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Religious superdiversity and intersectionality on the field

Islam, gender, and girls' football in an urban neighbourhood in the Netherlands

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Abstract

In contemporary Western-European cities, religious diversity and street football are both characteristics of urban life. Based on ten months of ethnographic research amongst young Muslim residents of the Schilderswijk, an urban neighbourhood in the Netherlands, this article discusses how to study religious diversity in relation to girls' football in urban spaces. It critically discusses how religion in intersectionality scholarship and in feminist scholarship on religion and gender is narrowly conceptualised as a form of racialised oppression or as piousness. I argue that these conceptualisations fail to capture the urban experiences and practices of 'religious but not so religious' young residents of the Schilderswijk who play football together. I conceptualise these young residents as 'space invaders' in urban football playgrounds and show that they have diverse experiences and strategies of playing football, which include but also exceed Islam, Islamophobia, and racism. I argue that their practices are, in addition to an intersectionality analysis, best understood through the concept of religious superdiversity (Becci, Burchardt, & Giorda, 2017), which provides a perspective that combines both religious and non-religious practices in urban life. Religious superdiversity emphasises the lived religious and secular experiences of young people in urban spaces beyond, on the one hand, piousness, and, on the other hand, racialised oppression and Islamophobia, and therefore provides an innovative approach to religious diversity in urban spaces.

Keywords: intersectionality, religious women's agency, everyday Islam, gender, urban space, sports

Introduction

Women's and girls' football in the Netherlands is becoming increasingly popular. Not only is an enormous increase in girls' participation in club football being recorded (Jeanes, 2011; Romijn & Elling, 2017), girls' football in public spaces such as playgrounds and football courts has also become particularly popular in urban spaces (Romijn & Elling 2017, p. 24) and amongst girls with migrant and ethnic minority backgrounds (Elling & Knoppers, 2005). The growing popularity and visibility of urban girls' football plays against the backdrop of heightened 'anxiety' in European cities about migration and ethnic and religious diversity (Modest & Koning, 2016). This is mostly related to the increasing public presence and visibility of 'new' religious groups in Western-European cities, in particular Muslims (Oosterbaan, 2014). This article explores how to analytically grasp the complexities of Islam in urban spaces by relating it to the growing popularity of urban football amongst girls with migrant and Muslim backgrounds. It provides an anthropological study of a popular girls' football competition in an urban neighbourhood in the Netherlands that is known for its ethnic and religious diversity: the Schilderswijk.

The Schilderswijk is a working-class neighbourhood in the Dutch city of The Hague. In media, public, and political discourses, the neighbourhood is represented as 'disadvantaged', and as the ultimate symbol for all that supposedly went wrong regarding migration, multiculturalism, youth, and Islam in the Netherlands (Rana, 2014; Franke, Overmaat & Reijndorp, 2014). Young residents have responded to the issues in their neighbourhood, mainly the negative image, poverty, and lack of leisure activities for girls, by collectively organising a girls' football competition: *Football Girls United* (*FGU*).[1] *FGU*'s aim is to make the public sport space in the Schilderswijk more inclusive. They organise weekly trainings and competitions where teams from the Schilderswijk play against each other, with, at peak hours, about 80 girls who play football. Their best teams also play in regional or national street football competitions. The football players are between 10 and 20 years old and most have Moroccan-Dutch and Muslim backgrounds. Although *FGU* is a girls' football competition, boys are allowed to volunteer as trainers, referees, or organisers, as long as they subscribe to *FGU*'s aim: organising football primarily for girls.

As such, *Football Girls United* deals directly with issues of gender, ethnicity, and Islam in Dutch urban public spaces. I place the perspectives and experiences of the football players within a broader theoretical and epistemological discussion on how to study religious difference and Islam in

urban spaces, thereby combining insights from three fields of study in feminist and anthropological scholarship: intersectionality, religion and gender, and superdiversity studies.

Intersectionality has become one of the main paradigms to study difference, power, and subjectivity in feminist scholarship and beyond (Nash, 2008). Intersectionality's central idea is that subjectivity and power are not converged through one axis of difference, such as gender or race, but through multiple axes that co-construct and reinforce each other. Subjectivity and power are thus formed through different combinations of axes of difference that are simultaneously in play, such as gender, sexuality, race, ethnicity, class, religion, location, and age (Yuval-Davis, 2006; Nash, 2008). Because of its emphasis on the co-constitution and mutual existence of the differences that are relevant for the case study of *Football Girls United* – ethnicity, gender, and Islam – intersectionality is the theoretical starting point in this article.

