

Struggles over access to the Muslim public sphere: Multiple publics and discourses on agency, belonging and citizenship (Introduction to the Themed Section)

Karin Willemse¹ · Sylvia I. Bergh¹

Published online: 7 September 2016

© The Author(s) 2016. This article is published with open access at Springerlink.com

Abstract This introductory essay provides the context for the articles in this Themed Section. Despite the diversity in locations, historical backgrounds and contemporary processes of change, all contributors to this Themed Section focus on the struggle of Muslim groups over access to an emergent Muslim public sphere. They highlight the contestations of and shifts in the notions of agency, belonging, and citizenship in nation-states with Muslim communities within its borders. The introduction consists of two parts. The first part reviews the notion of the public sphere as conceptualized by Habermas and critiqued by scholars of a diversity of backgrounds. In relation to the concept of the Muslim public sphere, three aspects of critique are given closer consideration in this first part: the value of thinking in terms of multiple publics, the loss of legitimacy of traditional religious authorities, and the importance of agency and identity that allow individuals to engage in a diversity of publics. The second part introduces the various contributions in the Themed Section.

Keywords Islam · public sphere · citizenship · Egypt · Saudi Arabia · Nigeria · Senegal · Morocco · Turkey

Introduction

This Themed Section is a result of the ‘Islam Research Program’ (IRP), a cooperative venture between the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Leiden University (Van Vollenhoven Institute) entitled ‘Strengthening knowledge of and dialogue with the Islamic/Arab world’. The project entailed the cooperation between Netherlands-based

✉ Karin Willemse
k.willemse@eshcc.eur.nl

¹ Erasmus University Rotterdam, P.O. Box 1738, 3000 DR Rotterdam, The Netherlands

academics and policy officers working at the Dutch embassies in various countries, as well as academics from the localities where the diverse research projects were conducted, spanning the Islamic world from Indonesia to Senegal. This Themed Section assembles five articles based on the empirical field research carried out as part of some of these projects, reflecting on recent socio-political and cultural dynamics in Muslim communities in countries such as Egypt, Saudi Arabia, Morocco and Turkey, Senegal, and Nigeria. While the field researches were carried out mostly in the (immediate) pre-Arab Spring period, the authors have updated their analysis where necessary and possible.¹

Despite the diversity in locations, historical backgrounds and contemporary processes of change, all contributors to this Themed Section focus on the struggle of Muslim groups over access to an emergent Muslim public sphere. They highlight the contestations of and shifts in the notions of citizenship in nation-states with Muslim communities within its borders. All authors consider these contestations as part of the relationship between the public sphere and legal issues, social and political activism, or the position of minorities vis-à-vis the state both in Muslim majority countries and secular nation-states, in a context marked by a struggle between democratization and old and new forms of authoritarianism.

All contributions explore how in such a context collective identities interact with political institutions, thereby transforming discourses and practices. The strength of the articles lies in the fact that they are all based on recent empirical research thus responding to Sani Umar's (2009: 7) call for a differentiated understanding of the public sphere as well as the state, based on more empirical studies of the various actors and groups who are claiming space in the public sphere. This will allow us to gain a more nuanced picture of their positions, instead of making simplistic assumptions about whether they are 'secular' or 'religious'. Before turning to some of these articles, a discussion on the concept of public sphere in relation to a Muslim public is necessary.

The public sphere and the issue of religion

The notion of the public sphere is closely associated with the work of Jürgen Habermas (1989), who linked it to the establishment of the Westfalian nation-state in Europe and the concomitant emergence of a bourgeois society since the early sixteenth century. The influence of the Enlightenment is obvious since in this model religion was officially relegated to the private domain and the notion of the public sphere developed in relation to the nationalist projects that emerged in that period all over Europe. The 'ideal of rational, informed discussion of public policy ... runs like a red thread' through Habermas' work on the public sphere (Outhwaite 1994; Gardiner 2004: 2). Habermas' idealized bourgeois public sphere has been severely critiqued for its Eurocentric and exclusivist nature in particular with respect to gender, class and ethnicity (Benhabib 1992, 1995; Fraser 1997: 73; Salvatore and LeVine 2005: 5; Willems 2007b). Interestingly, despite the critique on Habermas' model, his work on the notion

¹ Neither the staff of the now disbanded IRP Project Office at Leiden University nor the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs take responsibility for the content of the articles which lies solely with the authors. The guest editors served as members of the IRP's Academic Advisory Board.

of the public sphere continues to be routinely invoked in debates around democracy, citizenship and communication (Fraser 1992).

With respect to the Muslim world, studies point to an emerging public sphere, which holds a different genealogy than that in the West, whereby both religious and secularist notions about the ‘common good’ are debated in relation to Islam and its notions of proper public life.

