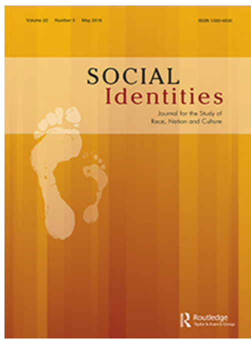

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Practices of active citizenship among migrant youth: beyond conventionalities

Fethi Mansouri and Liudmila Kirpitchenko

Alfred Deakin Institute for Citizenship and Globalisation, School of Humanities and Social Sciences, Deakin University, Melbourne, VIC, Australia

ABSTRACT

This paper discusses the empirical manifestations of the notion of active citizenship in the context of the experiences of migrant youth. It focuses on the practices of active citizenship through involvement in social networks and creative civic engagement. In doing so, the article examines the complex and multi-faceted nature of social networking among migrant youth and the extent to which their approach to engagement is dependent on the specificities of the local environment, the type of social issues involved, and the cultural norms of one's own cultural heritage. Key empirical insights are derived from quantitative and qualitative research conducted among migrant youth of African, Arabic-speaking and Pacific Island backgrounds in Australia. These empirical insights are used to examine the changing perceptions of active citizenship among migrant youth, and the possibilities offered through non-traditional networks to engender civic engagement and social participation.

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Active citizenship; cultural diversity; intercultural relations; migrant youth; social networks

Introduction

This paper focuses on practices of active citizenship among migrant youth, building on the fundamental premise of the social capital literature (Bourdieu, 1986; Coleman, 1988; Putnam, 1993, 2000) that strong engagement in societal networks generally entails a range of positive social, mental and attitudinal outcomes (Portes, 2000; Putnam, 2007; Vyncke et al., 2013; Woolcock, 1998). Migrant communities, in particular youth segments, are a pertinent example from which to explore the various manifestations of civic engagement and active citizenship as their settlement experiences are, in general, fluid and unstable within a context of negotiating the establishment of new social ties and networks in the host country. Migrant youth experience relatively more unpredictable and vulnerable conditions owing to their adolescent developmental stage, where identity formation can be most susceptible to the influences of fluid social networking practices (Kroger, 2004) and not only fixed societal structures (Block, 2013; Giddens, 1984).

For migrant youth in Australia, coming of age at a time when political and public discourse is signalling a retreat from multiculturalism is particularly challenging at the level of everyday negotiation of intercultural relations and self-identity (Giddens, 1991;

CONTACT Liudmila Kirpitchenko liudmila.k@deakin.edu.au
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Moran, 2011; Walsh, 2014). In the current environment dominated by insecurities and vulnerabilities agenda, migrant youth represent a highly suitable demographic group for exploring the impact of the practices of social engagement on notions of identity, sense of belonging and social engagement.

This is especially the case against a background of increasing critiques of multiculturalism as a social policy which are further undermining the ability of ethno-cultural groups to offer opportunities for initiating and sustaining social networks for youth within their communities and across the broader society at large. Previous research has shown that ethno-cultural specific networks may provide an important and positive resource in negotiating adjustment to a new country, particularly in the settlement stage (Colic-Peisker, 2005; Hagan, 1998). However, if too restrictive, ethno-cultural networks may exhibit a negative impact and end up facilitating ghettoisation (Hardwick, 2003) or the promotion of radical agendas (Tilly, 2007). Migrant youth are in a particularly susceptible position because not all the networks they are engaged with have a positive effect, and some may have a distinctly negative impact (Harris, 2013).

Of foremost concern to policymakers and the public are 'situations in which group solidarity is cemented by a common experience of adversity and opposition to mainstream society' (Portes, 1998, p. 17). Many within the current generation of migrant youth have been subjected to problematised, exclusionary discourses by the majority culture (Triandafyllidou, Modood, & Zapata-Barrero, 2006). In Australia, especially following the racially motivated 2005 Cronulla riots, Arab migrant youth have been associated with deviating behaviours in the public discourse. Migrant youth, often described as 'prone to inter-ethnic conflict, lacking intercultural awareness, in need of values education, dissociated from participatory life and disruptive to community harmony', have become a 'target of anxiety about national security, social cohesion and the future of culturally diverse nations' (Harris, 2013, p. 141).

However, despite the abundance of literature on social capital and social networks, there is still a need for sociologically-informed understanding of the significance of social networks for migrant youth negotiating and contesting notions of belonging and active citizenship. Furthermore, *subjective* and agentive positions of migrant youth negotiating social engagement and political participation have seldom been the focus of systematic empirical investigations. Indeed migrant youth 'are rarely seen as civic actors, creative agents or multicultural citizens in their own right, and the complex realities of their everyday experiences of living in multicultural environments have been overlooked' (Harris, 2013, p. 5). This paper, therefore, addresses these lacunae by examining active agentive stances, self-perceptions and relational attitudes that young people associate with participating in, and belonging to social networks. In approaching migrant youth as active creative agents, this paper draws on Bennett (2003) who coined the term 'self-Actualizing Citizens' to describe people who are 'self-reflexively' involved in meaningful and shifting social networks.

