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Introduction

The Internet offers us a broad range of possibilities; especially social practices and communications have changed immensely the last few decades. Email, personal (photo) blogs, forums, msn and Facebook are just some examples of new means of communication that make it possible to contact people from a far distance or to become acquainted with people you would not have been able to meet in real life. This means, among other things, that migrants can more easily stay in touch with (people from) their home country and at the same time meet people from a similar background on special websites or forums. Researchers have both pointed out the advantages and disadvantages of these new means of communication. For example, the anonymity of the Internet, both gives people the opportunity to discuss and ask things they otherwise might not have dared to, but at the same time also creates an easy environment for deception. As many of the public debates mainly discuss migrants as Muslims, Islam plays an important role in most (Muslim) migrants' websites.

Researchers know more and more about the relationship between gender and ICT in general and new media specifically. But not only gender: also other categories of difference are more and more taken into account in research on new media. For example, age is an important factor in research as well. Many researchers are interested in how the behaviour and well-being of younger generations are influenced by digital networks and other new forms of communication. Recently, also ethnicity and migration are more and more researched in connection to digital media. However, despite the growing attention for these various categories; there is still a lack of research that investigates the connections between gender, ethnicity, age, class, nationality and sexuality. In order to better understand the position of migrants in relation to their digital activities, this project aims to take all these categories (and their intersections) into account.

An important starting point for this is intersectional theory and hence the connections between gender, religion, nationality, class and age. Intersectionality teaches us that all identities are based on the intersection between various axes of difference. For example, in order to understand the sexism that migrant women have to deal with, we have to take into account the mechanisms of racism, and if we want to understand the racism migrant women experience, we also need to look at sexism (Crenshaw, 1989). Our research focuses specifically on young Muslim women and on the intersections between these axes of difference, in connection to new media. It is our final aim to explore the role of digital media in the emancipation of Muslim women. For many migrants, especially women, Internet forums offer the possibility to invalidate their image in popular media (Bink, 2010). These sites give them a voice, which they do not have in other public spaces. The

research is cross-cultural and conducted in the Netherlands, the United Kingdom and Greece.

1. Gender, Migration, Religious Practices and New Media

1.1. Netherlands

For a long time, the Netherlands was internationally known to be one of the most tolerant societies in the world. It is highly probable that this is just a belief without proper empirical basis. But whether the belief in the 'tolerant Netherlands' is true or not, it is certain that this view has changed in recent years. After the murder of Pim Fortuyn and Theo van Gogh the Netherlands are generally not considered to be a multicultural success story anymore.

It took the Dutch governments a long time to respond to the growing amount of migrants in the post-war era. This is mainly connected to the widespread belief that most migrants did not come to the Netherlands permanently. Especially guest workers were seen as temporary migrants who came to the country for just a few years. When the government realized that most of these people would not go back to their country of birth, integration policies became an issue. However, this was not until the 1980s, when many migrants had already lived in the country for several decades. In these years, policy was mostly based on the idea that migrants should integrate into Dutch society, while maintaining their own identities: 'integratie met behoud van eigen identiteit' (Ghorashi, 2003). The beginning of the current discussions, or neo-realist discourse, about migration and Islam in the Netherlands can be connected to the first statements against this approach towards migrants and the neo-realist discourse in the Netherlands, can be recognised by its harshness and focus on women, but is also connected to two other developments: (1) a transformation in the discourse about migrants: from guest workers to Muslims and (2) a (re)new(ed) definition of national identities, very much related to secularism.[1] If we analyse these developments from a Dutch perspective, we see that discussing cultural recognition and integration actually meant discussing Islam (Peters, 2006). So even though the Netherlands has known a broad variety of migrants, such as those already mentioned, guest workers and postcolonial migrants, but also refugees from all over the world, current migration debates only seem to

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[1] The following articles contain interesting analyses of the changing discourse in the Netherlands: R. Peters. 2006. "A dangerous book': Dutch Public Intellectuals and the Koran'. RSCAS Working Paper No 2006/39. European University Institute. Also online available: http://home.medewerker.uva.nl/r.peters/bestanden/Dangerous%20book.pdf and M. Bruinessen. 2006. 'After van Gogh: Roots of Anti-Muslim Rage'. Paper Presented at the seventh Mediterranean Social and Political Research Meeting, Florence, Italy. Also online available: http://www.let.uu.nl/~martin.vanbruinessen/personal/publications/ws10-2006MM-van-Bruinessen.pdf

cover the Islam and Muslim migrants rather than other cultures (Prins, 2002).

For many migrants, digital networks are important tools for keeping in touch with people from their home country and for meeting those with a similar background in their new country. Especially for the latter goal, there are hardly any other means (for example there are now special newspapers for specific groups of migrants) to connect, except the websites that target these groups specifically. Especially Dutch Moroccans are active on the internet; which also shows in the amount of research on new media and Dutch Moroccans (Mamadouh, 2003). A final reason why new media are attractive to migrants is that they can create their own platforms where they have a voice and people listen to them. This contrary to other media, where migrants often feel ignored or discriminated. Hence, for many migrants, the Internet fulfills a role that mainstream media neglect to (Romer, 2002). Moreover, specific group targeted websites also make the larger public aware of the existence and position of these specific groups (Mamadouh, 2003).

In that context, most research on migration and digital media in the Netherlands focuses on the question of integration: Does the use of new media by 'allochtonous youth' in the Netherlands improve or (prevent/limit) their integration into Dutch society. Various researchers give different answers to this question (De Waal, 2003). Some argue that websites that focus on specific groups, such as Maroc.nl, enhance segregation, as their visitors dissociate themselves from the public domain. Others believe that such activities on the Internet can have a positive influence on integration and that most migrants combine visits to specific Moroccan sites and more general 'Dutch' ones. Furthermore, researchers in this strand believe that even if migrants only visit websites such as Maroc.nl, their discussions are often about the intersections between Dutch and Moroccan identities (Geense and Pels, 2002).

De Waal argues that discussion websites such as Maroc.nl and Maghreb.nl create a possibility for the emancipation and integration of Moroccan youth in the Netherlands (De Waal, 2003). But rather than slowly assimilating to Dutch culture, de Waal sees a development towards more multicultural identities. Young Moroccans are claiming more space within the Dutch public domain, while holding on to their Moroccan background. Also Islam plays an important role on most of these websites; both in the forum discussions and information that is provided. On some sites, visitors can ask questions about Islam to 'cyber-imams' (Geense and Pels, 2002). This way, the Internet is not only important for migrants to communicate with each other, but also to form their opinions on issues that are important to them. According to Leni Brouwer especially Dutch Moroccan women use online communities to define their position in both the Dutch and the Moroccan society, without having to be accountable to family or other people who try to control their actions (Brouwer, 2006). Furthermore, she argues that research shows that contrary

to public discussions and debates on television, the participants in Internet forums are mainly young, less educated and female (Brouwer, 2006).

1.2. Greece

Greece was considered until the 1990s as a country of emigration. Since the 1990s, however, immigration became an important issue in public debates, primarily linked to issues of criminality, illegality and precarisation of labour. Responding to the lack of a legal framework for regularization, migration policies in the following decades focused on the residence permits of illegal migrants who lived and worked in Greece. These policies adopted a framework based on successive ad hoc regularization procedures that nonetheless stopped in 2005, when a relevant European directive was implemented. As a result of the fact that Greek constitutes an entry point to Europe, the rising number of immigrants that have entered Greece illegaly after 2005 have no other means of regularizing their presence in Greece than to apply for asylum. Given the fact that Greece has the lowest rate of asylum recognition in the EU and that the procedure often takes many years, most of those who cross the borders are forced to remain in a state of illegality and precarity. A temporary "pink card" is often granted to those who apply for asylum – which constitutes a permit to stay in the country for "humanitarian reasons", but gives no other rights to the applicants. In these conditions, transit migration has become a dominant trend in Greek migration flows.

Gradually public discourse in Greece shifted from an intolerant attitude towards Balkan and especially Albanian migrants towards a much more racialized discourse that targets transit migrants of Asian and African origin who are constructed as, "coloured people" with cultural habits that are incompatible with the Greek way of life. In this context, anti-islamic sentiment has also risen. The rise of popularity of the ultra right-wing political party LAOS and the neo-nazi organization and political party Chrysi Avgi, which was elected in the Greek parliament in the 2012 elections. During the 2010s, there was an escalation of racist violence by the police, ultra right-wing groups and local citizens in "self-defense", as well as a legitimization of racist attitudes, policies and arguments by more mainstream political parties, groups and the Media. Although anti-racist movements still exercise considerable influence primarily amongst the left-wing, the rise of nationalism that followed the financial crisis has led to the spread of racist practices to different segments of the Greek population, which become primarily manifest in the so-called "problematic areas" of the centre of Athens.

Integration policies were never a priority in the Greek policy agenda. Although several projects have been implemented by government agencies and NGO associations –most of which were funded by EU funds- there was never a systematic attempt, with the exception fo some inter-cultural schools, to implement integration or multiculturalist projects in Greece. First generation migrants were largely expected to integrate into the Greek labour market covering existing shortages, while second generation migrants were expected to integrate by entering the Greek educational system. The only exception to this tendency was the voting of a new naturalization law that gives the chance to children of migrants born or having being educated in Greece and long-term legal residents to apply for Greek citizenship. Although this law opens up new possibilities, its restrictive provisions and selctive implementation have led in practice to a very low percentage of naturalizations. Despite the lack of integration policies, migrants who have managed to apply for resident permits prior to 2005 are in a very different position than transit , "pink card" holders and asylum seekers.

For this reason, we have chosen to focus on the practices of two groups of Muslim women currently residing in Greece. First, we focus on Arab Muslim women as they constitute a relatively well established and intricately networked group among Muslim migrants in Greece, who have been active in claiming their religious rights and identity in political terms through setting up religious activities in cultural centers that function as informal mosques and through their participation in transnational migrant networks. Second, we have chosen to focus on Afghan Muslim women as they constitute a group of transit asylum seekers that reside in Greece only temporarily in their attempt to find ways to cross over the Greek borders towards other European destinations. Despite the common religious identity, Afghan women's experiences, practices and perceptions in the society of origin and residence, as well as in their migrant communities differ significantly from those of Arab women. This double focus opens up the discussion to the question of intersectionality analysing the processes and discourses that enable migrant women of different social classes, national and ethnic origins, educational backgrounds, and ages to (re)negotiate their religious affiliations and their multiple belongings.

Arab Muslim migrants in Athens are the oldest migrant Muslim group and form a loosely defined community. Although there are several Arab nationalities (mostly Syrians, Palestinians, Egyptians, and fewer from Northern African countries) living in Athens today, they have organized themselves for religious purposes under the unifying umbrella of the Muslim Association of Greece,[2] which is hardly representative of the diverse Muslim migrant

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[2] Accessed at: http://www.equalsociety.com/en/ (webpage); https://www.facebook.com/pages/Muslim-Association-of-GreeceMAG-Μουσουλμανική-Ένωση-Ελλάδος-ΜΕΕ/276437975740419?sk=notes (Facebook page);

communities in Greece today (that include also Afghan, Pakistani, and Sudanese Muslims), but plays a very important role in representing Muslim interests in official consultations and public debates. The Muslim Association was set up in 2003 and represents a faith based organization that includes both migrant Muslims and Greek converts, in contrast to other migrant Muslim organizations which are based on ethnicity and nationality, such as the Pakistani Community. In this sense, even though it includes mainly Arab Muslim migrants, it still stakes a universalist claim in representing the interests of Muslims in general, as a universal religious community, especially vis-a-vis the state and with regards to the legalization of migrants, the construction of a central Mosque in Athens, and the provision of a Muslim cemetery (Kanonidou et al. 2009, Triandafyllidou 2010).

Contrary to the established Arab Muslim communities in Athens, Afghan migration in Greece is predominantly transit migration. Greece's asylum system remains dysfunctional, despite the recent reform of the refugee law, with migrants and asylum seekers, including children, detained in inhuman conditions and access to asylum procedures being severely undermined by serious obstacles (Human Rights' Watch 2009). Afghan Muslim women in Greece are mostly in transit towards different European destinations, where family members or relatives reside. Their every-day lives are consumed in the accumulation of the necessary transport fees in order to move to their desired destinations. Most of them have very little or only basic knowledge of the Greek language and many are IT illiterate. Because their migration plans aim usually towards crossing the Greek borders, illegality and the threat of deportability condition their stay in Greece. As a result of the transit character of Afghan migration, most of the socioeconomic problems they face with regards to asylum applications, food, water and housing and health care are resolved through their participation in transnational networks, in which exploitation and violence exercised by male smugglers is the norm.[3] Many children attend Greek public schools only for short periods of time, and some of them –especially the younger ones - may not even be enrolled in the Greek educational system. The peculiarities of life in transit are also reflected in the limited participation of Afghan women in the activities of official Muslim groups and collectivities in Athens.

1.3. United Kingdom

This case study focuses on Muslim female migrants from the post-Soviet space living in the United Kingdom (U.K.), focusing on the role of Internet in

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http://independent.academia.edu/MuslimAssociationofGreeceMAGΜουσουλμανικήΈλνωσηΕλλ άδοςΜΕΕ (Academia.edu).
[3] Interview with male informant 20/12/2012

the religious life of these migrants. More specifically, the study focuses on how these migrants use this medium to fulfill their religious needs and construct their social networks, but also further examines how mediated discourses intervene with their off-line activities hybridizing female Post-Soviet Muslim agency in the digital era.

Several aspects make this atypical and marginal group of migrants worth exploring. First, this group of migrants is currently settling in the UK, which despite the growing Muslim population, has a population with a highly developed secular worldview (less than 5 % churchgoers). According to Pew Research[4], Muslims in the U.K. are expected to account for 8.2% of the population in 2030, up from an estimated 4.6% today. There are well-established communities of different denomination of Islam. The majority of British Muslims has arrived from countries of the Commonwealth that had colonial associations with the UK in the past. The majority of post-Soviet migrants practicing Islam came to Britain in late 1990s after the demise of the Soviet Union. They are in the process of forming their congregations and establishing relationships with the existing ones in the U.K. They also actively create community hubs on-line and off-line. In Britain these migrants enjoy various financial standings and class demographics, from oligarchs to struggling individuals to young professionals, students, and entrepreneurs with a significant share of women among all of the groups (Morgunova, 2009).

Secondly, the native countries of these migrants are currently experiencing religious revival. According to the quoted above Pew Research in 1990 in Azerbaijan 78,1 % of habitants self-identified as being Muslim, while in 2010 the same figure was 98,4%. In Tajikistan the figures went from 77,1 % to 99,1%, while in Kazakhstan from 50% to 56% respectively. On the territory of the Russian Federation itself there are several predominantly Muslim autonomies (Dagestan, Chechens, Tatars and others), while more recent years saw a wave of incoming Muslim migration from the former Soviet territories.[5] Therefore, the dynamics of self-identification with Islam is 9.2 to 11.7 with the projection of reaching 14.4. by the 2030, which reflects this revival, supported to a different degree by the governments of states under nationalization (excepting the central Russian government). Such states invest in new religious education courses, built mosques and promote Islam through the mass media.

Thirdly, the researched population shares important cultural bonds across ethnic differences in the form of Soviet and post-Soviet experiences and shared (second) language. According to existing research (Morgunova 2009) the majority of post-Soviet Muslim migrants are now in their late 30s and 40s, which means that they were born and partly socialised in the USSR, the

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[4] http://pewresearch.org/pubs/1872/muslim-population-projections-worldwide-fast-growth
[5] http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=J1Kqh8cTi34

country of official atheism, where practicing Islam (as well as any other religion) had to be a conscious decision connected to soul searching or political dissent. In terms of gendered policies, the Soviet Union promoted emancipation of women in the Middle Asia, declared gender equality and encouraged education. Headscarves were rather widely worn in the former Soviet republics, while veils were not tolerated, but were not formally prohibited either (for complexity of the gender politics in the early USSR era see Northrop, 2004).

The Russian language remains an important means of communication in the Muslim post-Soviet countries. Recent research confirms that Russian language also plays a special role as the language of the Internet for these countries. For example, Suleymanova studied Tatar groups in a popular Russian language social network and noticed that

> many Tatars, especially those that live outside the Republic of Tatarstan, do not speak the Tatar language and do not practice Islam /but/... important element in the construction of the Tatarness in these online groups is Islam. Muslim symbols (mosques, crescent moon, etc.) are frequently present in the design of the group, including the profile picture and special albums with Muslim images. Discussion topics frequently concern Islam, such as "Islam in Our Life," "Islam and Modern Tatars," "Greetings for All Muslims," "Ideal Husband is a Muslim".[6] (Suleymanova, 2011:45-46).

Dirk Uffelmann in his research on the Russian language Internet in Kirgizstan and Kazakhstan shows that the Russian language registered in Russia and elsewhere plays a role of Eurasian Mass Medium (Uffelmann, 2011). Migrants from the post-Soviet space continue using Russian as the language of communication on-line even more than off-line when in the UK. Consequently, such marginalities allow an insight in how the secular character of the host country culture together with the legacy of the Soviet past interplays with intense religious negotiations of Muslim agency in the UK and Muslim influences from the native territories both on-line and off-line.

In sum, the first section Context and Methodology describes the research techniques followed and the actual sampling logic and context for the data. The section on Generational differences enquires to which generational patterns and continuities or ruptures can be observed and explores whether

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[6] D. Suleymaniva "Tatar Groups in Vkontakte: The Interplay between Ethnic and Virtual Identities on Social Networking Sites" *in* Digital Icons: Studies in Russian, Eurasian and Central European New Media, Vol. 1, No. 2 (2009): 37-55

new media can create differences in religious practices between generations. The section on Public and Private looks at how women are represented in public discourse in the UK and in general, as well as by other Muslims in UK, what access to public discourse to they have, how do they position themselves vis-à-vis these representations, and what role religion plays in shaping their identities in the context of migration, with a special focus on new media. The section on Secularism examines their experience and tensions between secularism and their religious identity, for example whether they feel fee to practice their religion now in the UK, or do they still experience difficulties. The final section after the analyses on generational difference, public/private questions and the issue of secularism engages in a theoretical discussion on Agency to apply theory on the findings and to show how these specific migrant women exercise agency and whether they experience tension between religion and emancipation or is religion inspiration of emancipation. Ultimately, the study attempts to understand the impact of new media on these female migrants' religious practices.

2.   Methodology

2.1. General Research Questions

Our research concentrates on transnational digital networks, migration and gender. An important starting point for the project is intersectional theory and hence the connections between gender, religion, nationality, diasporic belongings, class and age. The project focuses specifically on young, Muslim women and on the intersections between these axes of difference, in connection to new media. We are specifically interested in how Muslim women make use of digital media to negotiate their religious affiliations and their multiple belonging(s). The general research question that we want to answer after our investigation is: *How do Muslim women in the Netherlands, Greece and the United Kingdom use digital media to negotiate their religious affiliations and their transnational diasporic belongings and how does the intersection between nationality, religion, gender, age, class, and education relate to this?* By answering these questions we also aim to contribute to the recent discussions about agency and Muslim women and scrutinize how the Muslim women in our case studies define and redefine agency and what the role of digital media is in connection to this.

 In order to scrutinize this, we first study what media Muslim women use, how they use them and what topics they are interested in. Moreover, we are interested to find out whether their online activities are restricted to the countries they live in or whether they are more transnational, and connected to this, whether they define their religious beliefs/practices through a global interpretation of Islam or in a 'European' way and context. The next step in the research is to investigate how various categories of difference influence both the online behaviour of Muslims and their religious practices. For example, is there a difference between men and women and how does that influence their offline relations? Another question in this context would be about the role of age and generations. Are only young women/men active online and how do these activities influence their religious beliefs/practices compared to those of other generations? The last stage of the investigation focuses on the concept of agency in connection to digital networks of Muslim women. Questions that are relevant here are for example: How do women define emancipation and does their online activity make women more 'emancipated'? Moreover, does it help them to combine possible ideas their position in society with their religious beliefs/practices? Moreover we pay specific attention to the definitions of and relationship between gender, migration, and new media: agency, generational differences, the public sphere (and visibility) and secularism. These four concepts are the central

focus of each case study in the research on religious practices. Generations are important in this context, as there are not only huge differences in online activities between younger and older people, but also the concepts of feminism and emancipation have been interpreted differently by various feminist generations. Moreover, also religious practices vary and change between generations. Our initial hypothesis is that as participation on the Internet influences religious practices and beliefs; this should also has an effect on various generational differences. The public sphere plays a central role in our research project because digital media changes it immensely. On the one hand there is a lower threshold to participate (compared to for example other media), on the other hand, through digital media, the public sphere can also be manipulated and changed in ways that goes beyond anyone's control. Moreover, because our research focuses on migrants, the issue of visibility is also important, as some groups remain invisible, for example because in certain national contexts religions signs and/or institutions are banned from the public sphere, while others are maybe over visible, for example through (a focus) on their dress (e.g. the debates on Muslim women's headscarves).

