

Dimensions of Ethnic Boundary-Making: Experiences of Young Muslims and Christians in Religious Transnational Fields in Oslo



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ABSTRACT

This article examines the religious transnational orientation among young Muslims and Christians in Oslo. The study draws upon Andreas Wimmer's (2013) theory of ethnic boundaries to analyse the characteristics of the ethnic boundary-making emerge within a religious transnational field, and how social closure, language, ideological framing and sociopolitical dimensions contribute to the ethnic boundary-making. The data consist of 22 qualitative interviews with young people between 16 and 35 years old.

The article shows that most young Muslims and Christians involved in religious transnational activities influenced by multicultural, cosmopolitan ideas and interfaith collaborations. Some youths, however, are involved in religious transnational activities where there are no forms of social exchange or cooperation with other religious and ethnic groups. Some groups use their native language to reinforce the ethnic boundaries, providing a link between their religion and nationality. Others use language to establish generational differences between young people and their parents. As for the ideological framing, the findings show those boundary-making efforts that emphasize the incorporation of Islam in the West. The sociopolitical dimension refers to the classificatory struggles of Muslims with right-wing politicians who argue Muslims in Europe and Norway represent a danger to Western democracy and values.

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INTRODUCTION

In recent decades, Norway has experienced great demographic changes due to immigration. Many immigrant groups have different forms of transnational networks involving the receiving country, the country of origin and sometimes a third country where many individuals of the same minority background reside. The backdrop for these transnational networks is usually an assumption that they share one form of common identity or another, often based upon a single place of origin and the cultural and linguistic characteristics that implies (Vertovec 2001). For the children of immigrants, however, the situation may be different. Earlier studies point out that youth with minority backgrounds from the Nordic countries participate in transnational networks and activities that have no direct connection to their parents' country, culture or language of origin (Aarset 2016; Andersson 2012; Haikkola 2011; Schmidt 2005).

This article deals with religious transnational orientations among young Muslims and Christians in Oslo. Employing Wimmer's (2013) theory on ethnic boundaries, I raise the following question: What dimensions among youth emerge on the religious transnational field¹ and how do those dimensions contribute to ethnic boundary-making?

Ethnicity can result both from ascription by outsiders and a subjective choice, negotiated in connection to an ethnic group that is demarcated from others (Barth 1969). As a boundary, ethnicity divides people into groups of 'them' and 'us'. 'Ethnic boundaries' means visible or invisible qualities that people use to understand themselves or others as a part of a group. These include historical narratives, geographical location, traditions, language and religion (Mitchell 2010: 54). Ethnic boundaries also concern which groups we socialise with, and what type of contact we have with different groups (Wimmer 2013).

'Transnationalism' has been described as contact between individuals or organisations across national borders (Basch, Schiller, & Szanton 2005). In studies of immigrants, the term is used to describe the relationship established and maintained with people in their country of origin and other countries in the diaspora.² This is a process whereby immigrants – through their daily activities and social, economic, religious and political relations – create social relationships that cross national borders (Basch, Schiller, & Szanton 2005). Here, the term encompasses religious transnational activities and relationships that link immigrants and their descendants in Norway with individuals, religious organisations, groups or institutions within many states and across their borders (Levitt & Schiller 2004: 1010). These activities include the celebration of rites or festivals abroad or in Norway, youth conferences related to religious themes and summer camps. Participation in transnational religious activities does not necessarily include travelling to another country; it can also be visits from another country, or participation in networks via internet fora. All these aspects make transnational networks and activities places for innovation regarding ethnic boundary-making.

The congregations this article focuses on are the Coptic Orthodox Eritrean Church in Norway (CEC), the Nordic Chinese Christian Church in Oslo (NCCC), the Islamic Cultural

1 The term religious transnational field includes religious activities and relationships that connect descendants of immigrants in Norway with individuals, religious groups, or institutions within many states and across their borders. This is explained in more detail in the definition of transnationalism on page 3.

2 I define 'diaspora' as a dispersed population living in several countries but sharing a national identity, country background or a region of the world (Andersson, 2010).

Centre (ICC) and the Islamic Association – Rabita. Each congregation is located in Oslo. The study covers young people who were born or raised in Norway, but who each have one or both parents who immigrated to Norway. Informants are male and female, and all are active congregation members.

PREVIOUS STUDIES OF RELIGIOUS TRANSNATIONAL ACTIVITIES

Earlier research conducted among American Christian and Muslim communities (Ebaugh & Chafetz 2000; Schmidt 2005), and young Muslims in Europe, provides a range of examples of minority background Christian and Muslim youth participating in varying religious transnational activities, both with and without links to their parents' country of origin (Erdal & Borchgrevink 2017; Haikkola 2011; Jacobsen 2011). For example, according to Ebaugh and Chafetz (2000), in Houston, Texas, faith communities serve as central transnational networks for migrants and their children.