The current social climate of perceived social tensions in many émigré societies, including Australia, highlights the need to develop a more nuanced understanding of the complex nature of intercultural relations processes, in particular among migrant youth (Mansouri, 2015). Both formal and informal networks developed by migrant youth in different contexts have the capacity to impact on the ways they articulate a sense of individual belonging and group membership. Formal and informal social networks are often

interlinked and can operate in either a complementary way or, in the case of informal networks, as a substitute for formal networks and social support structures (Pichler & Wallace, 2007). In this way, social networks can influence the lived experiences of belonging among migrant youth.

Empirical findings on civic participation among migrant youth reported in this paper are framed within the theoretical notion of *active citizenship* defined as extending 'the participatory democratic vision' (Rimmerman, 2011, p. 5) and indicating the ability of full participation in a particular political community. Active citizenship describes 'citizenship-as-desirable-activity' (Kymlicka & Norman, 1994). It acts to supplement 'citizenship-as-legal-status' which describes formal membership in a particular political community. This differentiation between two dimensions of citizenship distinguish between (i) *formal* inclusion coinciding with what passive status provides, and (ii) *substantive* inclusion which can only be achieved through active participation (Abu-Laban, 2014). This paper focuses on the latter dimension. A brief overview of classical articulations of citizenship is provided below before proceeding to a discussion of newer theoretical concepts of citizenship, which are increasingly seen as guarantees for substantive participation and meaningful active citizenship.

Conventional forms of citizenship

Conventional citizenship is closely associated with the idea of contributory rights and entitlements which accompany the status of belonging to a national community. This classical approach was articulated by Marshall and Bottomore (1992, p. 6) who defined citizenship as 'a kind of basic human equality associated with the concept of full membership of a community' adding that the concept was mainly about citizens' rights, progressively achieved in the civil, political and social spheres of societies. Recent scholarship has noted that this classical conception may be seen as describing the mainly *passive* aspects of citizenship (Kymlicka & Norman, 1994). Indeed, Marshall and Bottomore (1992) stresses a consensual society-wide evolution, rather than focusing on conflicting processes and the mobilisation of particular groups. His definition of citizenship as 'a status bestowed on those who are full members of a community' (Marshall & Bottomore, 1992, p. 18) reveals that the ideal of citizenship does not need to be internalised by the individual, but that it is a political reality created by a state largely concerned with procedural solutions. Such a conception implies that citizenship is dependent on those entitlements bestowed by the state and 'all who possess the status are equal with respect to the rights and duties with which the status is endowed' (Marshall & Bottomore, 1992, p. 18). According to this approach, the community is presented as a passive and unitary recipient of the uniform status, and the fullest expression of citizenship depends almost entirely on guarantees of civil, political and social rights to all. The state, therefore, strives to achieve a 'fuller measure of equality' which is seen as 'an enrichment of the stuff of which the status is made and an increase in the number of those on whom the status is bestowed' (Marshall & Bottomore, 1992, p. 18).

Despite the contemporary critique of the conventional forms of citizenship, rights-based approaches have, nevertheless, influenced many social and political thinkers who rely on this theory to include new types of rights, such as economic, (multi)cultural, and ecological rights. For example, Sassen (1996, p. xiv), a strong advocate of 'economic rights', argues that 'we must consider the possibility that there exists a form of economic citizenship that

empowers and can demand accountability from governments'. Turner (1990, 2001) has also argued in support of Marshall's theory maintaining that the provision of a citizenship status with its contributory rights remains an essential ingredient for the functioning of the state.

Citizenship as activity and participation

The newer approaches to citizenship theories have built on the conventional understanding of citizenship as an articulation of contributory rights, and have advanced it further by highlighting the role of civic participation and engagement in the life of the political community. While conventional approaches to citizenship are reliant on a mostly passive acquisition of rights and accompanying responsibilities, participatory citizenship stresses the active social involvement of individuals in accessing and appropriating these rights (Turner, 1990). This non-conventional approach views citizenship as surpassing its passive status-based and rights-based conception. Citizenship in this tradition is actively reflecting an engaged commitment to the common good and active participation in public affairs. The origins of this approach can be traced to the work of the nineteenth century political philosopher De Tocqueville (2010, pp. 802–803) who highlighted the importance of a vibrant civil society for democracy:

> In democratic countries the science of association is the mother of science; the progress of all the rest depends upon the progress it has made . . . the art of associating together must grow and improve in the same ratio in which the equality of conditions is increased.

Tocqueville's work began a tradition of studying the role of civil society as a key dimension of democracy. In a similar way, after conducting an extensive twenty-year study of regional governance in Italy, Putnam (1993, p. 167) drew the conclusion that the quality of political governance tended to be determined by civil interconnections which he termed 'norms of reciprocity and networks of civic engagement'. Putnam's work was concerned specifically with the active aspect of citizenship, namely, civic participation. A common framework for understanding these phenomena has been the concept of *social capital*. Social capital refers to features of social organisation such as networks, norms, and social trust that facilitate coordination and cooperation for mutual benefit. Social capital tends to be self-reinforcing and cumulative (Putnam, 1995).