A second highly influential field within feminist scholarship focuses specifically on the intersections of religion and gender and is often referred to as the post-secular turn in feminism (Bracke, 2008; Braidotti, 2008). It conceptualises religion not only as oppressive, as it was previously often seen in feminist scholarship, but also views it as a source for religious women's agency and subjectivity. Surprisingly, the post-secular turn in feminist scholarship is quite different from intersectionality scholarship, and the two fields hardly engage with one another, as Singh (2015) has rightfully observed. I engage with both paradigms in contemporary gender studies and unravel their perspectives on and understandings of religion and Islam.

To contribute to both intersectionality and the post-secular turn in feminism, I bring in a third perspective from superdiversity studies. The notion of superdiversity mainly emerged within Western-European migration and urban studies, and in relation to policymaking in these fields (Vertovec, 2007; Back & Sinha, 2016). Superdiversity refers to the diversity that exists within diverse ethnic, religious, and migrant groups in society, and aims to describe the increasing heterogeneity and complexity of urban societies, in terms of ethnicity, religion, culture, language, et cetera. (Burchardt & Becci, 2016). In this article, I specifically engage with the concept of religious superdiversity, which was developed by Becci, Burchardt, and Giorda (2017). It takes into account the place of religion in superdiversity, which has been somewhat left out in earlier superdiversity studies (Burchardt & Becci, 2016). Religious superdiversity aims to capture how different forms and layers of religious and secular differences are articulated and

experienced in urban spaces through spatial regimes, histories, and power relations (Burchardt & Becci, 2016; Becci, Burchardt, & Giorda, 2017). Because of the focus on spatial constructions of religious and secular differences, the concept provides new insights for conceptualising religious difference and Islam in urban spaces.

In response and as a contribution to this special issue, I agree that the concept of superdiversity needs to be linked with a feminist and anti-racist intersectional perspective that is attentive to power and (global) systematic inequalities (Ahmed, 2012; Longman & Graeve, 2014; Back & Sinha, 2016). Yet, in this contribution, I do not focus on the critiques of superdiversity, but I explore how superdiversity can be useful for intersectionality studies, specifically in the context of gender and Islam in urban spaces. I show that the young football players in my research have diverse experiences and strategies of urban life, which include but also exceed Islam, Islamophobia, and racism. As I will argue, feminist intersectionality and religion and gender research fail to capture these diverse experiences, whereas religious superdiversity provides a new perspective that includes both religious and non-religious urban spatial practices.

Methodology

The empirical part of this article is based on ten months of ethnographic fieldwork in 2014 and 2015 with young football players from the Schilderswijk neighbourhood.[2] The methodological foundation was formed by feminist epistemologies and methodologies, particularly feminist ethnography. Feminist ethnography is based on situated and reflexive knowledge production, thereby explicitly paying attention to power relations involved in the positions of researcher and research participants (Davis & Craven, 2016). This meant that my positionality as a white, non-Muslim, Dutch woman from outside the Schilderswijk neighbourhood formed an integral part of the talks and encounters with my research participants. Most football players mentioned to me that they are very critical of the large number of white journalists and researchers from outside the neighbourhood who focus only on the negative aspects of the Schilderswijk, and who create negative stereotypes about the Muslim and Moroccan-Dutch young residents. However, because of my specific interest in girls' football, and not in 'negative' issues such as radicalisation and criminality, most football players told me they saw my participation in *FGU* as an opportunity to show also the 'positive' sides of the Schilderswijk and its residents. As I

belong to the dominant white, non-Muslim group in the Netherlands, most research participants especially emphasised their Dutch, rather than their Moroccan, identification towards me, thereby challenging dominant constructions of Moroccan-Dutch and Muslim citizens as 'other'. These self-representations towards me as researcher therefore form explicit insights into how identity and difference are always constructed in relation to wider society, as I will also discuss in the sections below.

The main methods of data collection were participant observation and informal talks, taking place at public sport playgrounds in the neighbourhood, and at football competitions organised by *FGU* in sport halls and at football courts. I especially engaged with a group of ten girls and boys between sixteen and twenty years old, who participated in football but also volunteered in the FGU team, together with the coordinator, Hanan. With this group of volunteers, I conducted a total of fifteen in-depth interviews about their experiences of girls' football, religion, ethnicity, and gender in the Schilderswijk. I analysed the transcribed data from the observations, talks, and interviews by open and axial coding based on a grounded theory approach (Boeije, 2010), with the help of the software programme *NVivo*.

