (Harris & Roose, 2013; Bennett, Wells, & Freelon, 2011; Harris, Wyn, & Younes, 2010; Vromen, 2011; Vinken, 2007; Collin, 2008). Of particular significance are theories of participation. These align with civic republican traditions, which outline citizenship as more than legal status and obligations to the state, but also centres on the development of the civic virtues of "good citizens who act on behalf of others" (Turner & Isin, 2002, p. 19). Collin writes that this communitarian aspect of citizenship has once more become a focus of policies aimed at promoting "active citizenship" among migrant young people, despite the broader shift of governments toward more individualised, neoliberal structures of governance (Collin, 2008, p. 530). In this frame, activities which are understood to foster "good citizenship" continue to conform to older models of civic participation, i.e., becoming involved with "organised groups, from civic clubs to political parties […] and generally engaging in public life out of a sense of personal duty" (Bennet et al., 2011, p. 838).

Countering these trends, Harris and Roose draw upon scholarship which redefines civic engagement as activities oriented toward "the public good, regardless of its form of expression or the domain in which such action takes place" (Harris & Roose, 2013, p. 2). They join a chorus of scholars who convey an evolving understanding of what constitutes civic participation, bringing attention to new styles of self-presentation and "everyday" cultures of engagement arising from internet and social media use (Jenkins, 2006; Bennett et al., 2011; Harris at al., 2010; Boyd, 2007; Harris, 2013, Vromen, 2011; Vinken, 2007; Bang, 2004; Collin, 2008; Dahlgren, 2000). For example, Bang regards the forms of "speaking out" enacted on social media as acts that produce "citizens as everyday-makers" (2005), whilst

Bennett's description of "self-actualising citizenship" emphasises a shift "away from taking cues as members of groups or out of regard for public authorities (opinion leaders, public officials and journalists) […] toward looser personal engagement with peer networks that pool (crowd source) information and organise civic action using social technologies that maximise individual expression" (Bennett et al., 2011, p. 839).

The importance of new media to rethinking what counts as meaningful citizenship is clear in these accounts. Harris et al. (2010) further relate these developments to the changing nature of the public sphere in the digital era, thus acknowledging the importance of public sphere theories to understanding citizenship rights as communication rights (Hartley, 2010, p. 241). In particular, they speak of the role that new media technologies play in shaping new sites "where they could connect with their peers and build networks, if not a community, of both local and distant others" (Harris et al., 2010, p. 26). The latter observation is crucial to the "acts of citizenship" examined in this paper, which, by being enacted in networked, online spaces, enable facilitation of and participation in political communication that transcends the boundaries of national community. Further, the overlap of emerging theories of citizenship and participation in "transnational" or "virtual public spheres" (El-Nawawy, 2010) provide fertile ground for re-examining minority Muslim young people's civic and political practices—particularly given their perceived exclusion from formal spaces of public deliberation and political engagement since 9/11 (Mansouri & Marotta, 2012).

2. Policies Addressing Muslim Young People's Internet Use

In the Australian policy context, two dominant narratives frame Muslim young people's internet use. On the one hand a "securitization" narrative has been applied to these practices since 9/11, responding to fears that alienated Muslim youth may become recruited into forms of violent extremism through participation in online networks (see Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet, 2010a). This is supported by international reports and research which highlight the risk of young Muslims living in the West becoming influenced by online jihadist networks (Bunt, 2009; Sageman, 2008; Home Office, UK, 2004).

This narrative dovetails with a competing set of discourses highlighting the potential of online participatory practices to facilitate greater social inclusion and social connectedness for marginalised youth (Harris, 2013; Harris et al., 2010; Mansouri, 2009; Hopkins & Dolik, 2009; Penman & Turnbull, 2012). In these discourses the internet is viewed as a dynamic space of communication allowing minoritised youth to actively negotiate their identity and social connections outside

of reductive and often hostile mainstream media frames. As Harris and Roose argue, paying attention to these new styles of engagement is important, given that a "picture of 'civics deficit' and at times panic regarding disengagement endures" in policies targeting Muslim youth (Harris & Roose, 2013, p. 3).

In writing about Muslim civic engagement, Harris is particularly critical of policies that have sought to increase participation for young Muslims in a manner that excludes the "voices" of Muslim youth themselves. For example, Harris criticises the "National Action Plan to Build on Social Cohesion, Harmony and Security" (DIMIA, 2006), arguing that, apart from this policy explicitly "targeting Muslim communities for intervention and engagement" (Harris, 2008, p. 31) thus adding to the stigma already felt by Muslim young people, it also rests upon a conservative understanding of what citizenship and participation is by framing these practices as activities that should foster integration into a community of "shared values"; a belief that research shows is not capturing the voices and experiences of minority Muslim young people.