The concepts of secularism relates to this as digital media are often considered to be western technologies and just as secularism, connected to freedom and democracy. In practice however, the Internet seems to polarise the debates and hence maybe restrict certain positions. For example, the many radical and often heated debates *about* Muslim women might discourage them to actually participate in online discussions. This research project starts from a critical perspective on the concept of secularism and the relationship between religion and secularism in European societies (see f.i. Braidotti, 2008, Bracke, 2008, Connolly, 1999, Scott, 2007). Finally, agency is a central concept, both in research on (and debates about) Muslim women and in research on digital media. The latter are supposed to create more possibilities and freedoms for people, but also restrict those who have less access or experience with these techniques. Furthermore, while it is often argued that online activities are more anonymous and that people can participate without concealing certain aspects of their identity (for example gender and ethnicity), in practice it seems that identity is very important on the Internet. Rather than freeing themselves from the constraints of their identity, people more often try to restructure and redefine their identity online. This connects to the current feminist debates on agency in which this concept is redefined outside the liberal framework of oppression versus resistance (Mahmood, 2005) and as affirmative and connected to daily activities, rather than only to general political action (Braidotti, 2008).

2.2. Fieldwork Methodologies

The aim of this project is to conduct research on digital spaces, dedicated to religion, in relation to migration and gender, focusing in particular on the participation of migrant women in religious digital networks and ways in which such participation structures their on-going relation with the places of origin, thus forging transnational networks across territorial and sometimes even religious borders. The final objective is to explore alternative policy and theoretical perspectives through which religion and diasporic belonging are propagated by means of new digital media as part of the processes of transnationalism. By conducting interdisciplinary, intersectional and internationally comparative research, we strive to contribute to our knowledge on the digital activities of Muslim women in various European countries, their participation in transnational (and religious) networks and gain more information on the role of various categories of difference, such as age and nationality) in this context. The four concepts are central in our analyses: agency, secularism, generations and the public sphere (and visibility). The methodology for our research is a combination of critical discourse analysis (based on the work of Norman Fairclough) and online and offline ethnography (based on the work of among other Christine Hine), and focus groups.

Ethnography is a research method that is considered to be extremely valuable in both industrial and academic research. Ethnographers mainly use participation and observation to study the composition, characteristics and cultures of certain communities (Kozinets, 2010). Especially, participant observation, in depth interviews and surveys are important elements of data collection within the ethnographic method. In that sense, ethnography is usually a combination of various methods. But to do ethnographical studies, always means to "undertake an immersive, prolonged engagement with the members of a culture or community, followed by an attempt to understand and convey their reality through 'thick', detailed, nuanced, historically-curious, and culturally grounded interpretation and deep description of a social world that is familiar to its participants, but strange to outsiders" (Kozinets, 2010, p 60).

 For the online data collection, we used specific online ethnographical methodologies, such as virtual ethnographies or netnographies. Data collection through netnography means communicating with people from an online community, albeit in many different forms (Kozinets, 2010). Participating in the community itself is essential for virtual ethnography or netnography; this includes collecting data in a way that takes into account the context of a certain community. Using netnography and virtual ethnography for our research means that we tried to find a balance between being the reflexive, autobiographical and subjective cultural participants and systematic, and somewhat objectifying scientist (Kozinets, 2010). This provided us with a

rich set of data, including archival data (directly copied from the CMC), elicited data (data created by the researcher through interaction with members of the community) and fieldnotes (observations of the researcher during the investigation).

For the offline data collection, we mainly used focus groups. The interaction and multivocal narratives that occur in focus groups make them a highly suitable method for accessing certain marginalised or 'subjugated' voices (Leavy, 2007 in: Nagy, Biber, and Leavy (ed). 2007). First of all, focus groups are generally considered to create the most equal relationship possible between researcher and interviewees (Wilkinson, 2004). Contrary to a one-to-one interview, in a focus group the researcher is outnumbered by the interviewees. This can make it easier for them to take control of the conversation and shift the balance of power. Another advantage of doing focus groups in a research project like this one is that focus groups produce socially situated knowledges. The dynamics in the group can make it possible for participants to make connections between certain opinions, which they had not been able to make before. If one woman for example mentions a certain experience, another might remember she has been through something similar and can possibly explain the way she has dealt with it. This is important because it might help participants to mention things they had forgotten about or would otherwise consider as unimportant, but it also shows how individual experiences can be turned into 'collective sense making' (Wilkinson, 2004).

Critical Discourse Analysis was an important starting point for the analysis of our online and offline data. Generally, we can call a combination of texts and images 'a discourse'. In this research, we will apply the definition that Norman Fairclough uses in *Language and Power*: "language as social practice determined by social structures" (Fairclough, 2001, p 14). An important point to note here is that discourse has effects upon social structures, as well as being determined by them (Fairclough, 2001). We have chosen to focus on the work of Norman Fairclough regarding CDA because power and power relations are central in his work. Fairclough has a background in linguistics but developed an approach to discourse, which is also useful for social scientists and philosophers. Fairclough distinguishes two different forms of power related to discourse: power *in* discourse and power *behind* discourse (Fairclough, 2001). The first refers to the fact that powerful participants of discourse can control and constrain less powerful participants. This can be done on three different levels: content (what is or can be said), relations (the social relations people enter into in discourse) and subjects (the subject positions people can occupy). Very often, especially in the mass media, this power is hidden. Power behind discourse, on the other hand, refers to the social order of discourse; this includes things such as access.

The samples for the case studies consist of a number of websites on which Muslim women are active and where they discuss various aspects of their lives, in connection to their religious affiliations. We selected a combination of digital media, such as Facebook, discussion websites for Muslims in general and Muslim women specifically, and finally we included the websites of organisations that are also active offline. The sample this way reflects the broad variety of online activities and the different Muslim women living in the countries of the casestudies (e.g. from various ethnic backgrounds and from various generations and ages). For the offline analysis, we conduct a series of focus groups with the organisers of the websites and women who are active in women's organisations and other women that we contacted through snowballing methods.

2.3. Case study 1: the Netherlands

The main research questions for our investigation are: *How do Muslim women in the Netherlands use digital media to negotiate their religious affiliations and their transnational diasporic belongings and how does the intersection between nationality, religion, gender, age, class, and education relate to this?*

The sample for our case study consists of a number of Dutch websites on which Muslim women are active and where they discuss various aspects of their lives, in connection to their religious affiliations. It was our aim to create a sample that was as diverse as the group of Muslim women living in the Netherlands. In this context, we payed attention to ethnicity, religious strands, political aims, age, migration status, level of education etc. We selected both Muslim websites for women and men (such as wijblijvenhier.nl), as well as Muslim websites that aim to be women-only (such as moslimagids.nl). We included website posts, blogs, stories, question-and-answer sections, as well as forums in our analysis. In total we included four websites in our analysis: wijblijvenhier.nl (we are stying here), moslimagids.nl (Muslim women's guide), turksestudent.nl (Turkish Student) and nieuwemoskee.nl (new mosque). The focus-group interviews were held with some of the website initiators and/or editors, women who are active in Muslim women's organisations and individual women we reached through snowball. Also for our offline analysis, we selected respondents from different ethnic groups, including amongst others Turkish, Moroccan, Afghan, and Dutch (converts to Islam). Furthermore, the diversity of the respondents is reflected in the age differences and different educational backgrounds. By including Muslim women from such a wide range of different backgrounds in our sample we tried to represent a broad segment of the Muslim women who are active online in the Netherlands.

2.3.1.   Online data

We have analysed four online websites, namely: MoslimaGids.nl, Turksestudent.nl, Wijblijvenhier.nl and Nieuwemoskee.nl. The first one, the MoslimaGids.nl, meaning, the Muslim women's guide, is a portal for Muslim women from different ethnicities, both focused on the Netherlands and the Flemish-speaking part of Belgium. It provides different guides to assist Muslim women. Available are, amongst others, a forum, Islamic articles, a wedding guide for future brides, a guide for suitable fitness schools, and guides for classes (amongst others, sewing and cooking classes).[7] The website moslimagids.nl is integrated in the website of ansaar.nl, a more general Islamic website for people of both sexes. Their goal is to empower the Muslim woman through Islam, on different levels in life. The Ansaar.nl community websites was founded in October 2009 with as main goal attracting attention to the negative image of Muslims as presented by mainstream Dutch media. Their current aim is to function as a source of information and virtual network for people from all over the world from mainly Muslim backgrounds.

Secondly, we analysed the website Turksestudent.nl. This is a website that aims to bring together Turkish students in the Netherlands. It also has a forum, which is where most discussions are held, mostly in Turkish. Different topics are being discussed, such as secularism, Turkish politics, Geert Wilders and the headscarf. The visitors vary from nationalistic, or Islamic-conservative to secularist. The website mentions a users rate of 14.524, which for the Netherlands is a significant number. Other popular websites for Turkish youth are lokum.nl and hababam.nl, but turksestudent.nl is the most popular website among both the Turkish-Dutch students and adolescents in the Netherlands.

 Thirdly, we analysed the website Wijblijvenhier.nl. This website is first and foremost a weblog that provides a platform to 'young talented Muslim writers', functioning as an alternative to mainstream Dutch media.[8] The website starts from the following statement: "We (Dutch Muslims) are staying here! Because we were born or raised here. Because this is our country and because we enjoy living here and would like to keep it that way. But we might experience certain things differently, or we might have a different view on certain things. Whether that's really that different, and what it is? That's what you will read on this weblog: a website made by Muslims, but not only for Muslims." Hence, the website is interesting for both Muslims and non-

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[7] http://moslima.ansaar.nl/
[8] http://wijblijvenhier.nl

Muslims. The first group mainly share experiences and opinions, the second (group) can get more information on Muslims' lives in the Netherlands.[9]

Fourthly, the website nieuwemoskee.nl has as its main aim to bring together Muslims of different nationalities living in the Netherlands, especially those with a critical stance towards societal and religious issues. Nieuwemoskee.nl present themselves as an Islamic platform for current and progressive thinkers with a critical vision on societal and religious issues. Nieuwemoskee 'strives for a continuing development of critical (self) reflection within the Muslim communities, something that was characteristic for the early period of Islamic thinking.' [10] Just as other websites such as wijblijvenhier.nl, nieuwemoskee also aims to counteract the negative stereotypes of Muslims as presented in mainstream Dutch media; instead, they try to present the diversity and dynamics of the many Islamic schools, cultures, and visions.[11]

We chose, on purpose, not to include the bigger Moroccan websites, because most research that has been done on migrant's activities online has already focused on these specific groups and websites (See for instance Leurs, 2012).

2.3.2.   Offline Data

Besides analyzing the abovementioned websites, we also conducted focus group interviews.. In total, six different focus group interviews were held, the number of interviewees during these focus groups varied between three and five.

The first group we talked to was from the organization 'Al Nisa'**.** Al Nisa is a national Muslim Women's organisation, founded in 1982. Their initial goal was to provide information about Islam, detached from specific cultural or religious backgrounds. Starting from 2002, several goals were added to this, including the improvement of the position of women in Islam, the position of Muslim women in Dutch society, and motivating Muslim women to gain more knowledge about Islam.[12] Currently, Al Nisa is the oldest national, independent Muslim women's organisation in the Netherlands that focuses on

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[9] Original text (in Dutch) : - Wij (Nederlandse moslims) blijven hier! Omdat we hier geboren zijn of hier opgevoed zijn. Omdat dit ons land is en omdat we het hier prettig vinden om te leven en dat graag zo willen houden. Maar wij beleven sommigen dingen misschien anders of hebben een andere visie op bepaalde zaken. Of dat echt zo verschillend is en wat dat dan is? Dat lees je op deze weblog: een website gemaakt door Moslims, maar niet alleen voor Moslims. Ook juist voor niet-Moslims is deze weblog boeiend, omdat het je meeneemt in de dagelijkse bezigheden van de Moslims en hun kijk op de zaken des levens.

[10] Original text (in Dutch) : Nieuwemoskee streeft naar een voortgaande ontwikkeling van kritische (zelf)reflectie binnen de moslimgemeenschappen, iets wat kenmerkend was voor de vroege periode van het islamitisch denken.

[11] http://nieuwemoskee.nl

[12] http://alnisa.nl

women and Islam, and the only organisation that continues to focus on a diverse, broad group of Muslim women. For more than 27 years they have been organising emancipating activities for Muslim women and – girls, and they have stimulated Dutch Muslim women to become conscious of their position in the Netherlands and the Dutch Muslim community. For the focus group interview, five employees/volunteers of Al Nisa talked to us and with us about their experiences.

The second group we talked to were women from the Islamic Student Union of Amsterdam (ISA). 2 Women and 1 man from ISA participated in the focus group interview. They were all students aged between 18 and 24. ISA is attached to the VU University of Amsterdam. It is a young, Islamic organisation that prioritizes the fulfilment of the needs of the (Muslim) student, regardless of that student's educational institute. The name, ISA, is also a 'wink to the Christian origins of the Amsterdam Free University, because ISA is Arabic for Jesus'.[13] The organisation presents itself as active, engaged, and with an academic/scientific focus. Besides the activities and actions they organise, they look after the interests of (Muslim) students, organise sports activities, provide discounts, and networking- and socializing possibilities.[14]

The third group we interviewed was the ISRA foundation. This foundation is part of the women's branch of the federation of Milli Görüs. It was founded in 2001, and runs on young female volunteers. All tasks are carried out by the boardmembers. They organise different activities, with as main aim stimulating the development of one's own identity, increasing social skills, and participation in society. The foundation is mainly focused on the Turkish community in Utrecht, but as they state on their website, they are open to diversity.

 Fourthly, we talked to the three editors and website moderators of Nieuwemoskee.nl about their view on Muslim women, religious practices and new media. They write articles for their website, and also have the task of editing articles written by other volunteers. For more information on this website, please view the section 'online data'.

 Fifthly, we talked to one of the bloggers of the website Wijblijvenhier.nl. She is a young Muslim who writes articles about various subjects, but mainly about the position of Islamic youngsters in the Netherlands. For a description of the website Wijblijvenhier.nl, please view the section 'online data'.

 Lastly, we organised an interview with a group of Afghan women. These women were approached through snowballing methods. They were all in the beginning of their twenties and studying in the Netherlands. They had

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[13] http://isa.nl
[14] http://isa.nl

migrated with their parents from Afghanistan to the Netherlands when they were teenagers.

2.4. Case study 2: Greece

2.4.1.   Offline data

The Greek case study consists of visits, interviews and participant observation in four cultural centers/mosques in the broader area of Attica, including Gyzi, Neos Kosmos, Piraeus and Moschato. Most of our fieldwork has been conducted in the cultural center/mosque at Gyzi, registered as the "Greek Committee for the Help and Support of the Child", a Greek-based Palestinian organization, which has its offices and facilities on the ground floor of an apartment building in a densely populated white, Greek middle class Athenian neighborhood that also includes more established migrants of different origins. Men use the center for praying as well as religious classes, while women (mainly of Syrian, Lebanese and Palestinian origin) organize, mainly on Saturdays, different cultural activities, including an Arab kindergarten, Arabic language classes for Arab children and youth, and religious classes for the interpretation of the Qur'an. The space is set up to accommodate small classes in its different rooms and has been equipped with desktop computers and Internet connection, which are used by the children who attend Arabic classes at the center and some of the Arab women themselves. It is a very lively, open and hospitable place. The center also hosts a 'religion and culture' group for young Muslim women in their late teens from different ethnic backgrounds, most of them in their last years of school or already in higher education. The purpose of this group is to discuss issues of religious and cultural identity, especially with regards to the challenges young women face when living in a non-Muslim country such as Greece.

Inteview and Focus group number	Nationality	Migration status	Sex	Type	Date of interview	Location
Interview 1	Syrian	Second generation	F	Organizer/coordinator of the women's groups	22.03.2011	Gyzi Mosque
Interview 2	Syrian	First generation	F	Responsible for the day care centre	01.10.2011	Gyzi Mosque
Interview 3	Syrian	First generation	F	Responsible for the day care centre	01.10.2011	Gyzi Mosque

Interview 4	Syrian	First generation	F	Arab Language teacher	01.10.2011 08.10.2011	Gyzi Mosque
Interview 5	Egyptian	First generation	M	Accountant of the Mosque	08.10.2011	Gyzi Mosque
Interview 6	Syrian	Second generation	F	School student	23.10.2011	Gyzi Mosque
Interview 7	Syrian	Second generation	F	School student	23.10.2011	Gyzi Mosque
Interview 8	Syrian	Second generation	F	Unemployed/engaged to Syrian man (Interview 9)	23.10.2011	Gyzi Mosque
Interview 9	Syrian	Second genderation	M	Engaged to the Syrian girl (Interview 8)	23.10.2011	Gyzi Mosque
Interview 10	Syrian	Second generation	F	Unemployed/ mother and activist	14.05.2011	Piraeus Mosque
Interview 11	Egyptian	Second generation	F		23.02.2012	Home / Kypseli
Interview 12	Egyptian	Second generation	F		23.02.2012	Home / Kypseli
Interview 13	Egyptian	Second generation	M		02.04.2012	Home / Kypseli
Interview 14	Afghan	Transit	F	Unemployed/mothe	15/1/2012	Victoria Square
Interview 15	Afghan	Transit	F	Unemployed/mothe r	15/1/2012	Victoria Square
Interview 16	Afghan	Transit	F	Unemployed/mothe	15/1/2012	Victoria Square
Interview 17	Afghan	Transit	F	Unemployed/mothe r	15/1/2012	Victoria Square
Interview 18	Afghan	First generation		Student/informant	20/2/2012	Home/ Attica square
Interview 19	Afghan	Transit		Unemployed/mothe r	20/2/2012	Home / Attica square
Interview 20	Afghan	Transit		Unemployed/mothe r	13/5/2012	Network of support for refugees and immigrants

						/ Exarheia
Interview 21	Egyptian	First generation	M	Head of the Muslim Association of Greece		Syntagma square
Interview 22	Greek	Greek citizen	F	Convert- Activist- Member of Muslim Association of Greece		Syntagma square
Interview 23	Palestinian	First generation migrant	F	Secretary of the general of the Muslim Association of Greece	27.04.2012	Neos Kosmos Mosque
Interview 24	Syrian	Second generation migrant	F		21.04.2012	Neos Kosmos Mosque
Interview 25	Egyptian	First generation migrant	F		29.04.2012	Neos Kosmos Mosque
Focus group 1	10 Syrian and Egyptian	Second genderation and converts	F	Members of the Muslim Association of Greece	12/5/2012	Gyzi Mosque
Focus group 2	10 Afghan	Transit	F	Unemployed	2/5/2012	Language Classes Kerameikos

During our visits in Gyzi, we interviewed 8 Syrian women and girls who were involved in various ways in the Mosque activities and conducted a focus groups discussion with ten teenage girls of school age.. We also interviewed one Egyptian man who was responsible for the finances of the centre and one Syrian man who was engaged with one of the girls in the mosque. During our visit in the Piraeus mosque/cultural centre, we interwiewed one Muslim woman of Syrian origin, married to an Egyptian – who was also the only female regularly attending the Mosque. We also interviewed three second generation Egyptian migrants, at their home in Kypseli, (two female and one male). We interviewed the Egyptian President of the Muslim Association of Greece and his wife – a Greek convert. At the Mosque in Neos Kosmos, we interviewed the Palestinian secretary general of the Muslim Association of Greece and other Arab women members of the Association. Finally, we conducted a focus group discussion with four women members of the Muslim Association of Greece. With regards to the Afghan Muslim women, we have interviewed four women that we met in Victoria square, one Afghan male informant and two other Afghan women that we contatced through this informant. We also conducted a focus group discussion with ten other women

who were attending greek language classes in a church in the area of Kerameikos.

2.4.2. Online data

The online data consists mainly of two types of web-based media that are representative of both the variety and the specificity of religiously informed online practices: official Muslim websites and Facebook interactions. The following web-sites were identified as especially relevant for the Arab Muslim community in Greece, although some of them no longer exist.

- **Islam.gr** (http://www.islam.gr)

- **Greeks rethink: Connecting Rethinkers of Life** (http://www.greeksrethink.com/)

- **Lychnari** (http://www.islamfriends.gr/)

- **Muslim Association of Greece** (http://www.equalsociety.com/en/)

- **Islam for Greeks** (http://islamforgreeks.org/)

As far as formal websites are concerned, we chose to focus our analysis on 'www.islam.gr' as it is the site with the longest trajectory and the only one regularly maintained by Arab Muslim migrants affiliated to the Muslim Association of Greece.[15] Concerning the gendering of website authorship, with the exception of Greeks Rethink and Lychnari, which have had two Greek convert women in the editorial team, we could not identify migrant Muslim women's active online involvement in the above websites, in spite of the fact that they all contain visual and written references to Muslim women. The absence of migrant Muslim women from the production of these formal websites is particularly striking when compared to their strong presence on social media, such as Facebook. It can also be contrasted to the engagement of many Arab migrant women with the religious, social and cultural activities of the informal mosques as well as the political activities of their own communities. The official online and offline spaces seem to be separate and distinct, reproducing a gendered division between the private and the public.