Eickelman and Salvatore point out that even in the case of early modern Europe, religious movements played an important role in the development and expansion of the public sphere. Habermas himself later acknowledged that tradition and culture constituted important aspects of the process of producing norms as well as the way in which individuals internalize procedures of consensus (Eickelman and Salvatore 2002: 96; Habermas 1992: 84–86). In this respect, Roy (2012: 7) argues that we must set aside the assumption that democracy presupposes secularization, given the re-Islamisation of everyday life and the rise of Islamist parties in the Arab world over the past thirty years. As Eisenstadt maintains (Eisenstadt 2002: 159) ‘we cannot avoid Western concepts, but we can make them more flexible [...] through differentiation and contextualization’. The use of a concept like public sphere in relation to Muslims societies is thus helpful provided we do not assume that the way in which these notions evolved in Europe constitutes an evaluative yardstick for other modernizing societies.

Despite the different geographic locations that are the foci of the articles of this Themed Section, three aspects of such a re-modeled notion of the public sphere constitute a common starting point. These are first, the value of thinking in terms of multiple publics; second, the importance of agency and identity that allow individuals to engage in a diversity of publics; and third, the loss of legitimacy of traditional religious authorities.

Plurality, ‘multiple publics’, and the notion of agency

Traditionally, pluralism has been a major issue in Muslims societies, since, on the one hand, it ‘is related to the status of non-Muslims living under Islamic law as *dhimmi*, protected minorities’ (Esposito 2003b: 94). Indeed, in many Muslim countries, the presence of religious minorities such as Shiites in the Gulf countries, Copts in Egypt, or Christians in Nigeria point to problems of unbalanced political representation and discrimination with regard to social and economic rights and access to the public sphere. Such (real and perceived) discrimination can give rise to sectarian violence, as witnessed in Kano, Nigeria, and South Sudan.

Recently, the notion of ‘counterpublics’ has been put forward as an alternative to the notion of one singular, overarching and unified public sphere predicated on consensus and the bracketing of difference (Fraser 1992: 122; Laubach Wright 2012; Taylor 1995). As conceptualized by Nancy Fraser (1997: 81) a ‘subaltern counterpublic’ refers to a ‘parallel discursive arena where members of subordinated social groups invent and circulate counterdiscourses, which in turn permit them to formulate oppositional interpretations of their identities, interests, and needs.’ Fraser developed the concept as a reflection on the ‘real world conditions of massive *inequality*’ (Fraser 1997: 83, italics in original), in which a system of domination and subjugation is in fact sustained

by the emphasis on the common good. The creation of subaltern counterpublics offers subordinated social groups a means of support and collective resistance. Fraser (1997: 82) elaborates:

In stratified societies, subaltern counterpublics have a dual character. On the one hand, they function as spaces of withdrawal and regroupment; on the other hand, they also function as bases and training grounds for agitational activities directed toward wider publics. It is precisely in the dialectic between these two functions that their emancipatory potential resides.

The notion of ‘counterpublics’ thus constitutes ‘a critical term to signify that some publics develop not simply as one among a constellation of discursive entities, but as explicitly articulated alternatives to wider publics that exclude the interests of potential participants’ (Asen 2000: 425). In this respect, both global movements and local sites of resistance can be included in this concept: the Arab Spring uprising, like the Occupy Movement, can be understood as counterpublics with global and local phenomena. However, this conceptualisation of different public spheres implies a hierarchy of ‘publics’ since the notion of counterpublics presupposes a dominant public sphere with which or against which they struggle over access to public debate and opinion making. In addition, both the dominant public sphere and these counterpublics are thereby constructed as bounded and mutually exclusive, while the diverse analyses in the contributions to this Themed Section show how religious identity intersects with other identifications such as gender, class, youth, ethnicity, geography and education in constituting sometimes dominant and at other moments alternative (Muslim) publics.

People can thus take up a diversity of positions in the contestations over access to the public sphere. These positions are not only shaped by perceptions on the role of secularity and religion, but also by a diversity of identities which are considered to be relevant in processes of in- and exclusion from the public sphere. As Eickelman and Anderson (1999: 1) maintain, Muslims do not just act as Muslims but also engage in debates on and in the public sphere on the basis of class interest, out of a sense of nationalism, because of ethnic loyalties, or on behalf of their families, and most often out of a combination of these. This politics of difference is thus based on the fact that multiple identifications allow individuals to engage in a diversity of publics. The notion of public is thus not bounded, but refers to a ‘continuous process of construction and reconstruction, of negotiation and contestation’ (Meyer and Moors 2005: 12).