The Federal Labor Government (2007–2012) adjusted this policy to a "social inclusion" agenda in 2010 (Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet, 2010b), emphasising a less ends-oriented approach that respected diversity and valued participation in terms of benefits for disadvantaged individuals and communities (Penman & Turnbull, 2012). Despite some positive reception however, the policy continued to be criticised for constructing minority communities as groups to be integrated into a more or less stable community of shared values, excluding any recognition of the role that minority youth can play in shaping the values of a multicultural polity that is dynamic and changing (see Ang, Brand, Noble, & Sternberg, 2006; Mansouri, 2009; Harris, 2013; Harris & Roose, 2013). In particular, the 2008 Muslim Youth Summits report and a number of other reports responding to the "National Action Plan" demonstrated a particular concern with the civic engagement of young Muslim men (Jacubowicz, 2009; Harris & Roose 2013).

The social cohesion/inclusion agenda also failed to mention the role of religion in constructing the "shared values" of the nation, despite singling out Muslim young people on the basis of their faith and assumed challenges of integration. This reflects the broader tone of multicultural and social inclusion policies targeted at migrant youth, which tend to conform to a secular vision of the types of cultural diversity that are acceptable and those that are seen to threaten social cohesion (Modood, Triandafyllidou, & Zapata-Barrero, 2005; Akbarzadeh & Roose, 2014). More recently, the return of the Tony Abbot led Coalition Government has brought these debates full circle, with the disbandment of the Social Inclusion Unit (http://www.socialinclusion.gov.au).

The following sections address these tensions between policy and youth-led practices by reviewing the available literature and providing directions for future research. In the first instance the paper reviews emerging research on youth and digital citizenship and relates the findings to theoretical concepts underpinning "acts of citizenship" and new imaginaries of the "virtual" of "transnational" public sphere (El-Nawawy, 2010; Fraser, 2007). The focus will then shift to identify recurring themes which arise in research on Muslim young people's internet use by focusing on two case studies that illustrate the use of social media platforms and web forums to engage and build communities, and perform civic identity around particular issues. This will serve as the basis for exploring the potential and limitations of using Isin and Neilsen's "acts of citizenship" to describe the performative, creative and dynamic ways Muslim young people negotiate their religious, cultural, political and civic identity online (van Zoonen, Visa, & Mihelj, 2010).

3. Youth, Online Media Participation and "Acts of Citizenship"

In youth policy (Harris et al., 2010; Harris, 2013; Mansouri, 2009; Hopkins & Dolik, 2009) and Media and Communication research (Burgess & Green, 2009; Coleman & Blumler, 2009; Penman & Turnbull, 2012) there has been a growing focus on the relationship between internet use and civics education, particularly in light of evidence that young people are withdrawing from formal political membership and participation, and turning to online forms of communication to perform their rights and responsibilities as citizens (Putnam, 2000; Coleman & Blumler, 2009; Harris et al., 2010). This is reflected in Australian youth policy frameworks with most state governments and youth focused NGOs having "integrated the internet into their policies and strategies for youth engagement" (Collin, 2008, p. 527).

There are a number of reasons for this trend. Social theorists have highlighted the impact of detraditionalisation, globalization and individualization on young people's withdrawal from state-based political institutions and relationships (Bauman, 2001; Beck, 1992; Beck & Beck-Gernsheim, 2002). Youth and cultural researchers, in turn, have debated whether the shift towards online socialisation and participation, particularly around consumer and lifestyle interests, contributes to a general "civics deficit" or promotes new ways of being political and participating in public life (Harris et al., 2010, p. 12; Hartley, 2010). In problematizing normative accounts of citizenship, a recent Australian study reported that the notion of a "bounded, stable" community of shared values has been replaced with a reality in which young people participate in a range of "partial, multiple and unconventional civic identifica-

tions" (Harris et al., 2010, p. 579). These are enacted across physical and virtual spaces, and bridge local and transnational networks of connections.

This finding is supported by international scholarship highlighting the failure of conventional politics to accommodate the voices and interests of young people. Coleman and Rowe (2005) point out that young people's preference for "youth-created content" does not align with the desire of traditional political and civic institutions to control channels of communication (see also Bennett et al., 2011; Jenkins, 2006). Hartley underlines this disconnect with reference to the move of young people's civic participation away from "rights, duties, conduct, allegiance, obligation, powers and protection" (Hartley, 2010, p. 234) to a form of "self-organising, user-created, ludic association, modelled by online social networks" (2010, p. 233).