In addition to these social manifestations of active engagement and political participation, citizenship also relates to collective affective experiences. In this sense, citizenship is viewed as having a psychological dimension that describes the emotional ties of identity and solidarity maintained with others in the community (Hage, 2009). This psychological dimension evokes 'the quality of belonging – the felt aspects of community membership' (Bosniak, 2000, p. 479) rather than mere formal status of membership. The affective aspect of citizenship is important for understanding the nature of belonging and solidarity that individuals maintain within the nation-state. The concept of 'multicultural' citizenship (Kymlicka & Norman, 1994) further highlights the call for examining allegiances and identifications with particular cultural and social groups *within* the nation-state rather than *to* the nation-state at large.

The affective dimension of citizenship discussed above can also shed light on how different individual identities are contributing to the articulation of common collective identity and the importance of including and recognising differences.

Active citizenship and its diverse practices

In contrast to the traditional understanding of citizenship as an appropriation of rights and responsibilities, recent approaches to citizenship emphasise active involvement and engagement in the practices of citizenship. The idea that the *active* side of citizenship needs to be emphasised has received strong support from many contemporary scholars of citizenship. As Isin (2008, p. 7) reminds us, 'critical studies of citizenship over the last two decades have taught us that what is important is not only that citizenship is a legal status but that it also involves practices of making citizens – social, political, cultural and symbolic'. Indeed, citizenship has two necessary aspects – practice and learning – and as such it 'has to be learnt and practiced among the groups of civil society, not necessarily by joining political parties' (Crick, 2010, p. 22). Similarly, Meehan (2010, p. 115) suggests that active citizenship stands for a combined 'voluntary action and experiential learning'.

Lately, civic engagement has been explored as an integrated construct referred to as 'Active and Engaged Citizenship' (AEC) which includes behavioural, cognitive, and socio-emotional components and, in particular, is comprised of an integration of civic action, civic skills, social connection, and duty (Zaff, Boyd, Lerner, & Lerner, 2010, p. 736). This notion of AEC focuses on those who share a commitment to engage actively in their communities in order to build stronger, healthier, and safer communities. In this context, an active and engaged citizen is a person who possesses a set of civic skills and behaviours, such as a sense of civic self-efficacy, social connections within a community, and a responsibility to a community (Zaff et al., 2010, p. 737). There are many individual and social benefits associated with active civic engagement, including positive contributions to individual development, families' wellbeing, and communities' civic fabrics. Indeed, 'when young people are active citizens and actively engaged in improving the well-being of their communities and their country, their own development is enhanced and civil society benefits' (Zaff et al., 2010, p. 736). Civic engagement forms a part of what it means to be a young person who is socially engaged and politically active (Lerner, 2004). Such individuals take actions that serve their own wellbeing and, at the same time, the wellbeing of parents, peers, community, and society. In this way, engaged young citizens tend to represent 'thriving people' who 'show exemplary positive development in the present and become generative adults who make positive contributions to self, others, and civil society' (Lerner, 2004, p. 4).

Mutually beneficial contributions to self and to society are the cornerstones of Lerner's (2004) theory of positive youth development which is possible in a society that values and supports civic initiatives and individual contributions. This mutually beneficial relationship between person and society is characterised as societal freedom and liberty (Lerner, 2004). This description of 'freedom society' is juxtaposed to Beck's (1992) metaphorical 'risk society', in which the social structures and cultural traditions that previously streamlined individual experiences and identities have been largely dismantled. Rather than relying on established pathways for social engagement, individual experiences are the result of a process of autonomous, individualised, reflexive self-creation. Individuals have effectively become the authors of their own lives, responsible for crafting their own biographies. In the words of Giddens (1991, p. 75), 'the self is seen as reflexive project, for which the individual is responsible. We are, not what we are, but what we make of

ourselves'. Individual projects are no longer bound by the traditional social anxieties in constructing and maintaining their self-identities. Individual projects are seen as more open and flexible undertakings (Giddens, 1991). The active citizenship concept draws from the sociological theory of 'individualisation' (Beck & Beck-Gernsheim, 2001) that describes a modern society with increasingly disintegrated social structures and greater demands on individual choices, initiatives and undertakings. In such modern societies, young people are increasingly held responsible for their own successes and accountable for their own failures. In these conditions, civic engagement can be seen as a core outcome of positive youth development (Lerner, 2004). Understanding and enhancing youth civil engagement becomes 'a critical facet in programs and policies aimed at maintaining and enhancing democracy' (Zaff et al., 2010, p. 746).

An example of such policy enhancing youth engagement is a recent initiative of the Council of Europe calling on member states to pursue youth policies that will help young people integrate into society through active citizenship, social dialogue and resulting sustainable employment opportunities (CE, 2012). Another example of a project aimed at promoting 'active' or 'responsible' citizenship is described by Steden, Caem, and Boutellier (2011) who report empirical insights on the local public safety projects.