Acknowledging the multiple identifications that individuals can uphold, Taylor (1995) argues for using the concept of ‘nested public spheres’, in which smaller public spheres are nested within larger ones. Seyla Benhabib (1996), on the other hand, suggests thinking in terms of a ‘plurality of modes of association’, referring to mutually interlocking and overlapping networks of opinion formation and dissemination (see also Asen 2000: 424). In this way the multiplicity and multivocality of different, often subaltern, ‘publics’ holding a range of normative ideas come into focus without necessary ordering them into a dichotomy of alternative counterpublics vis-à-vis a stipulated dominant public sphere (Calhoun 2002; Dewey 1927; Eickelman and Salvatore 2002: 98). In the same vein, we here opt for the notion of ‘multiple publics’ in the sense of overlapping networks that nest in shifting constellations in particular historical and national contexts, as members of the diverse networks try to access the (Muslim) public

sphere in order to influence government policy to suit their different interests. The contributions to this Themed Section thereby refer rather loosely to the public sphere as an arena that in the postcolonial societies they study emerges in conjunction with some political liberalization and commercialization, or at least as a space in which struggles over these processes evolve (see also Meyer and Moors 2005: 6).

Given the ongoing processes of shifting configurations of diverse publics by people engaged in continuous processes of identification, the notion of identity is problematic since it suggests fixedness and closure. In particular the increase in transnational mobility seems to have effected a process of ‘disembedding’ or ‘deterritorialization’ of identities from their former local (cultural, religious) and national frameworks (Salvatore and LeVine 2005:14; see also Davids and Willemse 2014; Hall 2000; Meyer and Geschiere 1999). The increasing influence of processes of globalization on local communities does not, however, mean the demise of the nation-state. Although debates on transnationalizing the public sphere (Fraser 2007, see also Fraser 2014) are important and necessary to rethink the public sphere in the twenty-first century, the boundaries of the nation-state still serve as the main framework of the public sphere and the interests of citizens. In this respect Geschiere (2009): 1, citing Murray Li (2000) points out that the trend towards a growing cosmopolitanism has been overshadowed by a ‘global conjuncture of belonging’ in which religion plays a major role. Belonging and agency are thus located in the tension between processes of globalization and the attempts to reinvigorate the nation-state’s grip on its citizens (Geschiere 2009: 21–22).²

In relation to these developments, Eickelman and Salvatore (2002: 106) point at ‘shared anticipation’ as a precondition of the public sphere. This collective sense of anticipation refers to the consolidated effect of processes of socialization that underlies notions of social welfare and of the ‘common good’ and can be seen as a form of ‘moral agency’. While the nation-state posits itself as the main common denominator for constructing a shared notion of morality, ‘shared standards of anticipation must still be based on ties that are perceived as local, even if these ‘localities’-taking advantage of modern communications- are not local in a geographical sense’ (Eickelman and Salvatore 2002: 107). A shared collective sense of anticipation binds individuals in these configurations. This implies a ‘complex process of understanding meanings in context’, which involves ‘emotional and intellectual attunement among participants’ (Eickelman and Salvatore 2002: 107). This amounts to what Eickelman and Salvatore refer to as ‘a modern sense of responsible agency’ (ibid 2002:107–108) and brings into view the processual, every-day construction of notions of morality (Benhabib 1992: 37–8, see also Gardiner 2004: 34).

The notions of shared anticipation and moral or responsible agency thus acknowledge the individual engagement of people in struggles over access to the public sphere. Large numbers of Muslims frame their agency in terms of the normative language of Islam (Eickelman and Anderson 1999: 1–2, 6, 13), so that Muslim identity politics have become a significant force in both Muslim-majority as well as –minority states, leading to the emergence of Muslim public spheres that are discursive, performative, and

² Agency is thereby not contrasted to structure: it is not considered to only entail an active and articulated stance contesting certain restrictions or moral discourses. Following Saba Mahmood, agency may also be found in the more subtle negotiations of dominant discourses or even in compliance with seemingly oppressive or restricting notions, policies, or laws (Mahmood 2004, see also: Davids and Willemse 2014).

participative, and not confined to formal institutions recognized by state authorities. In these Muslim public spheres societal issues are presented and resolved differently by various strands of Islamic political thought based on differing interpretations of religious texts. Some religious preachers may purposefully use them to try to mobilize their followers or provoke reactions from political leaders. In this respect, a radical shift has recently taken place in the means of accessing the public sphere in Muslim societies.

The new media, youth, and the loss of legitimacy of religious authorities

Since December 2010, a wave of protests has rippled across the Arab World. From Algeria in the West to Yemen in the East, the Arab Spring has ousted rulers in Tunisia, Egypt, Libya and Yemen, and has brought protests to Morocco, Jordan, Bahrain, Lebanon and Palestine.

The struggle in Syria has turned to civil war and in many countries the ramifications continue four years later. Fundamentally, civil unrest in the region has been caused by decades of authoritarian rule, unresponsive state institutions and overbearing security apparatuses that controlled citizens and repressed fundamental rights (Integrity Research and Consultancy 2013: 10; see also Ayebe 2011; Bond 2011; Gause 2011; Joya 2011). The role of the new media, its use by the mostly young population, as well as the erosion of traditional religious authorities are important factors that help explain the scale and dynamics of the protests.