The congregations help maintain contact with the country of origin, while nurturing independence. Migrants no longer need to travel to their homeland to participate in rituals. Instead, religious specialist from their country of origin visit and lead the congregation in those practices. Schmidt (2005) found that although young Muslims in Sweden, Denmark and the United States prioritised their local Muslim community practices, they also participated in transnational conferences with international experts on Islam organised by local Muslim youth organisations.

Several studies also report that minority youth intentionally amalgamate culture and identity from more than one cultural tradition (Andersson 2010; Vertovec 1999). According to Jacobsen (2011), young Norwegian Muslims form one part of transnational religious networks with other youths from differing countries. The youths see themselves as a part of a global community of Muslims with whom they share ideas concerning universal values. Andersson (2012) claims that Norwegian and European youths create differing forms of hybrid identities that function as frameworks for various types of transnational engagement throughout Europe. These hybrid identities can be understood as a collective effort to achieve solidarity through difference, based on an imagined social identity that emerges from the young people's experiences of being excluded from different national identities in Europe. Boundary studies conducted in the US and Europe demonstrate ethnicity-related negotiations concerning identity markers among young Muslims and Christians (Alba 2005; Jacobson 1997; Modood 2010). Religious and ethnic subcultures subsequently result in new boundaries within ethnic groups and religious communities (Synnes 2018).

Other studies of minority youths have focused on transnationalism as a flow of constructed styles or trends, social institutions and everyday practices that do not necessarily follow the traditional pattern of ethnicity and nationality as being the most important identity markers for minority youths (Aarset 2016; Back 2002; Gilroy 2000; Smith & Guarnizo 1998). Aarset (2016) shows that religious transnational relations are somewhat more fluid. Religious transnationalism becomes a consequence of practical conditions, for example, the parents want the children to receive better follow-up through one-on-one religious teaching online, and that they at the same time develop language skills with a religious teacher abroad. Erdal and Borchgrevink's work on Islamic charity (2017) among young Muslims show that religious ideals are a motivating factor for engagements in emergencies, poverty reduction or development abroad. While migrants draw on both transnational relations and Islamic charity to

engage in various forms of development work in their countries of origin, descendants are more open to engaging in countries unrelated to their parents' country of origin. This approach downplays the ethnic self-identification of minority families and move away from the idea of hybrid identities.

The abovementioned body of research shows the importance of transnational activities and networks for minority youths' negotiation of the ethnic boundaries. This article further contributes to the research on religious transnational activity among young Muslims and Christians with a minority background.

THEORETICAL APPROACH TO ETHNIC BOUNDARIES

Many theoretical perspectives on ethnic boundaries are based on Fredrik Barth's (1969) study *Ethnic Groups and Boundaries*. Barth argued that cultural aspects of any ethnic group are dependent upon time and context. Ethnic groups are created and modified through interactions with other groups both within and outside the boundaries they establish. This is a process of social inclusion and exclusion in which ethnic groups set boundaries and define who belongs and who does not (Barth 1969: 13–14).

Following Barth, Andreas Wimmer (2009: 970) argued that ethnic boundaries are the result of the classificatory struggles and negotiations between actors situated in a social field. The strategy of ethnic boundary-making those actor adopt dependent on the institutional order, distribution of power and political networks.

Wimmer (2013: 80–83) also claimed that ethnic boundary-making has four dimensions: political, social closure, cultural difference and stability with the meaning of these varying from group to group. The political dimension within ethnic boundaries refers to how groups use ethnicity for political representation and alliances. Social closure refers to the social networks and exchanges groups experience with one another. Groups may isolate themselves from other groups because of choice, exclusion or discrimination. Wimmer attributes cultural differences (2013: 88–89) to language, racial phenotypes and those subjective cultural differences that make ethnic boundaries appear 'natural' and reproduced. The final dimension is stability; Wimmer claims that some boundaries are often relatively stable and not just based on imagined similarities and differences, thus persisting over time and generations.

Wimmer's four dimensions have informed and guided this study as similar findings emerged within the religious transnational field of the participating youth. The dimensions unique to this study are social closure (isolation and inclusion), language, ideological framing and sociopolitical dimension.