Social networking sites and other online, participatory platforms have been a focus for research exploring youth civic engagement and political action. Boyd (2007) writes that social networking sites offer a place for young people to "write themselves and their communities into being" (2007, p. 14) suggesting that young people have a desire for public engagement (p. 21) but have limited opportunities to have their opinions heard and valued in formal spaces of participation. Harris (2008, p. 489) also explores the articulation of a "public self"—a key understanding of democratic participation—and points to the possibility that young people are using digital, networked media to experiment with forms of public self-making that subvert dominant norms of representation, participation and citizen formation.

Historically, the concept of the public sphere has been central to debates regarding modern democracy and "participatory citizenship" (Salvatore, 2013) following the publication of Jurgen Habermas' *Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere* (1989). Habermas linked structural changes relating to the emergence of mass communication systems (especially national press and broadcasting) in the 19th century with a theory of communicative action that envisioned the mobilization of public opinion as a political force. Theorising these changes, Habermas conceptualised a normative theory of democracy and citizen engagement, where citizens' personal interests could, through public debate and deliberation, be transformed into a rational consensus on matters of the public good. This vision of "publicness", imagined as co-extensive with a national sphere of communication, naturalized connections between ideas of "the public" and the citizenry of a democratic Westphalian state to the extent that access and participation in the public sphere is now conceived as a fundamental right of citizenship and a critical marker of democracy and social inclusion (Fraser, 2007, pp. 9-10; Aly, 2012).

Despite this, several critiques have been made of

the "public sphere" model. Most often these have problematized the class bias and Eurocentric focus of the Habermasian public sphere (Salvatore, 2013; Fraser, 2007) whose democratic potential rests on an idea of universal and equal access, despite it predominantly being an arena for debate between elite members of society. As "feminists, multiculturalists and anti-racists" have argued this model fails to recognise "the existence of systemic obstacles that deprive some who are nominally members of the public of the capacity to participate on par with others, as full partners in public debate" (Fraser, 2007, p. 11).

The Habermasian model has also been criticized for the implicit understanding that the democratic potential of the public sphere can only be realized where there is a single, shared medium of communication (Fraser, 2007, p. 10). Whilst still underpinning conceptions of citizenship and "participatory democracy" this vision does not correlate with the new "transnational" or "virtual" public spheres being theorized in the digital era. Fraser claims that the online discursive arenas where people communicate and deliberate about political matters today "overflow the bounds of both nations and states", meaning that "often too, their communications are neither addressed to a Westphalian state nor relayed through national media" (2007, p. 14). "Transnational" or "virtual" public spheres therefore problematize the normative concept of the public sphere *and* the styles and behaviours of citizenship and political engagement supported by it.

And yet, it has also been argued that it is precisely this ambivalence that vitalizes the internet as a space where new emancipatory possibilities of political engagement and citizenship may be imagined and theorised. For example, Fraser has recently evaluated the usefulness of the concept of "transnational public spheres" in terms of the possibilities it envisions for democracy (2007). She argues that one principle that may in fact be strengthened by the affordances of the web is the "all affected principle". In normative models of the public sphere this principle refers to the capacity of all members of the national community to be able to participate freely and on equal terms in processes of opinion formation. Given the failure of nationally controlled communications infrastructure to fulfil this principle, Fraser regards transnational public spheres as spaces that provide fresh opportunities for all citizens to be heard, particularly in an era of global communications where parity of participation does not just refer to the national context, but acknowledges that issues that affect people's lives are now are increasingly structured by global movements and social issues (Fraser, 2007, p. 22).

In line with this, Papacharissi argues that the internet has revived the concept of the public sphere by expanding spaces of political deliberation and participation, in the process creating new "avenues for expression"

which promote "citizen activity" (2002, p. 10). Chouliaraki (2010) adds that new media technologies invent "novel discourses of counter-institutional subversion and collective activism" (2010, p. 227; see also Burgess & Green, 2009). In particular, by expanding grammars of publicity and civic action to include online practices such as "blogging or jamming", citizenship is being reimagined and infused with a new "ethics of witnessing and politics of care" (Chouliaraki, 2010, p. 228).

Unsurprisingly, given the nature of the exclusion of Minority Muslim citizens from national public spheres since 9/11, theories of the "Virtual Islamic Public sphere" are at the vanguard of efforts to reimagine the public sphere and its critical and democratic value (Bunt, 2009 El-Nawawy & Khamis, 2009; Mandaville, 1999; Eickelman & Anderson, 2003), and yet the application of public sphere theory to these formations continue to be regarded as problematic, if not empty, given that "the very purpose of public sphere theory is to explore the ways in which political authority can be made accountable to a democratically generated public opinion" (Crack, 2007, p. 348). Therefore the absence of a clearly defined addressee for online public interactions and claim-making contributes to the ambiguity of the "virtual public sphere" as a space for new performances of citizenship.

