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Handshaking in the Secular: Understanding Agency of Veiled Turkish-Dutch Muslim Students

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Handshaking in the Secular: Understanding Agency of Veiled Turkish-Dutch Muslim Students

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Abstract

The article discusses agency of second generation veiled Turkish-Dutch Muslim students by looking at the issue of handshake. Utilising the Bourdesian conceptual tool of habitus and its accompanying concepts, we present the ways in which handshaking works for our respondents. Subsequently, we show how both not-handshaking and handshaking can lead to strategic gains. While not-handshaking becomes a positive and valued feature of their cultural capital in interactions with pious Muslim men, following the handshaking norm in Dutch social interaction is widely practiced to gain benefits. Given how they act in adaptive ways, we show how women's agency can be defined and accounted for in two ways; both through the paradigm of 'doing religion' (Avishai, 2008), as well as through the paradigm of agency as defined by liberal feminism.

Keywords: muslim diaspora, muslim women, religious practices, women's agency

El Acercamiento en lo Secular: Entendiendo la Agencia de las Estudiantes Musulmanas Turco- Holandesas con Velo

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Resumen

El artículo aborda la agencia de la segunda generación de estudiantes turco-holandesas musulmanas con velo, examinando la cuestión del acercamiento. Utilizando la herramienta conceptual Bourdesiana de habitus y los conceptos que se derivan, presentamos las formas en que se lleva a cabo el acercamiento para nuestras encuestadas. Posteriormente, mostramos cómo ambos, el acercamiento y el no acercamiento, pueden conducir a ganancias estratégicas. Mientras el no acercamiento se convierte en un rasgo positivo y valioso de su capital cultural en las interacciones con los hombres musulmanes, seguir las normas de acercamiento en la interacción social holandesa es una práctica común para obtener beneficios. Teniendo en cuenta la forma en que actúan de manera adaptativa, se muestra cómo la agencia de las mujeres puede ser definida y contabilizada de dos maneras; tanto a través del paradigma de "hacer la religión" (Avishai, 2008), así como a través del paradigma de la Agencia según lo definido por el feminismo liberal.

Palabras clave: diáspora musulmana, mujeres musulmanas, prácticas religiosas, agencia de las mujeres.

In 2006 Dutch Immigration and Integration Minister Rita Verdonk came together with fifty Dutch imams in their graduation ceremony from an integration course. Minister Verdonk encouraged such initiatives, arguing for the need to constitute a bridge between Dutch society and Islam. However the event took a turn for the worse when some of the imams refused to shake her hand based on their religious convictions of not touching unfamiliar women. The minister was appalled. Considering the handshake as a matter of common courtesy, Verdonk voiced her disappointment. ‘I am a woman and minister. I stand here as a minister’ (Volkskrant, April 26, 2006). This incident was quickly noted by the media, as in November 2004 an imam from Tilburg had also refused to shake Verdonk’s hand. These incidents were considered by many as an illustration of ‘the multicultural drama’ painted by Paul Scheffer in the daily NRC of January 29, 2000. He had argued that the Dutch tradition to strive for social equality and integration was not applied to the immigrant population and thus leading to an ethnic, culturally different underclass. His critiques of the Dutch laissez-faire mentality and the heightened debates on multiculturalism very much influenced Minister Verdonk’s policies of integration. For many, the handshake incidents illustrated the failure of this integration policy and raised the question of to what extent Muslim piety can be accommodated in the secular-liberal¹ order in the Netherlands.

In recent years Europe has faced a multicultural challenge of dealing with incorporating religious practices and multicultural sensibilities into daily life, bringing into debate the accommodation of the religious in the secular.² The Verdonk incident is one of the many situations of gendered conflict in Europe such as the infamous veil debates in France and Germany (Scott, 2007; Joppke, 2007), the question of how to accommodate Muslims in mixed-sex physical education in Britain (Benn & Dagkas, 2006), or whether Dutch public money should be available for hymen repair for Muslim women (Saharso, 2003). Overall, in conceptions of the civilisational fault lines between Western autochthonous people and its Muslim others the most fervent issues were the ones pertaining to normative gender equality and sexual freedoms.

This study looks at the issue of handshaking in the case of second generation veiled Turkish-Dutch Muslim women³ who are in higher education, asking ‘How do veiled practicing Muslim Turkish-Dutch students

negotiate agency in social contact in the Netherlands?’ In this article I focus on how these respondents navigate within the secular-liberal order with their distinct ideas and practices to live ethically, and show how they resolve the embodied practice of handshaking. On a more theoretical level this helps us to discuss their agency.