This article contributes to research on religious transnationalism by connecting Wimmer's (2013) theory on ethnic boundaries to empirical literature on transnationalism among young people and uses informants' stories of religious transnational activities to stimulate a more general discussion of what these activities say about the boundary work youths from minority backgrounds carry out.

CONTEXT: IMMIGRANT CONGREGATION IN OSLO

In 1970, the immigrant population in Norway accounted for only 1.5% of the total population (Vassenden & Andersson 2011). The number of Norwegians born to immigrant parents accounted for 0.06% of the entire population. As of July 2019, the same category accounted for 3.4% of the Norwegian population (Kirkeberg et al. 2019).

Although the Lutheran Church of Norway continues to play a significant role in society and as an ethnic identity marker, various congregations outside the Church of Norway have experienced strong growth in recent decades. This growth is due primarily to recent immigration. There are approximately 150 Christian immigrant congregations and 150 mosque and Muslim organisations across the country (Augland 2010; Regjeringen 2017). The four congregations in this study have been active in Norway for 30–40 years and are therefore well-established faith communities. They have varying forms of transnational links with organisations and religious institutions in other countries. They vary in membership and ethnic make-up, but all have established youth groups and a high degree of participation of youth from both genders.

The CEC in Oslo was founded by Eritrean migrants in 1985. The congregation is a part of the Eritrean Orthodox Church, Tewahdo, and shares the same theological foundation as the Oriental Orthodox Church with the Coptic, Syrian, Armenian, Indian and Ethiopian Orthodox churches (Synnes 2018). A characteristic of the Orthodox churches in the diaspora, as well as Norway, is that instead of gathering across nationality as is expected of the Orthodox Church, they tend to establish branches of their national congregations with close relationships to the Church in the country of origin of its members (Thorbjørnsrud 2015: 569). In Norway, it has over 1000 registered members. The majority are migrants from Eritrea, but many are youths who were born and raised in Norway. The youth group consists of around 80 individuals between 14 and 26 years old.

NCCC was established by Chinese immigrants at the beginning of the 1980s. It is one of seven Evangelical Chinese migrant congregations in the Nordic region that constitute a network of Nordic Chinese congregations. It cooperates with similar congregations in the United States and Canada. They have no formal links to the historic Protestant Church community, but define themselves as Evangelical. Many Asian Evangelical Churches adapt theologically and organisationally to other congregations in the United States and Europe (Synnes 2019; Min 2010: 146–147). Protestantism in the congregations is not closely linked to culture and traditions from members' country of origin. Thus, emphasis is placed on a Universalist understanding of religion, and religious identity is often elevated at the expense of ethnicity (Min 2010: 5–6).

The congregation has around 150 members, 90 of whom are adults and the rest are children or youths. The youth group consists of around 25 individuals.

ICC was founded in 1974 by some of the first Pakistani work migrants. The aim was to present Islam as a universal religion in a European context (Vogt 2008: 38–40). Theologically, ICC is associated with Deobandi, a Sunni Islamist–originating movement in the Indian sub-continent, and with Jamaat-i Islami, a Pakistani political party (Vogt 2008: 41–43). Today, there are several ethnic groups connected to ICC, though the majority still have Pakistani origins. The congregation has over 4000 registered members. ICC has two different youth groups for females and for males, together making up around 100 regular participants in their activities.

Rabita was founded in 1987 and was the first mosque in Norway, not affiliated to a specific national or ethnic group. Arabic has been used as the main language since the beginning, but today more and more activities are being conducted in Norwegian and English. Theologically, the mosque can be linked to the *wasai* approach within Sunni Islam. It allows for the modification of some religious laws for Muslims living as minorities in the West, and is considered theologically liberal (Shavit 2012: 418). The congregation has over 3000 registered members. Rabita has its own youth group, with around 50 members of both genders between the ages of 15 and 28.

Unlike many others, Muslim congregations in Norway, Rabita and ICC are multi-ethnic and emphasise Islamic identity as something universal while de-emphasising particularistic national or sectarian identities (Synnes 2018). The two Christian congregations are linked to a specific ethnic group in different way. While CEC is strongly associated with culture and institutions in Eritrea, NCCC is to a greater degree connected to other Chinese migrant congregations in other Western countries.

I have selected the congregations based on the congregations were well established Christians and Muslims in Norway, and that they had existed for a longer period (30–40 years). The congregations had a high representation of young people between the ages of 16 and 35 who had lived most of their upbringing in Norway. Another criterion was that the congregations should be in Oslo because the city has the highest number of migrant congregations in Norway and the largest proportion of people with a migrant background. Some of criteria may have affected the basis of comparison, since the congregations are not only different, but also cannot be said to represent all Christian and Muslim immigrant congregations in Oslo (Synnes, 2019).