This discussion opens up some important points of connection to Isin and Nielsens' conceptualisation of "acts of citizenship", which represent a theoretical and empirical departure from normative citizenship theories and debate. By theorising "acts of citizenship" the authors call for critical attention to be focused on moments of "rupture" when political "acts" break away from routines, rules, habitual behaviours, practices and/or orders, and where "regardless of status and substance, subjects constitute themselves as citizens or, better still, as those to whom the right to have rights is due" (Isin & Neilsen, 2008, p. 2). By making "acts" the object of investigation, the givenness and durability of orders that citizenship practices are usually embedded in (primarily nation-states) are precisely brought into question.

Isin and Neilsen identify several key ideas as important to theorising "acts of citizenship". In this paper they are also recognised as providing new insights into understanding Muslim youth citizenships which are enacted online, particularly as these expressions arise from conditions of exclusion of young Muslim voices from national, mainstream political debate (Aly, 2012, p. 169). First, mirroring work being done in Media and Communications research, Isin argues that the structural shift away from national communications infrastructure toward global, online communication creates new "sites and scales" of struggle where "specific claims or counter-claims are made about rights, responsibilities, identity, recognition and redistribution". Isin re-

gards the networked, virtual spaces opened up online as providing new platforms for subjects to "enact themselves as activist citizens (claimants of rights and responsibilities)" in a way which disrupts orders of claims-making embedded in the nation-state (Isin, 2008, p. 39).

In elaborating on the types of citizenships and citizens the use of these technologies may produce, in his later work Isin (2012) discusses the internet as a medium which reorients narratives of "we, the people" whereby citizenship status and practice is embedded in the nation-state, toward "we, the connected" referring to the globally "networked" society opened up by the internet and New Media (Isin, 2012). Whilst Isin regards "we, the connected" as a grand narrative in itself, which has implications for the way individuals are governed, he draws upon the example of "global or transnational activism" (Isin, 2012, p. 73) to point to the possibilities the internet opens up for new ways of acting and being recognized as a citizen, beyond geographical and cultural boundaries.

Isin acknowledges, however, that, by viewing citizenship as "acts" or performances that create new "sites and scales" of political struggle, one of the most fundamental principles of "participatory citizenship" is problematized—that is the question of who is the addressee of such claims, and to whom these "acts" are answerable. This relates us back once more to the problem Fraser poses when she argues that whilst "virtual public spheres" open up new forums for expressing rights outside of the nation-state system, they do so without a clearly defined addressee/authority capable of responding to such claims.

Van Zoonen et al. elaborate on this problem in their exploration of young Muslims "performed citizenship" on YouTube (van Zoonen et al., 2010). Van Zoonen et al. describe the activities of Dutch Muslims, as well as Muslims and non-Muslims around the world, who participated in blogging, "jamming" and posting user-created videos and comments to You tube in protest against Dutch parliamentarian, Geert Wilders, and his publication of anti-Islam video *Fitna*. As van Zoonen et al. articulate, despite the impassioned "acts" of "jamming" and commenting on offensive video content, whether or not such "acts" constitute performances of citizenship is problematized by the lack of a clearly defined addressee or audience. Van Zoonen et al. argue that this presents an issue as there is no guarantee that such acts produce any form of meaningful exchange and answerability.

Yet, the authors address these criticisms by calling for citizenship to be viewed as "acts" or performances that should be considered meaningful in terms of what they achieve "not only for a possible audience but also for the speakers themselves" (van Zoonen et al., 2010, p. 252).

This connects with Isin and Neilsen's reference to Bakhtin's "two-sided answerability" (Isin & Neilsen,

2008, pp. 28-35). Isin and Neilsen draw upon the work of a long line of philosophers and political theorists, including Bakhtin, to understand "acts" as being conceptually different to citizenship "practices" because they are not oriented toward an existing order and therefore cannot be reduced to categories of "calculability, responsibility and intentionality". Bakhtin's understanding of "acts" addresses the question of responsibility and answerability but, rather than understanding this in relation to a situation where the decision to act is always oriented toward and folded into an existing order (i.e. the nation-state), here answerability and responsibility is instead grounded in the performance and making of the decision to act itself:

> The answerable act must be investigated as the 'actualization of a decision'…To investigate an act would articulate, not the world produced by the act 'but the world in which the act becomes answerably aware of itself and is actually performed'. That moment of becoming aware of itself is the unfolding of the actor to her being in the world—a world that does not contain already given objects and subjects (thus a given scene), but in which those subjects and objects unfold in their relations to each other (thus creating the scene). (Isin & Neilsen, 2008, p. 30)

In this sense "acts of citizenship" represent rituals of performance that break away from "everyday habits as well as broader institutional patterns" (Morrison, 2008, p. 289) to create new political subjectivities that are not necessarily oriented toward anything other than justice and Being (Isin, 2008, p. 39).