Critiques of intersectionality and religious women's agency

Various scholars have criticised intersectionality studies for its relative lack of engagement with religion (Bilge, 2010; Singh, 2015; Weber, 2015). Furthermore, if religion is being discussed, this is mainly in the form of studying religion within structural power relations (Singh, 2015). According to Singh, intersectionality studies have recently shifted to a mere study of oppression and structural power, rather than also acknowledging the intersectional identity formations that form people's subjectivities and narrative self-constructions 'on the ground' (Singh, 2015; also see Yuval-Davis, 2006). Intersectionality scholars have provided elaborate critiques of contemporary Islamophobia as a form of racialisation of religion and its intersections with gender, sexuality, and race/ethnicity (e.g. El-Tayeb, 2012; Lentin & Titley, 2014). Without denying the relevance and importance of this work, religion here figures mostly as a form of structural oppression, as a way of creating 'others', while religion also has other possibilities for its adherents. These authors do not discuss what being Muslim can actually *offer* the subjects they study, for example in the form of moral or theological guidelines, religious agency, empowerment, personal belief, or community-

forming, and as ways of dealing with racialised oppression in an Islamophobic society.

Singh (2015), as well as Bilge (2010, p. 24), suggests that studies of religious women's agency as a challenge to intersectionality are needed, as they precisely point to the ethical-political subject formations not only formed 'negatively' by oppression, but also by faith as positive source of values and aspiration for religious women. Although I appreciate their attempt to bring the two fields together, I think the focus on religious agency is also limited in the sense that this scholarship turns to the other end of the spectrum of religion and religious subjectivities. Studies of religious women's agency foreground experiences and perspectives from very pious women in religious settings, where their religious subjectivity and agency is foregrounded, as anthropologists of Islam have noted (Soares & Osella, 2009; Schielke, 2010). For example, the work of Mahmood (2005) and Bracke (2008) focuses on pious women in Islamic and Christian movements. Because of the clearly religious setting and the focus on religious women – who are precisely the focus of and selected for these studies *because* they are religious – these authors mainly explore women's actions, subjectivity, and agency through the lens of piousness. This is also the case in much research on religion, gender, and youth, such as that of Fernando (2016), who studied pious Muslim French youth; Ryan and Vacchelli (2013), who interviewed observant Muslim mothers in London about the upbringing of their children; and Amir-Moazami (2010), who focused on young pious women in Islamic organisations in France and Germany. The single focus on *pious* youth and mothers results in a rather limited perspective on young Muslims' urban, leisure, and sport activities. For example, it emphasises (some) Muslim women's need for gender-segregated spaces (Amir-Moazami, 2010; Ryan & Vacchelli, 2013; Fernando, 2016) and contrasts pious youthfulness of young Muslims with dominant conceptions of youthfulness as 'sexually liberated' (Amir-Moazami, 2010).

Indeed, this also touches upon current debates within the anthropology of Islam, which sees a growing body of work on 'everyday Islam' as counterpart to the strong focus on observing, pious women (Fadil & Fernando, 2015; Sehlikoglu, 2017). Scholars within the anthropology of Islam have stressed that the field focuses too much on Islamic pious practices and spaces, and too little on other aspects of Muslim lives: the non-religious or daily activities and spaces Muslims engage in, such as work and popular culture. This large focus on piety reinforces the notion of Muslims as 'different' or 'other' in European societies. Scholars argue that there should be more attention to the complexities, incoherencies, and struggles of Mus-

lims in their daily and moral lives, where religion is not necessarily always prioritised (Soares & Osella, 2009; Schielke, 2010).[3] The growing body of research on Muslim women and sport seems to indicate that sport is one of these domains to study the 'other' aspects of Muslims' lives. Yet, I found that most sport sociological studies on Muslim women and sport (e.g. Dagkas & Benn, 2006; Kay, 2006; Benn, Pfister, & Jawad, 2011) reduce Muslim women's embodied practices and experiences in sport solely to the headscarf and to family and/or religious restraints, as also other critics have argued (Ratna, 2011; Samie, 2013; Sehlikoglu, 2016).