The congregations' histories, theological and ideological traditions, relationships to different ethnic groups, languages and national backgrounds are important references in the boundary-changing activities of the young informants. If all the congregations had been either multi-ethnic or oriented towards a single national group, some of the results in this study may have been different.

METHODS AND DATA

The article is based on ethnographic fieldwork in the form of participatory observations, interviews and document analysis. The study follows the ethical guidelines for research and has been approved by the Norwegian Centre for Research Data (NSD). Fieldwork encompassed attending several youth activities between September 2016 and March 2017. Data on the proceedings, attendance, participation, vernacular, messages and presentation were collected. Potential groupings among those present was also considered. Access was provided to various types of digital or written materials, such as newspapers and other sources of information about or produced by the congregations. The study included 22 (12 females and 10 males) semi-structured interviews with young people ages 16–35. Each of the participants was born and/or spent most of their childhood in Norway. To preserve anonymity, congregant roles were excluded, and pseudonyms used.

The interviews took on average 50 minutes. Participants were asked about their interactions in Norway or elsewhere with other Muslims/Christians or others of the same ethnic origin; of the extent of their participation with various forms of religious youth networks and its importance; whether there were major differences between these networks and their local congregation; and where they felt most at home either the mosque/church, among friends or in the network. Only young people were interviewed in this study and any knowledge of their parents' religious and ethnical orientations came from their responses; the views and comparisons of the youth are central to most of the analysis.

Snowball sampling, or word of mouth, facilitated recruitment as the few individuals with which I started put me in contact with others. I also sent emails and was introduced to key youth group figures who also identified promising participants. Much of the recruitment occurred during meetings and events. The participants

contacted via email as well as those recruited during events received the NDS-approved information letter, which explained the topic and reason for the project.

The analysis consisted of transcribing interviews and identifying recurring patterns of thoughts, attitudes or behaviour. The patterns identified as dimensions are similar to Wimmer's dimensions within ethnic boundary-making. However, the ethnic boundary-making in this study occurred within the religious transnational field. There was no religious component to Wimmer's work.

THE DIMENSIONS OF THE ETHNIC BOUNDARY-MAKING

The youths in this study participate in a range of transnational religious activities. Some relate to their parent's country of origin or a country in the diaspora, whereas others have a more international and diverse perspective. My analysis yielded four categories that shall be used to organise the findings. Comparable to Wimmer's theory on boundary-making, I argue that social closure, language, ideological framing and sociopolitical propensities, termed dimensions, play roles in the ethnic boundary-making that takes place within the religious transnational field of the youth in this study.

The term 'social closure' encompasses ways that social isolation or strong links to networks in the country of origin, and inclusion may contribute to a monoethnic, multicultural and sometimes multi-religious transnational proclivity. Language refers to the practice of associating native languages with religious and national identities or when it is used to distinguish generational differences between young people and their parents based on linguistic preferences.

The ideological framing is used to analyse the Muslim organisations' connection to theological movements that promote the modification of religious laws for Muslims living in the West. The sociopolitical dimension is witnessed when the intellectual and pan-Islamic approach of Rabita and ICC are discussed along with the topic of right-wing politicians and critics of Islam claiming that Muslims in Europe represent a danger to Western democracy and values.

SOCIAL CLOSURE

The transnational orientation of youth in this study can be understood in light of what Wimmer (2013) calls social closure, which in some cases may contribute to the social isolation of young people as well as show a strong association with networks in the countries of origin of the dominant immigrant groups. This is the case with the CEC where the youth participate in transnational activities that are more monoethnic and characterised by the national and ethnic identity of their congregation. In other cases, it contributes to the promotion of social inclusion between the youth and multicultural groups with similar or varying religious and ethnic backgrounds. Both youth groups at the two Muslim congregations, the ICC and Rabita, and at the Christian NCCC are the examples. It is important to note that in this last case, the social aspect of activities is emphasised. These are organised by young people to socialise with other people from different backgrounds thus downplaying the cultural and tradition-bearing aspects of religion (Synnes 2018).

Social isolation and the links to institutions in the country of origin

The transnational activities that young people in CEC participate in involve little or no form of social exchange or cooperation with religious transnational networks,

organisations or people outside the Eritrean Coptic Church. This form of social isolation may affect the transnational orientation of the youth. Many of the activities that the Christian Eritrean youth engage in stand out by not being special activities purely related to the young people's network. Their activities also have an educational character where the aim is to teach the members specific religious traditions from the country (Synnes 2018). As Semira, one of informants says:

We have monks who come from Eritrea on important days to teach us.
That's for the whole congregation, there is nobody who comes just for the young people, I have never seen that.

