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5 **Embodying religion, gender and citizenship**

A case study of Muslim girls playing football in a Dutch urban neighbourhood

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Introduction

Women's football is among the fastest-growing sports in Europe, and this is also the case in the Netherlands (Romijn and Elling, 2017). The increase of football participation is especially high among junior players: girls and young women up to 19 years old (Romijn and Elling, 2017), and takes place both in official clubs and in other more 'unorganised' sports spaces such as playgrounds and football courts, also called street football. Specifically in the Netherlands, 'unorganised' football in the streets and playgrounds became popular in urban neighbourhoods (Romijn and Elling, 2017) and among girls with Moroccan–Dutch and Turkish–Dutch migrant backgrounds (Elling, 2004, 2015; Elling and Knoppers, 2005:262). Moroccan–Dutch and Turkish–Dutch girls with Muslim backgrounds thus increasingly occupy public playgrounds in Dutch cities through playing street football. This development takes place against the backdrop of dominant representations of Muslims as religious and racialised 'others' (Wekker, 2016), and an increased problematisation of the presence of Muslim citizens in Dutch public spaces (Moors and Salih, 2009; Oosterbaan, 2014; Sunier, 2009).

Muslim immigration to Europe and the integration of ethnic and Muslim minorities in urban multicultural neighbourhoods are often debated in politics and public debates, and these debates often centre around women's bodies. Gender and sexuality are key markers in these discourses, as the decade-long debate on women's Islamic dress in public spaces shows, which resulted in the Dutch parliament's approval of a ban on the face veil in public areas such as schools, hospitals, government buildings and public transport in 2016. In France, the issue of Islamic women's bodies as 'unintegrated' came to the fore in the ban of the *burkini* on French beaches that same year, making leisure and sports a key element in the debates on the 'proper' integration of Muslim women. Another example is how, in the context of the Dutch parliamentary elections in 2017, women's rights and feminism, both portrayed as

the results of secular modernity, were used as an argument to further close the European borders for migrants from Islamic countries. A speech by Edith Schippers (2016), minister of Public Health, Welfare and Sports, is a case in point. She argued that Dutch culture is superior to immigrant and Islamic cultures, especially when it comes to gender and sexual equality, and she primarily illustrated her argument by using examples related to the body: the headscarf, freedom to choose clothing, female genital mutilation (FGM) and (not) shaking hands. In this chapter, I will discuss how these dominant ideas on Islam, gender, sexuality and bodies play out in the domain of neighbourhood girls' football by taking citizenship and embodiment as conceptual lenses. Embodiment is a key element in both playing sports and in the debates on Islam, gender and citizenship in the Netherlands, as I will show that citizenship is constructed through gendered and sexualised notions of the body. Yet, I argue that playing football, as an embodied cultural practice (Carrington, 2010), also exceeds merely gendered and religious embodiments of citizenship, and that Dutch Muslim girls reconstitute citizenship through performances of football and winning.

The culturalisation of citizenship: Gender, sport and embodiment

Citizenship is relevant as a conceptual lens because questions of religion and the public visibility of religion, especially Islam, are very much related to questions of citizenship in the Netherlands. In this case, citizenship is not about formal citizenship or having citizenship rights, but about what Dutch scholars call the 'culturalisation' of citizenship (De Koning, 2016:116; Duyvendak et al., 2010). This means that cultural participation, in the form of emotions, norms, traditions or symbols, has largely replaced the discourse of economic participation in Dutch society (De Koning, 2015; Duyvendak et al., 2010). Citizenship is seen through a set of embodied cultural norms and practices, defining what it means to be a 'good' or 'real' Dutch citizen, for example, not wearing religious clothing, sexual freedom and food as cultural belonging. Gender and sexuality are prominent markers of the cultural norms of Dutch citizenship, using women's sexual emancipation as an indicator for the division between 'real' and second-class citizens – often Muslim or other religious or ethnic minority citizens (Bracke, 2012; Butler, 2008; El-Tayeb, 2011; Ghorashi, 2010; Holston and Appadurai, 1999; Mepschen et al., 2010; Wekker, 2016). In the debates on integration and emancipation in the Netherlands, Dutch gender and sexual norms are represented as modern, liberal and equal. Islam is seen as antithetical to that: traditional, backward and characterised by a lack of women's gender and sexual freedom (Mepschen et al., 2010; Scott, 2009). 'Migrant' and Muslim citizens are seen as still in need of 'integration' into Dutch society because they do not embody gender and sexual freedom yet, even when they are born and raised in the Netherlands (De Koning, 2013; El-Tayeb, 2011; Modest and De Koning,

2016; Oosterbaan, 2014). In that way, cultural citizenship is written through the migrant's and Muslim's body.