The large attention to piety in studies on religious women's agency, and to the headscarf in studies on Muslim women and sport, does not correspond with the experiences and practices of my research informants, the young Muslim football players at *Football Girls United*. They, like many other religious young women and men, do not necessarily aspire a very pious, observant life, or engage with explicit Islamic or religious organisations. And, even if they do, many religious young women and men also engage with non-religious organisations or find themselves in non-religious or secular urban spaces, such as sport or leisure spaces. Religious women's subjectivity or agency is not necessarily always primarily constructed through a pious or religious lens, especially not when it concerns young people. The girls who participated in my research almost all identify as Muslim yet are not explicitly observant or pious in the sportive spaces where the research took place. The headscarf was, for most girls, not an important concern or constraint. Furthermore, the girls were not selected for the research because they are religious, but because they play football. It is this group of what I call 'religious but not so religious' young Muslim women that is until now virtually invisible in feminist research on religion and gender. It is thus necessary to create a new conceptual space to account for the experiences of Muslim women beyond considering them, on the one hand, as merely enmeshed in oppressive Islamophobic power structures, and on the other hand, as primarily constituted by piety.

Performing gender, religion, and ethnicity on the urban football field

This section discusses the footballers' motivations for and experiences of playing in the *Football Girls United* (*FGU*) competition in the Schilderswijk. First, it is important to note that participation in *FGU* is not based on any religious or ethnic belonging. Nora (sixteen years old) explained to me:

> We're not like: 'this place is only for headscarves or Moroccans or Muslims', because we also have Christian girls, or Catholics, or different backgrounds with a different skin colour.

Also, other football players mentioned that everybody is welcome at *FGU* and that the football competition is for all girls from the Schilderswijk and adjacent neighbourhoods. In practice, however, it are mostly Moroccan-Dutch Muslim girls participating in the competition and trainings, plus a few Pakistani-Dutch Muslim girls. Contrary to Nora's claim, I did not encounter Christian or Catholic girls during my fieldwork at *FGU*, but I suspect that she referred to a few white Dutch girls who participated irregularly in *FGU*, which she assumed have Christian religious backgrounds. I did not explicitly ask all football players about their religious believes, identities, or practices. Yet, in our talks about playing football and its relation to gender, ethnic, and religious backgrounds and identities, most of the girls and boys mentioned that they identify as Muslim. In the talks they had amongst each other on the football field, some girls and boys mentioned religious activities, like going to the mosque, taking Arabic and Quran classes, and trying to pray regularly. Others did not mention their involvement in such religious activities. I will now share some specific experiences of my research participants regarding Islam and religious difference in *FGU* and in playing football.

Space invaders: Ethnic, religious, and gendered 'others' on the football field

> People underestimate us. A lot. Two years ago, we played the National Street Football Finals, against a team with really only Dutch girls. And of course, they thought: 'we will win, they are just Moroccan girls with headscarves, they cannot play football'. But in the end, yeah, we've beaten them to the max. They ridicule us, laugh, like these kind of things. Not that we care, because in the end we are the ones who run off with the Cup.

This quote from Nora does not stand on its own. More girls from *FGU* told me stories about being perceived as ethnic, religious, and gendered others on the football field when they play against teams from outside their neighbourhood. Opponents or spectators then expect that they are not good at playing football, because they wear a headscarf, because of their Moroccan-Dutch background, and because they are a girl. For example,

some girls were verbally abused by a passer-by because of their headscarf when they were playing football on a public football court. In other cases, sport organisers assume that Moroccan-Dutch or Muslim girls are not allowed to play football, because of their supposed traditional religious and cultural background. The girls from *FGU* were very much aware of these negative prejudices and expectations and actively tried to resist them, for example, by winning the game, as became clear in Nora's story. Some other girls told me that they employ stereotypes in their football strategy: they first play very shy and act as if they are afraid of the ball, so that the other team is sure they will win. And then at some point, they switch to full force and impress the opponents by making one goal after the other. In this way, they manage to 'talk back' to stereotypes (hooks, 1989; Es, 2016), through winning. However, these experiences also indicate that the girls of *FGU* are not seen as the 'natural' occupants of a football space by others, because of their visible identities as Muslim and Moroccan-Dutch young women.

