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## REIMAGINING PEACE, REIMAGINING EDUCATION: PEACE EDUCATIONAL POTENTIAL OF SOCIAL MEDIA

M. Ayaz Naseem

Education Concordia University, Montreal, Canada

Georg Arnhold Research Professor of Educating for Sustainable Peace Georg Eckert Institute,  
Braunschweig, Germany

E-mail: [adeela.ayaz@gmail.com](mailto:adeela.ayaz@gmail.com)

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### Abstract

In this paper I examine the potential of blogosphere for civic education. My main argument is that in in-crisis societies such as Pakistan the blogosphere is a space where conversations and multilogues on issues that are crucial to societal regeneration are taking place. These conversations and multilogues in/through the blogosphere are democratic and inclusive in that they are not confined by the traditional articulations of 'expertise', privilege and subject positioning. Neither the writer nor those who participate in the ensuing conversation are or have to be experts in a disciplinary sense. They are not privileged by credentials or by their positioning in the 'knowledge' hierarchy. Any and all agents of the civil society can either start or engage in these multilogues, many of which directly or indirectly, focus on issues of national and societal self-regeneration.

**Keywords:** reimagining peace; reimagining education; multilogues in the blogosphere; potential of social media

### Abstrak

*Dalam makalah ini saya meneliti potensi ruang-blog (blogosphere) untuk pendidikan kewarganegaraan. Argumen utama saya adalah bahwa dalam masyarakat yang sedang dilanda krisis seperti Pakistan ruang-blog (blogosphere) merupakan ruang di mana percakapan dan interaksi percakapan tentang isu-isu yang sangat penting bagi regenerasi sosial, berlangsung. Percakapan dan multilogues melalui ruang-blog ini bersifat demokratis dan inklusif karena tidak dibatasi oleh artikulasi tradisional yang mencirikan 'keahlian', pengaturan posisi berdasarkan hak istimewa dan subjek masalah. Baik penulis maupun orang-orang yang berpartisipasi dalam percakapan tidak harus ahli dalam disiplin tertentu. Mereka tidak diberi hak istimewa atas dasar prestasi atau posisi mereka dalam hirarki 'pengetahuan'. Setiap dan semua masyarakat sipil dapat memulai atau terlibat dalam interaksi percakapan ini, banyak di antara mereka yang baik langsung maupun tidak langsung, berfokus pada isu-isu regenerasi diri di tingkat nasional dan masyarakat.*

**Kata kunci:** reimagining peace; reimagining education; interaksi percakapan dalam ruang blog; potensi sosial media

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## Introduction

Research presented in this paper is part of a larger project on ‘social media as a space for peace education’ that I undertook in 2013-2014 as the First Georg Arnhold Research Professor at the Georg Eckert Institute, Braunschweig, Germany. For the research on blogosphere as a space for peace and self-regeneration I examined a large number of blog written in both Urdu and English on various topics. The analysis in this paper is grounded in discourse analysis of blogs by two active bloggers Rishad Sheikh and Farha Zaidi Moazzam on the blogging section of a leading daily newspaper in Pakistan ([www.DAWN.com](http://www.DAWN.com)) and the ensuing multilogues. The first blog titled “Confessions of a hijabi” by Moazzam explores the misunderstood issue of spirituality that has come to be essentialized through debates on hijab. This blog so far has 761 engagements. Written as a satire on various perceptions of terrorism Rishadullah Sheikh’s blog “My name is Khan and I am a terrorist” has generated a spirited multilogue with 139 responses and interventions. These blogs, as multilogues, carry in them contestations over meanings, articulations and representations of the self and the other in the broader context of self-regeneration of the Pakistani society and nation. These conversations highlight the civic educational value of the blogosphere.

The paper is organized in three sections. In the first section I outline the main characteristics of blogosphere in order to highlight its potential as unique space that enables new modes of existence, identity, and representations. My argument is that we can understand the social media/ blogosphere as the new space where change can and does emerge. In the second section I present the multilogues that ensued the two blogs. My focus in analyzing these multilogues is to uncover the emergence of

counter discourses on representation, regeneration of the self, and discourse change. Finally, I bring together the conceptual insights and the discursive evidence to make preliminary conclusion about the potential of blogosphere as a space for peace education.