While Foucault’s theorization of ethical self-formation is extensively used by feminist studies on gender and the body, McNay argues that Bourdieu’s concept of ‘habitus’ allows a more nuanced reading through its incorporation of the social into the body (McNay, 1999: 103). ‘The body is a private gendered space but at the same time it is a social space in which religious, political and ideological understandings can be articulated’ (Shanneik, 2012, p. 97). Due to this social aspect, in answering the research question, I utilise the Bourdesian conceptual tool of habitus and its accompanying concepts of capital. To put it simply, habitus refers to the distinctions, sensibilities, tastes and dispositions people have due to their particular class and other positions. An agent’s habitus depends on different kinds of capital; the embodied forms of cultural capital that she/he brings from childhood, the human capital gained through training and skills and social capital gained through group membership and participation in social structures as well as economic capital.⁴ While the handshake issue has been framed in scholarship as pertaining to Foucauldian ethical self-formation (see Mahmood, 2005), I bring the discussion further to theorise on handshake in the case of my respondents with special attention to the social dimension of the body and the wider social contexts in which it operates.

As I will show in what follows, due to their specific habitus, the second generation veiled Turkish-Dutch respondents practice the handshake in a way, which helps them to maximize their capital differently in the different contexts. This tells us that their agency cannot be solely theorised through their preoccupation with ethical self-realisation, as also a liberal notion of agency through conscious choice and deliberate action is at work in their lives. The complex nature of the veiled second generation Turkish-Dutch women’s subjectivity formation through the intertwinement of the practices of secular-liberal and Muslim normativities is presented.

This article is written as part of a broader study on gender issues of practicing Muslim students in higher education who veil, based on two years of fieldwork. It combines the methods of semi-structured in-depth

interviews, participant observation and informal focus groups naturally occurring in meetings with respondents. Interviews were done with 28 Turkish-Dutch and 30 Turkish respondents in the Netherlands and Turkey respectively, who are both in higher education and who wear the *hijab*. The interviews with Turkish-Dutch respondents that I cite from in this article were all conducted in Turkish. The respondents are recruited using snowball method, and their names are changed in text to protect their confidentiality. Data in the form of interview transcripts and field notes were coded and analysed using the grounded theory method (Strauss & Corbin, 1998).

Social Background

Studying pious Muslim women's practices in the Netherlands needs to be contextualized within the wider realm of social and political relations between the Dutch and Muslim immigrants. In recent years, a host of events such as 9/11 and the killing of director Theo Van Gogh by an Islamic fanatic have resulted in an increasingly negative perception of Islam in the Netherlands. This is also reflected in the political rise of conservative parties with anti-immigrant discourses. The biggest criticisms on Islam pertained to that of gender and sexuality issues (Bracke, 2011). Muslim women have come to be regarded as the 'unemancipated Other' of Dutch women (Ghorashi, 2010), and the veil, practiced by some pious Muslim women became a signifier for Islam's antagonism towards women. Muslim women increasingly became the targets of integration policies and were highly encouraged to abandon their religious practices (Korteweg and Triadafilopoulos, 2013). It is within this highly contingent context in which being a practicing Muslim woman is a contested identity that everyday choices in their lives become areas of negotiations. An intersectional perspective (Crenshaw, 1991) is needed to account for the respondents' specific case of multiple grounds of identity pertaining to their religiosity, Turkishness and second generation Dutchness work in dealing with the multiple and often conflicting demands made on them. The issue of social contact in the example of handshaking will be analysed with an intersectional approach.

Theorizing Handshaking and Agency

The handshake issue is theoretically situated in the wider context of agency debates in gender studies. Underlying this debate is the feminist difficulty with understanding why pious women are attracted to conservative religions, which seem to be at odds with their own interests leading to divergent approaches (Midden, 2012; Van den Brandt, 2014). Liberal feminism conceptualizes agency as autonomy and connects religious attraction to lack of autonomy. Accordingly, this view of agency presupposes that actions should be self-determined, characterized by free-will (Nussbaum, 1999, p. 70). It also presupposes that free choices are always good choices. Such a secular liberal view has been challenged on grounds of a postcolonial ethnocentrism that frames pious Muslim women as the Other of an autonomous Eurocentric subject. Another line of theory, which from here on I will call the ‘doing religion’ paradigm (Avishai, 2008) put forth the idea that women comply with and participate in conservative religions for the sake of religious ends only rather than any other gains (Avishai, 2008; Bracke, 2008; Mahmood, 2005; Jacobsen, 2011), with a view to ‘doing religion’; ‘as a mode of conduct and being’ (Avishai, 2008, p. 412).

Bracke and Fadil argue that a question of whether the headscarf is oppressive or emancipatory is wrong in itself due to the fact that it employs the ‘autonomy’ framework of liberal feminism, equating agency with autonomy and emancipation (2012, p. 53). Mahmood argues for the need to redefine agency, challenging feminist theory to attend to different meanings of agency ‘whose operations escape the logic of resistance and subversion of norms’ (2005: 167) and proposes to think about agency ‘as a modality of action’ (ibid: 157).