These arguments raise legitimate questions as to how citizenship can or should be defined in an era where social connections and networks are stretched across local and global spaces, and where online "participatory practices" blurs the boundaries between popular forms of youth culture and media production and more civic, ethical or politically oriented activities. Indeed it is these transformations that have led youth and citizenship scholars to argue that narrow definitions of citizenship, which summon individuals to realize their "duty" to a common, shared purpose embedded in the nation-state, have been surpassed by newer, more relevant forms of digital citizenship (Hartley, 2010).

In the next section I will review a sample of the current literature focusing on Muslim young people's online participation to evaluate whether these practices cultivate new expressions of citizenship and public identity. As a thorough and full review is beyond the scope of this paper, however, I will limit the review to a brief survey of literature describing the emerging "virtual Islamic public sphere" coupled with a more in-depth analysis of two empirical case studies (van Zo-

onen et al., 2010; Harris & Roose, 2013) which highlight the potential and limitations of the internet and social media sites for producing "acts of citizenship" among minority Muslim young people.

4. Muslim Young People Online: A View from the "Virtual Muslim Public Sphere"

The focus of recent scholarship on young Muslims' online "participatory practices" has identified the internet as a popular venue for Muslims "to build networks, form and maintain relationships and spread and consume news in an alternative Islamo-public sphere" (Bahfen, 2008, p. 2; see also Bunt, 2009; El-Nawawy, 2010; Brouwer, 2004; Aly, 2012). Scholars focused on Muslim internet use make the claim that, since 9/11 the internet has become an "alternative discursive space" and place of "sanctuary" (Aly, 2012, p. 168) for minority Muslims living in Western societies, opening up a space where they are "free" to assert their religious and cultural identity and engage in democratic dialogue beyond frequently hostile mainstream media portrayals of their communities. As Aly argues, by participating in online forums such as "Aussie Muslims" and "Muslim Village", where discussions range from religious issues to issues of national significance, young Australian Muslims are claiming a "fundamental right of citizenship", which is otherwise denied them in the national public sphere.

Whilst Aly and Bahfen speak predominantly of the emergence of online Muslim publics forged by a shared sense of injustice at the treatment of Muslims in western media, Brouwer (2004), Bunt (2009), Eickelman and Anderson (2003) El-Nawawy (2010) and Mandaville (1999) highlight the potential that online platforms have for giving voice to a range of interpretations and views of Islam, empowering young Muslims to "take religion more into their own hands and to create a new form of imagined community" (Brouwer, 2004, p. 47).

Eickelman and Anderson claim that the advent of the internet has refashioned Muslim communities around the world, creating "new public venues and identities", with "even local disputes [taking] on transnational dimensions" (Brouwer, 2004, p. 48). Brouwer further claims that the medium of the internet has been significant for minority Muslim youth for whom older generational response to issues of how to "lead a Muslim life in a non-Muslim country" are being contested and transformed in the new discursive (and visual) arenas opening up online. This is supported by Mandaville (1999) who argues that the engagement of Muslim young people on "hybrid discursive spaces like the internet" (1999, p. 23) has produced powerful Muslim minority voices which are active in contesting religious authority and integrating Islam's narrative and rituals with western social norms and lifestyle. These findings highlight the changing nature of the "public

sphere" in a digital era, which has implications for the way Muslims engage in the public domain and give an account of themselves as citizens.

And yet, while scholars such as Bunt, El-Nawawy, Eickelman and Anderson, and Mandaville tend to focus on the creation of a new Islamic public sphere online that mirrors some of the normative characteristics of the Habermasian public sphere—i.e. where critical dialogue is understood to result in consensus on matters of the "common good" (*al-maslaha al-amma*), constructing a more or less unified virtual *ummah* (El-Nawawy & Khamis, 2009)—other scholars have argued that broader participation in online participatory platforms such as YouTube, Facebook and personal blogs have facilitated connections between Muslims and non-Muslims both within national contexts and around the world. These connections forge new patterns of solidarity, identification and "performances of citizenship" that cut across membership of nation-states and religious community, whilst not signalling an exit from these frames (Pickerill, 2009; van Zoonen et al., 2010; Eckert & Chadha, 2013).