Social media can be depicted as public commons. It is a space where the social agents forsake the body and the place to become discursively constituted subjects that consume as well as produce and shape the discourses in online and offline environments. The ensuing online/virtual relationships raise questions about representations, relationship between ‘online’ and offline’ forms of identity and behaviors, distinctions between the real and the virtual, and questions about the self and the other. The social media such as blogosphere are seen as a space where technology (re-)mediates between the cultural and the social and where renegotiations between the self and the other take place. As public commons social media afford a public space that allows pluri-vocalilty, transnational audience and transnational relationships. Through social media private voices of the citizens can be transformed into public voices. Social media can also be seen as space for contestations between what Deluze calls the ‘control society’, where every action is monitored (by the third eye) and the agentic society where digital panopticons are shattered every day.

## The Blog, the Blogosphere, and the Blogger

Barger coined the term WEBLOG in 1997. Barrett assembled a list of known weblogs and published it on his site in the same year. In 1999 there were 23 known Weblogs. It was at this time that the term Blog appeared with the owner/editor of the blog becoming known as the blogger (Blood, 2000/2013). Initially, the bloggers juxtaposed their writings, musings and

analysis with the original piece on which they were commenting. As Blood points out, “new bloggers position(ed) themselves in this community (of bloggers), referencing and reacting to these blogs they read most, their sidebars (became) an affirmation of the tribe to which they wish to belong (2000/2013) (Parentheses added).

The basic unit of the blogdom/blogosphere is a singular blog (Lampa, 2004). In blogosphere, unlike the traditional media, the community decides the importance of the issue. Thus blogosphere filters contents more democratically than the traditional media sources and forms its own mediascapes. Instead of deciding what will be the most profitable to promote, the blogosphere promotes what its members find to be most interesting (Lampa, 2004). The non-economic character of the blogosphere, according to Rosen (2003 cited by Lampa) represents a shift from the status quo of the traditional print-media industry. “A blog empowers the writer with greater freedom to provide colorful, subjective, and political commentary than would be possible within the framework of a traditional media outlet, which has an economic interest in maintaining a sense of detached objectivity (Lampa, 2004)”.

While this might reflect the general trend in blogging and the blogosphere this is not to deny that blogs can be used for for-profit motives (for example by corporations, businesses) or that bloggers can be employed by the businesses to write sympathetic blogs.

Blogging has been defined and understood differently by different scholars. It has been defined by the authors of the influential PEW study on Internet use after 9-11 as DIY journalism. New literacies scholars Davies and Merchant (2009) define blogging as citizen journalism, as a text-making practice, and as a literacy practice (p.82). Richardson (2006, in

Davies and Merchant) understands blogging as Read-write-think-link. When one critically considers global Internet access and usage, it is clear that the blogging community represents a relatively small number of global elite who has the luxury of time, talent, and expendable wealth (Lampa, 2004). However, as I shall argue below it can also be understood as a community of engaged citizen weary of the gaze and the expertise of the so-called experts. Seen as the ‘new’ town and the ‘factory’ (Barraclough, 1965, discussed below) this is where ideas are disseminated to the wider community—the elite might be ‘elite’ in terms of having access to the computer, the Internet, time and language abilities—but they might not be elitist in terms of ideas and counter discourses. For example, Kevin Barbieux of the homeless guy fame who used internet in public libraries did have the time, abilities and the language to air his ideas but it were his ideas that were counter discursive and aimed at civic engagement (Luo, 2003; Barbieux, 2003 cited by Lampa, 2004).

### **Social media and Blogosphere as the new ‘town’ and ‘factory’**

As Barraclough (1965) noted in his analysis of the decolonization what the colonists failed to see in the colonized world was the remarkable ability of the societies at self-renewal. This failure led to self-renewal in the former colonies and saw the emergence of 60 new national and cultural identities in a short span of 45 years from 1945 to 1960. A number of these societies are again being written off as ‘failed states’ ‘societies in crisis’ and as ‘basket cases’. Once again what is being ignored is their capacity at self-renewal.