The youths in the CEC do not travel to take part in religious transnational activities abroad, but the congregation on special occasions usually receives visits from religious leaders from Eritrea. This is because most of the religious leaders and staff in the CEC are laypersons; only priests or monks carry out rites or instruct. This is true for the mass and other rituals, being held in Ge'ez, the liturgical language. Subsequently, they have close ties with the Coptic Eritrean Church in Eritrea.

The CEC stands out in this study because it is the only congregation which has such a strong connection to its country of origin, and it has neither transnational cooperation with other countries nor a global perspective. The transnational activities are organised by the adults in the congregation, and the youth group participates alongside other members.

The preserving of parents' national and religious identity

Among many Christian Orthodox youth in Oslo, similar studies show that migrant congregations play a central role in preserving parents' national identity among many Christian Orthodox youths in Oslo (Synnes 2018; Thorbjørnsrud 2015). Similar transnational religious activities also appear among Catholics in Norway and African Pentecostal congregations in Europe (Adogame & Spickard 2010; Mæland 2015). Participation is understood to be a duty, and it is through this that youths learn about religious traditions and rituals (Bankston & Zhou 1996). Some youths in my study take a critical position towards this way of teaching religious traditions in CEC. Ester, another informant says:

They use Greek words [Ge'ez] there, and it's really difficult to understand...
you learn things, but you learn them again and again and again. You learn the same things. It's like writing lines. They're always repeating. You finish reading the book, and then you have to read it again and again.

The citation above shows that when Ester says, 'They're always repeating', she is being critical of the way religion is taught in the congregation. In a study of young Muslims in Oslo, Jacobsen (2011) also found criticisms. Her findings showed, however, that Muslim young people see youth organisations as ideal learning arenas because of the opportunity to dialogue on the content presented. In contrast to the mosque, all knowledge sharing is conducted in Norwegian and youth from diverse ethnic backgrounds meet. In my study, none of the informants from the CEC reported participating in similar youth organisations.

Although most of the youth did not criticise the events organised in the churches, some of them expressed a desire for activities that they could attend with youths from other groups and ethnic backgrounds. Some of them expressed a desire to

socialise with Ethiopians, which is a group they believe shares similar religious and cultural traditions. This is what Esther says:

I would have liked to have contact with Ethiopians who are orthodox. Everything is the same, there is no difference between us. I like that they have more faith. In Norway, I have noticed that there is a bad relationship between Eritreans and Ethiopians. I don't know why. That should not be the case. It's bad, I wish it was a better relationship and that we could share a Church.

Neither the NCC, Rabita nor the ICC, are as concerned with the culture of the country of origin as the CEC. The CEC is the only congregation with ties to the religious organisation and ethnic majority group, the Eritrean Orthodox Church, of its country of origin. This could be, among others, the reason for such ethnic boundary-making.

Hybrid Scandinavian–Chinese community

Summer camp is the most important transnational activity for youths in the NCCC. It is a hybrid Scandinavian–Chinese social event where Chinese identities are maintained and strong local ties to Norway and Scandinavia are recognised. Daniel explained:

[...] the Church has arranged a summer camp every year since I've been attending. It gathers up the different congregations in Scandinavia. So out of that I have a lot of friends who are Chinese Christians from outside Norway.

The camp is described by most of the NCCC youths as the year's most important social activity. This is when the youths have the opportunity to meet other Scandinavian youths with the same Chinese Christian background, and the youth in my study describe the social dimension as one of the most vital motivations. One of the informants, Erik, says the following on summer camp:

It is very good for us to meet people from other countries as well. And understand how they feel, and how they can help us, and we they. So it is very important for us to have contact with them.

Erik interpreted his participation in religious activities as a social expression and not as a religious or educational duty. The social relationships developed during transnational activities are presented as more important than reproducing the group's religious traditions (Synnes 2018; Bankston & Zhou 1996). Another participant, Daniel, said the following when he was asked where he felt most at home:

It's probably in summer camp I would say. It's because it's something I grew up with. There are lots of good memories from vacation. A week where you have free time from everything, no school, nothing, so you can do what you want in a way.

According to a participant, the annual summer camp led to other transnational collaborations such as a Nordic–Chinese youth network, where youths from the various countries collaborate and maintain contact. Eloy, one of the young people in NCCC, said:

I am a part of the NCCC youth network, which we simply call 'Network'. There are young people from Sweden, Finland and Norway. The leaders all

keep in touch, and it's we who arrange all of the camps [...] Just now we are discussing the vision and aims of the group. There is also a question of how we are going to grow in all the congregations, in all the local congregations. It's important because it provides a lot of inspiration and a strong sense of teamwork. There's a bond even though we live apart from each other in several different countries, but we have taken many trips to Finland and Sweden, and in between we also travel around a lot as friends.