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[15]   The Facebook site of the Muslim Association of Greece was not included in the present analysis as it's activity only started recently, after December 2011; it should however be included in any follow up study.

Facebook, on the contrary, can be considered as a privileged site for the study of the entanglement and overlapping of online and offline modes of interaction in the everyday life of Muslim, particularly Arab, migrant women. More specifically, Facebook interactions tend to be multipurpose and multilingual combining in unorthodox ways not only different cultural and linguistic norms, but also the multiple gender roles (of the mother, the pious woman, the activist, the migrant) that Muslim women adopt. In that sense, they provide the space for transnational networking not only amongst other Muslim women, but also amongst women (and men), migrants and citizens of different ethnic origins and religions.

2.5. Case study 3: The United Kingdom

2.5.1.   Offline data

For this study the (field) researcher (MIG@NET Research Fellow Morgunova) used pre-established links in the Russian speaking community to identify potential Muslim respondents. Muslim community organisations and projects (these links are further explained below) were approached to indentify post-Soviet migrants-participants, while Facebook contacts were used to further enlarge this snowball sample of interviewees and their social networks. Interviews took place in Edinburgh, Glasgow and London in 2010-2012 and the countries of origins were Kazakhstan, Tatarstan (part of Russia), Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, Dagestan (part of Russia), Chechnya (part of Russia) and Azerbaijan. Respondents self-identified as Muslims, they were of different marital and visa status and their ages ranged mainly between late 20s and late 40s.

In a typical snowball type of research, whilst searching for the relationships and links in the social networks of female Post-Soviet migrants, the respondents were asked to indentify the networks they use to communicate with other Muslims. Further, the Russian language web was searched for the most visited websites with Muslim affiliations (such as http://www.islam.ru and www.islamnews.ru), while the links to British news and events relevant to these migrants were examined. Several active websites, which were visited by users with regularly changed content were identified. These sites represented different forms of online participation, such as forums, group discussions in social networks and community websites. These were selectively sampled to reflect Muslim Post-Soviet female migrants in the U.K.

2.5.2. Online data

The majority of respondents identified with the 'odnoklassniki' social network (Russian equivalent for the "schoolmates") as an important web-hub. For example, one of the respondents, an asylum seeker from Tajikistan typically expressed the dominance of this network: 'I do everything on-line: I buy things via e-bay...I book my tickets on-line, compare prices, and look for jobs, opportunities. I do not have a Facebook account, or *v contacte*. I am only at *odnoklassniki*' (interview 1, Edinburgh, April 2011). Subsequent research also confirmed that several respondents communicated through this social network in Muslim groups. Due to such importance of the website, it was included the data sampled, and several profiles were analysed, especially those of respondents.

Here, it is worth mentioning a limitation in the sampling. Muslim group discussions were difficult to access if at all, as technologically the site allows blocking 'by silence' and such requests on the part of the field researcher were ignored. Subsequently on of the respondents was asked to allow the researcher to view profiles (London, December 2011) and discussions of the groups through the respondent's profile in her presence were viewed, while she guided the researcher and commented on the messages. The researcher was not allowed to make any detailed notes during this browsing session. The observed groups were 'The World of a Muslim girl' (12,005 members) and 'Woman in Islam' (12 028 members, group created in May 2008). Participants were discussing spiritual experiences, interpreting surahs, and were supporting each other during some family situations. They were also sharing stories from their native places, discussing politics, family relationships, debating some questions about family relationships. Nevertheless, more intimate questions (for example about sex) are not allowed. The language of communication is mainly Russian, however Arabic is used in avatars. Another group examined is the 'Style of a Muslim girl', which currently has 19, 895 members and was created in July 2008 by Alphia Musina, a Muslim from Moscow, which migrated intensively. The group was an open one, allowing guest visits and unmonitored registration of new members. There were discussions about fashions and dress code, photos of new outfits and family events, lifestyle discussions, or exchange of opinions on how to pray before cooking a special meal, is rollerblading or buying a car after taking a credit is allowed by Koran.[16] Many of the members put 'a novice' status with their avatar. Men were allowed to become members of the group. At the time of writing (2011-early 2012) the group was closed for visitors and got a status 'women only'.

The official website representing the UK-based Chechen community http://www.vaynahgb.com was also included in the sample. The site is mainly

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[16] http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=J1Kqh8cTi34

in English, but there are translations into Chechen and/or Russian as well as videos in Arabic, translated or subtitled in Russian and /or Chechen. The site is associated with several YouTube channels including Vainahgb. Adverts are allowed but limited to travel, food and children goods. The site is visited by 4, 000 people every day, the majority of materials have 1, 000-2, 000 views. The site contains a short mission statement, declaring it being apolitical and non-ideological, but clearly defining the borders of the audience as 'our (Chechen - O.M.) people': This website is designed purely for social and communal needs and purposes of our people. We shall not advertise or polemicise here any political or religious views and ideologies. We shall thrive to create harmony amongst all our people and those around us, setting a decent example for the rest. We shall hail our worthy, counsel our wrongdoers and denounce any clashes. We shall stimulate our youngsters to instill *(sic)* to all spheres of the British society and produce a constructive upshot. By doing so, we believe, we can foster a generation who will produce peace unity and statehood in the future. May Allah bless our aim! (http://www.vaynahgb.com).

Another website, the Kazakh forum KUB (www.kub.info) was also examined, as it was often mentioned by Kazakhs, even at the initial stage of the research. The site is well known to Kazakh migrants living in the UK and contains a number of lengthy and active religious discussions. KUB was organised by a Kazakh postgraduate student from a British university, with the nickname 'Observer' in 2003. It is a blogging platform/forum with around 10, 000 participants and more than 30,000 discussions. Many threads contain from 300 to 5,000 verbal messages, pictures or videos, and no adverts.

3.   Religious Practices, New Media, and Generations

3.1. Introduction

Our first reason to make generational differences as one of our key points of attention is the fact that there are huge differences in online activities between younger and older people. Moreover, also religious practices vary and change between generations. Finally, and this is especially relevant in connection to the concept of agency, also in feminist theory and history, the concept of generation plays an important role. The history of feminism is generally described through generations (waves) and those generations are often considered to have their distinct interpretations of the terms feminism and emancipation. We are particularly interested whether new media created new patterns in generational differences, both in relation to religious practices and gender.

3.2. Netherlands

3.2.1.   Introduction

Both in our website analyses and in the focus groups, it first of all turned out that the concept of generational differences was indeed important for many Muslim women in the Netherlands, and secondly that the generational differences themselves were multi-layered and connected to various aspects of their identities. In some of the narratives age and differences between youth and older people were important, in others migration was the starting point for thinking about generations, which led to thinking about differences between people that migrated themselves to the Netherlands and their children. The latter were born in the Netherlands but often raised with cultural and religious traditions of the country of their parents. Finally, a last important generational issue arose from the differences between born Muslims and converted Muslims, as the latter often lacked a family with whom they could share their faith.

3.2.2.   Different generations and respect

Thinking about differences between generations, and especially between youth and older people, the issue of respect soon comes to mind. Also on the websites we analysed this appeared to be an important theme.

On the website 'We are Staying here', Amina Sebbar talks about respect and social media.[17] She argues that new forms of communication create new, and sometimes disrespectful, ways of talking to each other. She mentions the use of the word 'dag' at the beginning of an email, but also the practice of calling other Muslim women 'sister':

> "I don't find it nice if women that I do not know, call me sister. Yes, I know that, as Muslims, we are sisters to each other, and I do see many of my friends as Muslim sisters. But I also experience that young girls call me sister, and then I think: 'hello, I could be your mother!'." [18]

When it comes to respect for older generations, especially, 'respect for mothers' is often discussed. On 'Muslim women's guide', the position of the mother in the family is given much appraisal. She is considered as the epicentre of the family and has the responsibility to make everyone feel welcome and comfortable. In that context, motherhood is referred to as a "priceless job"[19] which needs all the physical and mental attention a woman can give. However, especially regarding religious practices, some of the young women at the forum actively criticise their mothers.

> Also on the website 'We are Staying here', the issue of parenthood is discussed. In the article 'Het opvoeden van koppig Khoetbapubliek', Noureddine Steenvoorden reflects on the relationship between respect, age differences and Islam.[20] He argues that Muslims go to the mosque and listen to a sermon, in order to "place your faith deeper in your heart and to improve your knowledge about the Islam, so that you can adjust your acts accordingly".[21]

3.2.3.   Generational differences and change

The concepts of age and generations are not only important in relation to respect, but also change is a recurrent subject of discussion on the websites we analysed. The interviewees mainly discussed the differences between their own and their parents' religious practices. In most cases, they argued that

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[17] http://www.wijblijvenhier.nl/10509/dag-tante/

[18] http://www.wijblijvenhier.nl/10509/dag-tante/. Original text: Zelf vind ik het niet prettig als voor mij onbekende vrouwen, mij zuster noemen. Ja, ik weet dat we als moslims zusters voor elkaar zijn en ik zie ook veel van mijn vriendinnen als moslimzusjes. Maar het komt ook voor dat het jonge meiden zijn die mij zo noemen en dan denk ik: 'Hallo, ik kon je moeder zijn!'.

[19]   Original   text: "Een   onbetaalbare   baan."   > http://moslima.ansaar.nl/index.php/component/content/article/65-de-vrouw-in-de-islaam/127-een-onbetaalbare-baan

[20] http://www.wijblijvenhier.nl/3889/het-opvoeden-van-koppig-khoetbapubliek/

[21] http://www.wijblijvenhier.nl/3889/het-opvoeden-van-koppig-khoetbapubliek/. Original text: om het geloof dieper in je hart te vestigen en om je kennis over de islam te vergroten – zodat je je handelingen en gedrag ernaar kunt aanpassen.

their parent's religious practices were for a large part determined by previous generations, as they were often passed on from one generation to another:

> "The difference is also that we are open for renewal, new things. whereas our parents, they have learned it in Turkey, and that's the way it is (for them). We would be open to adjust our ideas, but for our parents, it's like, this is the way it is, end of discussion.." (ISRA, 2012)[22]

The internet is in this context often a valuable source of information, especially for converted Muslims, who often cannot go to family members for information:

> "For me, new media were the way to learn about the Islam. I was not born as a Muslim, but chose for the Islam. And when I was considering the Islam, I went on the Internet. That was my entrance to Islam." (Nieuwe Moskee, 2012, 33:37)[23]

According to Niel, the new generation has the capacity to deconstruct old stereotypes and think beyond the division between East and West or religious differences: "they are proud of their roots and they love their culture, but they are not blind to the many problems in their region".[24] But as this might be the case in (some countries of the Middle East) one could ask whether the recurrent debates on Islam and migrants in western countries, make it hard for the younger generation that grows up here, to find the space for a similar revolt. As I already described in the above, the writers of the New Mosque website are constantly struggling to balance Islamophobic debates with a critical stance towards their own faith and religious practices. It seems that this struggle is difficult to combine with strong political or religious transformations.

3.2.4. Passing on culture and religion to next generations

In addition to these generation gaps in which parents and children have different ideas about religion and bringing it into practice, there are cases in which the children ask their parents for advice. Whereas advice on certain

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[22] Original text (in Dutch) : *'Het verschil is ook, dat wij open staan voor vernieuwing, nieuwe dingen, terwijl onze ouders die hebben het ooit in turkije geleerd, en zo is het.. wij zouden wel onze ideeen bijstellen, maar bij ouderen is het van zo is het en klaar.'*

[23] Original quotation: "Voor mij waren nieuwe media op een bepaald moment een manier om over de Islam te weten te komen. Want ik ben niet als Moslim geboren, ik heb gekozen voor de Islam. En toen ik erover na ben gaan denken, ben ik eerst op internet gaan kijken. Dat was de ingang."

[24] http://www.nieuwemoskee.nl/2011/02/jong-idealisme-en-oubollig-cynisme/. Original text: Trots op hun wortels en ze houden van hun cultuur, maar ze zijn niet blind voor de vele misstanden in hun regio

private or 'female' issues such as menstruation might be looked for online (for example on forums), some women choose to ask their parents about this. One example is one of the interview respondents from Isra, who explains that she asks her father for advice on a wide range of topics:

> "I do ask my father those kind of things. He has six girls, so for us that's nothing weird. At the time I also just asked him whether I was allowed to take away my moustache, those kind of things.." (ISA, 2012)

When we move our attention from generation as an age related concept to one starting from migration, different issues come up. It appears that especially for young people who are born in the Netherlands, but whose parents are from elsewhere, it remains difficult to balance their different cultural and religious backgrounds and experiences. On Turkish Student for example, Eudaimonia posted an item with the title "Child education and religion".[25] KaraYILAN responds to this by stating:

> "Although people say that nothing will happen, after a certain while, the child that got educated in different places (like Quran schools in the Netherlands) often gets into conflict with his family…And this is quite normal, because they got a different education, or the one is educated and the other not…And this causes big traumas within the child in the future…He or she starts asking him or herself 'why did you send me to those places if you were going to disapprove it later on?"[26]

It seems that the most important conflict between parents who grew up somewhere else and children who were born in the Netherlands is related to Islam and how to bring it into practice. We have seen both examples of young people who wanted to live their religion less strict than their parents, but also the other way around. In the latter case, younger generations would often accuse their parents of a lack of theological knowledge of the Islam.

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[25] http://forum.turksestudent.nl/index.php/topic/46378-cocuk-egitimi-ve-din/ (Visited on 01-03-2012) Original text: "Cocuk egitimi ve din" Posted by Eudaimonia on 13-12-2011 (member since 14-05-2007, 6453 messages)

[26] http://forum.turksestudent.nl/index.php/topic/46378-cocuk-egitimi-ve-din/ (Visited on 01-03-20120) Original text: "ilk etapta ebeveynler kendilerinide egitmeli ve bu konuda donanimli olmalidir... ne kadar birsey olmaz denilirsede... bir zaman sonra sagda solda egitim alan cocuk ailesiyle catisiyor... buda gayet dogaldir cunku farkli egitim almislar veya biri egitimli biri egitimsiz oluyo... ve bunlar ilerde o cocukta buyuk tramvaya neden olabilir... madem bana reva gordugunuz egitimden hosnut deilsiniz... neden beni gonderdiniz sendromuyla kivraniyorlar... hatta aldiklari egitimin tam tersine herseyden soguyabiliyorlar..." Posted by KaraYILAN on 13-12-2011 (member since 19-03-2003, 6213 messages).

3.2.5.   Converted Muslims and family relations

Living between cultures is not only something that migrant children experience, but also an important aspect of the lives of converted Muslims. Especially specific Muslim celebrations are sometimes difficult for them, as they do not always have family to share these with. On New Mosque, Elma Kronemeijer writes about forgetting the Eid-ul-Adha fest after the birth of her first child.[27] Even though this huge event in her life might sound like a legitimate excuse for this, she felt guilty and caught:

> "It wasn't just about forgetting. There was more at stake here, namely the fact that I did not have my own history with this fest, I didn't grow up with it. Let's be fair: it wouldn't be easy to forget Christmas."[28]

3.2.6.   Living between different countries

Where converted women sometimes suffer from the lack of a connection to a country and family with a Muslim majority, migrants and their children often struggle with the fact that they do. Especially on the forum Turkish Student, many of the participants show that they are still connected to the country they or their parents were born. On one of the blogs for example, an article of the newspaper 'Volkskrant' is published. The title is 'Big worries about the Turkish-Dutch youth'.[29] It argues that Turkish-Dutch youngsters are torn between cultural differences (between their culture at home and the Dutch society as a whole), and that they have difficulties choosing between their Turkish and their Dutch identities.[30] In response, a person with the nickname 'Crazed' argues that "this is a generational problem. My grandson will not be bothered with these things".[31]

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[27] http://www.nieuwemoskee.nl/2011/11/mijn-offerfeest-een-wake-up-call/

[28] Original text: Het ging me er niet alleen om dat ik het was vergeten. Er was meer aan de hand, namelijk dat ik zelf geen historie heb met het Offerfeest, er niet mee ben opgegroeid, en er dus geen band mee heb opgebouwd. Laat ik eerlijk zijn: Kerstmis zou ik niet zo snel vergeten.

[29] Original text: "Grote zorgen over Turks-Nederlandse jeugd", posted by Zulis (member since 16-08-2007, 6200 messages) on 10-01-2011. http://forum.turksestudent.nl/index.php/topic/45228-grote-zorgen-over-turks-nederlandse-jeugd/ (Visited on 21-02-2012). This item has 35 reactions.

[30] Original text: "Grote zorgen over Turks-Nederlandse jeugd", posted by Zulis (member since 16-08-2007, 6200 messages) on 10-01-2011. http://forum.turksestudent.nl/index.php/topic/45228-grote-zorgen-over-turks-nederlandse-jeugd/ (Visited on 21-02-2012). This item has 35 reactions.

[31]   Posted on 10-01-2011 by Crazed (member since 18-01-2005, 17433 messages, so a very active user). Original text: "In mijn ogen is het nog steeds een generatieprobleem. Mijn kleinzoon zal er geen last meer van hebben." http://forum.turksestudent.nl/index.php/topic/45228-grote-zorgen-over-turks-nederlandse-jeugd/ (Visited on 21-02-2012)

On the other hand, there are also differences within the different groups. For example, within the TS-General, the category 'Religion, Culture and Society', Sananeya<u>aa</u> opened a discussion about the differences between and within both the Turkish and the Dutch culture (with 148 reactions). She emphasizes that she often feels discriminated against by other Turkish youth, because she is too liberal. She claims:

> "I have more cultural problems in the Turkish community, because I am not totally Turkish-Turkish (more Dutch with Islamic-Turkish origins)".[32]

Burak responds to this by stating:

> "The choices that one makes, define who you are. What Dutch people attempt to do is to put people in frames. Either you are Dutch, or you are Turkish. Everything that lies in-between is not allowed. You can't be a human being with opinions about certain issues."[33]

Hence, these youth try to negotiate their own identities and aims in life, despite and in collaboration with the expectations and discourses about them.

3.2.7. Changes in Dutch society

Cultural diversity not only leads to complex situations and identities for migrants and their children, but also for other Dutch citizens. On 27 April 2011, feryâd-û isyân posted an article from a news organisation, with the title "Future generations will have worse times than now".[34] The article argues that 73% of the Dutch population thinks that the future generations will live in worse conditions than the current ones. Although the article does not mention 'Muslim youngsters', Crazed is responding with the following text: "If only the cows are drugged while slaughtering, and the municipalities are free

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[32] http://forum.turksestudent.nl/index.php/topic/45468-cultuurverschillen/ (Visited on 01-03-2012) Original text: "Ik heb meer cultuurproblemen in de Turkse samenleving, omdat ik niet helemaal Turks-Turks ben (eerder Nederlands van Islamitisch-Turks afkomst)." Posted by sananeyaaa on 21-02-2011 (member since 10-02-2011, 55 messages, female). This post has the tag of being popular with 148 reactions.

[33] http://forum.turksestudent.nl/index.php/topic/45468-cultuurverschillen/ (Visited on 01-03-2012) Original text: "De keuzes die je maakt, maakt jouw wat je nu bent. Wat Nederlanders geneigd zijn om te doen is mensen in hokjes stoppen. Of je bent een Nederlander, of je bent een Turk. Alles wat er tussen ligt mag niet. Je mag geen mens zijn met verschillende opvattingen over aantal zaken." Posted by Burak 21-02-2011 (member since 09-03-2006, male, 5615 messages).

[34] http://forum.turksestudent.nl/index.php/topic/45770-toekomstige-generaties-krijgen-het-slechter/ (Visited on 28-02-2012) Posted by feryâd-û isyân on 27-04-2012 (member since 06-08-2007, 14318 messages). Original text: "Toekomstige generaties krijgen het slechter".

of people with headscarves. Who cares about the rest".[35] Obviously he is responding very cynical about the so called problems for future generations in the Netherlands. According to him there are also 'real' problems in this country, but these are never discussed.

3.3. Greece

3.3.1.   Introduction

The Greek case is very different from the Dutch (and the UK ones) because of the different history of migration flows and the peculiarities of Greek migration law. While there is an emerging second generation of Muslim women who have been raised and educated in Greece, these are mostly of a school age.

In addition, the presence of a large number of transit Muslim migrant women makes migration status (transit migrant or legal resident) a very significant factor from the perspective of intersectionality. In this context it is important to stress that class, and ethnicity tend to play a much more important role in determining on and offline practices than age. We will illustrate this point by reference to the different generations of Muslim migrant women that we have interviewed.