During the wave of self-renewal that led to independence newer social and political spaces such as the ‘town’, the ‘factory’, and print media provided the space where agency for self-renewal

could aggregate. The civic educational potential of these spaces was immense and yet has been overlooked in most analyses of societal self-renewals. As we refocus our attention to these societies we must look for newer spaces that offer room for initiating, aggregating and disseminating conversations on possibilities of self-renewal. Does social media with their multitude of social networking platforms (Facebook, Twitter, blogosphere) provide that space where conversations and multilogues on self-renewal can start and aggregate?

### The blogger

Two influential studies (PEW, 2002; Perseus, 2003) categorize the blogging community in terms of active bloggers (2-7%) and the passive periphery (what they call the teenage girls who write blogs only for their family and friends). This categorization is problematic on two accounts. First, it follows the Enlightenment binary of public/private with 'teenage girls' situated in the second half of the binary. Second, epistemologically it follows the Enlightenment schema on the sources of knowledge where personal experience is not a legitimate source of knowledge. This categorization overlooks the agency and experience of the 'teenage girls' as a source of knowledge besides precluding the possibility that valuable and important insights could be gleaned from these texts. It also genders the 'teenage girl' as non-expert and less' valuable. Finally, the narrow view and definition of what constitutes a blog purely on how often it is updated (Perseus, 2003) and the average life span of a blog leaves out the qualitative knowledge and meaning making aspects of the narratives that might not be updated with the regular frequency of a technical blog. This is perhaps the key difference between a technical and a social/ political blog.

### The blogosphere

Alternatively, when viewed in qualitative/civic sense as a "community in a space" or as a counter discursive space the importance of the blogosphere starts to emerge. To fully understand the importance of blogs and the blogosphere one needs to look at the qualitative (impact) rather than the quantitative aspects. The community that the blogosphere represents does not necessarily has to be a community of bloggers—those who write and interact with other bloggers—rather it should be investigated in terms of a community-of-purpose; a community comprising the blogger and the reader and those who engage with both.

Lampa, following Benedict Anderson understands the imagined community in the blogosphere as resulting from the "shared experience of instant publishing (2004)". Building on Anderson's notion of 'style' in which communities are imagined Lampa argues that the blogging community comes into the imaginary/imagination in a 'style' that stems from instant publishing medium itself to create a discursive, transnational, online imagined community (p.2). While useful this understanding of the community ignores the reader—the vital member of the community who is not merely a consumer of the blogs but who engages with the text to produce alternative texts and thus the possibility of discourse change. Lampa considers blogging as a form of journalistic activity and refers to bloggers as amateur journalists. This needs to be problematized. Blogging can also be seen as gaze avoidance or attempt to get out of the scrutiny of the experts gaze. However, Lampa correctly notes that blogging attempts to appropriate power away from the traditional one-way communication/dissemination.

There are two important functions that the blogging community has come to perform in the

recent years that: a) separate it from the traditional print and media journalism community and give it a unique fifth estate status; b) lets them be cohesive as a community by making them realize their own sense of community. The blogosphere also acts as a conduit for non-mainstream ideas to become a part of the cultural consciousness. The new currency of this new medium is the idea that may have been marginalized by the mainstream media. The profit motivation is to get out of the experts gaze; to put forth the ignored, marginalized idea; the profit motivation is to be heard. For example, during 9-11 bloggers were able to put forth “first hand unedited accounts of the common people in New York and Washington DC that otherwise may have been lost amid broadcast media’s more pressing coverage of national security issues (Rainie, Fox, and Madden, 2002 cited in Lampa). On other occasions such as reporting the racist comments of the Senate minority leader Trent Lott, the bloggers kept the issue alive when the traditional media had let it slip. These two events among many reinforced the blogging community’s own sense of purpose and agency. A third function that the participatory SMS such as the blogosphere has performed is to force the traditional print media to become more participatory. There is now greater participation allowed by the traditional media in shape of comments, etc., that they invite on every news item. Almost all of the major print and electronic media have their own bloggers and blogging sites. However, one could argue that the news/issue selection is what still marks the difference between the traditional media and the more participatory social media/blogosphere.