Against this theoretical background, this paper will explore active citizenship and its many practices and experiences by migrant youth. The paper deliberately departs from the epistemological bias of focusing on mainstream youth and aims to explore active citizenship among an under-researched and under-theorised group – a diverse cohort of non-white migrant youth in Australia.

The current study: methods, sampling and participants

This paper is based on a larger study supported by an Australian Research Council Discovery Grant focussing on migrant youth and social networking in contemporary Australia. The paper reports on quantitative and qualitative data based on 258 surveys, 50 interviews and three focus groups conducted among young people aged 14 to 25. These participants were selected using sampling techniques to account for the key variables of age, gender and socio-economic status. Migrant youth for this study were selected among three broadly clustered ethno-cultural groups: Arabic-speaking, Pacific Island and African.

These ethno-cultural groups were selected because they have been routinely portrayed by the media as being amongst arguably the most vulnerable and marginalised groups in Australia. Their vulnerability has been seen in recent high profile cases linking them to the manifestations of prejudice, stigmatisation, racism, public disorder and inter-communal conflict. Research shows that Arabic-speaking youth, for example, have experienced a heightened sense of marginalisation since 9/11 (Mansouri, 2005; Mansouri & Kamp, 2007; Mansouri & Marotta, 2012). African youth have been described as problematic, exhibiting very high levels of youth unemployment, being unable to integrate and potentially a major threat to social cohesion in Australia (Abdelkerim & Grace, 2012). Young people from a Pacific Island background account disproportionately for higher rates of crime and incarceration (White, Perrone, Guerra, & Lampugnani, 1999). These three groups are particularly important case studies for the research project with its emphasis on the role of social networks in engendering a sense of belonging and civic participation.

Participants included young people with varying lengths of Australian residency and migration pathways, who spoke a variety of languages and who had varying levels of inter- and intra-group social participation. Participants were recruited mainly through high school education sectors (Department of Education, Catholic and Independent Sectors) as well as through service providers in the region (including the Centre for Multicultural Youth). All interviewees and focus group participants were assigned pseudonyms. The main demographic characteristics of the survey sample are presented in a Table 1 and Figures 1–5 below.

Findings: practices of active citizenship

The research findings suggest that even though migrant youth are somewhat interested in active citizenship practices, they predominantly expressed an aversion to formal structured engagement, particularly within their own ethnic communities. There was some moderate interest demonstrated in engaging with school-based groups, both broad-based and ethno-culturally centred. Significant interest was demonstrated in actively engaging in more informal family and community settings.

When asked whether it is important for them to be involved in their community, young people expressed considerable willingness to practice active citizenship and be involved in solving local issues. The strongest willingness for participation was recorded for African participants (46.5%), followed by Arabic speakers (33.3%) and Pacific Islanders (30%). To probe further their actual involvement in activities conducive to a sense of active citizenship, participants were asked about their preferred places to go *in* and *outside* their neighbourhood. These places included both formal and informal places where active citizenship could be expressed, such as community centres, parks, sports facilities (for example, basketball courts, cricket pitches), shopping centres, libraries, movie theatres, and places of worship**.** Overall, participants showed an aversion to formal sites of community

Table 1. Survey sample at a glance.

Participant groups	Total no.	Age	Gender	Leading countries of birth overseas vs. Australian born	Length of Residence in Australia	Religion
African	87	15–17 y/o: 42.5% 18–24 y/o: 57.5%	Male: 57.5% Female: 42.5%	Sudan: 47.1% Kenya: 9.2% Ethiopia/Somalia: 8% Born overseas: 96.6% Australian born: 3.4%	<5 yrs: 48.3% 6–10 yrs: 34.5% >11 yrs: 12.6%	Christian: 74.7% Muslim: 21.8%
Pacific Islanders	81	15–17 y/o: 59.3% 18–24 y/o: 40.7%	Male: 44.4% Female: 55.6%	New Zealand: 33.3% Samoa: 8.6% Born overseas: 54.3% Australian born: 45.7%	<5 yrs: 22.2% 6–10 yrs: 14.8% >11 yrs: 60.5%	Christian: 93.8% Muslim: 0%
Arabic-speaking	90	15–17 y/o: 53.4% 18–24 y/o: 46.6%	Male: 41.1% Female: 58.9%	Iraq: 40.0% Sudan: 8.9% Born overseas: 57.8% Australian born: 41.1%	<5 yrs: 34.4% 6–10 yrs: 16.7% >11 yrs: 45.5%	Christian: 56.7% Muslim: 37.8%
Total Sample	258	15–17 y/o: 51.6% 18–24 y/o: 48.4%	Male: 47.7% (123) Female: 52.3% (135)	25 countries of birth, including: Australia: 29.5% Sudan: 19.0% Iraq: 14.0% New Zealand: 10.5%	<5 yrs: 35.3% 6–10 yrs: 22.1% >11 yrs: 39.2%	Christian: 74.4% Muslim: 20.5%