3.3.2.   Arab Migrant Women in their 40s

With respect to their activities in the host country, women in their 40s are mainly occupied with the family and tend to live more family and community oriented lives. Motherhood is a significant part of their identity and, apart from few exceptions; they do not entertain professional activities. Their knowledge of Greek is limited and therefore they often rely on their children and husbands as mediators in their interactions with Greeks. They maintain very close ties to their extended families in their countries of origin, and in some cases hope to return there one day. They are active in three areas: in setting up and maintaining the work of the informal mosques/cultural centers, which provide an outlet for them, both socially and in terms of applying their

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[35] Original text: "Als de koeien maar goed verdoofd worden bij het slachten en de gemeentes vrij zijn van mensen met hoofddoekjes. Wat boeit de rest nou." http://forum.turksestudent.nl/index.php/topic/45770-toekomstige-generaties-krijgen-het-slechter/ (Visited on 28-02-2012). Posted by Crazed on 27-04-2012 (member since 18-01-2005, 17433 messages).

professional and educational competencies. They are the ones who organize and carry out the educational activities of the cultural centers, and are very keen to teach their children Arabic as a way to inculcate them into the culture of their home country. Thus, although they are not employed, they become important members of their migrant communities, as informal educators and cultural mediators.

The Internet is an important means for them to retain their ties with their families in their home countries. They use Skype and MSN messenger on a daily basis, and often for many hours, to communicate with rest of their family and keep up with developments there. Satellite TV is also a very important source of information about the situation in their home countries. They do not, however, consider the Internet a reliable source of information about Islam. For some of them this presents a ground for not, in fact, using the Internet, since they believe that the Internet only disseminates lies and misinformation about Islam.[36] For religious questions, they either refer to other community members, or elders in their home countries. Social media, such as Facebook, are a more preferred means of communication and networking, especially for those who are more active in integration politics.

3.3.3.   Young Arab Girls (school age)

Young Arab women, on the other hand, who are still in school or study at the University, tend to have every-day on- and offline interactions with Greeks that bring to the forefront many of the issues that they face with regards to their religious identity and their integration into Greek society. Among them different paths are to be observed: In some exceptional cases they turn away from their family background and abandon their religious Muslim identity, much to their migrant parents' dismay and form social ties with Greeks only and integrate completely into Greek society by marrying Greeks.[37] Relationships with migrant parents and family back home become very strained, and for periods of time are severed. Compromises can be reached by legitimizing their marriage through a nominal Islamic ceremony, which, however, does not represent a religious commitment but only a formal arrangement for the sake of their parents' social standing with relatives back home.

Young girls who have entered higher education and are envisaging a professional career, even though they identify positively with their religious and cultural background and claim it with pride, or communicate openly with their Greek friends about their religious identity, they find it difficult to wear the hijab in public because they are afraid it will set them apart and mark

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[36] Interview 9 with Syrian second generation migrant and mother in Greece, (08.10.2011)
[37] Interviews 11. 12.13 with second generation Egyptian migrants (23.02.2012 (02.04.2012).

them unfavourably amongst their Greek peers and their wider Greek social networks. While negotiating the outward marks of their religious identity, such as the hijab, is a point of tension and ambivalence, they also, nevertheless, consider themselves to be ambassadors of their religion and culture and assume this role both in school and more broadly through activities meant to sensitize and educate Greeks about Islam.

> "I was born here in Greece. I took the university exams this year. I passed and now I will study Optometry. I can't wait to start. I am a Muslim. I know this from a young age. That I won't do the sign of the cross in school etc. But now I am getting to know my religion more, to live it that is. Because where I live, in Peiraias, there we don't have any Muslims, at all. I don't even have one Muslim girlfriend around. All my friends are Christians and they are very nice. OK, sometimes someone will react and say things, will take objection, and such, but OK, I'm used to it … I have also done presentations about Islam in schools, in Keratsini, in my own school. (…) My parents don't pressure me to wear the veil. But since 6th grade I've always believed, siad my prayers. But they never pressured me. They tell me "you should wear the hijab when you are ready, when you will be 100% pleased with this, we don't want you to wear and then take it off behind our backs, or hate it (…) I don't think I face the same problems as the girls who wear the hijab, because I don't stand out. So … I don't face a lot of reactions. Only sometimes when I'm somewhere and they start talking about Islam in a bad way, and going on and on, then I start explaining to them, telling them how things really are. (…) So far, I have not decided to wear the hijab. I think it's too hard. And the older a girl gets the more difficult it becomes, because (…) I'm afraid of the environment around me. (…) OK, I talk about Islam, that's no problem, but I'm still afraid to take that step.[38]

▪ Afghan women (20-45)

• As in the case of Arab Muslim women, Afghan women's migration is in most cases part of a larger family migration plan. However, there are several cases of Afghan women who migrate independently in order to escape gender discrimination and persecution linked to cultural and religious norms in the countries of origin.[39] During our interviews, we encountered two cases of women who migrated in order to escape domestic violence, including the rape and biting of women and children by their husbands and other members of

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[38] Interview 6 with second generation Syrian girl, 23.10.2011
[39] Interview with lawyers from the Greek Council of Refugees

their husbands' families.[40] We did not encounter significant generational differences in this category of interviewees.

The possession of an internet connection or even a computer at home is considered as a luxury since most of them have lost or sold almost all their valuables during their journey to Athens. Although some of them use the internet (mainly Facebook and skype) to connect with relatives and friends in other European locations, this is only done sporadically in internet cafes. On the contrary, mobile phones constitute a technology that enables them to access transit migrant networks in an immediate and relatively cheap way. Mobile phones are used by Afghan women also as storing devices where they keep memories of home places, relatives, but also information and documents that may be useful for their travels. For example, one Afghan woman that we interviewed in Victoria Square showed us how she uses her mobile phone to carry documents that prove that she was working in a women's organization in Afghanistan. She intended to use these documents when she applied for asylum in her final European destination. [41]

Overall generational differences between Muslim migrant women with regards to the usage of new technologies are determined by individual factors, by marriage status, by employment, by ethnic origin and by the duration of stay in Greece. Much more important than generational differences, however, are differences in ethnic origin, class and migration status. In that respect, it is interesting to note that, as one Arab woman noted, culture is the main factor that differentiates them from other Muslim women.[42] This reproduces the distinction between "culture" and "religion". As Ramadan argues, this position rests on the assumption that Muslims often mistakenly confuse certain cultural traditions ,(such as discrimination against women, the imposition of the veil, and violence against women) with religion (Ramadan, 2009, p. 184). The specificities, however, of different cultural traditions and gender relations, as well as different migrant trajectories, constitute a determining factor in the divergences between Muslim migrant women's religious practices in Greece. Although these differences are largely silenced in Greek public discourse, they tend to be very important in the context of Muslim women's transnational online communities (Piela 2011).

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[40] Focus group 1
[41] Interviews 14 and 15 with transit Afghan women in Victoria Square 15/01/2012
[42] Interview 1 with Organizer and Coordinator of Women's Activities at the Gyzy Mosque (22.03.2011).

3.4. United Kingdom

As a relatively new phenomenon, the post-Soviet migration to Britain does not readily allow to observe several generations living in the same country and to trace points of rupture or cultural reproduction among generations. Post-Soviet female migrants can be roughly divided in two age groups: 20 something or younger and women between the ages of 30 to 50 years old. Nevertheless, in terms of their Internet use and participation surprisingly there are not as dramatic differences as often expected. The differences in digital literacy were often related to the financial standing of a migrant or were paralleled to the level of digital development in their native country. As a respondent explained: 'In my native place Internet is not widely spread. I get in touch by phone usually, and I do not need the Internet to get in touch with my family' (Interview 16). Thus, generational differences in the post-Soviet Muslim migration perhaps correlate more with migrants' life experiences rather than their physical age. It has more to do with whether migrants had experience of socialist/ atheist realities and with whether the person left the native country after the beginning of religious revival or before it took place.

Traditionally the archetype of generational differences is embodied in the image of mother, but here it was absent both in the online and offline discourses. Mother (or father) did not represent an authority in religious discourses of migrants at all. Nevertheless, implicit comparisons with mothers' generations were made by the respondents, who alluded to differences in lifestyles of different generations. For example, younger migrants tend to say that they would like to be beautiful longer, implying 'longer than my mother' (for example in Interview 3, Edinburgh, March 2011); mothers appear in the interview as tragic figures ('Her mother was not allowed to stay nearby at the funeral', Interview 17). Or converts might say about a mother's reaction: 'My mother do not understand the hijab and is afraid for me', Interview 20).

Furthermore, generational differences in religious practices are directly connected to the Soviet period of de-islamisation of the now post-Soviet territories and the decades of atheist propaganda enforced by the Soviet regime. For the generation of mothers, practicing Islam is associated with the fear of persecution by the authorities (as in the Soviet past) and the fear of fundamentalism, which is seen by the respondents as spread by mass communication media. The break of religious tradition in the Soviet times is 'repaired' in the interviews and online material by references to earlier generations: grandmothers and grandfathers. They emerge in the discourse as 'Arabists', that is, fluent speakers and interpreters of Arabic sacred texts (Interview 9, London, September 2011). Also, in family stories as religious people: 'My granddad was Muslim and my grandmother was Christian, they were not married but were very happy together' (Interview 20) or 'My

grandfather was respected by other Muslims for his wisdom' (Interview 14, Glasgow, August 2011).

Accepting the pre-Soviet generation as an authority, migrants symbolically repair the rupture of the Muslim tradition in the native land and their family history. The religiosity of contemporary Muslim migrants is 'self-taught', in accordance with the tendency observed by Silvestri in her studies of Muslims in Belgium:

> In particular, many of the young Muslim women ...declared to have begun a process of 'self-teaching' Islam. This appears to accompany and gradually overtake traditional paths of religious instruction where the elders of the family or the religious authorities prevail. Consequently, a reverse process starts whereby these born-again young Muslims begin to re-instruct their Muslim parents in the faith, enter in a dialogue about the meaning of religion with them, or push them into adhering to old practices in a more conscious, more critical, and more autonomous way. (Silvestri 2008:44)

Personal experiences of religious upheaval in the post-Soviet countries also contributed to understanding of a generation category in migrancy. The story of Fatima, an asylum seeker from Turkmenistan illustrates generational differences related to such experiences. Fatima came to the UK 12 years ago with her youngest son aged 10 years at that time. Her husband was imprisoned shortly after her escape and as a result her elder sons were unable neither to get into University nor to find good jobs. Family properties helped them to survive, and the second son joined the mother in the UK two years ago. Fatima is a non-practicing Muslim as well as her younger son, who grew up in Scotland and fully integrated into his Scottish neighborhood and university networks. His elder brother, while alone in Turkmenistan, recreated himself as a devoted Muslim under the influence of local religious revival. When he came to Britain, different understanding of religious affiliations created tensions and conflicts within the family: the second son does not approve his brother's 'secular' upbringing, complains that his mother failed to raise the youngest brother as 'a proper' Muslim. The brothers' understanding of the role of Islam in their lives and their perceptions of gender roles in the society and in the family are dramatically different and reflect generational change, albeit influenced by the sociopolitical environment, rather than personal differences.

3.5. Conclusions

Generational issues have played a large role throughout our research project on religious practices. For the groups of men and women we have talked to,

generations do not only refer to age differences, but also to other axes of their identity: such as whether they have migrated themselves or are children of migrants, whether they are born as a Muslim or converted to Islam at a later age and whether they could practice their religion in their youth (see UK case). Moreover all these generational differences interact in various ways with the other pillars of our research: religious practices, gender, and new media. Younger women use the Internet in other ways than the older women in our research, but also for first generation migrants the Internet means something else than for second-generation migrants. For example, the older Arab women in the Greek case mainly use the Internet to stay in touch with family and follow the news of the country they were born, while the younger women see the Internet as a way to keep up their social networks in Greece. For most of the Dutch interviewees, the Internet was first of all a means to find information on Islam and negotiate their Muslim and Dutch identities. Especially for converted Muslims, who were in a way first generation Muslim, the Internet provided and important source of information on their religion. In the UK case study, the relation between religion and generations were even more different, as for this group of migrants it had been impossible to practice their religion in the USSR. In short, all our case studies show that the various generations of migrants and Muslims use the Internet in different ways, consequently their religious practices are also influenced differently by new media. For some the Internet is not more than a big library or means to get in touch with like- minded, while for others the actual practices become more digital (e.g. send around prayers to facebook friends) or watch youtube videos of sermons to feel better.

4. Religious Practices and New Media in relation to Agency

4.1. Introduction

Current debates about agency and subjectivity have taught us much about the relationship between feminism, emancipation and religion. Saba Mahmood (2005), for example, states that if feminists really want to understand the lives, experiences and strategies of all women, they have to be open to the possibility that we can learn from other women and maybe even change our political views accordingly. Therefore, according to Mahmood, feminists have to separate their analytical and prescriptive work and hence rethink their conceptualization of agency (Mahmood, 2005). Most feminist thinking is primarily liberatory and agency in this context is described as a model of subordination and subversion. Mahmood argues that this attachment of agency to progressive politics is problematic. If, she says, there are different ways to change the world depending on social, political and historical contexts, then the meaning of agency should not be fixed in advance. These insights have played an important role in our approaches to the issue of agency of Muslim women in relation to their religious practices. The case studies will both discuss in what ways Muslim women emancipate themselves through their religion, but also how religion provides them with an non-liberatory agency.

4.2. Netherlands

4.2.1. Redefining feminist struggles and emancipation

In an article on more inclusive interpretations of feminism, I already argued that many migrant women in the Netherlands are interested in emancipation, but that they are often critical about feminism (Midden, forthcoming). One way of showing agency in relation to the connections between religion and gender is through knowledge and analysis of the Qur'an and its message. Ceylan Pektas Weber argues on the Website 'New Mosque' that many female Muslim intellectuals have showed that more attention for female aspects in the holy texts is an important aspect of the struggle for equality and justice:

> "Men and women are depicted as equal in the Qur'an (..). The traditional interpretations, mainly produced from a male perspective, do not do

justice to this startingpoint."[43]

Despite these women's interest in emancipation, the idea of feminism in many cases did not appeal to them, or was even highly criticised. Akachar finds it problematic that women who fight for equality tend to adapt too much to the dominant group. Instead she argues, feminists could better re-value femininity in order to improve the position of women in our societies and not fall in the trap of trying to become the same as men.[44]

4.2.2.   Multiple Critique

As became clear in some of the quotes in the above, Muslim women are positioned on a complicated and sometimes contradictory location. Because of the often negative and judging representations by for example popular western media, Muslim women developed something called 'multiple critiques', Miriam Cooke argues. They discuss gender roles in their local and religious communities; challenge conventional interpretations of holy texts and traditions and at the same time defend their religious and national communities. According to Cooke, Muslim women create new histories and knowledges about their own lives and criticise the many accounts that are often produced *about* them, without consulting them.

In an intimate and highly self-conscious way, Ceylan Pektas Weber reflects on the headscarf and the respect people (can) give to each other as human beings.[45] She argues that the headscarf has been criticised, cursed and considered as oppressive and backwards, at the same time there is also a movement of describing it as emancipatory and a sign of assertiveness or expression of one's identity. In the interesting balancing act of this article, Weber argues:

> "In both cases, I experience a growing problem and feeling of narrowness. Not in the least because of the often used word 'symbol' when talking about the headscarf. A symbol represents something, an ideal, a thought, a movement. But usually not a person. And in both responses to the headscarf, the women wearing one run the risk of becoming the representative of such an ideal, vision, or movement,

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[43]   http://www.nieuwemoskee.nl/2011/11/gelijkwaardigheid-van-man-en-vrouw-in-de-islam/.
Original text: Mannen en vrouwen worden in de Koran als gelijkwaardige mensen voorgesteld, die zonder onderscheid zijn aangesteld als rentmeester op aarde (*khalifah*). De traditionele interpretaties, die grotendeels eenzijdig vanuit mannelijk perspectief tot stand kwamen, doen dit uitgangspunt geen recht.
[44] http://www.wijblijvenhier.nl/1938/feminisme-oude-stijl-feminimalisme/
[45] http://www.nieuwemoskee.nl/2010/12/versteende-beelden/

and not as a person. Women who wear headcarves have more and more become the headscarf. A thing, not a person."[46]

Other critique <u>from this</u> Muslim community is about the veiling discussion in the Netherlands. In one forum discussion on the possible ban of the headscarf, almost all of the discussion participant's state that they will keep their headscarf on no matter what. In this way their headscarf becomes a tool of agency, to make a statement against the Western secular society. On the webite Turksestudent, we also see that participants make references to Dutch culture in order to criticise the negative debates about headscarves and veiling. At a certain point during the discussion, in which a lot of men also participated. Asu for example posted the following picture:

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[46] http://www.nieuwemoskee.nl/2010/12/versteende-beelden/. Original text: In beide gevallen ervaar ik echter een toenemend probleem en beknelling. Niet in de laatste plaats vanwege het veelvuldige gebruik van het woord 'symbool' als het om de hoofddoek gaat. Een symbool vertegenwoordigt iets, een ideaal, een gedachte, een beweging. Maar meestal geen mens. En in beide stellingnamen dreigen de draagsters van de hoofddoek ook eerder als een vertegenwoordigster van zo'n ideaal, visie, of een beweging gezien te worden, dan als mens. Vrouwen die een hoofddoek dragen, zijn in de afgelopen vijftien jaar in toenemende mate zelf een hoofddoek geworden. Een ding, geen mens meer

It states: "Tax on the headscarf (*vodden*: literally 'pieces of clothes'). Just ask it back from the tax services". [47] It is signed with 'Rafje' instead of the traditional Dutch name 'Loesje'. Rafje is a short name for Rafih Berkane, while it is also a fictitious person who signs critical and humoristic texts from a multicultural and Islamic vision.[48] Together with this explanation, another picture is published by Turkmeneli:

"WAAROM
DRAAG JIJ EEN
HOOFDDOEK?"

Rafje

"-WAAROM
DRAAG *JIJ* ER
GÉÉN?!"

It states "Why do you wear a headscarf?" and "Why don't you wear one?"[49] Especially in the last poster, the producer turns around the discourse by making it debatable why someone decides not to wear the headscarf, rather than always asking women who do, why they made that choice.

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[47] http://forum.turksestudent.nl/index.php/topic/45417-hoofddoekje/page__st__30 (Visited on 28-02-2012) Posted by ~Asu~ on 18-02-2011 (member since 23-01-2005, 6940 messages). Original text on the picture. This "tax for the headscarf" is a slogan of MP Geert Wilders.

[48] http://forum.turksestudent.nl/index.php/topic/46242-geen-loesje-maar-rafje/ (Visited 28-02-2012) Posted by Turkmeneli on 23-09-2011 (member since 19-02-2007, 1662 messages) Original text: "Rafje is de naam van een fictief persoon die vanuit een multiculturele en/of islamitische visie posters met kritische en/of humoristische teksten ondertekent en in verschillende media publiceert." See also www.rafje.nl for more information. It is mostly published on: Turkish-Dutch newspaper HABER, MZINE, De Moslimagenda (The Muslim Agenda), Wijblijvenhier.nl and forums of Marokko.nl. Source: http://forum.turksestudent.nl/index.php/topic/46242-geen-loesje-maar-rafje/ (Visited on 28-02-2012)

[49] http://forum.turksestudent.nl/index.php/topic/46242-geen-loesje-maar-rafje/ (Visited 28-02-2012) Posted by Turkmeneli on 23-09-2011 (member since 19-02-2007, 1662 messages) See picture for original text. Source: http://forum.turksestudent.nl/index.php/topic/46242-geen-loesje-maar-rafje/ (Visited on 01-03-2012) Original source according to Turkmenli: http://nl.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rafje

4.2.3.   Against sexualisation and consumer culture

In some cases, the multiple critiques of Muslim women can be combined in one specific argument that brings together their multiple affiliations and sometimes also different groups of women. The struggle against sexualisation is an example of such a topic, and has the potential of bringing together faith and feminism, though not according to all bloggers. Akachar finds it problematic that women who fight for equality tend to adapt too much to the dominant group. Instead she argues, feminists could better re-value femininity in order to improve the position of women in our societies and not fall in the trap of trying to become the same as men.[50]

4.2.4.   Living according to the right rules

In the previous examples we could see various interpretations of thinking about emancipation and often the women showed agency, in the sense of Braidotti's interpretations: as daily negotiations and (affirmative) alternative perspectives on emancipation. However, not all women in our research approached life in such a way. Especially on the website 'Muslim women's guide', women were mainly talking about what they are allowed and not allowed according to the Qur'an and how to live accordingly in the Netherlands. But also here, I would like to argue, women do show agency, mainly in the sense, as suggested by Saba Mahmood, in a non-resisting way, for example by begin modest or by critiquing western ideas of freedom or by showing solidarity with other women.