In this vein Eckert and Chadha (2013) argue that the blogging activities of Muslim minorities in Germany do not refer so much to the creation of a singular virtual public sphere, but that they align more closely with Fraser's concept of counter-publics (1990). Fraser used the concept of "counter-publics" (1990) to account for the activities of subaltern and subnational groups that, owing to their exclusion from dominant public discourses, created alternative discursive spaces where they were free to contest and correct dominant narratives and representations. Eckert and Chadha use this concept to describe the discursive practices of German bloggers who were found to use blogs as a platform to "redefine their identities, interests and needs" *and* to engage in "agitational activities directed at wider publics" (Eckert & Chadha, 2013, p. 930). In this sense there is a clear emphasis to "avoid being an 'enclave', to use Squires (2002) term, and instead to reach out to other Germans" in order to engage, influence and shape mainstream discourses (Eckert & Chadha, 2013, p. 937).

The Arab Spring uprisings and the use of social media tools to mobilise global and local public dissent against corrupt and authoritarian state regimes (on platforms not controlled by the state) have further highlighted the democratic potential of platforms such as Facebook and Twitter. Indeed, the force of movements such as the Arab spring have demonstrated the power of the internet to generate new political and civic action, which has the potential to reshape political structures, social identities and whole societies—not only in the countries where these movements are born, but around the world.

The connection between the Arab spring and new performances of online citizenship has been highlighted in Linda Herrera and Rehab Sakr's book "Wired Citizenship: Youth Learning and Activism in the Middle East" (2013). Herrera and Sakr use the "Arab spring" to describe how Arab and Muslim youth in the Middle East are using the web to learn and exercise citizenship, transforming their relationship to the state and political institutions by providing alternative platforms for experimenting with civic and political identities and commitments. In particular, the authors suggest that young people's engagement with online media is producing different citizenship dispositions to older generations through expanded opportunities for networking with young people around the world, and from different cultural and religious backgrounds, leading to new "associations amongst strangers" (Hartley, 2010).

This revised vision of the public sphere and "participatory citizenship" inspired by the Arab Spring is also analysed by Salvatore (2013), who argues that the way Muslim young people and intellectuals in Tunisia, Egypt and across the Middle East used social media platforms (blogs, SNS's and Facebook pages) in the Arab Spring has inspired young Muslims around the world, having implications that stretch well beyond the "dismantling" and "reshaping" of Middle Eastern public theatres.

In describing the novel discursive practices and registers of activism documented in the Arab Spring, Salvatore uses the case of Egyptian bloggers and Facebook activists, primarily "Facebook Girl" (2008) and "We Are all Khaled Said" (2011), to highlight the emergence of new forms of online activism which draw together "global" and "local" networks in order to mobilise dissent against state authorities. Salvatore regards these "acts" as having created a new language of "public-ness" and social connection for Egyptian youth, which has vitalized the democratic process within and beyond Egypt. An example of this is the activities of Egyptian bloggers whose use of a language combining "colloquial forms of speech in Arabic, sometimes paired with local versions of a 'global' type of internet English" demonstrated a departure from the language of the "official" Egyptian public arena, enabling activists to reach out beyond even "Pan-Arab" audiences to address Western, English speaking Muslim and non-Muslim publics.

Further, the circulation of visual media documenting abuses by the regime, accompanied by the vernacular, at times "vulgar" language of blog posts created a discursive and emotional register that served to refashion civic commitments to Egypt and Egyptian society in a way that bridged the social divide between Islamist and more secular oriented groups (Salvatore, 2013, p. 221). The key point here is that the normative, deliberative style of the Habermasian public sphere was not entirely absent but was transformed by new registers of discursive expression associated with DIY blogging culture, breaking through the "crust" of normative political, religious and civic associations, nourishing a surprising inclusiveness and plurality of political, religious and cultural voices.

5. Performing Muslim Identity: Intersections of Religion, Gender and National Identity in Web Forums, Blogs and Social Networking Sites

Beyond discussions of the "virtual public sphere", literature on the uses of the internet and social networking sites by Muslim young people also highlights the growing importance of open platforms such as Facebook and YouTube in facilitating new religious, cultural and national performances of identity. In particular the concept of "performativity" (Butler 1990) is critical to analysing "acts of citizenship", as they are produced through social networking practices and "DIY online culture" (Jenkins, 2006; Harris, 2008).