The Nordic–Chinese network does not necessarily contribute to a legacy of religious belonging dominated by Chinese culture, as is the case among young people in the CEC. Their transnational mobilisation does not occur only in relation to Chinese culture. Most of the NCCC youth focus principally on their shared Scandinavian or Norwegian identity, while having an identity as an ethnic minority. These transnational activities cross borders and point to complex connections with different Nordic–Chinese groups at different levels, but primarily have a local base in Norway (Aarset 2016: 449).

I did not find similar orientations among those in the CEC. Although most of the informants in this study were born and/or raised in Norway or Scandinavia, such forms of ethnic boundary-making, as explained earlier, may also be made possible by the two congregations' differing relationships to institutions and mainstream culture in the countries of origin. While the CEC has a historical link to a majority church in Eritrea and is a branch of the Eritrean Church in Norway (Synnes 2019; Thorbjørnsrud 2015), Chinese Protestantism is in a minority position in China and not integrated into mainstream Chinese nationalism. Since its inception, the NCCC has been concerned with the Chinese people in the diaspora living in the Nordic countries (Synnes 2019).

Transnational network building and multi-religious dialogue

Several young Muslims from Rabita were concerned with the importance of transnational network building across cultural backgrounds and religious affiliations. These religious networks are more complex, and with an unclear, if not without, direct relationship to the parents' country of origin. Two variants of these transnational activities that the young people from Rabita and the ICC took part in are: 1) activities influenced by cosmopolitan ideas and a focus on network building and interreligious cooperation; 2) activities that emphasise that religion is universal and not linked to a specific culture or ethnic group, downplaying the cultural and tradition-bearing aspects of religion and emphasising the social dimension.

One activity that focuses on this is a large annual conference, Reviving the Islamic Spirit (RIS). The website of RIS,³ describes RIS as follows:

The RIS convention is an attempt by the young Muslims in the West to help overcome new challenges of communication and integration. The convention aims to promote stronger ties within North American society through reviving the Islamic tradition of education, tolerance and introspection across cultural lines through points of commonality and respect. Attendees and speakers attend from around the world, including the United States, Europe and the Middle East.

One of the Muslim informants from Rabita scheduled to attend was Ali, who reported:

I find it very exciting and cool to go travelling with people who have the same mindset, same vision, possibly different background [...] [RIS] is

3 Reviving the Islamic Spirit; <https://www.ristalks.com/about.php>.

among the biggest conferences in the world in Toronto, there are usually thousands of delegates, it's gigantic[...] And we have a lot of focus on solidarity, both when it comes to Muslims and non-Muslims, and this year and last year they have something they call 'interfaith dialogue', where they gather a rabbi, a priest and an imam and then they talk about how they can work together, and how we can learn from each other.

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The difference between some networks such as RIS and traditional immigrant networks is that their leaders are university educated, born in Europe and the United States, and currently reside there. Its participants, however, come from every continent. Although Islam dominates, interfaith dialogues and a moral cosmopolitanism that emphasises justice and equity regardless of religious affiliation (Horst & Olsen 2021: 6) are priorities. They communicate through non-governmental organisations (NGOs), multinational publishers and social media outlets, and are critical of traditional local religious leaders.

Another example of network building and multi-religious dialogue is The Umma Conference, arranged by the youth in Rabita for Muslims in Norway. The conference is transnational in that the speakers are invited from other countries. The conference has a global focus and is 'driven by a universalistic, border-crossing interpretation of Islam, and the youth assert themselves as members of a global religious community' (Jacobsen 2011: 107).

At the Umma Conference, Islam is presented as the most important identity marker and ethnic affiliation is less relevant. Omar says:

The Umma Conference, [...] we arrange for ourselves, or on our own initiative. We invite various speakers. That are maybe a bit better with young people, who can talk to young people. And it's often in English. At conferences like this, it's also for the social part that many young people, both Muslims and non-Muslims, can meet up and socialise and have a nice time.