Furthermore, sports are seen as a main domain in which Dutch cultural citizenship is learnt and embodied, especially for youths. In the Netherlands, youth sports form an important aspect of civic engagement, youth education and social participation, not only in the form of playing sports itself but also in the accompanied volunteer work that parents are expected to engage in. Sports projects are used as a means of national and local governments and organisations to 'integrate' and 'discipline' urban youth, especially of Muslim or ethnic minority backgrounds, into dominant Dutch society and cultural, sexual and gender norms (Besnier and Brownell, 2012; Rana, 2014; Vermeulen and Verweel, 2009). Football is an especially important embodied practice and symbol of Dutch national identity, and it is therefore no coincidence that many neighbourhood sports projects focus on this popular sport. Football is seen as the way, par excellence, to embody 'real Dutchness', in which religion is deemed absent or at best a private matter, as this chapter will show (see also Silverstein, 2000 for the French context). Muslim girls are a specific target group in neighbourhood sport projects; they are framed as in need of becoming emancipated and becoming a 'real' Dutch citizen through sport. At the same time, sport itself is also a highly embodied, gendered and heterosexualised practice, in both religious and secular contexts, as many researchers have shown (Besnier and Brownell, 2012; Blazer, 2015; Butler, 1998; Caudwell, 2003; Dyck and Archetti, 2003; Young, 2005). The embodied practice of sport is strongly organised along gendered and (hetero)sexualised lines, with the segregation of men's and women's bodies and the (hetero)sexualising of athletes as best examples (Caudwell, 2003:380; Van den Heuvel, 2017). Thus, sport and citizenship provide interesting lenses to look at contemporary embodiments and intersections of religion and gender, in the context of Dutch problematisations of Muslim women and public religion. As I will show, in both the embodiments of citizenship and football, religious and gender identities are constructed, performed and resisted.

The conceptualisation of culturalised citizenship mainly focuses on the level of dominant discourses and representations of citizenship, and not on actual practices of citizenship and marginalised subjects' resistances (El-Tayeb, 2011). Approaching citizenship mainly from the perspective of the dominant culturalisation of citizenship overlooks how citizenship is also something that is always performed, practised and lived. Citizenship is not only produced through dominant discursive (sexual and cultural) norms, but, importantly, also through public, political and embodied practices that negotiate and question precisely those norms (Lazar, 2014; Nyhagen and Halsaa, 2016). Nyhagen and Halsaa (2016:60) therefore conceptualise citizenship as lived practices: '[a]n emphasis on citizenship as lived practice is based on the idea that citizenship is not so much a fixed attribute of a particular group but rather involves contested, fluid and dynamic processes of negotiation and struggle'. Practices of negotiation and resistance in turn

contribute to changing dominant perceptions of citizenship: citizenship ‘is a dynamic construct which shifts as much due to the actions of those excluded from citizenship as those with the greater power of full membership’ (Lazar, 2014:72). Occupying urban public spaces through street demonstrations, neighbourhood-based social gatherings or creative forms of protest such as graffiti are contemporary forms of embodied citizenship action (Lazar, 2014:76), and this could also include playing street football. Football is not only a means of creating ‘ideal’ citizens, but is also the most popular sport among young people in the Netherlands, especially among ethnic minority and Muslim boys and girls and in urban neighbourhoods (Romijn and Elling, 2017), and therefore is also a way of creative and embodied self-expression and of claiming public spaces and citizenship, as I will argue in this chapter.