Mahmood’s main contribution is her argument that individual autonomy and self-realisation are two different things. In her work on Egyptian pietists she presents that the women in the piety movement do not strive for autonomy, but instead aim for self-realisation in their endeavour of cultivating piety. Thus, they are ‘active agents, applying corporeal techniques and spiritual exercises in a project of ethical formation’ (Vintges, 2012, p. 292). Therefore, rather than being preoccupied with autonomy versus oppression, pietist women strive for ‘practicing through “self-techniques” an “ethical formation” that engages their entire way of life’ (ibid: 284). Mahmood contrasts western liberalism’s model of the freely

choosing, autonomous self with the women she studied who strive for cultivating piety. Therefore I can identify agency ‘not only in those acts that resist norms and prescriptive structures, but also in the multiple ways in which one inhabits norms’ (Mahmood, 2005, p. 15).

Mahmood’s analysis draws on Foucauldian ethics according to which individuals constitute themselves as moral subjects by their own actions. Mahmood demonstrates certain practices of the pietists as ‘self- techniques’ that result in their ethical formation. These are ‘techniques which permit individuals to perform, by their own means, a certain number of operations on their own bodies, on their own souls, on their own thoughts, on their own conduct, and this in such a way that they transform themselves, modify themselves, and reach a certain state of perfection, of happiness, of purity, of supernatural power, and so on.’ (Foucault, 2007, p. 154). Within the ‘doing religion’ paradigm, the analysis of handshaking is framed by Foucauldian ethical formation.

While I adopt Mahmood’s formulation of agency as self-realisation, clearly the cultural context of Turkish-Dutch pious students significantly differs from that of Egyptian pietists. As I will show in the article through the particular example of handshaking the respondents tap into different sources for justifying and making sense of their practices within a coherent subjectivity. Sometimes they strive for self-realisation, and sometimes they strive for autonomy. They have a particular way of approaching the handshake issue contingent on its context and framed by their specific habitus.

Not-Handshaking as Cultural Capital⁵

How do the respondents view the handshake and its place in their pious lives? Ayşegül explains why handshaking is problematic:

The thing is you need to live a certain way as a Muslim woman. You know there are things you can do, and there are things you just don’t do. That is how it is ordained (by God). You are not to touch, you are to lower your gaze with stranger men, and you try not to attract their attention. You just learn these things when you are growing up, and you learn to implement them... You know that you need to live by these to feel you are a good Muslim. You know this is the right

way to live, so it doesn't feel like a burden. You know that paying attention to such things is important to protect yourself and others. That is why handshaking is an issue for many Muslim women. It is not something that has a place in our culture.

Ayşegül alludes to the principle of boundary maintenance in Islam by referring to 'the need to live a certain way'. She contextualizes the handshake within the prescription of legitimate conduct between women and men which she states is ordained by God, arguing that 'things you can do and don't do' are clearly delineated such as non-touching, lowering the gaze and refraining from attracting men's attention. For practicing Muslims boundary maintenance with the opposite sex is of utmost importance, organised through the social concepts of *mahrem* and *namahrem*. *Mahrem* are those to whom one is related by blood, which for a woman 'comprise father, brother, son, father's brother, mother's brother, brother's son, sister's son, and suckling brother' (El Guindi, 1999, p. 98). They are the ones whom a woman can touch, but also with whom one can spend time unveiled. '*Mahrem* literally refers to intimacy, domesticity, secrecy, women's space, what is forbidden to a foreigner's gaze; it also means a man's family⁶ (Göle, 1996, p. 7). *Namahrem* refers to anyone of the opposite sex, to whom one is not related by blood and with whom therefore sexual relations are possible. Even distant relatives are considered *namahrem*. Touching *namahrem* is forbidden. In this understanding it is literally the female body, which establishes distinction between *mahrem* and *namahrem*, defining the interior versus exterior realms of privacy. Both not-handshaking and veiling pertain to this boundary maintenance, working as practices of ethical self-formation setting the limits of behaviour within Muslim gender normativity.