What the blog also does is to include/forefront/bring in the mundane (what a blogger noticed on the sidewalk, what she ate, the movie/book he/she enjoyed or otherwise) and makes it important. It makes the personal

newsworthy, a source of new shared knowledge. Epistemologically, it brings the profane into the realm of sacred. Methodologically, it brings in the hitherto excluded sources and sites of knowledge (experiential) and positions them as counterweights to the holy grail of logic, empiricism and rationality. It personalizes the public and publicizes the private. It also aggregates the experiences of the readers and writers not in in the immediate vicinity of each other—thus globalizing the local and localizing the global—In other words it creates an imagined community (of shared experiences) that, unlike Anderson’s print media based communities is not based in nationalism but on issues of shared concern, interest, and experiences.

### **National and Societal self regeneration in the Pakistani Blogosphere**

Pakistan has been in the proverbial ‘eye of the storm’ for the past many years. It is seen by many as a failed state, a nexus of instability, and off lately as the epicenter of both terrorism and the war on terror. In addition there are deep political, social and religious schisms that are seen as the failure of the state. As a result many analysts and critics have wondered about the future of the society and the state to function in the society of nations and states. In many of these analyses what is rather understated (if at all) is the potential of the society to self renew itself and the means that can be instrumental to such a self-renewal.

The two blogs under study touch upon two of the issues that are at the epicenter of debates in Pakistan both at home and abroad. These two issues are namely: the Hijab, an issue that is looked at as central to the questions of identity. This issue also connects conversations on and about issues such as liberty, gender equity, and democracy in Pakistan. This, ironically, is also

one of the issues to which conversations and analyses of Islamic identity are reduced. The second issue is that of terrorism, particularly the so-called Islamic terrorism that is central to many debates and conversations today. Again, the reductive analyses see this issue related to the way we (the world) understands or should understand a people. In a larger context these issue relates to questions about representation, recognition, identity and subjectivity.

Conversations on these two issues have largely been carried out in the traditional media and academic spaces, analyses are rendered and verdict passed. These conversations, analyses and academic conclusions/verdicts are undertaken from a position of power and privilege: the power and the privilege of “expertise” (political, journalistic and academic). In a number of these conversations what is missing is the voice of the subject. Thus raising the question that Spivak (1988) raised: Can the sub-altern/subject speak?” The subjects are speaking but as Fanon (1963) would say they might not be interested in speaking to the holder of academic power and privilege. They are speaking to each other on issues that matter to them. In doing so not only are they initiating and carrying on conversations and multilogues but they are also using their agency to de-privilege, de-position and de-power us: they are making us irrelevant—they are saying do not undermine our capacity at self renewal. They are using the new ‘town’ and the ‘factory’—they are using new spaces where the oppression of expertise and academic snobbery is absent. They are using the gathering grounds of the social media—with or without—the experts—with or without us.

“Confessions of a hijabi”: The Journey, the choice

Confessions of a hijabi by Farah Moazzam Zahidi explores the misunderstood issue of spirituality that has come to be essentialized

through debates on hijab. This blog was posted on March 23, 2010 and so far has 761 engagements. Following is an abridged version of Zahidi’s blog:

I discovered my spirituality as I reached my teens. My parents were not the coercive type, and they gave us the right to disagree, question, and think for ourselves. Innately curious, I soon found myself reading the Quran in translation, in an effort to better understand its meaning. A few persuasive teachers and friends guided me through this process. As I read, a new world opened up to me... At this stage in my life, I was an average kid. Like most teenaged girls, I believed my hairstyle was my asset. Looking good was one of the prime goals in my life... As the years passed, I started to seriously consider doing hijab. After what felt like a personal tug-of-war, I clumsily covered my hair for the first time with no idea what I was doing, or whether I would be able to keep it up. For someone whose hairstyle was her signature trademark, this wasn’t an easy step... Back then, the hijab was less common than it is now, and people were less accepting. As someone who was used to receiving compliments, I found these asides difficult to handle. I soon gave up... That move was an ordeal in itself. Everywhere I went, I heard comments such as, “See? This is why I don’t do it. People start to wear hijab, then take it off. They’ve made a joke of it.” Inwardly, I kicked myself because I knew they were right; I was ashamed of my inconsistency. But the truth is that I needed more time... As I continued wearing the hijab, some would praise me encouragingly, saying I looked beautiful with my head covered. Others called me all those terms recently added to the dictionary such as

Ninja, Fundo, Taliban. A few would tell me to go do “Allah Allah” at home with the oldies... Others gave me apologetic smiles, fumbled with their dupattas, or perched them on their heads as soon as they saw me...Amongst all these reactions, what I wanted was fairly simple. I just wanted everyone to treat me as they always had, like a normal person. Just let me be. I wasn’t abnormal. I was just a non-conformist who wanted to follow her religion. I was a woman making a choice, which is normally perceived as a sign of emancipation. It was strange to me that some as a sign of oppression, and worse, extremism differently saw my dressing.

The multilogue that ensued the posting of ‘Confessions of a hijabi’ clearly shows that people (the subjects of the hijab discourse in Pakistan) do make an effort to shun the expert ‘gaze’. This is, for example, demonstrated by the fact that in the 761 engagements on the blog there are simply no references to the scholarly literature or discourses on hijab. Similarly, there are hardly any references to the religious scriptures, interpretations by religious scholars or the historical-nationalist narratives that Pakistanis grow up with. What ensues is a social conversation not a religious one; it is an in-the-moment conversation which is also democratically multivocal in that it does not silence dissent or exclude contending opinions. Its epicenter understands hijab in reference to the subjects of the hijab, her subjectivity, her spirituality, reflexivity and choice. For example:

**Nissa says:**

You wear hijab... you started studying Quran at a very early age.. you wrote a very good article..... but tell me how you justify publishing of your picture with kajal in your eyes and a broad attractive smile for everyone.... Islam do not let you appear like this in front of public

means “na mehrum” .... ??? I believe this is the biggest contradiction of girls wearing hijab....just covering head is not parda in Islam.... you must lower your gaze while among public...you must not wear any make up... so what do you say now ....????????????????????????????????????

**Khalid Mahmood says:**

Well, some are questioning the consistency of some who wear headscarf and that is fine. However, with all that inconsistency (make up and all), if then a person wears headscarf surely there might be there some element of religious consciousness and/or concern for modesty, so why decry it? Another thing, how do we know that women who did not observe hijab when they were young and beautiful and when old adopted it are hypocrites and how do we from that infer that religion is a “show”? ... Must not we avoid unverifiable conjecture? And, if we must guess it should be to give them benefit of doubt.

**Zehra Wamiq says:**

Good thing is that she is wearing hijab to please Allah and not people like Nissa, because no matter what one do nothing is ever good enough for them. They will always be judgemental and arrogant about their knowledge of religion.

**Rahul says:**

...That’s where there is a problem. Including for Farah and others. Dress incidentally (see Kara Swart’s comments too) is to do with climate and geography, as is food, food habits and so on. Belief is in the six-eight inches of the brain, and need not be something we need to “cover” ourselves with, unless, like the old saying “empty vessels make the most noise” ...and daresay, the most covering up?????

The multilogue on hijab marks a clear shift in the discourse—from one(s) that either see/understand/constitute hijabi women as either

victims of an oppressive religio-political order (the Western and western inspired discourses), or that articulate women only as religious and cultural subjects (the religio-political discourses endemic to Pakistan). The participants of the multi-vocal, multi-gendered conversation are using this newfound space to 'talk' to each other, contest each other's perspectives from multiple epistemic political and social positions.