Van Zoonen et al. explore this in relation to video and text based responses to the release of anti-Islam video *Fitna* by Dutch parliamentarian Geert Wilders (van Zoonen et al., 2010). The video led Muslims in the Netherlands and around the world to engage in street protests and other forms of deliberative and passionate protest through mainstream political and public channels. Beyond these, however, "ordinary citizens" used the internet to engage with the debate by uploading "thousands of videos" to YouTube and posting comments. In describing these acts as "performances of citizenship" van Zoonen et al. argue that YouTube provides a platform for an open exchange of views between Muslims and non-Muslims both within the Netherlands and at a global level. Van Zoonen et al. point out that, as *Fitna* claimed that Muslims can never be citizens of a contemporary democratic society, the upload of videos offered an opportunity for both Dutch Muslims and minority Muslims from around the world to "insert themselves as citizens within both a national context and debate, and within global controversies around Islam, and moreover as legitimate interpreters of their own religion" (2010, p. 252). Van Zoonen et al. frame these performances as "acts of citizenship", whereby:

> Through making and uploading a video, posters performed an act or practice which constituted them as a part of this placeless public. Even if no-one is paying attention to this performance, the first relevance is nevertheless for the actor him or herself, who takes him or herself seriously as a stakeholder in a controversy that is otherwise played out on the distant stages of the mass media. (van Zoonen et al., 2010, p. 252)

Moreover, in exploring what "new modes of citizenship practice" emerge through uploading and commenting on videos, van Zoonen et al. do not just describe the way these "acts" disrupt nationally prescribed understandings of citizenship, they also point to the emergence of new "political and religious selves". For example, they refer to a v-log uploaded by a young male from the Muslim American Association, who positions himself in the debate as an American Muslim and a citizen of "humanity". In the video he uses humour and self-parody to address the audience, pointing to the different modes of address that gain public attention in social media:

> Hi, I am not a terrorist or a date merchant, I don't live in a tent or keep my wife zipped up in it everyday…

The video disarms *Fitna*'s assault on the rights of Muslims through the performance of a religious and political self which entertains and plays around the boundaries of cultural difference to subvert dominant stereotypes. As van Zoonen et al. note, the tone shifts half-way through toward an "emotional praise of Islam" where the cultural achievements of Islam are highlighted. Finally the speaker declares himself an American citizen and a Muslim. Thus, the video offers "a perfect example of the performance of a religious self that also articulates a democratic and inclusive political self" (van Zoonen et al., 2010, p. 258).

The mix of humour and more religious modes of address is also important as it forges new forms of "associative agency" or "public-ness" between Muslim and non-Muslim audiences through a language that is common to YouTube as a discursive space. As Hartley claims the concept of "play", which is associated with DIY/online media practice, is the very stage for this performed citizenship (Hartley, 2010, p. 241). This is also demonstrated in the case of anti-*Fitna* protest through the prevalence of "sorry" or "jamming" videos uploaded by non-Muslim Dutch citizens in support of their Muslim co-citizens (van Zoonen et al., 2010, p. 255). Van Zoonen et al. regard these expressions as clear examples of "acts of citizenship" insofar as they use the specific affordances of the web to disrupt the viewability of the *Fitna* video, and to apologise to a global Muslim audience, thus reimagining the boundaries of civic responsibility and obligation.

Whilst van Zoonen et al. use the case of the global *Fitna* controversy to demonstrate the way in which national, exclusionary practices generate new performances of transnational citizenship, counter-publics and online activism, other scholars have identified Facebook and web forums as sites where religious and civic community, experience, and identity are being refashioned at a much more grassroots and "everyday" scale.

One such study is Harris & Roose' "DIY Citizenship amongst Young Muslims: Experiences of the 'Ordinary'" (2013) in which they examine more "ordinary" styles of online civic and political engagement amongst minority Muslim young people in Australia. In defining what they mean by "ordinary" the authors use the same definition that Isin and Neilsen call for by focusing less

on the minority status and identities of young Muslim people, and more on the "ordinary" civic practices they engage in, including their use of social media platforms, to perform a range of tasks consistent with theories of DIY or "self-actualising" citizenship (Bennett, 2003; Harris et al., 2010).

Specifically the authors argue that the "ordinary" online activities and expressions of Muslim young people in these sites reflected a desire to develop one's own political and civic self, guided by a "religion-inflected moral citizenship" (Harris & Roose, 2013, p. 8). For example of the young people surveyed in the study, 65 per cent said they expressed their views on political and social issues through media engagement, particularly social media, with 60 per cent saying that they had participated in an online forum or written a blog.

In describing the types of issues and interests that were frequently discussed in these forums, participants identified a mix of political and religious topics, including: "Islam and politics", "feminism, a woman's place in Islam" as well as "everyday stuff" (Harris & Roose, 2013, p. 9). Other participants described involvement in media and cultural production online, including writing a blog, which was identified as a platform for "getting your voice heard out there" (p. 10). For many young women writing a blog about 'hijabi fashion' was an empowering experience. This specifically highlights the overlap between popular culture, creative endeavours and political expression, with Roose and Harris identifying these sites as "an important way to have a different public voice cutting across heated debates driven by Australian politicians and media about Islamic dress" (p. 10).