Similarly, 23 year-old student of pharmaceuticals, Yeliz underlines the same notion: 'From a young age I have known that some things are supposed to be in a certain way. That you ought to behave a certain way with men' when referring to legitimate conduct between sexes. In the context of relations with the *namahrem*, modesty is to be worked on by curbing and controlling the desires of the body. Therefore, modesty is the ethical substance of this formation which inhibits the handshake; the aspect of the ethical formation that one needs to work on continuously by behaving properly vis-a-vis *namahrem* males. Such an understanding of Muslim moral conduct is an aspect of their cultural capital that as Yeliz states 'from a

young age' was instilled. The embodied dispositions of bodily comportment, ways of moving and acting in the world vis-a-vis *namahrem* males are acquired by individual respondents as part of their cultural capital as they observe and learn the particularities of Islamic gendered socialisation from their families and their religious contexts as 'systematic cultural apprenticeship' (Thorpe, 2010, p. 193). Bourdieu argues for the importance of early experiences of primary socialisation in the way habitus becomes embodied. Drawing on the work of developmental psychologists in construction of gender identities, he argues that 'primary social experiences have a disproportionate weight' (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992, p. 134). This is evident in the story of Efsun, a 21 year-old student of pedagogy:

I was in a classroom with only girls in the Islamic primary school, so when I moved on to junior high it was a bit difficult to adjust to the mixed sex setting. I did not feel so comfortable. You had to constantly mind your veil, and the way you act. You are in close proximity with males.

The idea of bodily discipline and gender segregation asserted by religious socialisation inhibits direct interaction between the sexes, creating a highly gendered division of the social space.⁷ Therefore, when the single-sex space becomes a mixed-sex space in junior high school, Efsun is faced with some adjustment difficulties. The painstaking care she takes in her actual bodily comportment when she has to share a space in close proximity with males is 'charged with a host of social meanings and values' (Bourdieu, 1977, p. 87). Through her religious socialisation her particular body has become the vehicle through which the social structure is enacted, and this religious habitus is reproduced as she pays attention to the ways in which she acts.

The following excerpt exemplifies the extent of such boundary maintenance. Tugba is a 21 year-old student of accounting. She has lived in the same town all her life. She's an outgoing and popular person and in her small town she knows many of the young people of her age. As she became older and donned the veil, she had to mark the boundaries in her interaction with male Dutch friends more strictly:

The thing is, fellows Turks know the culture, and Dutchmen don't. They do not know where to draw the line with a woman. Sometimes

with Dutch male friends, they do these jokes with their hands you know. They are too touchy-feely. Like poking ... Just the other day one of them poked me jokingly. And I gestured to stop him abruptly. He was then asking: ‘Are you bothered? Shall I not touch you?’ And I obviously said to him ‘well, actually it is better if you don’t’. But they really don’t think it’s too strange. After all, they know it’s a different culture.

As touching *namahrem* is frowned upon, when telling this incident Tugba lowered her voice as if she wanted to prevent that other people would hear about her transgression. As a devout Muslim, she was conscious of keeping her distance with *namahrem* males and did not shy away from warning her friends about the boundaries they should respect. As with other respondents she was painstakingly cautious in her interactions with males with regards to modesty, especially with the Dutch friends whom she perceived as too careless in keeping boundaries. Whom to shake hands with is an intricate question, and so is the response to other forms of touching. In line with Muslim ethical formation, abstaining from bodily contact with *namahrem* males, keeping bodily distance and retreating oneself from a male’s touch, in the handshake or otherwise is a learned disposition from childhood. It is a self-technique and as such a means of self-realisation in line with their religious upbringing and part of their cultural capital.

As not-handshaking and bodily boundary maintenance is part of their cultural capital, this is something they have in common with Turkish men, and in particular with men from their religious communities. Efsun referred to this when she said:

Some Turks who are distant to religion, they also extend their hands to me. They are not too conscious. But others who know their religion well, they know that it is inappropriate so they don’t do it. They know that it is inappropriate both for me and for them. They don’t extend their hand because first they have respect for you, and second that it is religiously improper. When a Dutchman comes, you can extend your hand more easily to him, but with a Turk it is a different story. Something different happens. How can I say...for example, a Dutchman from my class I can easily shake his hand, or he can shake mine. But it doesn’t work like that with a Turk. Since

both of you know what is appropriate and what isn't, you withdraw yourself... But in fact, both are *namahrem*.

Efsun acknowledges not-handshaking with the *namahrem* as a self-technique. However, she makes a distinction between Dutchmen and Turkish-Dutchmen. While she feels more secure in extending her hand at Dutchmen, she is more hesitant to touch Turkish-Dutch males based on the shared knowledge regarding the precept of non-touching. She distinguishes further between religious and non-religious. As religiously-minded men are more aware of the precept of non-touching, they do not attempt to shake hands out of 'respect' for the woman in question. They are equipped with the right knowledge to play the game of social interaction within their community. Non-religious Turkish-Dutch males however should know the rules but do not always behave accordingly. Therefore, handshaking behaviour is not only contingent on the context of the relationship but also contingent on one's ethnic background and/or religious orientation. Shared knowledge on religiously appropriate behaviour arising from their embodied cultural capital works to complicate interaction within the community, also evident in the following account.