When I asked the girls how they experience playing football in their neighbourhood, one of the most common experiences I heard was that they feel 'out of place' on public football playgrounds, because it is 'more normal' for boys to play there. Girls sometimes experience being chased away, or first having to convince boys that they are also good at playing football. Boys often form the majority on a playground, and do not always welcome girls. So, the playground is implicitly and 'naturally' constructed as a masculine football space by the boys who play there. This does not mean that girls do not play football at urban playgrounds – they do – but they are very aware that their presence on the urban football field is more contested than the presence of boys. The volunteers and players of *FGU* actively try to change this dominant idea of football space as masculine, as this is precisely the reason why they started the *FGU* initiative. Sarah (eighteen years old), for example, told me:

> Sometimes we go with a group of girls to a playground, and we play football there. So that other girls see that also girls can play football. You know, this playground is ours, not only theirs.

This makes clear that *FGU* football players claim football space as also 'theirs'. Nirmal Puwar has conceptualised women and racialised minorities who claim spaces that are 'naturally' seen as white and male as 'space invaders' (Puwar, 2004). Despite the growing participation of girls and women, football spaces are still very much constructed around traditional

ideals of gender (Elling & Knoppers, 2005; Jeanes, 2011). Sport, on the one hand, provides a space where girls can challenge traditional ideas of femininity (Butler, 1998), but, on the other hand, girls' participation in football is often 'accepted' only on the base of precisely embodying 'feminine' ideals of sexiness and slimness (Jeanes, 2011; Samie, 2013). Furthermore, as Muslim and Moroccan-Dutch women are often stereotypically portrayed as oppressed, passive, and inactive, playing football is also seen as 'alien' to racialised girls in dominant white society (Ratna, 2011; Samie, 2013). Because the girls in my research are not the 'natural' occupants of football spaces, as girls, as Moroccan-Dutch, and as Muslim, they can be seen as 'space invaders' who performatively lay claim to the space and thereby, at the same time, redefine the meaning of that space (Butler, 1993; 1998; Puwar, 2004). Here, sport is both a way of cultivating gendered and sexualised body ideals and of resisting stereotypical representations of Muslim women (Samie, 2013). Agency for these Muslim girls is, then, not necessarily performed through pious or religious embodiments, but through playing football as performativity of gender, ethnicity, and religion. Girls' participation in football is an intersectional and multi-layered experience of gendered, racial/ethnic, and religious norms and stereotypes (Ratna, 2011).

By analysing my field material through this intersectional lens, it became clear that dominant constructions of space in religious, gendered, and racialised ways contribute to girls' experiences of sexism, racism, and Islamophobia in public football spaces. Yet, a further look at my data suggests that my research participants' experiences are not limited to stereotypes about Muslims, racism, and Islamophobia, but that playing football also exceeds these experiences.

Morality and normality: How religion does (not) matter on the football field

When I asked the football players in what ways their religious background or beliefs matter on the football field, many responded with the word '*gewoon*' in Dutch, meaning something like 'just, normally'. Some immediately said: 'faith does not matter, it does not make a difference'. Or, they would reiterate experiences similar to those I described before: how they are constantly negatively defined by their religion by others. It became clear to me that many football players, especially the younger girls, were not very interested in talking about their faith or religion with me. After all,

they were there to play football, not because of any religious matters. Also, some might have wanted to avoid talking with me about Islam because of the stigmatisation of Muslims in the Netherlands, and others might not have been interested in religion because of their young age. In this context, insisting on Islam seemed strange and problematic to me, as I did not want to reinforce the stereotypes about them as Muslim girls that they so persistently tried to resist. It was thus mainly during conversations in which my research participants themselves opened up to talk about religion that I pursued questions about religious matters.

A few players made clear, sometimes implicit, how they incorporated religious beliefs in their activities on and off the field. Hanan (thirty years old), coordinator of *FGU*, was one of them. After a football training, she drove with me to a restaurant for an interview when she saw a woman with a *niqaab* walking on the street. Agitated, she told me:

> Look that woman in *niqaab*, I'm against that. Islam requires you to be open and welcoming. To be open to society and your neighbours. And this is why we welcomed you in our competition. A *niqaab* is not open, you shut yourself off.

In the quote, Hanan refers to the way she and the *FGU* volunteers were open for my research questions in an, indeed, very welcoming way. I was not the only person from outside the Schilderswijk or the Moroccan-Dutch Muslim community to be welcomed in *FGU*; a few times a year, the volunteers organise a football competition with girls from other neighbourhoods in The Hague to get to know each other, including girls from predominantly white Dutch neighbourhoods. For Hanan, to be open and welcoming to white Dutch others is linked to her Islamic faith, albeit in a way that directly 'talks back' to stereotypes about the Schilderswijk, Islam, and Muslims in Dutch society.