### **My name is Khan and I am a terrorist**

"My name is Khan and I am a terrorist" by Sheikh appeared on November 8, 2010. The blog written as a satire on various perceptions of terrorism has generated a spirited multilogue with 133 responses. Let me start with an abridged version of the blog:

That's right, my name is Khan and I am a terrorist, but I wasn't always one. In fact I wasn't even that religious before, though born in a so-called Muslim family. According to my current understanding I was actually a "Kafir" although I preferred to call myself an atheist or agnostic at best. So what happened? How did a liberated soul like mine get warped into becoming a Muslim firstly and then a terrorist...? Let me explain... I was young when 9/11 happened and like any other normal person I was shocked beyond belief at what had occurred. However what was more shocking was the fact that a certain group of Muslims was being held responsible for the atrocious crime. I wondered what could trigger Muslims to commit such an evil act all the while calling it Jihad in the name of God. From then onwards I saw the media unleash its wrath upon the Muslims along with which the world was introduced to the "War on Terror"... I saw the US forces invade Iraq, ensue foolish military endeavors in Afghanistan, I heard about Guantanamo

Bay, the killing of innocent people being termed as "collateral damage", drone strikes in Pakistan... I also noticed that Muslims were being ridiculed all around the world and their faith was being attacked on international airwaves and their religion being portrayed as inherently evil... In search for answers I started going to the mosques to attend lectures putting all my hopes in our learned scholars. I was sure they would be able to outline a course of action... But boy was I disappointed!... Not finding any solace in the ramblings of the mainstream Mullah I made a transition into the online world. It is here that I found my answers, my leaders, my heroes, my army, my ideals and my ideology... To sum it all up; I was young and the way events were unfolding around me got me really confused. I was concerned and had a will to change the world for a better place. Naturally I looked towards the mainstream scholars to provide me explicit solutions in the light of Islam regarding the current political and social struggles of the Ummah. Their failure to do so made me look elsewhere and that is where I found what you would call, "the radical camp". They inundated me with real Islamic knowledge and solutions with the help of religious texts and thus provided me with a ticket to Jannah. Inspired by heroes that stood up against oppression in the history of Islam, (and believe you me, there are many such heroes) I too decided that if I was going to die then it would be fighting against the enemies of Islam...

Sheikh's musings about terrorism, its articulation through the 'war-on-terror' discourse in the west and the religio-political discourses at home, got a spirited engagement from fellow Pakistanis (and some Indians) in the



blogosphere. Following are some engagements that ensued:

**Muhammad says:**

Sucide in any form is Tabu (haram) in Islam or in any religion... Your life is given to you to do good deeds in this world and pass on to eternity. Be a good beleiver and leave everything else on God to decide. You have no right to take any other life without a reason indicated. You need not be a scholler or a priest or a cleric to be a good believer. Allah knows what is in your heart and mind. Please read your holy books, obey the basic principles of your religion and be cordial towards other faiths. I am sure world will be a better place. Allah loves us all, muslims, christians, jews, even the non beleiver athiests and hindus as we all are HIS creation...

**Azad says:**

Thank you brother Mohammad, you are the first one to include all of God's creations in the same paragraph!!! We need more like you. We must spread the message of all beliefs and faiths being Allah's creations. That will help curb the crazies in our society.

**Ali Ghafoor says:**

Great write Mr. Rashid, but i would still disagree. Being a Khan, doesnt mean that people are more proned to being terrorist.

It means that they live in an area, where Government fails to function. But i am yet to see a place where our Government does function. Take the latest example of Karachi.

I actually find it really hard to believe when some times DAWN pretends to induce this new idea in the mind of our people that we are really bad. But the fact is WE ARE STARVED. We are starved of our rights...

**Muhammad says:**

Dude, you missed the point! The author doesn't blame the Islamic ideology. In fact, if you read his other article, he states that the Islamic way of dealing with such issues is not through violence, suicide bombings and killing of innocents. He is just pointing out that there are some scholars that encourage young Muslims to adopt these means that are against the principles of Islam.

**Ahsen Wali Mohammad says:**

The article is meant to be sarcastic!