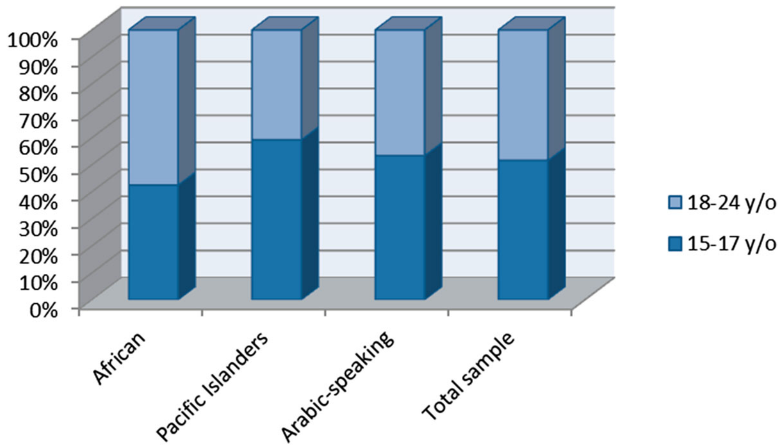

Figure 1. Age.

engagement, as indicated by Africans (75.9%), Pacific Islanders (84%) and Arabic speakers (94.4%). Africans (17.6%) were the most likely amongst three groups to go to community centres *outside* their immediate neighbourhoods.

Places of worship proved most preferred formal places of gathering. There was a consistent, although lukewarm, support amongst all groups with 37.9% of Africans, 44.4% of Pacific Islanders and 35.6% of Arabic speakers responding positively. The number of young people interested in attending places of worship *outside* of their neighbourhood increased by comparison with the African (48.2%) and Pacific Island (49.4%) groups, but decreased for the Arabic-speaking cohort (27.6%). In regards to how much time participants spend outside their neighbourhood, the most commonly chosen answers to this question were 'every day or almost every day' and 'at least once a week'. In fact, these two answers combined were chosen by a clear majority of Africans (75.9%), Pacific Islanders (85.2%) and Arabic speakers (78.8%).

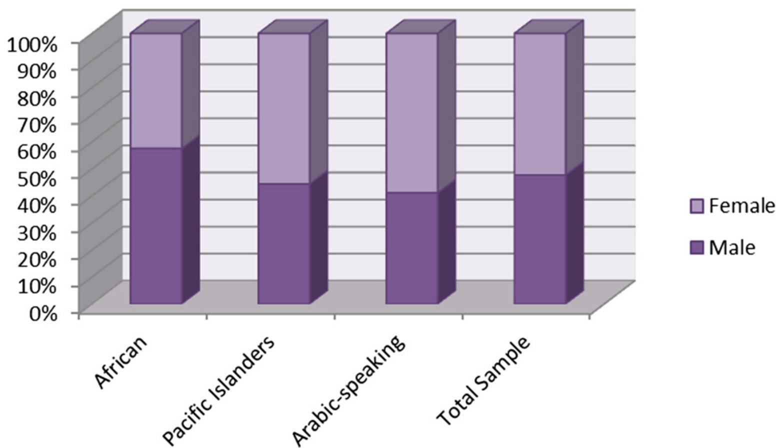

Figure 2. Gender.

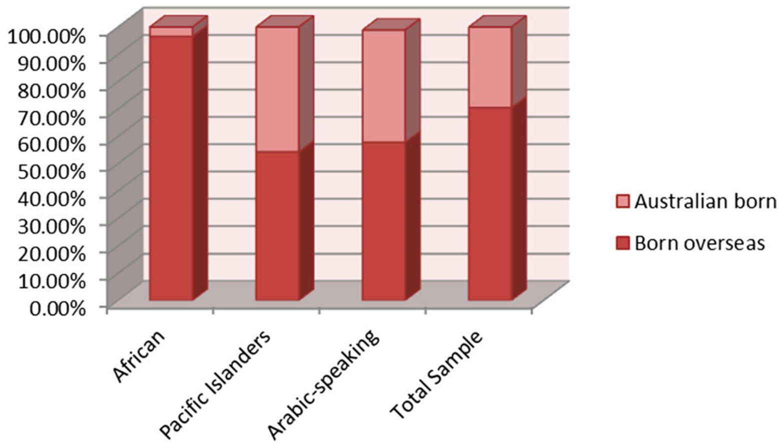

Figure 3. Born overseas vs. Australian Born.

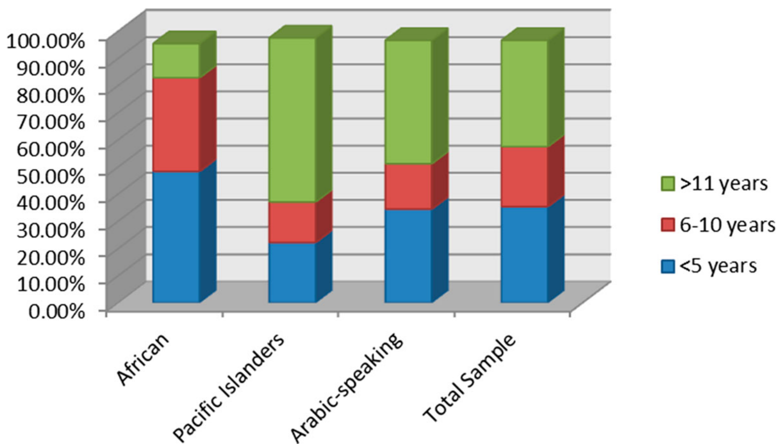

Figure 4. Length of residence in Australia.