Aycan lives in a small town where her parents are well known in the Turkish religious community, as her father gives religious lessons and her mother does social work for the community. She said:

I'm more careful in my interaction with Turkish-Dutch males, more so if I know them from the religious community. Actually just the other day we discussed this with other veiled friends. It is a bit strange, but true. With other Turkish males who are distant from religion, I am more relaxed. For example, at the classroom I would go sit by one of the non-religious Turkish guys more easily. They think this girl is too religious, so they are not interested in me, and I obviously am not interested in them, so it is more relaxed. With the religious ones from the community however, there is this sensitivity. I will probably get married to one of them, so you are extra careful in your behaviour. You think 'OK, let's be more careful'. How can I say, there is more respect, more consideration. And it is mutual. They also try to refrain from looking at me in the eye. They wouldn't be too forward.

Aycan also talks about how shared notions about the precept of bodily distance, of non-touching and avoiding the gaze, frames the interaction between her and her male peers in the Turkish community. What is striking here however is that she applies these self-techniques more strictly with religious men based on the idea that one of these men will be her future husband. With other Turkish males the perceived impossibility of forming a union due to religious differences, and thus lack of any romantic interest results in a more relaxed interaction. The opposite of this relaxed manner is identified as ‘respect’. Both Efsun and Aycan argue that religious Turkish men have ‘respect’ for them therefore they wouldn’t be forward, which manifests itself in their shying away from bodily contact and their timorous behaviour.

In this economy of gendered social interaction, non-handshaking has symbolic value pertaining to respect and modesty. As Turks are a collectivistic cultural group (Delevi & Bugay, 2013), both religious men and women acknowledge that respect and consideration for each other entails non-contact and social distance, as they both have been raised with the same values of modesty in gendered interaction. Religious socialisation has trained them in these body techniques that enhance their cultural capital. Non-handshaking, like other disciplined bodily comportment, is a valuable and sought after feature of my respondents’ cultural capital; one which attests to their prestige as pious, respectable women and defines them as marriage-material. They know that failure to show such modesty will have social consequences. As I have shown, the respondents are able to manoeuvre easily in their handshaking behaviour by evaluating whether or not it will be deemed proper, based on the ethnic and religious background of the person they interact with. Only in specific cases it will lead to loss of capital to shake hands. With people who are not familiar with such cultural values, they can interact more freely.

Handshaking as Act of Social Capital

In this section, I showed how not-handshaking works to give the respondents ‘religious merit’ (Jansen, 2004, p. 1) and how it is actively employed as a self-technique in their endeavour of pious self-realisation. The students are agentic in building cultural capital valued by relevant others who are seen as

potential marriage partners. Here, the analysis is in line with the ‘doing religion’ (Avishai, 2008) paradigm in that my respondents exerted agency in the form of sticking with the non-touching precept for religious ends. The respondents are committed to their piety as a mode of conduct and conceptualize the handshake within this understanding. However, I also show that the kind of self-realization my respondents strive for is motivated by certain socially determined rules. As my respondents strictly do not handshake with pious Muslim males and are less concerned with handshaking with Dutchmen or Turkish-Dutch secular men (although both are *namahrem* males) this attests to the strength of shared notions of cultural capital regarding the handshake. In what follows I look at other ways of how my respondents’ agency regarding the handshake can be accounted for.

Handshaking as Act of Social Capital

In this section I will present how my respondents manage the relationship between the self-technique of not-handshaking with the requirements of living in the secular-liberal order. Despite the centrality of non-touching to Muslim ethical formation, as I will show, in practice not-handshaking is rarely adhered to as my respondents act in adaptive ways in their Dutch milieu to maximize their economic, social, and symbolic gains. I will then discuss how their agency can be accounted for accordingly.

Although non-touching is part of my respondents’ habitus, in some contexts and situations handshaking becomes a strategic act in their habitus, pertaining to their Dutch social capital.⁸ Therefore, habitus is not eternally fixed. While it includes durable qualities, at the same time it also presents a ‘permanent capacity for invention’ (Bourdieu, 2004, p. 63). Bourdieu argues that the habitus ‘predisposes individuals in generative and creative ways to develop strategies that maximize profits either economic or symbolic which unconsciously improves or maintains their social or economic position’ (Bourdieu, 2000, p. 5 in France, Bottrel & Haddon, 2013, p. 15). As new experiences are encountered, individual’s habitus is either reinforced or gets modified by these experiences in various ways that benefit them (Bourdieu, 1992, p. 133). As my respondents move between Turkish and Dutch social fields, what gives them symbolic power changes regarding handshaking.

Efsun, the pedagogy student, explains why she doesn't refrain from handshaking in the Dutch social field:

Especially if you are new in an internship or a job, you have to establish yourself there. Since it is very important to introduce yourself, we can barely keep ourselves from shaking hands. And we often don't. But it is a difficult subject. You have to extend your hand and introduce yourself. Maybe if you do not do that, you will be left behind in the job, they will think you are not up to it or something. So even though it is wrong practice, I will do it.