For many of the young people interviewed, the importance of these platforms and forums was the opportunity that these spaces provided, not only to express their views in a "safe and supportive" public forum, and to be heard by other Muslims, but also to widen social networks and encourage interaction and dialogue with non-Muslims. As one participant said of his Facebook use, it was important to him: "To let people know that we're there and we're not letting them think they have control".

In evaluating the importance of these online spaces for enabling new acts or performances of citizenship for Muslim minority young people, Harris and Roose particularly highlight the role of religion in shaping and enabling the creation of a civic identity and forms of civic participation in social media and online forums. As the researchers argue, it is particularly the DIY styles of citizenship associated with internet use and social media that enable young Muslims to "make particular civic meanings of religious and cultural affiliations in ways that are not captured by conventional frameworks" (Harris & Roose, 2013, p. 14). Thus, in the project of "making themselves" online, away from formal structures and guides, the authors argue that Muslim young

people are mixing and matching religious and civic responsibilities in a manner that enhances rather than reduces civic engagement; a situation that requires policy-makers to reconsider how they define civic engagement to include a range of cultural, religious, popular, mediated and everyday resources which are being used by Muslim young people to refresh normative conceptions of "active citizenship" (Harris & Roose, 2013, pp. 14-15).

6. Discussion

This review has provided some insights into the potential that Muslim young people's online practices open up for new experiences of social connection, citizenship, collective agency and social inclusion which traverse state, geographic and cultural boundaries. In particular, the examples cited highlight the potential for new media technologies to open up positive spaces of interaction between Muslim and non-Muslim citizens and global publics, thus countering the marginalization of Muslim voices and perspectives in western, national public spheres.

Isin and Neilsen's concept "acts of citizenship" has been applied to the themes and findings emerging from the review to evaluate the extent to which these online practices shape the creation of new acts or performances of citizenship, or whether they merely repeat existing, habitual or normative claims to justice, citizenship and rights. The paper explored these tensions with reference to a number of themes. First the paper analysed the ways in which new media has facilitated a generational shift in young people's construction of themselves as moral, ethical and political subjects, and also in terms of how they "perform" citizenship. This was reflected in research analysing a qualitative shift from "dutiful" models of citizenship toward more personal, expressive styles of online, DIY citizenship (Hartley, 2010; Bennett et al., 2011; Harris, 2008; Harris et al., 2010; Vromen, 2011; Coleman, 2008), which traverse the nation as a bounded community, opening up new democratic spaces for public expression and the claiming of rights (van Zoonen et al., 2010; Isin, 2012). This is particularly significant for Muslim minority young people living in Western societies (Bahfen, 2008; Brouwer, 2004) where marginalization of Islam in the national public sphere has meant that social media has become a powerful medium for facilitating new connections which extend beyond the national and local to include global connections and claim making practices.

These new spaces and styles of citizenship are discussed in relation to young people's engagement with blogs, social networking sites (Harris, 2008; Boyd, 2007; Vinken, 2007), and video-sharing sites such as YouTube (van Zoonen et al., 2010), which provide new discursive and "networked" spaces for young people to engage with co-citizens, form opinions and make claims in a

way that bypass normative conceptions of the public sphere. Thus, Media and communication scholars and political scientists have stressed that young Muslims are using online "participatory platforms" to shape new public spheres and forms of collective agency (Herrera, 2013; Salvatore, 2013; El-Nawawy, 2010; Bunt 2009).

Significantly, these new virtual public forums are understood by van Zoonen et al. (2010) and Harris & Roose (2013) to open up a space for new performances of Muslim identity which integrate religious narratives and practices with democratic and civic aspirations. In particular van Zoonen considers the focus on "performativity" in Isin and Neilsen to be essential to understanding how the internet and new media technologies revitalize citizenship realizing the creative and multiple ways that people connect with others online, construct their identity, engage in debates of a civic or political nature and also construct their own "imagined communities" where their claims have meaning.

In exploring what these renegotiated understandings of the public sphere, civic engagement and recognition mean for "citizenship" and social inclusion, the articles and case studies presented demonstrate that it not only possible but essential that we think about Muslim young people's online "participatory practices" outside of the reductive frames of social policies, which tend to view these practices either in terms of "risk" or normative (dutiful) models of citizenship. As van Zoonen et al. claim, by focusing instead on what online participation "does" in terms of enabling new performances of religious, civic and political selves to be publicly staged, it becomes possible to think about digital platforms as spaces where the democratic right for citizens to speak and be heard are being forged for a new generation of Muslim young people.

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Conflict of Interests

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