According to Linge (2014: 44), engagement among young Muslims in Islamic revival movements in Norway and Europe among young Muslims occurred amidst a paradigm shift in the immigration debate. Until the late 1980s, the ethnic background of labour migrants was underscored whereas the importance of Muslim identity grew in Norwegian public debate throughout the 90s (Hagelund 2003). The youths found themselves displaced identifying neither with their parents' 'ethnic mosques' nor in the increasingly Islam-critical Norwegian discourse. Subsequently, the earliest Muslim youth organisations mobilised across ethnic divisions to counter discrimination against Muslims – something that Muslim congregations had never managed. However, the youth do not replace their parents' ethnic and cultural identity with one of being Norwegian, but many focus on the global and universal.

These transnational activities provide to Muslim youth opportunities to communicate and deliberate on religious life and global issues with peers across borders. They create networks that downplay language, nationality and cultural traditions as the most important dimensions of the religious identity (Andersson 2010; Jacobsen 2011).

THE PARADOXICAL ROLE OF LANGUAGE IN ETHNIC BOUNDARY-MAKING

As for Wimmer's (2013) dimension of cultural differences, my findings demonstrate that language both unites and divides. Among the youth and their transnational peers, language facilitates activities. However, between young people and their parents, it nurtures generational differences.

Native language

In an interview with Eliassen (2006), a leader of one of the sister congregations of the CEC in Stavanger said:

We hold worship services with the help of a deacon and our own resources every Sunday, besides Sunday school and training in the Eritrean language Tigrinya. We would like to have our own priest, but we must go to Eritrea to get one.

By teaching the Tigrinya language and keeping in touch with religious leaders and institutions in Eritrea, the congregation is provided with Eritrean cultural and religious traditions. In this way, distinctive features of Eritrean culture and religion contribute some stability to their ethnic identification. They focused only on creating a strong local Eritrean community and culture in Norway through 'importing' the reinforcing elements of 'cultural stuff' from Eritrea.

The bilingual transnational context

Activities during the NCCC summer camp are divided by age – children, youth and adults – and language. While the activities for the adults occur in Chinese, for the youth activities are in a Scandinavian language or in English. Linn, one of the participants at the NCCC, says:

We are actually quite used to speaking English too, because we usually have a camp during the summer to which we invite all the different Chinese churches. With Norwegian and Swedish it works well, but with Finnish we have to use English instead because it's more difficult to understand. We also get help from abroad too, where they send people to help us with the running of it, and they are often from the USA or Canada, so they speak English and so in a way we are used to it.

The transnational activities with which young people in the NCCC participate are complex and therefore English and Scandinavian play an important role. Several young people noted that there are substantial generational differences regarding the language that they would like to use in their activities, they have a limited understanding of their parents' language. Ali a boy from the Muslim congregation Rabita says:

I think that our main language should be Norwegian, but that we should preserve Arabic. And I'm noticing that the congregation is gradually becoming more Norwegianised. There's more of a main focus on Norwegian, but at the same time I think there should be some English as well. Because most good speakers/lecturers and so on are from the USA, Canada and Britain, so they speak English, so I think we can use it

because the young people understand English. So I think there should be opportunities for that, but that the main focus should be on Norwegian. That's what I'm pushing for, but it's not such a hard battle because the older generation actually agree, and they want to adapt and help us to pass on the baton.

Congregations recognise these language-related needs and facilitate various types of activities in Norwegian and/or English. This is evident in the two Muslims congregations, the ICC and Rabita, which are more multicultural than the two Christian congregations and hold bilingual activities for their congregations. This also happened in the youth group from NCC.

IDEOLOGICAL FRAMING

Since their inception, Rabita and the ICC, unlike other mosques in Norway, have been known for their intellectual and pan-Islamic approach, which interprets Islam in the West according to the social, cultural and political conditions of the country where its followers reside (Shavit 2012: 418; Vogt 2008: 140). The act of young Muslims taking part in activities is considered as the contextualisation of Islam in Europe. This mirrors the European Islam promoted by Tariq Ramadan (2004), who argues that Islam in Europe should consider the cultural reality of Europe. In doing so, Islam would align with the constitutions and jurisprudence of the European countries where Muslims live.

Most of the transnational activities with ICC participations were directed at Muslims in other European countries. They meet as congregations or collaborating international organisations. The most important transnational activities with which the youth group in the ICC participate occur under the auspices of the European Muslim Council of Youth. One young member says:

It's something that the first generation actually started, where principally those with Pakistani roots would meet up every year. People from a number of European countries meet annually somewhere in Europe. And then there is a kind of exchange and they report on their activities and how they work, and exchange experiences, so it has been really useful. They also took the decision that there should be something for the young people too. We've been having them for three years, and we had our first trip to England, Leicester [...]. That was the first time we took the youths with us, from Norway, Denmark and England. The following year it was here at ICC, and with people from Sweden, Denmark, Spain, Italy. We had a weekend seminar on the subject 'How can we develop young leaders, the leaders of tomorrow? How can we work together to tackle the challenges we are facing in society today?'