Efsun's social environment consisted mainly of Turkish people. It wasn't until she was doing a work placement that she engaged more with autochthonous Dutch people. Efsun considers the handshake as 'wrong practice' in the Islamic sense. Indeed, she was one of the few respondents who were slightly irritated with having to discuss the topic of the handshake. However, the fact that not shaking hands could diminish her chances in the competitive job market of the Netherlands affected her behaviour. To establish herself as a competent professional she feels compelled to shake hands with men in her Dutch milieu, as Efsun felt that shaking hands was one of the requirements of professional competency. This decision to do so was based on the argument that otherwise 'she would be left behind in the job;' directly referring to her concerns of economic capital.

Also Yeliz was very much aware of the impact of the social context on her choices regarding the handshake:

If I want Turks in the Netherlands to have a good standing, if I want to represent them in a positive manner, I have to give up on some things, to secure other things in the future such as a good job. Therefore I do not adhere to a strict rule of not-handshaking for example. Yes it might be wrong in the truly Islamic sense, but overall it is not more important than my future, which I have to prioritize. And for them, shaking hands is a way of socializing. In this context, we as Turks have to keep up with Dutch lifestyle, and fit in. In my school my teacher used to shake my hand, and then he asked me about it. He asked 'well I am doing it, but is it offensive to you?' And I explained to him that in theory it is wrong, but it is not such an issue if he wants to shake my hand. In time with familiarity,

you can let the people know that you prefer not to do it, but it is not crucial.

Despite the acknowledgment that in Islamic understanding handshaking is indeed wrong, Yeliz approaches the practice in a matter-of-fact way. Here, as in the case of Efsun, the handshake is detached from its understanding in a pious universe and considered for its social and economic importance in the secular-liberal Dutch framework. Yeliz emphasizes the need to fit in Dutch lifestyle. The handshake allows the respondents to be in harmony with Dutch social practices, and thus to creatively change their habitus and maximize their profits in other than the spiritual/cultural field by building up their social capital. The concerns of ‘representing Turks in a positive manner’ or ‘Turks having a good standing and having a good job’ are in essence concerns about upward mobility and being acceptable as partner in Dutch social (labour) networks. As she considers the handshake as a practice embedded in Dutch social life, she argues for being flexible and accommodating rather than strictly keeping with modesty. A certain bargaining takes place in her thinking between strict observation of piety and economic emancipation, in which the latter is found to be more important in the long run. Yeliz has a feel for the game in the field of proper Dutch social interaction between individuals, and plays according to the rules for her own social gains which in the long run will also be materially rewarding. In this context, the flexibility in shaking hands of the *namahrem* is closely connected to practical reasons of upward mobility.

Zeynep, a student of psychology (22) makes a similar point:

It is something in their culture. Living here we have to adapt to their ways. If we live here, we have to respect their ways. It is the proper and kind way of introductions. I had received an award some time ago in school. Imagine that when the man is giving me the award, I will say to him: ‘I can’t shake your hand, it’s against my religion.’ Of course you don’t do it. You don’t do it because firstly it will be rude. You don’t want to refuse this older man who has no idea, who is only being kind. But also because you need to be on good terms with such people. If we will go to their schools, and go to their jobs to make a living in this country, we have to adapt to these things.

In this account Zeynep affirms the handshake as a cultural element of Dutch social interaction, which is to be respected. It pertains to kindness in greetings, as ‘greetings are an important part of the communicative competence necessary for being a member’ of a community (Duranti, 1997:63). Therefore, also Zeynep conceptualizes the handshake in the field of appropriate Dutch social interaction and not in the Islamic pious universe of gendered interaction. In this context the handshake is a social obligation, refusing to do so is rude rather than an ethical choice of self-making. Indeed, the occasions of handshaking are positively seen as instances in which they are valued and welcome. As another respondent said: ‘If they extend their hand to me, they make an effort to get to know me, I have to meet them halfway. So of course I will shake hands.’ Ultimately, Zeynep underlines the practical aspect of the handshake, which then is employed to turn such hospitality in the long run to economic capital. Upward mobility by ‘going to their schools and their jobs’ necessitates complying with the prevalent social norm of handshaking.

Some consider knowing when to shake hands as crucial as knowing the language for full social participation. Nilay who studies business economics likened it to speaking Dutch without an accent:

For example, if you are to apply for a job in a company, you are better off if you have no accent. They will expect this. They will also expect you to be socially comfortable. Someone extrovert, who can handshake. Maybe it is something more difficult with the accent, but you need to do the handshake. You need to be socially confident. I believe that none of my veiled friends will refuse to shake hands.