The participants' answers to survey questions pertaining to their formal citizenship practices demonstrated that migrant youth have a moderate interest in attending the formal community and religious places both in and outside their neighbourhoods. Some reasons for this moderate interest were unveiled in the individual interviews. For example, some participants reported that in joining formal practices they responded to the pressures coming from their families. A 17-year-old African female participant, who was born in Congo and migrated recently to Australia, explained that she joined the Christian Church 'because [her] family said so'.

However, low levels of participation do not always translate into lack of interest in the affairs of local communities. The findings show that young people express consistent interest and willingness to be involved in collective actions aimed at solving local issues. While the desire of migrant youth to participate in formal community structures is moderate at best, the qualitative findings reveal young people do possess a sense of civic awareness and citizenship responsibility for their communities.

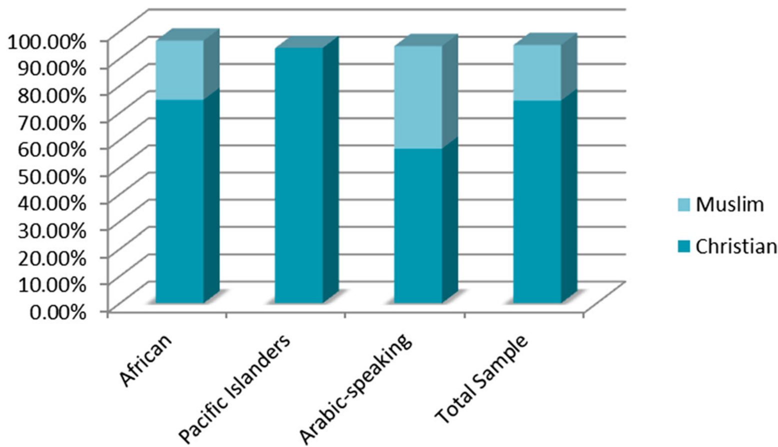

Figure 5. Religion.

Given the young age of the survey respondents, participation in school-based groups was considerable. Over a half of African (56.3%) and Arabic-speaking (54.4%) and almost half of Pacific Island (48.1%) participants said they were engaged. Some participants told of their close connections with the school-based groups. A 21-year-old Australian-born Palestinian female, whose extended family lives in Jordan, explained how she got involved in working as an Arabic teacher in Sunday school:

> I used to go to Sunday school and then the principal said, 'Since you're already here and you're always here, would you like to teach?' And I . . . always wanted to be a teacher . . . So my mum said, 'Give it a go and see if you like it'. And I do actually really like it, it's actually really good.

There was some interest shown in participating in school-based ethnic community groups by Africans (33.3%), Pacific Islanders (22.2%), but much less amongst Arabic speakers (15.6%). Involvement in the activities of religious groups was found to be somewhat higher compared to the involvement in the activities of ethnic community groups. The highest interest was expressed by the Pacific Islanders (46.9%) and Africans (37.9%). A considerably lower level of interest was found among Arabic-speaking participants (20%). Involvement in a volunteer group was a relatively more popular activity among African participants (21.8%), with lower levels of engagement recorded for Pacific Islanders (16%) and Arabic-speaking participants (15.6%). Not many participants were involved in *other* groups outside the suggested list. In fact, only 6.9% of African participants, 16% of Pacific Islanders and 11.1% of Arabic-speaking youth replied 'yes' to this question.

The findings also showed a very strong interest amongst participants in being involved in activities happening *within* one's family or ethnic group. In each of the three participating groups, only a very small percentage of participants indicated they were not interested in such activities: Africans (5.6%), Pacific Islanders (11.1%) and Arabic-speaking (3.3%). The remaining participants responded either 'yes' or 'sometimes'. Among those who said 'yes', Africans (60.5%) were the most active supporters of family or ethnic group activities compared to slightly less support by Arabic-speaking youth (46.7%) and Pacific Islanders (40.7%). The rest of the participants were sometimes involved in family or ethnic group activities: 33.7% of Africans, 48.1% of Pacific Islanders and 50.0% of Arabic-speaking youth respondents.

While in general there was a moderate to low level of interest in engagement in formal activities, this should not disguise the energy and commitment to engagement amongst many migrant young people. The interest and willingness in participating in the life of their own community, as well as outside of their community, is exemplified by Sarina – a 25-year-old female from Lebanese-Syrian background, born in Australia. Her father was born and raised in Lebanon and her mother is a Syrian born and raised in Lebanon. Sarina explained that 'they came here in 1977 after the 11-year civil war broke out . . . And they ended up in Australia as refugees'. Sarina has been actively involved in the affairs of migrant communities due to her 'continued interest . . . in issues affecting . . . particularly the Arab community, because I'm so aware of the issues that they face'. She has done

> volunteer work with refugees . . . of African and Middle Eastern backgrounds with various organisations, . . . with the Anti-Cancer Council because [her] father passed away from cancer . . . it makes it an issue that's close to [her] heart . . . and disability organisations too

because she has a disability. When asked how often she engages in volunteer work, Sarina responded:

> Now it's less than in previous years because now I'm doing my Masters . . . I also work . . . But I am hoping to resume volunteer work in the future. Particularly with the Asylum Seeker Resource Centre coz I'm really passionate about what they do.