The influence of the media in the dissemination and democratisation of access to religious texts is not novel. Eickelman and Salvatore (2002: 102) point out how the introduction of printing led not only to a standardization of religious texts but also made *shari'a* a 'popular trope rather than just a jurist's notion, encompassing the [...] rules, habits and practices needed to live a good life as a Muslims', thus taking on a 'new meaning as a template for reasonable, just and expected social practice – in short, social normativity'. In addition, intellectuals like Mustafa Mahmud in Egypt, but also Sufi sheikhs articulated the scholarly discourses of the *ulama* in the vernacular which made religious debates accessible for the larger public (Eickelman and Salvatore 2002: 110–112; Meyer and Moors 2005: 7).

However, what does constitute a new development is the fact that the demographic 'youth bulge' in the region, coupled with the growing use of the new media and technologies, has caused political culture to be more individualistic and less attracted to holistic ideologies, whether Islamist or secularist. As the new media facilitates rapid communication as well as dissemination of (religious) knowledge, members of these publics can more easily bypass state and religious authority and debate the diverse interpretation of religious principles within their own national boundaries and beyond. The new media thus plays a 'significant role in fragmenting and contesting political and religious authority' (Eickelman and Anderson 1999: 1). Challenges to authority revolve around rights to interpret and the proliferation of media channels allows for the engagement of a more diverse and wider public that can not only engage in debates on Islamic principles as these are discussed in the vernacular, but also because modern mass education means that these new publics are generally better educated than former generations (Eickelman and Anderson 1999: 6–10, 12–14; Meyer and Moors 2005: 9–

11). These new and more numerous interpreters of rights and religious texts, but also of the daily struggles encountered by Muslims, engage a more diverse and wider public, thereby challenging traditional authorities (see also Eickelman and Salvatore 2006: 9). Esposito (2003a: 2) refers to this development as ‘Islamization of society from below’, which has been both a source of oppression and empowerment, especially for women (ibid. p. 9; Willemsse 2007a, 2007b).

At the same time, ‘traditional’ as well as new religious actors increasingly resist state attempts to sideline them and strive to articulate and pursue agendas of social and political renewal and development, raising questions about the interconnections of private and public morality (Haynes and Ben-Porat 2013: 158–159). As Roy (2012: 10) argues, Muslim religiosity (the way the adherent experiences his or her faith) has changed as it now delinks personal faith from such communal religious foci like traditions, collective identity, and external religious (state or institutional) authorities. Like the ‘traditional (face-to-face)’ religious authorities (*ulama* and Islamist leaders), the latter have largely lost their legitimacy amid the rise of self-appointed and often self-taught religious entrepreneurs.

In these trends towards individualization, refusal of blind obedience, separation of faith from collective identity, and a certain distance from day-to-day politics, Roy (2012: 7–11) identifies ‘democracy-compatible’ patterns. These trends make it increasingly difficult for authoritarian rulers to restore traditional norms by decree, and for Islamists to claim a religious monopoly in the public sphere, especially in the context of growing assertiveness of other movements such as the Sufis and Salafists.

Indeed, Fattah (2006, cited in Haynes 2013: 174 ff.) distinguishes between three predominant Muslim worldviews which influence attitudes to democracy (and by extension, citizenship) in Arab/Muslim countries. ‘Traditionalist’ Islamists (often Salafists) believe they are the keepers of historic Islamic traditions such as the inseparability of politics and religion, and the applicability of *shari’a* law to all Muslims, with ‘liberal’ democracy regarded as anti- or un-Islamic. (Muslim) secularists on the other hand consider that neither the *Qur’an* nor *shari’a* law offers a governance blueprint, and that the West can serve as a model for socio- economic progress. They agree that democracy is a desirable political system to ensure representative, legitimate and authoritative government, along with a secular public sphere as a means to influence that government. Religion is in this view to be relegated to the private sphere. A position between these two world views is taken up by so called ‘modernist’ or ‘moderate’ Islamists (such as the *Ennahda* party in Tunisia, the Freedom and Justice Party of the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt, and the Justice and Development Party in Morocco). They believe that core Islamic values, norms and beliefs are compatible with democracy, as long as democratic mechanisms do not contradict *shari’a* law. They claim to be working to ensure dignity, equal opportunities and social justice. This ‘intermediate’ worldview is represented by parties that are or were in power recently in politically and ideologically diverse societies at times of economic crises. As Haynes (2013: 186) argues, these parties are or were forced to partner with other parties in order to materially improve the lives of citizens, and consequently, ideological ‘purity’ takes on reduced importance (see also Dalmaso and Cavatorta 2013: 240). Those belonging to the traditionalist side, such as the Islamists of Tunisia or the Salafists of Egypt, have to deal with the same dilemma. In order for them not to be (again) marginalized

from the political scene, these groups could now indeed become reluctant agents of a form of a specifically political secularization.