Lack of a detectable accent pertains to social capital as it indicates proficiency and belonging in the Dutch social context. Just as having an accent complicates belonging to Dutch society and renders the person less desirable in institutional settings, the respondent argues that the refusal of the handshake will work in a similar way. In this respondent’s discourse of social capabilities the handshake goes together with desired qualities of being outgoing and confident in social situations.

These examples show the intricate link between complying with Dutch norms of sociability and upward mobility. My respondents acknowledged

the embeddedness of the handshake in Dutch culture as an act that testifies to social competence and adeptness as a member of the Dutch social and professional community. As such it is an act that solidifies their social network and builds their social capital. In work or internship contexts my respondents establish themselves through proper introductions and handshakes as social capital is based on mutual knowledge and recognition (Bourdieu, 2008, p. 286). Handshaking has symbolic value in that it indicates that they know how to navigate the Dutch social sphere proficiently and belong to this prestigious group.

By using the symbolic power of the handshake, the Turkish-Dutch students expect that by doing so they will be granted recognition in the eyes of the Dutch as members of Dutch society. This recognition is then expressed by inclusion in their social network and ultimately transferrable into economic capital. Bourdieu argues for the ‘multiplier effect’ (2008, p. 286) of the influence of such social capital on economic capital which is at the root of all the other types of capital⁹ (ibid: 288). In other words, membership in the group of handshaking, competent Dutch professionals, and the good relationships cultivated with these professionals grant my respondents the social capital necessary to make greater claims on economic capital.

How is the worth of cultural capital balanced against that of social and economic capital? Aycan, a 23 year-old student of public relations, considers such a balancing act.

When someone wants to shake my hand I think to myself: Is there more good involved in it rather than bad? I mean if I shake their hand maybe something good will come out of it. That person’s prejudice will diminish. Maybe he will have a better view of Muslim women, maybe they won’t think of us as antisocial and passive types. So that they will know we are approachable. So overall I can afford a sin and shake his hand. This is how I go about everything, judging for myself whether I should do something or not. Only if they are close friends or acquaintances so I know it won’t be rude, I tell them I prefer not to touch. I make a gesture.

Like others, Aycan is well aware of the significance of handshaking as a social norm in the Netherlands and is highly concerned with how others

view Muslim women. Her assessment regarding whether to shake someone's hand is contingent on its repercussions in the views of the Dutch. Although she considers handshaking a 'sin', it is a sin worthy of committing as she thinks it changes the negative ideas the Dutch have about Muslim women's social skills. Although Ayca does not refer explicitly to the economic capital gains in her discourse as do the others, she does consider the social power it gives her; it may change the views others have of her and Muslim women in general and reconsider them as adept members of Dutch social community rather than 'antisocial and passive.' When people with whom she has a more casual relationship extend their hand however, Ayca responds by putting her hand on her chest, a gesture that informs the other person that she prefers not to shake hands.

As seen in these accounts, although handshaking is considered a transgression of pious conduct, at the same time they are significantly flexible on this practice. I have shown the discrepancy between Islamic ethical formation and the rules of Dutch socialisation. While ideally veiled Muslim students would not shake hands with *namahrem* men in line with their ethical self-formation, worldly concerns such as securing a job or maintaining a positive image of Muslim women circumscribed this behaviour. The handshake is viewed in a continuum of maintaining good relations with colleagues, bosses or teachers, returning kindness or hospitality, showing a professional attitude and knowledge of Dutch social norms which are ultimately concerns related to their emancipation, social standing and economic participation in the Netherlands rather than piety.

My respondents are preoccupied with Islamic ethical self-formation, but as shown here piety alone does not guide their actions. Regardless of their commitment to an Islamic ethical formation and the consequent religious prescriptions they live by, they rarely refuse to shake hands. Despite scriptural prescriptions, self-determined decision-making is at work in their handshaking behaviour as they are clearly concerned with fitting in the secular-liberal order. My respondents are able to judge in every instance whether handshaking will be for their benefit or not, and they will act accordingly through conscious choice and deliberate action. They autonomously determine how they will act and in this respect they show themselves to be agents in the liberal feminist conception of agency as autonomy.

Discussion and Conclusion

In this article I attempted to answer the question of ‘what is the way in which my respondents approach and appropriate the issue of the handshake, and how can their agency be accounted for regarding the handshake?’ As gender relations lie at the heart of the reproduction of the nation (or cultural group) (Yuval-Davis, 1997, p. 47), prevalent norms of gendered interaction become highly important as they determine to what extent agents are included in the imaginary of the nation/group. That is why the different ways of gendered interaction becomes important for how the respondents feel and claim belonging to the Turkish-Dutch and Dutch groups. I contend that Muslim ethical practices, how they are executed or not executed, should always be contextually analysed through their social meanings in a given setting. Only then they become meaningful. Therefore I have undertaken to look at the habitus of not-handshaking by veiled Muslim students, with its distinct understanding of gendered interaction. Moreover, I wanted to contribute to the agency discussions in the case of Muslim women. Agency is complex and multi-layered and should be theorised differently in different settings.