Other football players perform their religious belief mostly by way of moral behaviour on the field. When I asked if there are girls with different religious backgrounds at *Football Girls United*, one of the boy volunteers, Mansour (twelve years old), said:

> This is not important at all. Yes, most are Muslim. But everyone is treated the same. For example, if I do something racist, that's not okay. Or last week, there was a girl who became ill. Then we took her to the side, and we cared for her. We have to take care of each other.

It happened more often in my research that, when I asked about religion or Islam in *FGU*, research participants would at first say that religion does not matter, after which they started to talk about 'being nice for each other on the field'. For many of my research participants, including Mansour, Islam was not a main concern in *Football Girls United*. Only when I explicitly continued to ask them about religion, they connected this to morality, values of care, and equality on the field, something *FGU* explicitly strives for.

As said before, the most common reaction when I explicitly asked them about their religious beliefs on the field was: 'oh, just, normally', like Nisa's (twenty years old) response:

> I'm just a girl who likes to play football and who believes in Islam.

These statements led me to question the relevance of the identity marker 'Muslim' or 'Islam' for the football players in this research about girls' football. These encounters may indicate that many of my research participants do not primarily see themselves as Muslims or as believers on the football field, but as football players. Muslim football players do not always perform an Islamic or religious identity on the football field; it is not necessarily *as Muslims* that they are playing football, or that they are playing football because of religious motivations. Rather, on the field, they identify themselves primarily as football players and perform this identity as footballers by their winning strategies, in response to stereotypical representations by white or male players of them *as* Moroccan-Dutch Muslim girls who cannot play football. Samie (2013) arrives at similar conclusions in her research on British-Muslim women in sport, who prioritise their gendered and sexual identities on the field, rather than their religious identifications, as a response to both gender ideals in sport and to British stereotypes about Muslim girls.

Therefore, I started to think of the football players in my research as 'religious but not so religious' young women. I am not suggesting that they are not pious or religious in general or in other spaces, but, *on the football field*, religion or Islam is not their primary concern. The primary identification as football player, rather than as Muslim, can also be illustrated with the following quote – also from Nora, when she followed up on her story on the Street Football Finals:

> In the end, we are as good as them, or well, yeah no one is better than the other. We all have the same blood, right? We are all humans, so… if you have a headscarf or if you are brown or black or whatever, if you can play football you just play, that's not because of your skin colour or your descent or your belief.

The girls in *FGU* do not necessarily 'invade' football spaces *as Muslims*, because that would still make them 'other' or 'different' from the perceived 'natural' occupants. They invade the spaces as 'normal' football players who happen to be Muslim, and who claim that they equally belong to urban public spaces as boys and white or secular Dutch girls do. Similar to Sarah's claim that football space is 'ours, not only theirs', when she talked about gender, Farah (twelve years old) states, about racial/ethnic and spatial belonging:

> Whose space is this in the Netherlands? It's surely as much my space as it is a blonde Dutch girl's space!

Through playing football, my research participants show that they belong to urban public spaces as Dutch citizens. However, they are very much aware of public stereotypical representations of them as oppressed Muslim girls, and they 'talk back' to these stereotypes precisely by embodying the popular Dutch leisure activity, football, as 'natural' and 'normal' players. Foregrounding an identity as football player is thus not separate from structural racist and Islamophobic prejudices against the players but formed in relation to it. This identity as footballer both *is* and *is not* an identity as Muslim. It is, because it is a response to how Muslims are perceived in Dutch society, and it is not, because it is their way of 'talking back' to gendered, racialised, and religious stereotypes – by winning the game.

Conceptualisations of religion in intersectionality and religious women's agency studies do not provide space for this complex engagement and dis/identifications with Islam and the category Muslim. The football identifications of my research participants point to experiences and practices that incorporate but also exceed identifications as Muslim. Religious superdiversity is a useful concept here, because it precisely brings together religious *and* secular differences and experiences of diversity in urban spaces, and does not necessarily foreground religion, Islam, or piety. It examines how religious and non-religious strategies matter spatially in particular contexts and spaces (Becci, Burchardt, & Giorda, 2017). Religious

and non-religious are here not seen as opposites, but as both part of playing football in urban space.