**Asad Khan says:**

... We dont suffer from Terrorism, we suffer from Starvation.

**syed rizvi says:**

There is no doubt that the extremists and fundamentalists have hijacked the religion of islam and are incessantly violating the basic principles of islam and making a mockery of it in front of the whole world. They are the one who have always acted in the interest of american and other imperial powers and have caused maximum damage to the muslims. until and unless we will not get rid of these nomadic mullahs we cant compete with the world and for that we will have to work really hard.

Written in an ironical parlance this blog relies on humor to say the unsayable: the traditional discourses on terrorism, disseminated through the media, the pulpit, the educational systems and the political podium are neither realistic nor enough. The lack of satisfactory explanation pushes Pakistanis/Muslims to look for explanations elsewhere, mainly the Internet. And here the dark side of social media and the Internet kicks in and the extremist messages in the virtual space lure them to obscurantist discourses on Islam, jihad, etc. However, as the ensuing conversation and multilogue shows

young Pakistanis use the same space to talk to each other in an attempt to redefine the issues. What can also be noticed here is that unlike the hijabi blog, the conversations on terrorism inadvertently corollarte from or go back to the mainstream discourses on terrorism (anti-Americanism, Islamic ideology, etc.). Notwithstanding the seduction and power of the traditional discourses what is also apparent is that people in the conversation want a rupture in the discourse on terrorism to able to see (and show) that while this might be important it is not the only or the real issue that affects Pakistanis in their daily lives. The real issue, according to the participants of the multilogue is poverty, lack of development, political apathy. The real issue is also the ideological overtones of the explanations that the media, the educational system, and the religious elite provide. There is, in these conversations a clear desire to redefine issues, prioritize them in relevance to the problems that people face in Pakistan. Social media and the blogosphere provide these people with the space in which to reexamine, understand issues not through the academic, religious, and political lenses provided to them by the traditional sources but by rejecting the experts and their gaze. They are redefining the issues by talking to them in this participatory space.

## Conclusions

The promise of the web 2.0 is that voices, especially the ones that have been excluded and marginalized could flourish, communicate, and connect. Blogosphere as an important part of the participatory social media provides people with no technical expertise a space in which they can be a part of the conversations that are about them but have been carried out by others in their name.

While social media is largely seen as catering primarily to the “connected” developed world, it is also used by the have-nots for airing their problems, issues, and grievances. In this context the potential of the social media is huge. In the alter sense, however there are still numerous limitations that have to be accounted for. To begin with, the populace of the developing world is only minimally connected to the World Wide Web. Then, there are barriers of language, technical expertise and education that further limit the potential of the use of the WWW and social media as a tool for the citizenry of the developing world to air and to try to solve their problems. Notwithstanding these limitations and problems the potential of participatory media in bringing people into a discursive space where they can reflectively and reflexively engage in discussion on contentious issues is immense.

What emerges from a reading of the selections from the Pakistani blogosphere is that the new space offered by social media is being utilized by the citizens of Pakistan to explore issues that previously were deemed to be under the proprietorship of the academic elite, the knowledge brokers, religious scholars/clergy, the politicians and the media.

As yet we do not know the impact of these multilogues, away from the gaze of the traditional meaning makers on what shape the agency of common citizens will take. However, as witnessed in the past few years conversations in this new space have resulted in a keeping the issues alive (e.g. Shahzeb case, the Massacare of the Hazara Shias, etc). It has also resulted in transformation of private voices into public ones. But most significantly, it is in this space that new meaning making is taking place. This meaning making is disruptive, it is transgressive, and it could be counter discursive.

At the same time social media, especially the blogosphere is only one of the spaces where such

is happening. Meaning making in this space is and will be in contestation with the other discursive processes that articulate the political, social, cultural and religious processes. Also, meaning making in this space is fluid and also in contestation with other discursive processes. It is in these contestations that I see the potential of societal self-renewal. Just as the town and the factory provided the space for ideas, meanings to be articulated and then carried out in Asia, and Africa at the start of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, social media is perhaps the space where new ideas...those of self renewal will be articulated and carried out.

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