In general there is a great emphasis on obedience to Allah (for example; covering the body) and obedience to the husband (for example; the female responsibility to please the husband sexually, or remain silent and forgiving during an argument). Especially clothing rules are a popular topic on the website, where a decent way of dressing is described as a very important religious practice. One columnist discusses why Muslim women should take these rules seriously:

> "If you have problems with this, then go with all your protests and arguments to God, the creator of heaven and earth. As he is the one who created them."[51]

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[50] http://www.wijblijvenhier.nl/1938/feminisme-oude-stijl-feminimalisme/
[51] http://moslima.ansaar.nl/index.php/component/content/article/151-columns-/1116-hoofddoek-geen-discussie. Original tex: 'Als jullie daar problemen mee hebben, wendt jullie

4.3. Greece

In the Greek case, the understanding of agency in transnational online and offline networks is informed by the the concept of the "cybertype" coined by Lisa Nakamura (Nakamura 2002: 5-6). The cybertype of the Muslim migrant woman in Greece is largely produced through the interactions of male and female users, official and unofficial groups and individuals that belong predominantly to the Arab communities, but include also European, Greek, migrant and female and male users. In this context, Arab women and Greek converts are much more visible than non-Arab female Muslim migrants both in terms of authorship and in terms of usage. This form of counter-racialisation reflects also, as Nakamura argues, "anxieties", in this case about traditional Muslim values and Arab identities being challenged in Western dominated new media but also anxieties about the diversity of Muslim women's identities and practices. This silencing is in sharp contrast to the privileged position that personal stories of Greek women converts have in these web-sites and in Greek media discourse in general

 On the 'islam.gr' web-site the question of women's role, position and rights in Islam is clearly a pivotal issue for constructing the profile of an open-minded, moderate, benign and charitable religion which serves reason and justice, and it is addressed in various articles challenging (mis)representations of Islam in the West. Female images depict Arab women of all ages, even young children, wearing the hijab, usually smiling. Arab women are portrayed as pure, modest, demure, chaste, composed, studying, in the house, with children, or in public in the company of other women. Such images construct the profile of a more traditional and somewhat introverted and protected, yet colourful, femininity, contrasted, by implication, to Western representations of femininity in the media which are considered often indecent and degrading for women. Interestingly the gendered dynamics circumscribing The official Muslim web-sites we analyzed privilege the hyper-visibility of pious Arab women as an antidote to Western islamophobic propaganda, but don't include women's own voices. In this politics of representation, Muslim migrant women's agency is paradoxically lost at the moment when it is being formally asserted.

The question of the headscarf seems to condense some of the major dilemmas that emerge with regards to Muslim women's agency. Gender relations and migrant women's agency are renegotiated through online and offline dressing practices. In 'islam.gr', several articles refer to the meaning of the headscarf, either as it is practiced in the West, or as a reaction to the

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dan met al jullie protesten en bezwaren tot de Schepper van de hemelen en de aarde. Want Hij is namelijk Degene die deze voorschriften heeft bepaald.'

West and to western life-style. Seeking to challenge Western stereotypes that take the hijab as a sign of Islamic backwardness and oppression, the hijab is represented as a *free choice*, not an enforced religious practice. Wearing the hijab is constituted as an expression of a consciously assumed religious, cultural and national *identity*, rather than proof of passive submission to religious authority and traditional norms. In this sense, the hijab, while not an Islamic religious symbol pre se – a misapprehension which the authors invoke as proof of Western ignorance of Islam - does in fact become a symbol of religious and cultural difference and a prominent rallying point of Islamic identity politics. Choosing the hijab becomes signified as an act and declaration of agency rather than a mark of subjection. In this sense, the hijab controversy is re-framed from an Islamic perspective as a discourse symptomatic of Western prejudice and propaganda rather than a valid and justified critique of religious fundamentalism.

However, during the interviews we conducted the hijab was explained to us in terms of its multiple meanings and dynamic forms, rather than a fixed protective layer as represented in the official Muslim web-sites. The intense preoccupations with the ways in which it should be appropriately worn manifested varying degrees of autonomy with regards to the dominant norms in both the country of origin and the country of residence. For example, for most Arab women it appeared to be the product of a conscious decision to enter into adulthood; a rite of passage. For some Arab women, however, this manifested a break with previous generations of mothers and grandmothers who were not wearing it, and at the same time an object of renegotiation of their feminine, religious and cultural identity in Greece, where this practice is still seen as strange and backward. In one instance a young couple, a Syrian girl born and raised in Greece, and her husband to be, a Syrian young man who migrated from Syria as an adult, debated about the proper way to wear the hijab.[52]

> "When I first wore the veil, it was very difficult for me. All my Greek friends were asking me 'Why'? At the beginning I had psychological problems. I felt that everybody was staring at me. Now I do not have a problem anymore"

> "I like her more because she did it. I know she is strong" Tarik said "In Syria, some women wear Burga, some other wear it and then they take it off. It depends on the neighborhood. In the towns they are more open than in the most traditional villages. But even in the more traditional neighborhoods in Tripoli, you have to wear it. But Syria is

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[52] Interviews 8 and 9

changing. "We both want to go back and live there...A woman should not greet someone with her hand. It is inappropriate. When you wear the veil you must follow the rules. Otherwise you shouldn't wear it. My mother never wore the veil. My father did not force her to do so – this is only what "closed families" do. She is Lebanese. She is more "open".

This discussion shows the wearing of the hijab as part of the (re)negotiation of gender roles between Muslim couples rather than a code of dress imposed on Muslim girls by their male relatives. The couple had to resort to the opinion of a senior woman in the mosque who concluded that, in the case of the young woman, the hijab was indeed not properly worn. This further interaction in fact illustrates the central role of older women as cultural and religious gatekeepers, guardians, and instructors, as well as the points of tension between younger and older generations of Muslim migrant women. On a different occasion, however, the same Muslim woman told us that her favourite student amongst a group of young Muslim girls was the only one who was not wearing the hijab. She told us that she admired her for her intelligence, strength and integrity and for her ability to explain clearly to non Muslims the truth about Islam. In other words, the hijab, while signaling the conscious adoption of a religious identity, was not a necessary mark of belonging.

These renegotiations are also present in Facebook profiles. Younger, unmarried women on Facebook usually represent themselves as modern, fashionable and funny. Their profiles include links to schools and university groups as well as the Athenian neighborhood where they reside, while ethnic identity and religion are often not specified. According to our interviews, in many cases, young Muslim girls who are not wearing the hijab often prefer not to refer to their being Muslim and have a wide range of Facebook friends mostly from outside the Islamic communities in Greece. The moment they decide to publicize their decision to wear the hijab, this circle of friends becomes more limited and usually more focused to other Muslim women and men. This however does not indicate a return to tradition and the cultural practices in the society of origin, but rather, wearing the veil in Greece becomes an act of joining at least at the symbolic level a transnational network of young, educated Muslim women who break with tradition all over Europe. As Göle argues, "the veiling of women is not a smooth, gradual, continuous process growing out of tradition. On the contrary, it is the outcome of a new interpretation of Islamic religion by the recent urbanized and educated social groups who have broken away from traditional popular interpretations and practices and politicized religion as an assertion of their collective identity against modernity" (Göle, 1996, p.5) .

In December 2011, a group of young Muslim women from the Gyzi mosque who meet regularly to discuss issues related to everyday life and ethical dilemmas in Greece created a Facebook group page, using the title 'Muslimat.gr'. They produced a You Tube video entitled "It is that simple", in which they recount how it is to live in Athens as a young Muslim woman.[53] The video is in Greek, English and Arabic and very often the three languages are intermingled manifesting the young girls' multiple linguistic and cultural origins. As Yassim, a student, explains in the video: "I've been raised in Greece my entire life. I am Syrian and I cannot place myself in either this identity nor in that identity. I see myself as a Muslim. Not Greek. Not Syrian. Muslim. And I am mostly comfortable with that."The difficulty, uncertainty, but also unwillingness, to assume one specific cultural, national and linguistic identity is resolved through the adoption of a religious identity that is universal and can accommodate the dilemmas of cultural difference experienced on a personal level. The dilemmas these girls face revolve around issues of (mis)representation and visibility. As several girls explain, wearing the hijab makes their difference more visible, something that is not easy for other students and teaching staff to accept. The visibility of difference is always interpreted by "those who do not know about Islam" as an extremity. While one girl explains that she has been expelled from an exam for wearing the hijab on a hot summer's day, another one says that she and her sister are considered the "best girls" in school. The issue of (mis)representation is also highlighted by a girl who does not wear the hijab, but finds herself unable to identify with the images of Muslims presented in Greek history and religious text books. Their own Muslim identity, as she explains, is misrepresented in Greek educational and cultural narratives.

The reason for making the video, and the message they wish to convey through it, is that racist attitudes towards Muslim girls in schools and Universities feed upon ignorance of Islam. Greeks who do not know what Islam is make stereotypical presuppositions and exaggerate visible difference. In this context, making a Facebook group, publishing a You Tube video and teaching their own teachers and fellow students about Islam become practices through which young Muslim women assert their identities. As the video shows, Muslim identity is not considered by young women, who are mostly born and raised in Greece, as naturally or intrinsically hostile or alien to Greek culture but one that can be rendered legible and acceptable through everyday interactions that facilitate knowledge and understanding. On the contrary when Muslim migrant women finish their education, they face several difficulties because of their difference, especially when wearing the hijab.

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[53] http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Dpp9ujXIJXo

> "Muslim women usually wear the hijab not to put boundaries between them and the locals, meaning the Greeks, but rather they put it on because it's kind of more personal than something external. Usually we have people coming to us and telling us 'you put the hijab because you want to look superior to us, better than us...Are you trying to show off, to show that you are better than me because you cover yourself more than I do?' No it's not that...It's just are more comfortable this way. It's our identity. We think that this represents us".

As the example of this video shows, wearing the hijab in a specific manner becomes a decision that does not only assert women's agency vis-a-vis the Greek society, but also vis- a-vis the authorities of the Muslim communities (in this case the official blogs). As Amir-Moazami and argue Salvatore argue, "The ensuing politics of authenticity serves to further fragment traditional sources of authority (as for example mosque-based imams or parental authority) to the extent that the locus of the 'real' Islamand the identity of those who are allowed to speak on its behalf are becoming elusive" (Allievi and Nielsen, 2003, p.71)

Unlike Arab women, Afghan women consider the hijab not as a conscious choice they made in order to assert their religious agency but as a code of dressing that was imposed upon them (and still is) by male members of their community. Whereas all Arab women that we met, were wearing the hijab tightly, there were several Afghan women during the focus group that wore a loosely tied scarf. When we took a common photograph to publish on Facebook, one of them took off her purple scarf (which she removed on several occasions during our discussion) and put on a black one, as it is appropriate in Afghanistan. As one of them explained to us during the focus group, religion is mostly inscribed in personal and private feelings towards God and not in clothing.[54] In addition, when during a focus group we posed the question of the differences in their dressing habits in Greece and in Afghanistan, they explained to us that they were forced to wear black burgas that covered most of their bodies after the Taliban regime. For most of them being forced to wear specific clothing by the Taliban regime goes against Islamic teachings and morality. "Here in Greece, you are more Muslim then we were there. Using force to make women wear the hijab is not what the Muslim religion is about", one woman exclaimed.

Contrary to Arab women, not wearing the hijab becomes the means by which they can overcome some of the major obstacles and difficulties they experience in their of everyday lives in Greece, including work, housing and racial profiling by the Greek police and far right-wing violence. Moreover,

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[54] Focus group 2 with Afghan women

taking the hijab off becomes a strategy that makes possible their border crossings.

> "When I will get my passport, I will go to the airport dressed in European clothes. I like wearing European clothes but the men do not like it. In the square, some Afghan men if you do not wear Muslim clothes they shout. It is not acceptable. At first, it was difficult for me too because I was used to it. But now I do not have a problem to take it off because I will cross the border."

By renegotiating their dressing habits, Afghan women are able also to renegotiate oppressive gender relations in their homes and in their broader communities. In the contrary, for Arab migrant women, the main issue is not male oppression within their own communities but discrimination in the host society. The diverse on- and offline practices and attitudes towards the hijab in Greece by Muslim women of different ethnic origin, class, migrant status and age point out to the transformations of women's agency vis-a-vis Greek society but also within Muslim transnational networks.

4.4. United Kingdom

4.4.1.   Agile Agency in Female Post-Soviet Muslim Migrants

It has been shown above that migrants in their personal narratives deconstruct the over-determined category of 'Muslim women' and refer to multiple and contingent identifications including class, migration history, status. They also re-construct the notion of a Muslim through their on-line networking. These migrants also deliberately attempt to counter the negative attitude to Islam and the perceptions of Muslim woman being submissive and non-educated, which are widespread in the UK, but at the same time they do not attempt to be more visible in the way other minority Muslim migrants often do.

Shaista Gohir, a Global Campaign strategist and women's rights activist, in her blog written to commemorate the events of 9/11, argues that the events and subsequent intensification of anti-Muslim arguments in the UK had an unintentional outcome: '[A] dramatic rise in the number of Muslim women wearing the headscarf and a minority adopting the face veil. This phenomenon is not surprising because when any population feels threatened, it reacts by defending its culture or faith, becoming more attached to it. By

assuming a public Islamic identity, Muslim women suddenly became more visible'.[55]

In the post-Soviet case study visibility in form of religious dress was not approved by the respondents. The respondents provided a range of explanations for their decision. Some highlighted the priority of traditions of the country they choose to migrate to: 'I knew that I am coming to live in Britain and respect the traditions of this country. With my Afghan husband we lived in Saudi Arabia and I was wearing a scarf not to offend local people. I do the same hear by not wearing it' (Interview 17).

Invisibility was also discussed as an embodiment of personal freedom: 'I do not want people to see me first of all as a Muslim', one respondent told me and asked, whether I was a Christian. 'Do you want people passing by to think - is she a Catholic or Orthodox? Or simply enjoy being as the others?' When she was asked whether she was afraid or ashamed to demonstrate her faith – she denied it: 'It is my personal matter. Faith is not a commodity – a car, for example - to be proud or to be ashamed of' (Interview 6). Visibility is treated sometimes as suspicious. 'I heard of a woman who converted to Islam, she was wearing a veil, come to women's meetings, but when she died her relatives found a cross under her pillow.' (interview 7) 'My friend back home wanted to impress her prospective mother-in-law, put on a dress and a veil, but the old lady wanted a modern Muslim girl' (ibid).

The respondents claimed that they can choose when and how to be visible as Muslims. A respondent wearing buggy jeans and a polo in a deprived area of Scotland said: 'I know how to dress properly - I have all that outfits in my wardrobe - and behave when we have Muslim guests - not to bring shame on my partner' (Interview 11, Glasgow, October 2011).

At the same time discussing their religious affiliations the respondents self-identify as Muslims and were keen to fight the prejudices and stereotypes a stranger (researcher) might have had. Muslim respondents tend to discuss Islam and Muslims, as if they (the respondents) were arguing with somebody. This external opinion ('Here he, she, somebody, British people, the newspaper (etc) said, think, afraid of'), preconceptions in the society appeared in conversations immediately after the word 'Muslim' was used. Respondents refer to islamophobia in the contemporary world globally and counter this attitude as unjust and unfair: 'When a Christian kills 77 people everybody forgets that he is a Christian. Imagine if such atrocity was made by a Muslim – that will be a crime of Islam'. Or in Britain: 'I feel at home here, but if I put a scarf – everything changes. I admire those who do – they are so brave, but

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[55] Shaista Gohir , 'Muslim women finding empowerment despite the hostility after 9/11', at http://www.huffingtonpost.co.uk/tag/muslim-women posted 9/10/11

I will not do it. Not because I am afraid to be different from my university friends, just do not like it' (interview 8, London, July 2011).

The respondents described their life in Britain, and constantly refer to general negativity towards people of their faith (although when I asked if they experienced such attitude themselves the majority did not give examples). It was summarised by one of the respondents (Interview 4, Edinburgh, August 2011) 'I has been said – racism is changing from race to faith.' It was possible to suppose that the ideas of practicing of Islam and being a Muslim are heavily influenced by mediated discourse with the ideas of collective trauma and collective guilt. Muslims in the contemporary public discourse in the UK emerge as a sociopolitical category, when questions of a lifestyle, tradition, that are not anchored in faith, are translated into religious differences and further loaded with political associations and conclusions, in the same vein as phonotypical, physical differences are transformed by racism into the inferiority/superiority paradigm. Media discourse first creates a notion of Muslim being dangerous, violent and backward, and further uses it as a common knowledge to delimit and order public discourses. The respondents feel the racialisation of faith debates and try to confront this in their interviews.

More importantly, the study confirms that new notions of agency brought forward by digital networks and social media unsettle closed and fixed identities relying on religion or ethnicity to cement the production and reproduction of agency, and especially in terms of communicative agency. Earlier studies on the politics of cyberconflict showed that enthnoreligious groups adhere on the hierarchical notions of ethnicity, nationality and religion to form and transfer 'real' communities to cyberspace (Karatzogianni, 2006). This is also evident in the case of Post-Soviet female Muslim migrants. The reliance on nationality, ethnicity and religion to repress emotion, fear, suspicion and hatred both by other Muslims and nationals, and the host society confirms the politics of emotion and affect played in digital cultures (Kartzogianni and Kuntsman, 2012).

Nevertheless, what is new and significant here is a complex, constantly negotiated and therefore what could be termed *agile* agency, whereby the migrant mixes and matches their loyalty and primacy of one identity, identification and agency against another, depending on the group, the environment and the fear and uncertainty which needs to be exorcised at any given time in the diverse hybrid media environments they live in.

In these terms, agency, and especially communicative agency is extremely contingent and volatile and used to serve the purpose of the migrant to defend older loyalties or new religious revivals, old and new friends and enemies, in a constant effort to remain in many worlds (home country, host country, online and offline) at the same time and to be part of these worlds,

loved, appreciated, and safe. Emotions, affect, and technology get negotiated against the old constants of religion, nationality, ethnicity, generation and public life, in rapid rhythms, which digital networks make somewhat ephemeral and far more contingent than they used to be in the past.

Consequently, transformations in agency are not only technological, but as it has been argued elsewhere highly political/intentional and affective/motivated (Karatzogianni and Schandorf, forthcoming). Migrants are the most mobile part of society and the technological transformations in agency seem far easier to discern than in hacktivist and sociopolitical resistance groups, which relied on less fixed ideas and on a more active and open desire for change against the capitalist system through peer production and open systems/transparent governance. The migrants although engaged in this agile agency are more inclined to 'stick' to thick identities of religion, nationality and ethnicity as well as culture, than more sociopolitical networks of resistance, which is consistent with previous research on resistance in digital networks (Karatzogianni 2009) and resistance networks in the physical (Karatzogianni and Robinson 2010).

4.5. Conclusions

All women in our case studies are confronted with Islamophobia in general and prejudices about Muslim women (as victims of their religion) specifically. Only for the UK group, this was slightly different as the women from the former Soviet Union are generally not perceived as Muslim both by Muslims and non-Muslims. For the Greek and Dutch case studies, especially the hijab plays an important role in the debates about Islam in Europe and hence of the position of Muslim women. Both in the Greek case and in the Dutch case we recognise the multiple discourses and interpretation of headscarves that are put forward, as either oppressive or emancipatory (free choice), but we also detect the restrictedness of these discourses, as women's voices are sometimes still not heard or women find it difficult to escape this either/or discourse. The Muslim women in both the Dutch and the Greek case studies often explained the hijab in terms of its multiple meanings and dynamic forms, rather than a fixed or clear thing. In all cases women find different ways to negotiate the discrimination they experience as Muslim women and the ideas about gender relations within and outside their own communities. This clearly differs from the women in the UK study, as they are often not recognised and hence treated as Muslims and maybe partly consequently view their religion as a private issue. They argue that among other things, this means that they interpret their religion how they want to and decide themselves how visible they want to be as Muslims. When we look at how new media influence Muslims women's agencies, we see that the women in

all case studies negotiate their different identities and that new media unsettle closed and fixed identities relying on religion or ethnicity to cement the production and reproduction of agency. This can be explained by the fact that these new media provide Muslim women with extensive knowledge on their religion and hence their position as women in Islam, but also give them a voice and provide them with a platform where they can discuss their specific opinions and experiences, and are not restricted to specific discourses. The possible downside of this is that because they can influence who reads their online discourses, it becomes more difficult to manoeuvre between Islamophobic discourses that attack their religious communities and certain Muslim discourses that aim to hold on to specific gender relations.

5.   Religious Practices, New Media and the Public Sphere

5.1. Introduction

The public sphere plays a central role in our research project because digital media change it immensely. On the one hand there is a lower threshold to participate (compared to for example other media), on the other hand, through digital media, the public sphere can also be manipulated and changed in ways that goes beyond anyone's control. Moreover, because we focus on migrants, the issue of visibility is also important, as some groups remain invisible, for example because in certain national contexts religions signs and/or institutions are banned from the public sphere, while others are maybe over visible, for example through (a focus) on their dress (e.g. the debates on Muslim women's headscarves).