It is in this ‘post-Islamist’ context in which the appeal and sources of legitimacy of Islamism get exhausted, and secular exigencies are acknowledged instead (see Bayat 1996: 45–46) that we can situate current debates on citizenship in Muslim countries including questions on whether religious freedom should be made a human right, and the role of *shari’a*, especially in the area of women’s rights and gender equality (see the debates on the constitutions in countries such as Tunisia and Morocco; Dalmaso and Cavatorta 2013).

The revolutions and reform processes launched by the Arab Spring reflect the emergence of a new political subjectivity, especially among women and youth (Beinin and Vairel, 2011; Challand 2011; Hassan 2011; Khatib and Lust 2014). Apart from the role of the social media, awareness raising, lobbying and networking proved of key importance in political mobilization, often filling a void left by government’s that neglected the plight of the urban lower classes (Hassan 2011: 8; Norton 1999: 30–31). The uprisings illustrated the importance of loose networking that brought about ad hoc alliances between different societal groups (Hassan 2011: 6; Biekart and Fowler 2012). While the outcomes of the demonstrations are still unfolding, one common and undeniable feature across the region has been the reduction in the fear of citizens to stand up to demand increased voice, transparency, and accountability (Integrity Research and Consultancy 2013: 10).

The articles in this Themed Section refer to the struggles over access to the public sphere by looking closely at how these struggles, in terms of debates, actions, or withdrawal, are enacted in the context of daily life. They illustrate the point made by Eickelman and Salvatore (2006: 10) that while ‘some ideas of the public can be intensely local, others can be transregional and transnational, expressing multiple ideas of group and community. Participation in the contemporary public sphere implies an openness and at least implicit pluralism in the sense of a capacity to act – or at least communicate – independently from state or ruling authorities.’ These enactments of agency are part of the ties established in horizontal networks of participants in social movements, institutional organizations or public debates in the particular historical and national contexts of Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Senegal, Nigeria, Morocco and Turkey.

Multiple publics, agency and the daily struggle over the public sphere: from conceptual notions to empirical analyses - the contributions

An important issue in the countries under study constitutes the way that political discourses have influenced recent debates on access to the public sphere in ways that are quite different from the recent past. The contributions on Egypt and Nigeria examine how discourses on the preferred influence of Islam in the public sphere have recently altered local notions of citizenship and access to the public sphere.

In Egypt, the attempts by different parties to reform Egyptian politics have had unforeseen effects in the public sphere. Here, the main Islamic groups’ discourse on citizenship is no longer one merely expressed in the public sphere but is now part of their political agenda as they formed or joined political parties, even though they previously opposed such political activity. The article by Ashraf El Sherif in this

Themed Section focuses on the Strong Egypt Party (SEP) as a case study of Egyptian Islamist democrats. The party has proven its efficiency in pressuring the Muslim Brotherhood (MB) to moderate its discourse and henceforth counterbalance the pressures exerted by the conservative Salafists to the MB's right. El Sherif chronicles the presidential campaign of Abdel Moneim Aboul Fotouh from May 2011 to May 2012, gaining 4.5 million votes. A former Muslim Brother, he tried to mobilize the 'centrist mainstream' population, equally committed to Egyptian patriotism and moderate Islamic culture and values. El Sherif points out that in order to assemble as much support as possible from these 'floating voters', the notion of citizenship (and other key concepts) is left ambivalent and not well articulated in this party. The article thus highlights a problem that is perhaps common to all such 'progressive democratic Islamist' parties: their centrism (*wasatiya*), which aims to evade the Islamist-secular polarization that has dominated post-revolution Egypt but in doing so, runs the risk of being perceived as reluctant to taking sides.

Apart from through the discourses of Islamic actors and political parties, the substance and practice of citizenship is of course also determined by state ideology and institutions such as the Constitution that help to regulate relations between the state and religious groups. In Nigeria, the drafters of the Constitution sought to make the state 'impartial' in the country's multi-religious and multi-ethnic sphere. Yet in practice, several state governments have declared the extension of the scope of the *shari'a*, thus fueling conflicts between Christians and Muslims (Nasir 2012). In this Themed Section, the article by David Ehrhardt analyses the role of religious leaders – both Islamic and Christian clerics, preachers, and traditional rulers – in conflict resolution in metropolitan Kano, in northern Nigeria. This article focuses on the role that religious leaders, one of the major authorities in the city, have had in managing and attenuating these expressions of religious conflict between Muslims and Christians. It builds on original quantitative data as well as interviews with religious leaders and a wide range of other individuals involved in conflict resolution in the city. This 'Janus-faced' influence is based on the high levels of trust and 'informal authority' that these religious leaders command within their communities, which they can exercise through religious services, education, and the news media. Ehrhardt concludes that while religious leaders' inclusive discursive framing can have positive effects, their potential to do so has decreased with the increase in the violent actions of the Islamic political/religious organization *boko haram*. This article thus nuances the argument made earlier about the loss of legitimacy by religious authorities. It points to the importance of understanding the contextual factors which determine the extent to which religious leaders can influence the selection and 'operationalisation' of discursive frames which can either exacerbate or prevent collective violence.