Binta, an African Focus group participant, said it was important to give back to the people in her own community: 'To me to live in Australia is to live in two worlds. I give Australia 50% and I give my community 50% . . . So to give to my people in my community is to be an example in a positive way'. Another African participant, Chipo, spoke about her decision to conduct volunteering activities mainly outside of her African community:

> [I]n order to get other people interested in your cause you need to get up, because . . . the African community . . . yes we're black and were in refugee camps and hunger and starvation . . . but you need to let other people outside see that and personalise and humanise that experience.

Dalmar, an African participant, also said that she started her volunteering activities in her community and then she extended her work to the outside organisations:

> This year was the first time I started working with the Somali community, before it was [with] newly arrived communities . . . who need help with transport system, education system, and financial system, everything . . . So I was at my organisation . . . and it was really beneficial.

Eshe, also from the African group, had done volunteering in the community and outside concurrently, and she started volunteering outside: 'I became a member of the youth group that wasn't specifically African . . . People have to see how you are fond of things . . . And you have to prove yourself to the community'.

Kaina, an Arabic-speaking participant, spoke about her volunteering activities:

> I used to work in the community and I used to feel happier, because you feel like you achieved something. I used to work for a radio and I could deliver something, say something, people call and they say . . . oh, you are really good.

Sarina, who also participated in the Arabic-speaking focus group, said that being involved in the diverse social and volunteering activities meant a lot for her:

> You discuss things with people and you begin to get an idea of what their needs are and what's most important for them. And then you can act as sort of mediator between those groups and a wider society and [do] what can be done for these very often marginalised communities.

These excerpts show that migrant youth have the capacity to develop thriving subjectivities with a sense of civic responsibility and self-actualisation. These positive personal developments are nurtured to a great degree by participating in the citizenship practices and social events.

However, they were not without challenges. For example, some Arabic-speaking participants expressed tensions regarding community or religious engagement. One, Khatiba, explains:

> The activities that I wouldn't join are . . . the Islamic activities . . . Although it's my religion, but I just wouldn't join it. I would join Arab activities like . . . anything to do with Arab, because it's general, it's all religions.

Another participant in the Arabic-speaking focus group, Fasiya, similarly explained her lack of involvement with Islamic society: 'Islamic society unfortunately represents Muslims born in Australia, I don't feel like they represent me . . . who came later.' Rukan agreed with Fasiya: 'So you just feel more out of place, because you are meant to relate to them, but you go there and you can't relate.'

The research showed that not only were young people keen on participating in various events aimed at developing leadership skills, but also many were interested in undertaking leadership roles in their own communities. This was of particular significance to the African and Arabic-speaking groups who accepted more formal forms of leadership, although leadership was not imagined as an exclusively 'top down' process, but as a relational practice. The Pacific Island group, in some respects, challenged the perspectives of two other groups. They believe leadership is an inscribed individual characteristic and can be harboured by anyone. In this way, there is no particular need for conventional leadership requiring a hierarchical structure:

> With us, I don't think we have leaders. I think it's just a group of people and there's no one specifically . . . the leader of the group, there's nothing like that. I think with Polynesians we're more on the basis . . . we all respect each other like . . . if somebody says something and somebody disagrees we kind of compromise with it . . . But it's not like somebody is leading a group and somebody is a follower.

Among the Pacific Island group, the concept of mentoring was more readily accepted than the concept of leadership, because it could be translated into different contexts and could start within the family. It also had the potential to be more flexible, not necessarily adhering to a particular form of address or communication: 'Through my experience of Pacific Island young leaders that I worked with, I had a feeling like the ones that really led were not the ones who held microphones or were in the faces of everybody'.

Discussion: beyond the conventionalities of citizenship

This paper explored both formal and informal types of citizenship practices. It focused on the newer forms of citizenship engagement and discussed how they may be evidenced in the everyday practices of active citizenship among three ethno-cultural groups of young people. Research findings reveal that migrant youth have moderate interest in

participating in the formal mainstream citizenship practices exemplified in attending community centres and religious places. Very often participation patterns and engagement experiences of migrant youth diverted from the traditionally established norms. These findings correlate with an argument that conventional citizenship has declined across many societies resulting in a gradual erosion of trust, political participation and interest in politics (Isin & Turner, 2007; Putnam, 2000). Young people from all participating groups expressed a preference for charting their own subjective pathways towards civic engagement. To this end, and in relation to volunteering for example, the research findings reveal that young people tended to have a variety of ethno-culturally specific motivations for being involved in a range of formal and informal volunteering activities within and outside their communities. Paradoxically, not all forms of volunteering are recognised or accounted for by the public and the relevant government agencies. Ethno-culturally specific intergenerational care activities are examples of such practices.