5.2. Netherlands

5.2.1.   Religion in the public sphere: visibility and conflicts

The website the Nieuwe Moskee not only aims to make Muslims more visible in the Dutch public sphere, but most of all to bring specific voices (that are hardly heard by the mainstream media) more to the forefront. They want to show the diversity among Muslims in the Netherlands and make the diverse and critical approaches towards Islam present.[56] This means that they both invest in critical perspectives on Dutch society, such as on the right wing politician Geert Wilders[57], and on Islam and Muslims (in the Netherlands).

Many quotes on the websites we investigated, dealt with the frictions that arise when religious practices reach the public sphere of a secular society. On the other hand, we also saw articles that were critical about how more religious societies often create an atmosphere in which it is impossible not to participate in specific religious practices. The public sphere functions in this way as a crucial space for individuals to live their religious practices collectively. During the discussion on the movie '*Hür Adam*' ('Free Man') on the website Turkish Student, this is also considered to be an important aspect of Islam:

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[56] http://www.nieuwemoskee.nl/over/
[57] for example: http://www.nieuwemoskee.nl/2011/06/mosko's-witz/

> "Islam is a religion of societies. It is not an individual religion. It is considering all the people of the world".[58]

It seems that the public sphere is a place where these youngsters would like to meet each other, to be able to live their Islam collectively. In other words, Islam cannot be excluded from the public sphere, because Islam cannot be individualized, according to these youngsters. However, they also doubt whether such a collective Islam, which is very visible in the public sphere, can practically be achieved in a secular society as the Netherlands. Many fora on the websites we analysed, display discussion about negotiating Islamic regulations in Dutch secular society.

5.2.2. Hijab in public sphere

One of the most discussed topics on the websites and fora is the Islamic clothing regulation and the misconceptions about it in Dutch society. On Moslimagids.nl one of the forum participants, Noer-Islam, distinguishes two groups of Muslims in the Netherlands. First of all, the ones who are on the right path, and second of all, the ones who are on the 'modern' path. She then continues to discuss that the ones on the right path are always said to be extremist, whilst the 'modern' Muslims are said to be integrated. The author argues that she thinks that in reality the Muslim women wearing headscarves are actually more free than those who publicly show their beauty and are therefore judged on their beauty instead of on their qualities.

> "If you're sexy, you might be employed even though you can't do anything. Those [girls] are exactly the ones who are regarded as objects of lust. The more nude, the more wanted. Unfortunately they are told that this is freedom."[59]

The discussion about clothing regulation does not stay limited to public spaces in general, but also concerns Muslim women to make choices

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[58]   http://forum.turksestudent.nl/index.php/topic/45176-hur-adam%26-8217%3Ba-jet-soruthturma/page__st__30 (Visited on 21-02-2012) Posted by KaraYilan on 03-01-2011 (user since 19-03-2003, 6204 messages) Original text: "islam cemiyet dinidir... bireysel bir inanc deildir... ve butun dunya insanlarini baglar..."

[59] Original text (in Dutch): 'ben je sexy word je aangenomen en kan je niks. Ze worden juist gezien als een lustobject. Hoe blooter hoe meer gewild. Jammer genoeg is hun juist aangepraat dat dat vrijheid is.' – Noer-Islam
Link: http://forums.ansaar.nl/islam-ik/4853-ik-kijk-om-mij-heen-kan-iemand-mij-dit-uitleggen.html

regarding their garment and job opportunities. On 6 September 2010, Bedii asks within the forum of Turksestudent.nl:

> "Is a lawyer limited in her actions when she wears a headscarf? In other words: can a lawyer wear a hijab?"[60]

5.2.3.   Islamophobia and double standards

The negative public debate about Muslims and the Islam is critically discussed by Muslim youth on websites and fora. The articles and discussions often show that people are critical about the Islam because they lack proper knowledge about the religion or because they think all Muslims are the same (read: aggressive and violent). For example, an often discussed topic in relation to Islamophobia is the concept of freedom of speech and its limits in a society with many minority groups. Many of the forum participants state that there exists a double standard when it comes down to this 'freedom'. In the columns on Moslimagids.nl for example, freedom of speech is dealt with mostly in a sarcastic manner, pointing out the skewed way in which freedom of speech is used (and abused) both by politicians as well as Dutch media, including the major newspapers and television shows:

> "The funniest of this whole case is the hypocrisy of the people who have to ensure that people in the Netherlands won't spread hate and won't purposefully hurt certain groups. They react to statements by Muslims like a predator on its prey, but are as silent as the grave when the Muslims are the ones being hurt by a certain statement, also when this happens repeatedly and happens through national media and thus is a conscious offence and provocation'[61]

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[60] Originele text: "wordt een jurist belemmerd in haar functioneren als het zijn hoofd bedekt? kortom;   mag   een   jurist   wel   of   geen   hoofddoek   dragen?" http://forum.turksestudent.nl/index.php/topic/44453-hoofddoekjurist/ (Visited on 07-03-2012) Topic posted by Bedii on 06-09-2010 (member since 16-04-2009, 73 messages). 36 reactions on this post.

[61]Original text (in Dutch) : 'Het grappigste van deze hele zaak is de hypocrisie van de mensen die erop moeten toezien dat mensen in Nederland geen haat zaaien en niet bewust groepen kwetsen. Zij springen op uitspraken van moslims als een roofdier op zijn prooi, maar zwijgen als het graf als de moslims aan de gekwetste kant van de uitlatingen staan, ook als dit meermalen gebeurt en via nationale media gaat en dus een bewuste belediging en provocatie is.'
Link: http://moslima.ansaar.nl/index.php/component/content/article/151-columns-/1113-pak-de-moslims

Another example of this frustration comes forward in an article on Turkish Student and the discussion that follows after that. In the article, it is argued that Erdogan is concerned about the radicalisation of the Dutch political arena.[62] Wilders is also quoted, saying that "Erdogan is a dangerous Islamist". On the forum, feryâd-û isyân states that if:

> "Erdogan is a dangerous Islamist as Wilders says, what is Wilders then? An angel?"[63]

Among the Turkish youngsters there is a general feeling of the double standard in the Netherlands concerning the idea of 'freedom of speech'. They feel that while they cannot say their opinion, while Geert Wilders can present his offensive opinion and argue it is 'freedom of speech'. Especially the last court case where he was found 'not guilty', increased this feeling among the Turkish youngsters. In this context they also emphasise that this specific interpretation of freedom of speech seems to put the Netherlands into a position that Muslims are often accused of, namely to be intolerant towards others:

> "The Netherlands speaks about freedom, but then violate the rights of Muslims. The Netherlands is only going backwards. I don't have any faith left for this government. We are not being treated in a just way".[64]

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[62] http://forum.turksestudent.nl/index.php/topic/45944-erdogan-bezorgd-over-nederlandse-politiek/ (Visited on 23-02-2012) Posted by zipzip on 11-06-2011 (member since 16-09-2010, 110 messages). Source: NOS http://nos.nl/artikel/247558-erdogan-bezorgd-over-nederlandse-politiek.html (Visited on 23-02-2012)

[63] http://forum.turksestudent.nl/index.php/topic/45944-erdogan-bezorgd-over-nederlandse-politiek/ (Visited on 23-02-2012) Posted by feryâd-û isyân on 11 June 2011 (highly active member since 06-08-2007, 14310 messages) Original text: "Erdoğan is een gevaarlijke islamist zegt wilders. wat is wilders dan? een engeltje?"

[64] http://forum.turksestudent.nl/index.php/topic/46237-wilders-wil-referendum-minarettenverbod/ (Visited on 23-02-2012) Original text: "Nederland spreekt over vrijheid, maar ze schenden de rechten van moslims. Nederland gaat steeds er achteruit. Ik heb helemaal gaan vertrouw aan het kabinet. We worden niet met rechtvaardigheid behandeld." Posted by Turkmeneli on 22-09-2011 (member since 19-02-2007, 1662 messages).

5.3. Greece

5.3.1. Introduction

Migrant Muslim women's religious practices in Athens are mostly characterized by the blurring of the public and the private, the hidden and the visible, the national and the transnational. This in-betweeness as a particular social dynamic is partially reflected in the set up of the informal mosques/cultural centres themselves that are neither public - because they are hidden in apartments, shops or warehouses - nor strictly private, because they are used for public gatherings and religious ceremonies. As we can see, religious identity, and the bonds of community formed around them, become sources of resilience and solidarity for Arab Muslim women in the face of hardship. Indeed, it is important to note here that the analytic distinction applied in our research design, between public/private presence and agency, is difficult to maintain in terms of empirical data and does not reflect actual social practices, since their public and private lives are permeated by numerous overlapping challenges which they negotiate as part of their ongoing efforts to survive in Greece. Our research has shown that Muslim migrant women face the following obstacles to their access to public space.

5.3.2. Bodily practices and language

According to our interviews with Arab Muslim women, public interactions are mainly complicated by religious rules of conduct which diverge significantly from Greek cultural norms, rather than by racist conflict. During the interviews, Arab Muslim women mentioned language problems, as a factor preventing her from more direct interaction with Greeks. What they emphasized, however, as a major problem in their access to public space was the lack of knowledge on the part of Greeks of the appropriate rules that should inform a Muslim woman's behaviour. More specifically, they mentioned hand-shaking in public, which is prohibited between practicing Muslim women and men who don't belong to the immediate family, but is central to Greek public culture, which, in contrast, assumes the hand-shake as a primary form of social address and recognition. Such incommensurability leads to complicated practices of avoidance, especially in cases where Arab Muslim women are called to engage with Greeks on their own, without the presence of husbands or other male family members. One such social context of significance is the Greek school, where Muslim women are often invited to in order to be informed by Greek teachers about their children's progress. As she commented:

"I don't know what to do when I have to greet my son's teacher. He gives me his hand to shake but I can't take it, so I try to find ways around this. Sometimes I extent my hand in return but try not to touch his, other times I bow, or look down. It is very awkward and uncomfortable. I am worried that he might think I am disrespectful or avoiding him. I am not sure he understands why we can't shake our hands with strange men. That this is what our religion prescribes. I actually don't like going to the school."[65]

As this quote suggests, Arab Muslim women's participation in public space takes place through "bodily performances" (Moors and Salih 2009) that are not apprehended or are treated with mistrust and curiosity in Greek public space. Rather than an innocent cultural misunderstanding, however, this "inability" of the Greek teachers to understand Muslim bodily performances effectively silences the identities of women like Haana and confines them to the private sphere.

Similarly to Arab Muslim women, Afghan women, experience constraints to their access to public space which are linked to the lack of language skills and also to appropriate Muslim behaviour. In the case of Afghan women, however, this behaviour tend to be considered mostly as imposed by the Afghan male community rather than by their own will to live as good Muslims. During a focus group, Afghan women begun to discuss how talking to men, greeting them and laughing in public was prohibited in Afghanistan. According to Fatima:

"We had to wear black clothes and the burga or the scarf. And I thought that it was normal because all of us did it: my mother, my sister, my friends. I did not mind. We could not laugh with our friends in the park like young girls do here. I like it how women go out in the square and talk to each other and say jokes and laugh and smile...We could not touch men in public, you know, like a handshake, to say 'hello'. Because they told us that it should be like that, I, well, I just believed in it. But now that I am here, I think that I don't want to go back. We still are like this because we are mostly with Afghans and we don't have any Greek friends because we don't speak Greek... but when we leave, well, I don't want to be like this anymore". [66]

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[65] (Haana, Lebanese-Palestinian)
[66] Focus Group Afghan women

Differences between Arab and the Afghani Muslim societies of origin and traditions impose different attitudes towards such obstacles to public space. In the case of Afghan women overcoming these obstacles by adopting a more "European way of life" is usually a desired prospect, which is associated to gender emancipation and freedom from the oppressive rules imposed on them by their migrant communities. Rather than confining themselves in the 'private', they tend to see their participation in public space as being conditioned by their own "assimilation" into the dominant European norms and practices.

Labour market: Most Arab Muslim migrant women devote their lives after marriage to raising their children and taking care of their families. This choice prevents their access to the **labour market** and constrains them to the private sphere. Moreover, several Syrian women are facing severe economic hardship because of their husbands' lengthy unemployment but are also unable to go back to Syria, or get help from relatives, because of the ongoing war there. Finding themselves trapped in Greece with no money or the possibility of return is a predicament they try to cope with with patience, seeking refuge and consolation in their faith.

> "We would like to go back to Syria. My husband hasn't had work for over a year now. He used to work as a blacksmith; it was good work. Now all construction has stopped. We haven't paid the rent for many months. I don't know why the landlade hasn't thrown us out yet. I don't know what we are going to do. We have two chindren. It's very hard. We are waiting to see what happens. Our faith gives us strength to endure."[67]

> "For us, the woman is like a flower. She is tender. She has to be protected. This is good. We don't feel oppressed. It's better if the man goes out to work because it's difficult outside the home. Women should not have to face the harshness of public life." [68]

For Afghan migrants too finding a job in the context of a generalized economic crisis and rising unemployment in Greece is considered a major obstacle to their access to public space. Contrary to Arab women, however,

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[67] Interview 3 with Syrian first generation migrant 01.10.2011)
[68] Interview 4 with Syrian first generation migrant 01.10.2011)

for many Afghan women in particular -but not only- for those who have migrated alone or lost their husbands during the journey, finding a job in Greece in order to accumulate the necessary amount of money required by the smugglers "to move them away", becomes an urgent need. The 30 year old Fatima, who has lived in Greece for one and a half years before migrating to Sweden with her three children, told us how she found a job and took off the hijab despite her husband's prohibition to do so. As she explained to us, her husband was imprisoned after a Greek police raid in the apartment they rented along with other Afghan families. Fatima was left alone on the street with her children without money or housing. After she failed to get assistance from Greek NGOs, she found a job in an IT company, where she felt "better when she did not wear the hijab". Through her work she managed to accumulate the necessary amount of money needed for her and her children to move to Sweden, where she applied for asylum. According to Fatima,

"My husband was asking me to stop work, to wear the hijab. He thought that it was better if we were sent back to Afghanistan. I did not want to. I reacted to that. I did not want to go back to how I was before. When my husband went to prison I thought I had to endure this, like a good Muslim. But I do not think like this anymore. I think that it is God but also human will."[69]

5.3.3.   Racist and communal violence

Muslim migrants living in Athens encounter obstacles in accessing public space which are linked to the rise of racist and communal violence, in particular in certain areas in the centre of Athens. In 2009, a large demonstration was organized by Muslim migrants in the centre of Athens, following the destruction of a Muslim migrant's Qur'an by a policeman during a regular security check. The MAG (Muslim Association of Greece) supported the demonstration and mediated to the Greek authorities in order to punish the policeman who did it, but condemned the destruction of property by Muslim protesters following clashes with local residents and far right-wing groups.[70] These obstacles constrain women who wear the hijab since their Muslim identity is rendered hyper-visible, in comparison to male Muslims or other migrants. Although both Arab and Afghan migrants are potentially victims of racist violence, it is mostly Afghan women who mentioned it as an obstacle to their access to public space. In addition to the police and racist violence, several women mentioned the threat of "smugglers' as a source of

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[69] Interview 14 with Afghan transit migrant woman 15/1/2012
[70]See   "Muslims   against   the   police"   *Eleftherotypia*   27/5/2009
http://www.enet.gr/?i=news.el.article&id=48312

violence. Despite the obstacles they face, Muslim migrant women are becoming increasingly active in expressing political and religious demands in public in both online and offline public space.

5.3.4.   Integration

Integration into Greek society is a major public concern for Arab Muslim women who have been long-term residents in Greece and are raising their children here. In terms of the strategies deployed for engaging with the institutional and everyday politics of integration, Arab Muslim develop a double approach. To start with, some of them actively seek to enhance their social capital and leverage with Greek institutions by becoming members of transnational and European Muslim women's networks and participating in European Muslim lobbies, as well as local municipal councils and Greek governmental committees. Among the women we interviewed, Hala Akari, a Syrian woman living in Greece for the past fifteen years, stands out for her prolific and vigorous efforts to promote Muslim and migrant women's rights. She has joined the European Forum of Muslim Women and is a Migrant Councilor for the Athens Municipal Committee for Migration. Hala is also one of the protagonists in setting up the cultural and educational activities of the Gyzi mosque. As such, Hala has emerged as a community leader for the Arab Muslim women in Athens. While she stands out in relation to other Syrian women migrants, her trajectory exemplifies an emerging socio-political identity for Muslim women in Europe that is mediated through assuming an active role in the politics of migration and integration. At the same time, Arab Muslim women also actively pursue a more informal politics of integration, aimed to promote respect and coexistence in everyday life, through targeted interactions in the neighborhood and in other social contexts where they regularly mix with the Greek population, such as schools. For this purpose, they organize empowerment groups, especially with young, second generation Muslim women, where they rehearse scenarios of common incidents of tension and possible responses to them, aiming to dispel misconceptions about Islam and establish mutual understanding of difference as the proper basis for coexistence.

5.3.5.   Public/private religious practices

Contrary to the prevailing discourse that recognizes only men as the principle actors in diaspora Muslim communities and transnational networks, our research shows that Arab Muslim migrant women play a very active role in running informal mosques/ 'cultural centers': their involvement consisting mainly of specific religious, educational and outreach tasks and activities. As Saba Mahmood has shown in her study of the women's mosque movement in

Cairo in the mid 1990s, although these practices are more akin to cultivating an embodied practice of personal piety than to the mainstream notion of religious or political movements, they constitute an active form of resistance to the dominant Westernized and secular norms and have transformed gender politics in Arab societies (Mahmood 2004).

Furthermore, Arab Muslim women have recently become very active in voicing religious demands in public. We observed one such example of targeted intervention during a public debate on the issue of building a Central Mosque and cemetery in Athens, where we met several, first and second generation, Arab Muslim women in the audience, who had prepared small interventions. While their interventions were limited to few general comments, Arab Muslim migrant women wearing the hijab were continuously filmed by the organizers who projected the event live on a big screen. Although the visual representation of the veiled Muslim woman in the audience was meant to signal the openness of the event, their possibility to act as authoritative voices with regards to an issue of their immediate concern was undermined, circumscribing them in the role of informal commentators and listeners. In this context, the only positions reserved for Muslim women in Greek ethnonationalist public discourse are those of the silent victims who lack agency.

Facebook interactions, on the contrary, are paradigmatic of the participation of Arab Muslim migrant women in online and offline spaces that cut across the distinction between the public and the private. Similarly to the informal mosques in Athens, Facebook practices are conditioned both by the private and commercialized usages that Facebook is designed for and by their efforts to overcome the obstacles that prevent them from accessing the Greek public sphere. A notable example is the parallel on- and offline production of public Muslim celebrations in Athens. Once a year, Muslim migrants in Athens meet in public to celebrate EID. They are granted permission to do so in two of the biggest stadiums of the city. On this occasion, the Facebook pages of Muslim migrant women are filled with group pictures, which are tagged in order to identify and interconnect user profiles.

Although these pictures circulate in a closed group of Facebook "friends", they also become signs of Muslim migrant women's participation in the production of Greek space as a transnational Muslim space. The paradox that this image presents is that a "bodily performance" (praying) which is normally attached to the private sphere takes place in an open public space.

Moreover, the image above demonstrates the public presence of Muslim women in the background of an Olympic stadium, a symbol of Greek nationalism. Rather than an aggressive attack on nationalist institutions, this image challenges the ethnocentric symbolism of the stadium and asserts the public presence of female subjects that are normally silenced in public discourse. Contrary to the stereotypical representations of Muslim women as victims of male dominance or signs of the incommensurability of Greek and Muslim value systems, this image signals the possibility of a peaceful and harmonious co-existence. While the bodily performance presented in these pictures are situated within Greek public space, it also signals the transformation of this space (through the carpets, the hijab, the pious Muslim dressing) into a transnational space.

5.4. United Kingdom

5.4.1.   Public and Private

Post-Soviet Muslim migrants' presence is accentuated in the public sphere of their native land. Despite their differences in financial and social standing in

the host country, Muslim migrants belong to affluent circles in their native lands, and being a migrant in Britain is often considered as a privileged status. An Azeri respondent mentioned in her interview: 'My friends back home want to hear from me - women bring things from Britain to home – some new brands, names, recipes. Britain is associated with prestige. If you live in Germany – it is good, but if in Britain – this is something' (Interview 5, London, October 2011). 'My *odnoklassniki* friends do not understand HOW I live in Britain, they are fascinated with the fact that live I here' - remarks an asylum seeker from Tadjikistan, former doctor (Interview 3, Edinburgh, April 2011). A short movie about a yearly gathering of the Vaynakh community in London placed on the YouTube http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HC_t_Seh6pk was commented by Chechens from outside the UK, who asked: 'How many of our people are there?', 'our people are everywhere :) we will be ok (everything will be fine) then'.