In recent struggles over access to the public sphere, women and youth have been instrumental in shaping public discourses as well as alternative practices, as the articles by van Geel on Saudi Arabia and Camara and Bodian on Senegal show. In many Muslim majority countries, the issue of women's rights lies at the centre of potential and real power struggles between the *ulama* and the state (Yamani 2000 cited in van Geel, this issue). The article by Annemarie van Geel examines the historical development and current practice of women-only public spaces in Saudi Arabia, as well as its opposite phenomenon of 'mixing' between the two sexes (*ikhtilāf*). Especially the latter practice has given rise to heated debates about whether and if so, how, women should

participate in the public domain. Drawing on extensive discussions with urban-based young working women, students, activists, business women, and female Islamic preachers and teachers, van Geel analyzes the extent to which their attitudes and strategies with regard to gender mixing are related to their ideas about their presence in the public domain and notions of modernity such as ‘the liberation of women’, ‘empowerment’, and ‘the rise of women’. Van Geel’s article illustrates well our points about how religious and other (e.g. gender) identities intersect, and how this in turn influences the actors’ ability to constitute ‘multiple publics’. The women represented in Van Geel’s study negotiate their daily realities with regards to women-only public spaces and *ikhtilāf* while (re)producing or contesting women-only public spaces (Van Geel, this issue).

The importance of students in the changing configurations of (alternative) public spheres is central to the contribution on Senegal by Mamadou Bodian and El Hadji Malick Sy Camara. It presents the case of the rise of militant Islamists at the Cheikh Anta Diop University of Dakar (UCAD), and what the authors refer to as the ‘communitarianisation’ of the University sphere. The article argues that the affirmation of Islam at the university is the result of a ‘decomplexification’ of religion, i.e. its emancipation by students who have succeeded to overcome their complex of being Muslim in a space historically dominated by revolutionary and secular ideologies on the one hand, and influential Sufi Brotherhoods, in particular the Tijaniyya and Mouridiyya, on the other hand. With the help of external support, notably from the Gulf states, new group identities based on, amongst others, Wahhabi doctrine have emerged since the late 1970s, which have led to a fragmentation of Islam among students. Based on a variety of sources and research methods, the authors use this detailed case study to trace the emergence of a new form of Islamic ‘cultural citizenship’ and the way it has gained influence at UCAD. This contribution shows how the influence of religion on the arguably ‘alternative public’ of students at the UCAD is increasingly ‘interlocking and overlapping’ with recent developments with respect to the role of religion in the Senegalese public sphere at large.

The final contribution to this Themed Section, the article on Morocco and Turkey by Thijs Sunier, Heleen van der Linden, and Ellen van de Bovenkamp focuses on Islam as a multi-dimensional binding mechanism between migrants and transnational networks, both state-controlled and privately initiated. The article shows that the involvement of states with the lives of their subjects outside the country through state-monitored transnational networks regularly stirs discussions about territories, jurisdictions and foreign influence in the host-countries. Whether we deal with formal regulations on nationality and citizenship, or with networks, activities and political affiliations beyond the confines of state borders, the ‘long arm’ of governments is invoked and is generally considered as unacceptable, as it would violate national integrity. The authors compare the ways in which the Turkish and Moroccan states are involved in the lives of migrants and their offspring in The Netherlands in the form of, for example, the Moroccan *Amicales* organizations and those sponsored by the Turkish *Diyanet* (Directorate of Religious Affairs). Overall, the authors argue that there is no contradiction between the continuation of state-controlled and (increasingly) privately initiated transnational networks and the rooting of migrants in their ‘host’ societies, though the Moroccan Islamic landscape is much more fragmented than the Turkish one. Although the nation-states referred to in all contributions try to increase their control over their citizens in the

context of processes of globalizations and increasing connectivity, this article illustrates this very well for the case of Turkish and Moroccan migrants.

To sum up, this Themed Section addresses the contestations around the notions of citizenship and nation state, as well as the emergence of a public sphere and the rights of citizens and minorities vis-à-vis the state in several Muslim majority countries in a context marked by a struggle between democratization and old and new forms of authoritarianism. It explores how in such a context collective identities interact with political institutions, thereby transforming discourses and practices.