Two conflicting cultural norms regarding the handshake (avoiding handshaking for ethical reasons vs. handshaking to establish proper social interaction) were identified, both equally valued and recognised. In this article I set out to show how veiled Muslim students dealt with the conflict in practice and how this can be related to two diverse ways of theorizing agency.

In the first section of the article I have shown how my respondents refrain from handshaking in line with their religious convictions as part of their cultural capital of religious socialisation guided by the concepts of *mahrem/namahrem*. As such I argued that their ethical concerns of self-realisation in the pious universe confirmed the arguments of the ‘doing religion’ paradigm (Avishai, 2008). My respondents’ discourse regarding the handshake was based on concerns related to pious conduct. Non-handshaking had the symbolic power to give the agent prestige and esteem in the pious universe. This was most evident in the way they distinguish between Turkish-Dutch religious men, who are in the know about pious conduct and the precept of non-touching and who are potential marriage

partners, and secular Turkish-Dutch or Dutch men. This upholds Mahmood's notion of 'agency as self-realisation' (2005).

In the second section I have shown how they negotiate the non-touching precept in the Dutch social field. In fact, they seldom refuse to shake hands in this field. Here handshaking was seen as an important means to gain social capital, providing them with individual and communal benefits. This social capital in turn worked to generate economic capital. Their handshaking behaviour was tied to concerns of upward mobility.

In terms of agency this means that both notions of agency, of pious self-realisation and of autonomous rational decision-making were involved. By negotiating when and where to shake hands or not and by deciding which type of capital is more interesting to them in which specific context, they show that they can successfully combine these different types of agency. Their agency is not limited to constructing a pious self but can also be read within liberal feminism's paradigm of agency as autonomy. Moreover, rather than being two different things, as Mahmood stated, I see cross-overs. The Turkish Dutch students not only sought self-realisation as pious Muslim but also as Dutch professional, and they were not only autonomous in their rational decision-making on what was effective to their career but also on what would construct them as a pious woman.

Notes

¹ I borrow the term secular-liberal from Jacobsen (2011) who refers to Asad's formulation of liberal as a 'discursive space' allowing a common moral and political language to discuss issues; a discursive space to which ideas such as individual autonomy, rule of law, freedom, limitation of state power and religious tolerance are central. (See Asad, 2009, p. 25)

² Asad argues that the secular, as a formation of modernity has evolved in time to eradicate political problems arising out of religious wars, urging us to see the secular as not the opposition of religion, but rather as a form of governmentality (pertaining to ideas, sensibilities and institutions) which regulates religious practice in the name of a particular understanding of the truly human. (Asad, 2003, p. 17)

³ Turkish-Dutch second generation is religiously active and perceives itself as Muslim. Statistics show that 20% of all Turkish-Dutch second-generation women veil (Maliepaard and Gijsberts, 2012, p. 77).

⁴ Three essential forms of capital are economic, cultural and social. (Bourdieu, 2008, p. 281) Cultural and social capitals are the intangible forms, giving the agent privilege and status. Moreover, there is symbolic capital, which is the symbolic power and recognition granted to the agent in the eyes of others due to the agent's certain dispositions.

⁵ Cultural capital consists of three subforms: the embodied state as learned dispositions from childhood, the objectified state as in cultural artefacts and the institutional state in the form of cultural institutions as well as certificates obtained.

⁶ Göle argues that ‘the using of the Western concept of “private sphere” instead of mahrem would have led to the suppression of the distinctiveness of the domestic sphere in a Muslim context.’ (Göle, 1996, p. 7)

⁷ For a discussion on gendered religious socialisation in Turkish-Dutch dorms see Batum and Jansen, 2013. For a discussion of notions of appropriate and inappropriate gendered work spaces in the discourses of Turkish-Dutch and Turkish women see Batum, 2015.

⁸ ‘Social capital is the aggregate of the actual or potential resources which are linked to possession of a durable network of more or less institutionalized relationships of mutual acquaintance and recognition - or in other words, to membership in a group - which provides each of its members with the backing of the collectivity-owned capital, a “credential” which entitles them to credit, in the various senses of the word.’ (Bourdieu, 2008, p. 286)

⁹ ‘So it has to be posited simultaneously that economic capital is at the root of all the other types of capital and that these transformed, disguised forms of economic capital, never entirely reducible to that definition, produce their most specific effects only to the extent that they conceal (not least from their possessors) the fact that economic capital is at their root, in other words – but only in the last analysis – at the root of their effects.’ (Bourdieu, 2008, p. 288)

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