The majority of migrants keep close contact with their friends, colleagues and relatives at the place of origin. The connection between migrants' social networks back home and their current digital networks is very strong. For example, KUB discussions are very often connected to events in Kazakhstan, while comparing realities of foreign lifestyles with the Kazakh one. The events back home are also highly newsworthy for the VaynakhGB website. The offline respondents confirmed that they were connected both to their homeland and their country of residence through highly individualized digital networks.

Moreover, religious practices were 'synchronised' with the migrant's home country. Respondents told 'how things are done' at home, how marriages are prepared, holidays celebrated, new mosques built, but tend to not elaborate on the same issues in the UK. The majority of the offline and online contacts said that they do not visit mosques in Britain apart from special cases (big family holidays, or somebody's death for instance). In Britain, religious practices of migrants were conducted outside of traditional religious channels and public spaces. When asked about the reasons for this, the respondents talked about their dissatisfaction with some practices in British mosques. One of the respondents, a teacher originally from Dagestan conveyed that her friend also from Dagestan, who was an actively practicing Muslim, died in London a while ago, and the respondent and other female friends were not allowed into the main hall to say their farewell: 'They (people from the mosque) said that this a sin and bla bla bla. They send a Somali girl to lecture us at the gallery. We were not even allowed to the cemetery'. Developing her arguments the respondent said that all mosques in the UK are divided according to ethnic and national belonging. The mosque she described was dominated by the Somali community and post-Soviet migrants chose it for this occasion, because it was very close to the cemetery, but they were not fully accepted as Muslims there. Driven by her anger the respondent

incriminated British Muslims in not being well educated, not understanding the Quran and misinterpreting it (Interview 17, London, December 2011). Alisha, a practicing Muslim from Chechnya, kept her Quran on her knees during the interview, but she also noted that she does not attend any female groups at mosques and does not go to mosque in Britain either: 'Quran allows me to pray at home - and this is what I do. We have a friend who is very educated and respected Muslim, my husband can ask him if I need anything'. Alisha was the only respondent who did not feel comfortable with computer: 'My nephews will teach me one day, but now they are too small now'. (Interview 16, London, December 2011).

In some cases the Internet and advanced online skills of respondents helped them to translate their religious life into the virtual space. As put by a Muslim respondent, who is not a mosque goer: 'I am here on my own. Islam allows us to pray at home - and I do say may prayers. I probably would have additional support if I ask for it at the mosque. But I emigrated to rebuild my life, not to repeat it (she refused to go into details of her family life at home). I celebrate holidays, do not cook pork. Sometimes we buy Halal food'. She observes Ramadan and has a couple of Muslim friends she can share her religious needs with in virtual communication. (Interview 13, London, July 2011).

Among my respondents there were only two women who were active mosque goers and both of them were converts. One of them, originally from Tajikistan, was a public figure in the local Muslim community, gave interviews for Scottish radio, took part in lectures, organised evenings for women who got together for religious discussions, but was not a member of any formal organisation: 'There are two mosques in Edinburgh. One in Leith – there are more Pakistani there. The one in Nicolson street is more international. It is supported by Saudi Arabia. I go there. Surahs are read in Arabic, discussions are in English. A lot depends on the imam. In Edinburgh there is some University atmosphere. It is very special…We got together in this mosque. We meet to discuss surahs. It was not what mullahs read on a Friday before the service, but we organised our own meetings and lectures. I was very active for some time. After the birth of my daughter I stopped coming to such lectures. Not much time probably...I spend now more time in Muslim internet groups now' (Interview 20, Edinburgh, March 2012).

In general, very few on-line participants and offline respondents attended mosques in Britain; some came to classes and women groups created at mosques. Religious advice is usually given either by a member of the family both in the host country and at the place of origin (in the latter case telephone call or skype conversations are used), or searched for through online communication or by simply browsing the net. Online groupings serve substitute for a direct religious participation off-line. One of the respondents said 'If I want to express any view – my political views for example – I will go

on-line'. Such statement emphasises the role of 'sphericules' (Parker and Song) where group identities are constantly negotiated, reconstructed and disseminated. Online group discussions embody migrants' presence in the public space, but such sphericules are anyway separated from both the mainstream media in the native country, and from the public spheres of Britain as is discussed further here below. It is important nevertheless to note now that for the post-Soviet Muslim, public religious life is transferred to the domain of virtual activities, rather than formal gatherings offline.

The presence of post-Soviet Muslim migrants in the public sphere of Britain is limited. A look into a number of post-Soviet migrants' societies and community web-sites in the UK (e.g. example, http://oxaz.co.uk , www.anglo-azerbaijani.org , www.kyrgyzbritishsociety.org , http://www.kazakhstudents.org) shows that these present the community for an English speaking audience, but there are not any references to Islam (while in the Russian language sites religion plays an important part as other web-sites selected for this study tend to demonstrate).

However, the Chechen website and YouTube channel were an exception. The website is partly in English and aimed at both Chechen and British audiences. Materials directly addressing questions of religion comprise more than half of the content. They include full-length lectures on the nature of Islam, (in English, in Russian or in Arabic with Russian subtitles) or Friday sermons. The materials are both externally sourced or produced by amateur artists in the community. Materials that were not directly related to religion were also influenced by Muslim value discourse. For example, there are short movies illustrating good and bad behavior for example caring about elderly or sick parents, biikeing a good and caring husband, but the characters wear traditional dresses, the accompanied text quotes the Quran, women and men sit separately.[71]

Furthermore, in the Chechen website and YouTube channel, women are significantly under-represented in the materials as well as among authors of the materials or authors of the comments. Subsection 'Sisters' (removed in May 2012) contained only recipes (in Russian) and the information about a woman - human right fighter killed in Chechnya.[72] Another female featured in the website is Alla Dudaeva, widow of the Chechen leader Djohar Dudaev. She is the only female author of the web content and featured in a number of videos in her headscarf. Women in her short movies also wear headscarves.[73]

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[71] For example http://www.vaynahgb.com/index.php?limitstart=10; http://www.vaynahgb.com/index.php?limitstart=20
http://www.vaynahgb.com/index.php?limitstart=90
[72]archived at http://www.vaynahgb.com/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=280:events-in-memoriam-of-natalya-estemirova-&catid=36:ladies&Itemid=59
[73]http://www.vaynahgb.com/index.php?limitstart=50

The website as well as the YouTube channel also contain short reportages from yearly community gatherings featuring collective meals and dances.[74] Among the web places of Muslim post-Soviet communities in Britain the Chechen community website was the only one where Muslim identities were not shadowed, but emphasised. The comparison between the Chechen community website and nodes of other post-Soviet Muslim communities in Britain rise questions about the reasons for the reluctance of post-Soviet Muslims to publicly acknowledge their religious affiliations.

The tendency to limit religious practices to private sphere, both online and offline, partly explains the fact that Muslim migrants from the former post-Soviet territories and especially female Muslim migrants tend to be invisible for the society in general and even for many Muslim community activists. The field researcher approached some of them[75] through the Muslims in Britain research network, and none of them gave a positive answer if there are such migrants in their organisations. However, it seemed that some British Muslims perceive post-Soviet migrants through the legacy of Soviet atheism and keen to discard the newcomers as potential members of congregations or organisations: 'They are not really Muslims. It is just a cultural thing' remarked in one of the interviews a female Muslim activist from Pakistan working in a nonprofit organisation. This claim shows that for her there is a clear definition of what it means to be Muslim and this definition is geographically, if not ethnically, defined.

5.5. Conclusions

The visibility of Muslims has been an important subject of debate in current political discourses all over Europe. Especially the headscarf, or hijab are endless topics of debate, though Muslim women themselves are usually not the main actors in the discourses, which are often *about*, but not *with* them. Our research shows that new media on the other hand give Muslim women platforms to voice their opinions and experiences, and can hence claim more agency in their visibility. Only for the UK case study this connection between hyper visibility on the one hand and lack of voice in popular media works quite differently. First of all, because Muslims are less excluded from popular discourses, but also because the specific group of this case study (Muslims

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http://www.vaynahgb.com/index.php?option=com_content&view=category&layout=blog&id =35&Itemid=57; http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iSXXB_9Exbg

[75] Meetings were held in Bristol in July 2011 and in Edinburgh in April 2012

from the former Soviet Union) are often not recognised as Muslims, both by Muslims and non-Muslims.

In the Greek research we see that there is a big difference between the Afghan women and the Arabic women they talked to. Where the first mainly want to be able to be active in the public sphere in Greece (something that was not possible in Afghanistan and often not approved of by their husbands), the Arab women are more active to create space for themselves as Muslims, in the public sphere of Greece. In the Netherlands we don't recognise such national differences, but there are groups who actively try to bring Islam into the public sphere, where others are more focused on identity issues and claim they are part of the Netherlands, as Muslims. Besides these struggles of Dutch Muslims to have a bigger influence on the public sphere and public debate in the Netherlands, especially through media, we also noticed that new media have other effects regarding the public/private divide. For example, religious practices that used to be very much connected to the private sphere are now subject to social control as people ask each other on facebook whether they will actively take part in religious festivities or fasting.

6.   Religious Practices, New Media and Secularism

6.1. Introduction

In general, the term secularism is used to describe the division between church and state, the transformation of religion from the public to the private sphere, or just a decline of the importance of religion in society. But secularism is also very much connected to the West and a specific interpretation of modernity. In that sense, religion is connected to traditional societies and backwardness and secularism to modernity and progressiveness (in the West) (Bracke and Fadil, 2006). In this part of our research we aim to analyse how new media play a role in the relationship between religion and secularism and how this influences the position of Muslim women in Europe.

6.2. Netherlands

6.2.1.   Deconstructing Dichotomies

In the focus group interview with the editors of Nieuwe Moskee, it is argued that showing the differences between Muslims and interpretations of Islam, is one of the most important aims of their website. They find it highly problematic that in most popular media, Muslims are presented as one group, with people who all think the same and connect Islam to politics. Because of this specific representation of Muslims, it becomes rather easy to oppose them to issues as secularism, liberalism, emancipation etc. The website New Mosque tries to counter this image by giving voice to different Muslims and different interpretations of Islam:

> "The public debate is overtaken by populism, realism whatever. It is always the same debate about a politicized interaction with Islam and religion. This interaction is hard to deconstruct with just one website, but you bring different interpretations of Islam forward, within a group of people that are interested in religion." (Nieuwe Moskee, 2012)[76]

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[76] Original quotation: "Het publieke debat is gewoon gekaapt door populisme, realisme, wat het ook is. Steeds hetzelfde debat van een gepolitiseerde omgang met de Islam en met religie. En dat kan je met een site niet doorbreken, maar ik denk wel dat je binnen de groep

As we can see in the quotes, the articles described above, do not explicitly refer to the term secularism, but they do discuss the many dichotomies connected to this term: backwardness versus progressiveness, democracy versus dictatorship, freedom and liberty versus submission etc. They show how more knowledge about religion can deconstruct these hierarchical, and generalizing dichotomies. Finally, another important aspect of the secularism/religion divide is the connection of the first to modernity, and the latter to traditional, or even backwards societies.

6.2.2. Struggling between religious practices and a secular society

Most topics and posts addressing secularism and religion on the website Muslim women's guide, focus on how to participate in religious practices in secular society, such as the Netherlands. The authors and forum participants emphasize and motivate one another in enforcing religious matters, especially in relation to the Western environment they live in. Especially in the longer pieces of writing, the columns, there is special attention to the non-acceptance and discrimination of Muslims in the Netherlands.

 Besides the issue of practicing your religion, the forum participants also discuss their general position in Dutch society and how they can participate in this society as Muslims. Discussion questions range from whether Muslims can participate in Dutch elections to which education and jobs are suitable and allowed for Muslims. For example on one of the forum discussions on work it is argued that Muslims can work together with non-Muslims, but on the condition that their activities benefit the Muslim cause.[77] Taking part in the World War Two memorial day is therefore not allowed, because it does not serve the Muslim community and it would be impossible to take part without breaking the Islamic rules of having men and women separated.[78]

Posts with moral stories meant to remind the reader of the importance of the Islam and following Islamic rules, are popular and common. Moreover, they often point out the risks and dangers of not practicing or not adhering to Islamic rules. One example is a story called 'Doenya, my best friend', posted on the forum by AmatoelAziz[79]. It's a short story about a female friend called Doenya, a girl you can have fun with, buy perfume and clothes with and who makes you get boys' phone numbers. But once you turn sick, she disappears.

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die geïnteresseerd is in religie dat je daar met nieuwe media wat mee kunt. Dat je meerder vormen van Islam kan laten zien."
[77] http://forums.ansaar.nl/islam-ik/19847-wie-vind-zichzelf-praktiserend.html
[78] http://forums.ansaar.nl/islam-ik/19847-wie-vind-zichzelf-praktiserend.html
[79] http://forums.ansaar.nl/islam-ik/17713-doenya-mijn-beste-vriendin.html

Then, another girl appears, someone who tells you about Islam, Allah, and makes you return to the right path; that of Islam.

6.2.3.　　Being Muslim and part of a secular society

On the website We are staying here, there are several articles where authors explicitly state that they see themselves as Muslim and Dutch and that they believe that religious identities should be included in a secular society:

> "In this society there is also space for me, as an orthodox Muslim woman, who covers in a large robe, does not shake hands and prays 5 times a day: I can study, and will get a job after receiving my diploma! The Netherlands is my society."[80]

6.2.4.　　Debates about secularism in or in connection to Turkey

On the website Turksestudent.nl, there are different sub categories where the subject secularism is being discussed. One of the examples is the category 'everyday news'.[81] A visitor of the website argues that, "unfortunately", secularism means for the *Kemalists*[82] in Turkey that

> "the state can limit your freedom of religion on certain levels. Religion becomes a secondary option, and in Turkey one cannot enter a school with a headscarf. Under the name of *Kemalism*, they are oppressing the people".[83]

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[80] http://www.wijblijvenhier.nl/1753/ruimte-aan-orthodoxie-stimuleert-de-integratie/. Original text: In deze samenleving is er ook voor mij als orthodoxe moslima die zich bedekt in een groot gewaad, geen handen geeft en stipt vijf keer per dag bidt ook ruimte: ik kan gewoon studeren en ik krijg met mijn diploma gewoon een baan! Nederland is mijn samenleving.
[81]Akp'ye ne oldu, neden yavaşladı reformlar? http://forum.turksestudent.nl/index.php/topic/46463-akpye-ne-oldu-neden-yavathlady-reformlar/ (Visited on 26-01-2012)
[82] The followers of Ataturk's legacy of assertive secularism that was applied after the foundation of the secular state by Mustafa Kemal Ataturk.
[83] "Uzun lafin kisasi Kemalizm adi altinda insanlarin fikirlerine, dusuncelerine ve dinine baski yapmaya calisiliyor" http://forum.turksestudent.nl/index.php/topic/46463-akpye-ne-oldu-neden-yavathlady-reformlar/ (Visited on 26-01-2012) Placed on the website by 'tardu' on 24-01-2012 at 16:48 o'clock.

Conversely, another visitor argues "religion and state affairs should be separated from each other".[84] She or he believes that "they are only separated in Turkey 'in words'".[85] One could say that the discussions on secularism on Turkish student are rather fierce. This might be connected to the fact that this website is mainly visited by two specific groups: the *Kemalist* secular nationalists, and the Islamic nationalists. Where one group defines assertive secularism as a principle of laicism, the other group claims that the state is interfering in personal private matters and their freedom of religion. Even a cursory look at the different discussions on this website supports this claim. Most of the visitors have nationalist or religious symbols such as the Turkish flag, Ataturk, as either their profile pictures, or their subtitles. Fierce discussions between secularists and Islamic-rooted youngsters are taking place on a regular basis on the Turksestudent.nl forums, maybe even more than debates regarding the integration, Islamophobia, or Geert Wilders.[86] As such, this shows a transnational connection between the social, political and cultural news in Turkey and the Turkish youngsters living in the Netherlands.

6.3. Greece

In contrast to other European countries, as for example France and the Netherlands, the political system of Greece has not yet separated political from religious authority. Article three of the Greek Constitution (1975/1986/2001/2008) recognizes the Greek Orthodox Church of Christ as the prevailing religion in Greece; moreover, Greek national identity is consolidated around the nexus of ethnicity and the Christian Orthodox faith and, in this sense, is a religiously inflected identity (Triandafyllidou 2011). Therefore, in Greece, anti-Islamic sentiment is not organized around the antithesis between secularism and religious fundamentalism, but in terms of an inter-religious antagonism, between Orthodoxy and Islam, which finds its particular expression and legitimation through references to the turbulent trajectory of Greek-Turkish relations and the history of Ottoman rule. (Triandafyllidou & Gropas 2009).

However, Muslim migrants, who are not implicated in this history, invoke the common *religious* substratum of identity, and in fact engage the Greek Church in promoting their religious rights. This is particularly the case with

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[84]   http://forum.turksestudent.nl/index.php/topic/46463-akpye-ne-oldu-neden-yavathlady-reformlar/page__st__15 (Visited on 26-01-2012)
[85]   http://forum.turksestudent.nl/index.php/topic/46463-akpye-ne-oldu-neden-yavathlady-reformlar/page__st__15 (Visited on 26-01-2012)
[86] This is only an impression of the author, after a broad research within the TS-website's forums.

Arab Muslim migrants, who strategically address the Church as a potential ally, drawing not only on the commonality of a religious way of life, but also on doctrinal affinity, citing references of the Qur'an to Christian Prophets and Jesus Christ, as if Islam and Christianity were sister-religions. Moreover, this affinity is inflected by invoked common cultural and historical roots, as Eastern Mediterranean peoples (Kanonidou et al. 2009).

Moreover, as Salih argues, in relation to the Italian case, public debates over Muslim migrant women strategically silence the fact that Muslim women's practices do not aim at being fundamentally opposed to the dominant European secular norms and beliefs (Salih 2009). In fact, their aim is to show how compatible with the European conceptions of freedom and justice Muslim values are. During our face to face interactions, Arab women respondents went to great lengths to explain the principles of Islam and, in particular, its respect for other religions and cultures, its condemnation of war, terrorism, despotism and intolerance. In this context, they tried to dissociate themselves and Islam from the politics and tactics of groups such as Al Qaida or the Taliban, who are not considered 'good Muslims', betray the spirit and distort the lessons of Islam, contributing to its defamation in the West.[87] In the case of the Arab and Greek Muslim women interviewed, assuming an Islamic religious identity and practice is often represented as a conscious decision that reflects not only adherence to cultural norms, but, significantly, a chosen way of life, an ethical, spiritual and political stance, in other words, a worldview with universal scope, rather than an expression of particular cultural traditions and ethnic identities. The Islamic worldview, moreover, is posited as the opposite of the Western worldview, whose values, tenets and technologies of power are seen as compromising, rather than guaranteeing, the integrity of personhood and, in the end, a person's and a society's well being. Therefore, religious affiliation represents a personal choice that bears social and ethical implications: it makes them better persons, gives them a better life and produces better societies, based on respect, tolerance, community and charity/solidarity. In this sense, religion is posited not so much against secularism as against the 'West', which is seen as a world-system that promotes antagonism, exploitation, imperialism and war and leads to the degeneration of the bonds of community and of social order.

In so far as the choice of adopting the Islamic faith is invested with not only religious but also moral value, and is understood as a critique of the 'West', it expresses the politicization of religion, whereby Islam is experienced not only as cultural and/or ethnic identity, but also as a political one. At the same time, in so far as the objective is to belong to Europe and the 'West', Islam is also reconstructed *for* Europe in terms recognized and appreciated by dominant European secular and liberal discourses. This means that European

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[87] Interviews 23, 24 and 25 with members of Muslim Associations 08.10.2011, 08.04.2012 and 27.04.2012.

Muslim discourses have to tread a fine line between anti- and pro- Western positioning; something which is achieved by counterposing fundamentalist Islamist movements and countries to the more liberal, progressive and tolerant face of European Islam. Adopting an Islamic religious identity does not in fact place one outside the symbolic boundaries of Europe or the West, but is rather seen as enriching, if not as directly continuing, Western cultural and social history, given the long trajectory of Arabic and Islamic presence and coexistence in Europe. The restitution and integration of Islam in the history of the West, as one of its foundational influences, is also posited in more official representations, such as those found on the 'islam.gr' website. Moreover, liberal values, such as tolerance, self-determination and the right to difference are reclaimed as part of, rather than foreign to, the Islamic worldview, at least as it is practiced in Europe. Constructing an inclusive position that appreciates and incorporates difference, based on the principles of "tolerance and religious pluralism", is an important objective of the ''islam.gr' site and is variously pursued, both in its foundational statements and in its praise of Greeks' efforts to understand and vindicate Islam in the eyes of the Greek public, exemplifying that it is possible for Christians and Muslims, Greeks and migrants, to coexist harmoniously and to each other's mutual benefit, as if they were a 'family'.