Acknowledgments We thank Prof. Peter Geschiere for his comments on an earlier version of this article.

Open Access This article is distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>), which permits unrestricted use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided you give appropriate credit to the original author(s) and the source, provide a link to the Creative Commons license, and indicate if changes were made.

References

- Asen, R. (2000). Seeking the “Counter” in Counterpublics. *Communication Theory*, 10(4), 424–446.
- Ayeb, H. (2011). Social and political geography of the Tunisian revolution: the alfa grass revolution. *Review of African Political Economy*, 38(129), 467–479.
- Bayat, A. (1996). The coming of a Post-Islamist society. *Critique: Critical Middle East Studies*, 9(Fall), 43–52.
- Beinin, J. and Vairel, F., eds. (2011). *Social Movements, Mobilization and Contestation in the Middle East and North Africa*. Stanford, California: Stanford University Press.
- Benhabib, S. (1992). *Situating the self: Gender, community and postmodernism in contemporary ethics*. London and New York: Routledge.
- Benhabib, S. (1995). The debate over women and moral theory revisited. In J. Meehan (Ed.), *Feminists read Habermas* (pp. 181–204). London and New York: Routledge.
- Benhabib, S. (1996). *Democracy and difference: Contesting the boundaries of the political*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Biekart, K., & Fowler, A. (2012). A Civic Agency Perspective on Change. *Development*, 55(2), 181–189.
- Bond, P. (2011). Neoliberal threats to North Africa. *Review of African Political Economy*, 38(129), 481–495.
- Calhoun, C. (2002). Imagining Solidarity: Cosmopolitanism, Constitutional Patriotism, and the Public Sphere. *Public Culture*, 14(1), 147–171.
- Challand, B. (2011). The Counter-Power of Civil Society and the Emergence of a New Political Imaginary in the Arab World. *Constellations*, 18(3), 271–283.
- Dalmaso, E., & Cavatorta, F. (2013). Democracy, Civil Liberties and the Role of Religion after the Arab Awakening: Constitutional Reforms in Tunisia and Morocco. *Mediterranean Politics*, 18(2), 225–241.
- Dauids, T. and K. Willems (2014) ‘Embodied engagements: Feminist ethnography at the crossing of knowledge production and representation’, *Women's Studies International Forum* 43 (March–April): 1–4.
- Dewey, J. (1927). *The public and its problems*. New York: Holt and Company.
- Eickelman, D. F., & Anderson, J. W. (1999). Redefining Muslim Publics. In D. F. Eickelman & J. W. Anderson (Eds.), *New media in the Muslim world: The emerging public sphere* (pp. 1–18). Bloomington: Indiana University Press.
- Eickelman, D. F., & Salvatore, A. (2002). The public sphere and Muslim identities. *European Journal of Sociology*, 43(1), 92–115.
- Eickelman, D. F., & Salvatore, A. (2006). Muslim Publics. In A. Salvatore & D. F. Eickelman (Eds.), *Public Islam and the Common Good* (pp. 3–27). Leiden and Boston: Brill.
- Eisenstadt, S. N. (2002). Concluding Remarks: Public Sphere, Civil Society, and Political Dynamics in Islamic Societies. In M. Hoexter, S. N. Eisenstadt, & N. Levtzion (Eds.), *The Public Sphere in Muslim Societies* (pp. 139–161). Albany: State University of New York Press.