Conclusion: Religious superdiversity, conviviality, and everyday Islam in urban spaces

Paradoxically, after having argued that researchers should focus *less* on religion and Islam, I conclude this article with the idea of religious superdiversity. Religious superdiversity does not mean looking primarily at religious communities in cities but emphasising how religious *and secular* practices and belongings are shaped by and interact with urban dynamics, including power and inequality (Becci, Burchardt, & Giorda, 2017). In contrast with feminist intersectionality and religion and gender research, religious superdiversity points to how religion does not only mean experiencing Islamophobia or practicing piousness, but also how it interacts with practices and strategies that are not explicitly religious, such as playing football on public playgrounds.

Becci, Burchardt, & Giorda (2017) pay attention to how young people construct new belongings in relation to religion in secular city spaces, through festivals and leisure. In the context of my research, such religious innovation can also be applied to urban youth who innovate their neighbourhood spaces in terms of gender and religion: moving the focus away from religion and Islam, towards a focus on football and winning. In this way, the young footballers in my research 'unsettle established or dominant notions of social and cultural difference' (Burchardt & Becci, 2016, p. 2). For Muslim minority groups in Europe, dominant notions of cultural and social difference are often constructed through religious difference: a focus on Islamophobia in intersectionality research and a focus on piousness in women's religious agency research. The young people in my research play with these categories of religious difference by precisely exceeding the very category of Islam and performing other spatial and urban belongings and practices: playing football and winning, albeit in response to the dominant constructions of religious difference they experience. Applying the concept of religious superdiversity to the practices of young Muslim footballers emphasises these as urban and spatial, and religious and non-religious at the same time.

Often, in research on superdiversity, living and playing together in multicultural cities is described with the terms conviviality or co-existence: 'an alternative understanding of culture that focuses on what people do

every day rather than always reducing them to their cultural origins' (Back & Sinha, 2016, p. 522). Conviviality is less often linked with religion and religious forms of living together in urban multicultural spaces but can be used to analyse everyday practices of religious urban youth without reducing them to their religious 'origins'. Religious superdiversity and conviviality put the *relation* between religious, secular, and urban practices at its centre. It does not *a priori* assume that religion matters, but precisely questions how it does, when, and where. Then, indeed, the 'religious' in religious superdiversity is a question, not a given. It is for this reason that I propose the concept of religious superdiversity to explain the experiences of Muslim youth in urban neighbourhoods, and not the concepts of 'everyday Islam' (Fadil & Fernando, 2015), '*Islam mondaine*' (Soares & Osella, 2009), 'everyday religion' (Schielke, 2010; Schielke and Debevec, 2012) that are debated in the anthropology of Islam. These debates seem to primarily centre around the use and validity of 'everyday' and 'living/life' as analytic concepts, while I rather propose to question the analytic category of 'Islam' or religion in urban and gendered leisure practices, such as football (see also Samie, 2013; Sehlikoglu, 2016). While I support the turn to 'everyday' or 'living Islam' as reaction to the piety turn, I argue that 'Islam' might not always be the right category in the first place, but that it should be questioned when, where, and how it matters in which spaces and contexts.

Religious superdiversity can open up discussions of religion, Islam, intersectionality, power, and difference, by giving space to the experiences of 'religious but not so religious' young citizens. Religious superdiversity, in dialogue with intersectionality, allows for analysing the diverse daily lives of youth in urban neighbourhoods, which are not only formed by gendered and racialised power structures or by religious practices and identifications, but also by urban practices of conviviality and playing football together.

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Notes

1. Like all other names of organisations and persons in this article, this is a pseudonym.
2. This research is part of a PhD research on girls' football in urban neighbourhoods in the Netherlands. I also conducted fieldwork in a few other neighbourhoods in the Netherlands, but the Schilderswijk has been the most important field site.
3. The turn to 'everyday Islam' has been criticised in a special issue of *HAU Journal of Ethnographic Theory* by Fadil and Fernando (2015) for reinforcing an opposition between the everyday and religion, yet I believe it remains an important direction for thinking beyond Islam as primary category of difference for Muslim women's lives (see also Sehlikoglu, 2017). Because of limited space, in this article, I focus on debates of intersectionality and religion and gender in feminist scholarship, and only briefly point to some overlaps with the debates in the anthropology of religion and Islam. For a more comprehensive discussion of the 'piety turn', religious women's agency, and critiques of the turn to 'everyday lives' in anthropology, see Sehlikoglu (2017) and the contributions to *HAU Journal of Ethnographic Theory* (Fadil & Fernando, 2015).

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