Many of the transnational activities with which the youth participated occurred under the auspices of organisations that were founded by representatives of their parents' generation. The youth work birthed from either effort by their parents' generation or by the congregation. The youth argue, however, that the topics discussed are unrelated to Pakistan or to other Muslim cultures or countries. In the transnational

activities, the question of Norwegian or European Muslim identity is often discussed. One youth leader from Rabita says:

[...] in a way, our primary vision is that this is how we are going to develop a Norwegian Muslim identity. We will develop, teach and train up young people who will be as secure in their Muslim identity as they are in their Norwegian identity. Each one should never be at the expense of the other, and they should never be opposites. This is kind of my mantra, and I've got into the habit of showing people a picture of a girl who was active in the organisation walking around in a *bunad* [Norwegian national dress] and a hijab.

The youth leader in Rabita expresses a desire to combine the Muslim and Norwegian identities, further expanding the boundaries of what it means to be Norwegian. This theme is often brought up among the Muslim informants. By describing themselves as Norwegian-Muslim, the young people aimed to expand the ethnic boundary to include both their religious identity – historically associated with groups of immigrants from Pakistan, Morocco and Algeria – and Norwegian citizenship and identity – historically associated with Christianity (Synnes 2018). The trend is similar to what Modood (2010) calls 'moderate Muslims', a group of Muslims in Western countries that attempts to integrate various aspects of Muslim and Western reasoning and conduct so that there is no clear boundary or contrast between the two.

THE SOCIOPOLITICAL DIMENSION WITHIN EUROPEAN MUSLIMS STRUGGLES

Wimmer (2009: 970) argue that 'ethnic boundaries are the outcome of the classificatory struggles and negotiations between actors situated in a social field'. In Norway and the rest of Europe, the debate about immigration and integration, especially related to Muslims, often stirs up great interest and emotion. The political salience of this trend resides in that in recent years, right-wing politicians and critics of Islam have gone as far as to claim that Muslims in Europe represent a danger to Western democracy and values. Such tendencies can result in groups expressing hatred towards Norway and claiming that young Muslims will never be Norwegian or European (Joppke 2018; Sandberg 2018: 168). Many of the Muslim participants are familiar with these attitudes. One says:

Many people say, for example, the Islamic faith that comes from abroad with those who have moved here does not fit Norwegian culture, and that there is a contrast. So, there are many who say 'it's not possible' and 'Muslims are taking over' and 'they cannot follow our values and rules' etc. But on the contrary, I don't think there is a contrast. Being a Muslim and living in a secular Norwegian society goes well together.

At the transnational conferences, Muslim youths from different European countries meet to discuss issues. The primary topic is Islam's adaptability to Western democratic societies. Barths (1969) asks whether this trend be understood as a process of social inclusion and exclusion in which Norwegian and other European Muslim engages. It is a process where actors set boundaries and define participants. Here, the question raised is whether citizens with Muslims backgrounds can be accepted as Norwegian and European.

CONCLUSION

In this article, I have explored the ethnic boundary-making that occurs in the religious transnational field and that social closure, language, ideological framing and sociopolitical dimensions play a role in the formation, maintenance and weakening of ethnic boundaries. In the analysis, I argue that the social isolation and the strong links to religious institutions in the country of origin may contribute to monoethnic transnationals orientations. Other young Christians and Muslims participated in transnational religious activities consisting of international, cosmopolitan and interreligious thoughts and exchanges. The language dimension was relevant for the use of native language associated with religion and national identity, but also to establish generational differences between the young people the previous generation.

Ideological framing also plays an important role in the ethnic boundary-making. This is particularly evident among the young associate at the ICC and Rabita who are theological, associated with Islamist movements (Deobandi and wasai) that stress the importance of modification of some religious laws for Muslims living in the West (Shavit 2012: 418; Vogt 2008: 41–43). Finally, with the discussion on immigration, and integration, I highlighted the presence of a sociopolitical dimension especially witnessed among Muslims who deliberate on European Islam and boundary-making.

Wimmer's (2013) theory provided a framework for identifying dimensions –social closure, historical stability, cultural distinctiveness and political salience – encountered in the ethnic boundary-making of young Muslims and Christians in immigrant congregations. Further exploration may contribute to find additional reasons for their existence. Additionally, research on individual negotiations of ethnic boundaries needs to be further investigated.

COMPETING INTERESTS

The author has no competing interests to declare.

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