- Esposito, J. L. (2003a). Introduction: Modernizing Islam and Re-Islamization in Global Perspective. In J. L. Esposito & F. Burgat (Eds.), *Modernizing Islam: Religion in the Public Sphere in Europe and the Middle East*, pp. 1–14. New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press.
- Esposito, J. L. (2003b). Islam and Civil Society. In J. L. Esposito & F. Burgat (Eds.), *Modernizing Islam: Religion in the Public Sphere in Europe and the Middle East*, pp. 69–100. New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press.
- Fattah, M. (2006). *Democratic Values in the Muslim World*. Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner.
- Fraser, N. (1992). Rethinking the public sphere: A contribution to the critique of actually existing democracy. In C. Calhoun (Ed.), *Habermas and the public sphere* (pp. 109–142). Cambridge: The MIT Press.
- Fraser, N. (1997). *Justice Interruptus: Critical Reflections on the "Postsocialist" Condition*. New York: Routledge.
- Fraser, N. (2007). 'Transnationalizing the Public Sphere: On the Legitimacy and Efficacy of Public Opinion in a Post-Westphalian World.'. *Theory, Culture and Society*, 24(4), 7–30.
- Fraser, N. (2014). Transnationalizing the Public Sphere: On the Legitimacy and Efficacy of Public Opinion in a Post-Westphalian World. In K. Nash (Ed.), *Transnationalizing the public sphere* (pp. 8–42). Cambridge: Polity Press.
- Gardiner, M. E. (2004). 'Wild publics and grotesque symposiums: Habermas and Bakhtin on dialogue, everyday life and the public sphere'. *The Sociological Review*, 52((Issue Supplement s1)), 28–48.
- Gause, F. G. (2011). Why Middle East Studies Missed the Arab Spring: The Myth of Authoritarian Stability. *Foreign Affairs*, 90(4), 81–90.
- Geschiere, P. (2009). *The perils of belonging: Autochtony, citizenship, and exclusion in Africa & Europe*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Habermas, J. (1989). *The structural transformation of the public sphere. An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society*. Cambridge: The MIT Press.
- Habermas, J. (1992). *Moral consciousness and communicative action*. Cambridge: The MIT Press.
- Hall, S. (2000). Who needs 'identity'? In P. du Gay, J. Evans, & P. Redman (Eds.), *Identity: A Reader* (pp. 15–29). London: Sage.
- Hassan, K. (2011) 'Regional Perspectives on the 'Dignity Revolutions': How Middle Eastern Activists perceive Popular Protest', Knowledge Programme on Civil Society in West Asia Policy Paper No. 3, University of Amsterdam and HIVOS.
- Haynes, J. (2013). The 'Arab Uprising', Islamists and Democratization. *Mediterranean Politics*, 18(2), 170–188.
- Haynes, J., & Ben-Porat, G. (2013). Religion, Secularization and Democracy in the Mediterranean Region: Problems and Prospects. *Mediterranean Politics*, 18(2), 153–169.
- Integrity Research & Consultancy (2013) 'Baseline Assessment of Social Accountability in the Arab World', Final Report, Conducted for the Affiliated Network of Social Accountability in the Arab World (ANSA-AW) and CARE Egypt, 2013.
- Joya, A. (2011). The Egyptian revolution: crisis of neoliberalism and the potential for democratic politics. *Review of African Political Economy*, 38(129), 367–386.
- Khatib, L., & Lust, E. (2014). *Taking to the Streets: The Transformation of Arab Activism*. Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press.
- Laubach Wright, A. (2012). Counterpublic Protest and the Purpose of Occupy: Reframing the Discourse of Occupy Wall Street. *Plaza: Dialogues in Language and Literature*, 2(2), 138–146.
- Mahmood, S. (2004). *Politics of piety: The Islamic Revival and the Feminist Subject*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Meyer, B., & Geschiere, P. (1999). 'Introduction'. In B. Meyer & P. Geschiere (Eds.), *Globalization and Identity: Dialectics of Flow and Closure* (pp. 1–14). Oxford: Blackwell.
- Meyer, B., & Moors, A. (2005). Introduction. In B. Meyer & A. Moors (Eds.), *Religion, Media, and the Public Sphere* (pp. 1–25). Bloomington: Indiana University Press.
- Murray Li, T. (2000). Articulating Indigenous Identity in Indonesia: Resource Politics and the Tribal Slot. *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, 42(10), 149–179.
- Nasir, J. (2012) 'Freedom of Religion in Nigeria and its Implications for Religious Identity' in IRP Conference 2012: Trends in the Muslim World: Perspectives from Research and Policy, pp. 28–29. The Hague: IRP Project Office.
- Norton, A. R. (1999). The New Media, Civic Pluralism, and the Struggle for Political Reform. In D. F. Eickelman & J. W. Anderson (Eds.), *New media in the Muslim world: The emerging public sphere* (pp. 19–32). Bloomington: Indiana University Press.
- Outhwaite, W. (1994). *Habermas: A critical introduction*. Stanford: Stanford University Press.
- Roy, O. (2012). The transformation of the Arab world. *Journal of Democracy*, 23(3), 5–18.

- Salvatore, A., & LeVine, M. (2005). Introduction: Reconstructing the Public Sphere in Muslim Majority Societies. In A. Salvatore & M. LeVine (Eds.), *Religion, Social Practice, and Contested Hegemonies: Reconstructing the Public Sphere in Muslim Majority Societies* (pp. 1–26). New York: Palgrave MacMillan.
- Sani Umar, M. (2009) ‘Islam and the Public Sphere in Africa: Overcoming the Dichotomies’. Institute for the Study of Islamic Thought in Africa (ISITA) Working Paper 09–009. Northwestern University, Chicago: The Roberta Buffett Center for International and Comparative Studies.
- Taylor, C. (1995). *Philosophical arguments*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Willemsse, K. (2007a). *‘One Foot in Heaven’: Narratives on Gender and Islam in Darfur, West-Sudan*. Leiden: Brill Publishers.
- Willemsse, K. (2007b). “In my father’s house”. Gender, Islam and the construction of a gendered public sphere in Darfur’. *Journal of Islamic Studies*, 27, 72–113.