What the research findings also showed was that both volunteering experiences and leadership practices were undertaken by young people in a diversity of cultural forms and this diversity needs to be acknowledged and publicly promoted. Further, reported findings demonstrated that mainstream recreational facilities, such as sporting places or parks, were not very popular across all participant groups. Among the three groups, sports facilities were slightly more popular among African respondents, but they were particularly unpopular among Arabic-speaking participants. This noticeable aversion to going to sporting places and parks can also be explained by the preferences embedded in the ethnic cultures. This finding is in sharp contrast to a number of government programmes that seek to engage young people through sports as part of a social inclusion and community belonging agenda. In order to optimise participation, forms of social and recreational engagement for migrant youth need to be ethno-culturally specific and go beyond conventional mainstream activities and conventional forms of civic engagement. The research findings in this regard reinforce the policy imperatives for supporting culturally sensitive forms of social engagement as part of an active citizenship approach for migrant youth. Similarly in relation to the UK context, Hart (2009, p. 654) notes that 'what is needed is a move away from the normative citizenship agenda promoted by government towards a citizenship informed by a cultural or difference-centred approach'. Kymlicka (2011, p. 282) argues even more strongly that 'if the citizenship agenda is to be effective, we need a more multinational conception of citizenship, and a more multicultural conception of multi-nationalism'.

Conclusion

This paper draws attention to some significant limitations of conventional citizenship principles and practices in multicultural societies as they are expressed by young people's self-perceptions and relational attitudes. In accordance with the definition of 'self-actualizing citizens' (Bennett, 2003), young people of diverse backgrounds placed foremost importance on the opportunities to voice their experiences and be heard. They expressed a need to communicate the everyday realities of living as young and multicultural people to a wider Australian public. Yet young participants felt marginalised when they were perceived through the formal practices of labelling them as 'migrant', 'refugee' or 'CALD (culturally and linguistically diverse)' youth. Official labels often impeded migrant youth from

publicly voicing their experiences outside their ethno-cultural communities. It was found that increasing the number, variety and quality of opportunities for young people to express their views and be heard by the mainstream population is essential. Such opportunities can include multicultural programmes and events, youth forums and festivals showcasing their successes and achievements for broader societal audiences.

These insights prompt a reframing of the concept of citizenship within nation-states in the context of cultural diversity and heterogeneous polities, especially in times of retreat from multiculturalism. Engaging youth through diverse civic activities is paramount, but the forms of social and recreational engagement for migrant youth need to go beyond mainstream activities. Culturally specific forms of engagement need to be promoted and resourced as part of an active citizenship model for migrant youth. Similarly, volunteering experiences of young people which take diverse cultural forms need to be acknowledged and encouraged. It was also found that ongoing support is needed for cultivating leadership qualities among multicultural youth. This could be achieved by organising culturally sensitive programmes, events and other opportunities to enable young people from migrant and refugee backgrounds to participate in youth leadership training programmes, leadership fora and related leadership skills building activities. The research findings demonstrated that young migrants were deeply appreciative of the social activities organised by local government agencies which brought multicultural youth together to foster intercultural learning and exchange.

The research revealed that young people experienced the highest level of belonging and engagement when involved in social networks associated with their own communities. This preference of young people for engagement within ethnic groups demonstrates the importance of ethnic identification and sense of community that persist in otherwise hybrid and diffuse local and national settings. The research revealed that young people from Pacific Island, African and Arabic-speaking backgrounds had a clear and expressed desire to engage with young people across all ethno-cultural communities, but sometimes experience explicit or implicit barriers to this form of engagement. These barriers often manifest in terms of issues pertaining to trust (Putnam, 1995) and overall in terms of interpersonal relations. This despite the fact that youth from all three groups tended to be trusting of other people.

Interviewees from all three groups reported a range of 'exclusionary practices' that prevented them from participating in social networks which are seen as vehicles for social inclusion and building blocks of active citizenship. These 'exclusionary practices' ranged from explicit, targeted racism to more implicit or covert discrimination or social exclusion. This study suggests that while in general young people tended to have good relations with teachers and other school staff, they still felt a constant need to 'prove themselves' in an environment external to schools. They felt that in this broader environment beyond school, 'Australian' values and ways of learning were likely to be prioritised and their individual needs were – often unintentionally – supressed.

In conclusion, the research findings offer strong support to the theoretical argument (Lerner, 2004) that engaging youth through diverse activities can lead to positive outcomes, such as an increased sense of self-worth, belonging and wellbeing. The findings also reveal that particular migrant groups, as is the case with Arabic-speaking youth, are in more precarious positions and in need of carefully targeted and culturally sensitive pathways for civic engagement and participation. Such approaches go beyond

conventional models of citizenship as articulated by Marshall and Bottomore (1992). One of the more unexpected findings of the study reported in this paper was that many migrant youth were inclined to manifest a strong desire for being active agents in citizenship practices. This is especially the case when such activities are aimed at building trust, belonging and social cohesion among diverse social groups and ethno-cultural networks.

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