6.3.1.   Political activism

Furthermore, the recent uprisings in the Arab world, including the ongoing revolts in Egypt and Tunisia and the civil war in Syria, have played an important role in the politicization of Arab Muslim women's public presence. Syrian women, for example, have been engaged in organizing public events and collecting signatures against the war in Syria and the Assad regime, making their presence visible in public space at the centre of Athens. In addition, many migrant Muslim women publish, distribute and share on a daily basis several Facebook posts on these developments thus expressing their support on the on-going struggles in the Arab world. By posting statements of support to the Arab struggles, migrant women become part of transnational networks that link the place of residents with the place of origin in a direct and unmediated way. Several Syrian women told us during interviews that their family computers are constantly open in order to receive news from Syria.[88] Facebook posting, sharing and liking is a practice that redefines Muslim migrant women's agency in a transnational public space. In these practices, the online political agency of Arab women is far more open as they do not directly face issues of extreme visibility and misrepresentation nor do they experience discrimination as lacking authority to speak about religious politics in a seemingly secular society. While in most cases, Facebook posts

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[88] Interviews 3 and 4 with first generation Syrian migrant women01.10.2011.

simply reproduce imagery and texts written by others, Muslim migrant women also get the chance to question the prevailing in Greek society stereotypes of Muslim women as victims of male dominated structures and present themselves as active supporters of the political struggles that take place in their home countries.

These struggles enable multiple interconnections and links with local and transnational secular movements that Muslim women promote. For example, a Muslim woman that we interviewed was invited to speak on women's role in the war in Syria in a communist party convention in Athens.[89] In a similar way, most Arab Muslim migrant women during the spring of 2011, often posted articles and statements that emphasized the interconnnections between the Arab revolts, especially in Tahrir square, and the Greek indignados movement, in particular the Syntagma square occupation. (put examples) These linkages that take place both online in Facebook, through postings, liking of relevant Facebook pages, and relevant comments and offline in relevant meetings and speeches manifest the compatibility of secular and Islamic worldviews. The demands for democratic rights and economic equality come to be considered as common values that cut across the religious/secular divide and legitimize common actions and discourses.

For Afghan migrant women too, as explained above, asylum seeking constitutes an issue that links them to transnational human rights struggles, in which the division between secular and religious identities becomes blurred. Afghan women have become part of the movements that protests against the unjust asylum procedures and the lack of protection for refugees in Greece and in Europe more generally. Some of them have become public figures that participated in the hunger strikes organized against the Greek asylum regime in central spots of Athens. One newspaper article, published on the issue, mentioned in particular the participation in the movement of an Afghan mother of two young children who has escaped domestic violence in Afghanistan only to find herself homeless in Athens.[90] Although as the image bellow suggests, Afghan women's participation in these movements is mostly conditioned by their role as Muslim mothers.[91]

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[89] Interview 10 with second generation Syrian Woman at Piraeus Mosque (14.05.2011).
[90]   "Afghan   refugees   awaiting   a   response"   in   *Epochi*   27/2/2011
http://www.epohi.gr/portal/politiki/9031-
%CE%91%CF%86%CE%B3%CE%B1%CE%BD%CE%BF%CE%AF-
%CE%B1%CF%80%CE%B5%CF%81%CE%B3%CE%BF%CE%AF-
%CF%80%CE%B5%CE%AF%CE%BD%CE%B1%CF%82-%CF%83%CF%84%CE%B1-
%CE%A0%CF%81%CE%BF%CF%80%CF%8D%CE%BB%CE%B1%CE%B9%CE%B1-
%CE%A0%CE%B5%CF%81%CE%B9%CE%BC%CE%AD%CE%BD%CE%BF%CE%BD%CF
%84%CE%B1%CF%82-%CE%BC%CE%B9%CE%B1-
%CE%B1%CF%80%CE%AC%CE%BD%CF%84%CE%B7%CF%83%CE%B7
[91]

http://tvxs.gr/news/%CE%B5%CE%BB%CE%BB%CE%AC%CE%B4%CE%B1/%CE%AD%CE

6.4. United Kingdom

6.4.1.   Secularism

Many respondents argued for their right to practice Islam in a secular way. Secularism in the case study was expressed in two main tendencies. First, to rationalise norm and values of Islam and to make an emphasis on cultural specificity. Second, to argue for migrants' rights to practice religion 'in a secular manner' and having a choice on how exactly to practice Islam.

In the interviews respondents rationalised the norms of Islam, explained why these norms were created, used scientific reasoning and argumentation:

> Everything that constitutes the norm of life in Islam is healthy, as the contemporary science shows. If something happens - I say my prayers. But I am a sinner - I do not pray as Muslims do - 5 times per day. This is why I have my back pain - It is a very good physical exercise to pray

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%BD%CE%B1%CF%82-%CE%BC%CE%AE%CE%BD%CE%B1%CF%82-
%CE%B1%CF%80%CE%B5%CF%81%CE%B3%CE%AF%CE%B1%CF%82-
%CF%80%CE%B5%CE%AF%CE%BD%CE%B1%CF%82-
%CE%B1%CF%86%CE%B3%CE%B1%CE%BD%CF%8E%CE%BD-
%CF%80%CF%81%CE%BF%CF%83%CF%8D%CE%B3%CF%89%CE%BD-
%CF%83%CF%84%CE%B1-
%CF%80%CF%81%CE%BF%CF%80%CF%8D%CE%BB%CE%B1%CE%B9%CE%B1

properly. I probably shall do this - if the prayer does not help, the exercise will. (Interview 2, Glasgow, April, 2011).

The respondents often compared rites of Islam with Christianity. 'All religions tell the same - respect seniors, be honest, do not steal - people simply need authority to tell them to be good' (Interview 2, April 2011). 'Islam celebrates the change of seasons. Christianity does the same' (Interview 6, London, September 2011).

Discussing their religious practices both online participants and offline respondents deconstruct the notion of a Muslim and in a way secularise traditions associated with Islam:

> I wish I would have had a daughter. All my friends back home have daughters. I remember we are enjoying ourselves, talking on the carpets (valiaemsa na kovrakh), and a daughter brings us tea and please us and wash dishes. Women are soft in our country. Girls are different in here. You should tell them what to do/ They do not have this habit of doing nice things to older people. You can see on a bus how they shout, do not behave, "poshlye", dress ugly and provocative. But not all of them. There are very good girls, daughter of my colleagues for example. They are like us, not like weed along a road. But they are still different. Woman of the East is different - our traditions have been connected to Islam for centuries. (Interview 15, London, September 2011).

Many respondents when asked to describe their religious practices per se, focused instead on national festivals, moral conventions, traditional rules of behaviour etc. But they still describe them as Muslims very much in the same vein as those who seldom go to church call themselves Catholics or Orthodox. They were filling deeply connected to Islam through the native culture and everyday practices. 'It does not mean much if I am a practicing Muslim, or moderate, or non-practicing. Islam inculcates the culture, or probably in the other direction - out regional culture and climate -our deserts, winds, sun, sea - they are all patterned with the words of the Prophet. To be Azeri means to be Muslim' (Interview 6, London, September 2011). 'Many things are based on traditions but they are not actually religious. For example, the idea of a man – head of the family. We believe in informal settlements – if something goes wrong – a woman would not go to the police, but turn to her father or brother for protection. Women can work when they have children, but if her husband can provide for her – she can stop working' (Interview 10, London, December 2011).

In the interviews respondents distinguish between religious rites per se (e.g. regular prayers, knowledge of surahs, fasting), spirituality and traditional ethnic and regional interpersonal relationships, lifestyle, social markers, such as the attitude to elderly, gender roles. They also connect Islam to contemporary state of the world and existing inequalities. In the thread 'Women in Islam' for example, after discussing divorce and marriage from religious perspective, the participants switched to woman's freedom in different countries in the world, and grounded the norms in economic realities of the world questioning the universality of the norm. Somebody called Salafi[92] connected her personal experiences with the existing social and financial polarisation in the Muslim world:

> The situation of a Muslim (Arab) woman is different and ... depends on social and educational standing of her family. If you are rich – you live in a big flat, home chores are not for you too – even in our case somebody came to do clean the house. If you are poor, it is relatively ok in Britain, but in Sudan, Egypt or Morocco you will have less freedom. You cannot go out - in the nearby there are only pals are gathering in a "chaikhana", but you do not have money to go to a restaurant because you do not have enough money.

By bringing positivist and rational thinking into the religious worldview, these migrants challenge the idea of Islam as incompatible with secular development of the society (for detailed discussion see Masud 2005). Discussing Islam and its practices in different discursive domains (scientific, cultural, economic, historical etc), female Muslim migrants deconstruct Islam in the same way as rationalism of the Enlightenment secularised Christianity.

The freedom of making free choice of how women should practice Islam was also very important to respondents. Migrants sometimes not only highlighted their own freedom, but generalised their opinions arguing that their fellow country women share the same values and appreciate their freedom:

> My family is Muslim, but not particularly religious. They are of "communist decent". I can chose any husband I want, but my parents would appreciate if he is a Muslim - shared values, you know. Let me tell you something. Azerbaijan is different from other Muslim states around. We are a Muslim country, but it is not dead serious. We are a country of "laughing mullahs". They are mullahs, but they live among other people. Women here and there do not go to mosques, but it is considered masculine and good to go to the Mosque on Friday. So men usually do this. Nobody prays 5 times per day. Probably men in our

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92 http://kub.info/viewtopic.php?topic=1791&forum=6&asc=1

country are more religious than women... (Interview 4, June 2011, London)

Further the respondent connected such moderate way of practicing Islam with a high level of education in her family and praised the role of a secular state in the emancipation process:

My mother's friends are teachers, doctors, accountants, politicians. There are lots of women in media in my country. I think we should thank Soviet Union for women emancipation in Azerbaijan. There are no head scarves, you should go there – women wear modern dresses, best brands Women have not been encouraged to wear traditional dresses – even in villages you would not see many scarves. (ibid.)

The respondents praised their freedom of making personal choices of wearing or not wearing head scarf, fasting or not, etc. Some online and offline personalities highlighted the importance of wearing strict Muslim dress if they wanted, especially converts from non-Muslim families. In such case, they usually stipulated some other areas of emancipation. For instance, they stressed how free they were to create their own life-path or relationships in their marriages: 'In Egypt my friend Lubasha married an Egyptian from a very nice religious family, but he was a womaniser (shalopai). She divorced him and now she is married again - her new husband is a very nice Egyptian man. Now she decided not wear scarf' (Interview 20). Education and employment were loaded with special value in both online and offline discussions. Both were linked to being advanced and respected, and being able to make informed decisions. The respondents constantly highlighted their personal autonomy in relation to their faith.

It has to be noted that the online sources provided a more polarised picture. While KUB subjected both religious practices and religious culture to comparison and rationalisation, group discussions in *odnoklassniki* were focused on learning more about Islam, religious interpretations of events, women eagerly supported each others in their religious practices. The content was supported by the choice of avatars: avatars of 'rationalising' discussions abstained from Islamic symbols, but participants of religious groups in odnoklassniki choose Muslim imagery for self-representation.

Table 4. Avatars of the most active participants in the discussions in the KUB

Table 5. Avatars common for female participants of Muslim groups in odnolkassniki[93]

We can also see that female post-soviet migrants in their online communications create dramatically different discussion spaces and can migrate from one public space (sphericule) to another to fulfill a number of needs. Such situation probably reflects a ruptured and fragmented nature of post-modern identity. The secular character of the host country (Britain) even further complicates religious discourse on-line. For example, Vaynakhgb published on the same web page information about a book written by a Chechen woman, who was pictured without headscarf in a shirt showing her neck, and a video of a mosque lecture of how women should dress according to the rules of Islam,[94] sending mixed messages to the audience.

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[93] Only avatars are chosen for demonstration
[94] http://www.vaynahgb.com/index.php?limitstart=130

6.5. Conclusions

When it comes to the relationship between religion and secularism, especially in connection to the use of new media, our 3 case studies operate in rather different contexts. Many of the Greek and the Dutch women share a struggle against the idea that as religious women they would be (more) oppressed or backwards then non-religious (secular) women. But the public discourse and political situation vary in the sense that where the Netherlands have an official separation of church and state, the political system of Greece has not yet separated political from religious authority. Therefore, in Greece, anti-Islamic sentiment is not organized around the antithesis between secularism and religious fundamentalism (as it is in the Netherlands), but in terms of an inter-religious antagonism, between Orthodoxy and Islam. This means that for particularly the Dutch research group it is a constant challenge to both deconstruct the strict dichotomy between religion and secularism, and show that as Muslims they can be part and live in a democratic and secular country as the Netherlands. On the other hand they also struggle with practicing their religion in the Netherlands, and discuss online how they want to relate, as Muslims, to Dutch society. Also on a Turkish website the discussion on secularism are rather fierce, but mainly connected to Turkey and not the Netherlands. The migrants in the UK research have yet a very different relation to the relationship between religion and secularism. Because they often grew up in a very secular environment, they also argued for their right to practice Islam in a secular way. In that sense they distanced themselves from for example Arab Muslims in the UK and emphasised the cultural specificities in religious practices. These Muslims from the former Soviet Union described themselves as Muslims, but often did not go to the mosque and mainly focused on the celebrations and traditions of their religion.

7. Conclusions: Gender, Migration, New Media and Religious Practices

The general research question that we wanted to answer with this research project was: *How do (young) Muslim women in the Netherlands, Greece and the United Kingdom use digital media to negotiate their religious affiliations and their transnational diasporic belongings?* We started this research as an explicit intersectional project in which we aimed to understand more about the connections between new media and various axes of difference, such as nationality, religion, gender, age, class, and education. In order to answer our questions, we conducted elaborate fieldwork, consisting of in depth interviews and focus groups and online ethnographies, in the Netherlands, United Kingdom and Greece. Finally, our research focussed on 4 main concepts: agency, generational differences, secularism and visibility/public sphere. Critical Discourse Analysis was an important starting point for the analysis of our online and offline data.

For many migrants, digital networks are important tools for keeping in touch with people from their home country and for meeting those with a similar background in their new country. Especially for the latter goal, there are hardly any other means (for example there are now special newspapers for specific groups of migrants) to connect, except the websites that target these groups specifically. Also Islam plays an important role on most of these websites; both in the forum discussions and information that is provided. On some sites, visitors can ask questions about Islam to 'cyber-imams' (Geense and Pels, 2002). This way, the Internet is not only important for migrants to communicate with each other, but also to form their opinions on issues that are important to them. Moreover, in many cases, new media are the only media where migrants can present their perspective on issues and bring their opinions to a larger audience.

Also our research project shows that especially for Muslim women in Europe, new media offer the possibility to invalidate the image that is created of them in popular media. Online fora and websites give them a voice, which they often lack in other public spaces. Hence, the main difference between these and more mainstream platforms is the position of Muslim women. Whereas dominant media mainly talk *about* and often stereotype Muslim women; the more alternative new media platforms create spaces in which they can speak up and present their own experiences and ideas. Contrary to what is sometimes assumed, rather than freeing themselves from the constraints of their identity, it seems that Muslim women more often try to restructure and redefine their identities online.

Generational issues have played a large role throughout our research project on religious practices. For the groups of men and women we have talked to,

generations do not only refer to age differences, but also to other axes of their identity: such as whether they have migrated themselves or are children of migrants, whether they are born as a Muslim or converted to Islam at a later age and whether they could practice their religion in their youth (see UK case). Moreover all these generational differences interact in various ways with the other pillars of our research: religious practices, gender, and new media. In general, we not only found differences in online activities between younger and older people, but also religious practices varied and changed between generations. The interviewees mainly discussed the differences between their own and their parents' religious practices. These differences sometimes led to conflict, especially in the case of parents who grew up somewhere else than their children. Finding consensus on how to practice Islam remains a challenge for these children. For those who converted to Islam at a later stage (for instance in the Netherlands) or whose parents were not allowed to practice their religion when they were young (United Kingdom) even more different generational issues arose, as these people did not have a clear family framework to practice their religion and often used the internet to provide them with information and structure. In short, various generations of migrants and Muslims use the Internet in different ways, consequently their religious practices are also influenced differently by new media.

When it comes to agency it is important to note that Muslim women are positioned on a complicated and sometimes contradictory location. Because of the often negative and judging representations by for example popular western media, Muslim women developed something called 'multiple critiques' (Cooke, 2002). They discuss gender roles in their local and religious communities; challenge conventional interpretations of holy texts and traditions and at the same time defend their religious and national communities. One way for Muslim women of showing agency in relation to religion and gender is through knowledge and analysis of the Qur'an and its message. Another way of showing agency is by opposing sexualisation and consumer culture.

The hijab especially plays an important role in the debates about Islam in Europe and hence of the position of Muslim women. Both in the Greek case and in the Dutch case we recognize the multiple discourses and interpretations of headscarves that are put forward, as either oppressive or emancipatory (free choice), but we also detect the restrictedness of these discourses, as women's voices are sometimes still not heard or women find it difficult to escape this either/or discourse. For example in Greece, we saw that the images of Arab Muslim women are put forth on Muslim websites to challenge the dominant discourse of Islam in the Western world and to put into question orientalist and islamophobic stereotypes of Muslim women as oppressed and victimized, but Muslim women's own perspectives and agency are still silenced and marginalized. In particular, their demands and active participation in struggles for religious, political and socioeconomic rights and

the problems of migrant Muslim women living in Greece are absent from the official online discourse. This is different on facebook, where younger, unmarried women on Facebook usually represent themselves as modern, fashionable and funny. In general, we would like to argue that Muslim women mostly understand the hijab in terms of multiple meanings and in dynamic forms, rather than a fixed or clear thing or concept (the way it is usually presented in mainstream media). All in all, many different types of Muslim women's agency are discernable throughout the research. The women in all case studies negotiate their different identities and use new media to unsettle closed and fixed identities relying on religion or ethnicity to cement the production and reproduction of agency.

The public sphere functions as a crucial space for individuals to practice their religious practices collectively. One of the most discussed topics on the websites and forums is Islamic clothing regulation and the misconceptions about it. Besides this, freedom of speech is much debated, and especially its limits in a society with many different minority groups. Some of the forum participants in the Dutch case study for example state that there exists a double standard when it comes to this 'freedom'; the Dutch should be able to say anything they want, but Muslims ought to adjust and cannot act as they wish in the public sphere. Our research shows that new media give Muslim women platforms to voice their opinions and experiences, and can hence claim more agency, also in their visibility. This also makes it possible to recognise differences between Muslims. There are groups who actively try to bring Islam into the public sphere, where others are more focused on identity issues and claim they are part of Europe (for example the Netherlands), also as Muslims. Besides these struggles to have a bigger influence on the public sphere and public debates, we also noticed that new media have other effects regarding the public/private divide. For example, religious practices that used to be very much connected to the private sphere are now subject to social control as people ask each other on Facebook whether they will actively take part in religious festivities or fasting. In that context new media create new forms of social control regarding religious practices.

Finally, when it comes to the relationship between religion and secularism, especially in connection to the use of new media, our 3 case studies operate in rather different contexts, though there were similarities as well. For most of the Muslim women we talked to, it was important to struggle against the idea that as religious women they would be (more) oppressed or backwards than non-religious (secular) women, an idea actively perpetuated by mainstream media. Particularly for the Dutch research group it was important to challenge and deconstruct the strict dichotomy between religion and secularism, and to show that as Muslims, they can be part and live in a democratic and secular country as the Netherlands too. The migrants in the UK research have yet a very different relation to the relationship between religion and secularism. Because they often grew up in a very secular environment, they also argued

for their right to practice Islam in a secular way. In that sense they distanced themselves from for example Arab Muslims in the UK and emphasised the cultural specificities in religious practices. In Greece, anti-Islamic sentiment is not organized around the antithesis between secularism and religious fundamentalism (as it is in the Netherlands), but in terms of an inter-religious antagonism, between Orthodoxy and Islam. Among other things, this means that adopting the Islamic faith is invested with not only religious but also moral value, and is understood as a critique of the 'West', it expresses the politicisation of religion, whereby Islam is experienced not only as cultural and/or ethnic identity, but also as a political one. This means that European Muslim discourses have to tread a fine line between anti- and pro- Western positioning; something that is achieved by counter posing fundamentalist Islamist movements and countries to the more liberal, progressive and tolerant face of European Islam.

All in all, we would like to conclude by emphasising that in all 3 our case studies it appeared that new media are very important tools for Muslims in Europe to become more visible, to voice their opinions, get to know people from their own backgrounds and to fight dominant stereotypes about Muslims or Islam. Especially for Muslim women, the Internet is a space where they can gain more knowledge about their religion and hence struggle for change from within, and at the same time discuss who they are and create new, flexible and multiple interpretations of their faith, and their position as women in it and finally make their connections to Europe, as Muslim women.

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