In both these approaches to citizenship – the dominant culturalisation of citizenship and in citizenship as lived practices – the embodiment of citizenship refers predominantly to ‘standard’ categories of social identities, such as religious and gendered identities and backgrounds. In the culturalisation of citizenship, an idea of ‘fixed’ Islamic identities that are assumed to embody backwardness and gender and sexual oppression is presented as counterpart of the supposed liberal Dutch society. In the citizenship as lived practices approach, Nyhagen and Halsaa (2016) show how religious women embody citizenship through religious practices such as praying, church or mosque visits, food and caring. In other feminist approaches to embodiment and religion, too, religious identity and explicitly religious practices are taken as a key route into studying how women or girls embody religion and religious agency, for example, through the cultivation of religious norms and piety in the Egyptian mosque movement (Mahmood, 2005), or through the combination of religious and sports practices in the American sports ministry (Blazer, 2015). In studies of sport and embodiment, sport practices are seen to embody rather fixed identities such as national identity, religion (Dyck and Archetti, 2003) or gender (Young, 2005). This does not always correspond with the experiences of young Muslim women who play football in urban spaces, who, as I will show, rather try to go beyond ‘standard’ identifications and embodiments of religion and gender in their sporting practices. Yes, they are Muslim and they are girls, but their embodied football practices are not meant towards strengthening these religious and gendered identifications, but rather in strengthening their identifications and embodiments as *football players*. The relationship between religion, gender and embodiment is often only studied in the context of churches, religious rituals or explicitly religious (sport) spaces; however, in my research, the girls play football in public football spaces that are not explicitly religious, and hence I study how embodiment takes shape in these contexts, and how football embodiments intersect with embodiments of gender and citizenship.

Budgeon (2003:50, emphasis in original) has argued that embodiment is not a linear expression of identity, but that bodies should be studied ‘as *events* that are continually in the process of becoming – as multiplicities that are

never just found but are made and remade'. This is an approach that is congruent with the approaches of Mahmood (2005), Blazer (2015), Butler (1998) and Young (2005), as they also emphasise the continuously remaking and refashioning of bodies. However, Budgeon's (2003) approach provides more space to look at embodiment *beyond* explicit religious or gendered identities, as Budgeon takes an *event* as the conceptual entrance to embodiment and not religion or gender per se. Pink's (2011) approach to sporting bodies as place-events is similar and equally applicable here. Every sport event is recognisable as a sport event as it is similar to previous sport events, she argues, but it is every time a new *place-event* in which not only bodies but also the wider 'ecology of things' becomes reconstituted (see also Butler, 1998). This 'ecology of things' does not only refer to religious or gendered bodies, but also to the wider sociability and connectivity of organisms in this particular place. I will argue that the girls' embodied football practices in public spaces could well be interpreted as such: as place-events in which not only religion and gender are embodied and performed but also they go beyond that. I will set out this argument by discussing two different perspectives on girls' football. Firstly, I will present the perspectives of white Dutch sport and youth professionals on Muslim girls and sport, in which they reinforce dominant and binary ideas on both religion and gender. Secondly, I will show how football-playing girls themselves relate to and experience gender, religion and citizenship in their embodied football practices and strategies.

An ethnography of urban girls' football

This chapter is based on ten months of ethnographic fieldwork between 2014 and 2015 with girls' football players in an urban multicultural neighbourhood in the Dutch city The Hague. Some additional research was conducted with women's football teams from other cities in the Netherlands. This was part of a broader research project on the role of gender, race/ethnicity and religion in girls' football and public playgrounds in the Netherlands. I conducted participant observations, 11 interviews and many informal discussions with girls who played football in the public playgrounds in their neighbourhood, as well as with girls who played in and organised their own girls' football competition Football Girls United (FGU).¹ The football players in this competition were between 10 and 20 years old and mostly from the Moroccan–Dutch community in the neighbourhood and with Muslim backgrounds. The ethnic and religious composition of the players in this competition was not a deliberate endeavour, but more an outcome of the ethnic and religious composition of the neighbourhood itself, as is mostly the case with urban football (see also Karsten, 2003; Samie, 2013).

The aim of FGU is not only organising a girls' football competition, but it is also more broadly focused on girls' emancipation in football and in public spaces in the neighbourhood, as both are still often perceived as dominantly masculine spaces (Van den Bogert, 2018). Interestingly, FGU aims to create

greater gender equality in football by teaching *boys* that girls also belong on the football field. They do this by explicitly involving boys in the girls' football competition, who not only act as volunteers in the organisation of the competition, but also play together with the girls. The 'girls' in Football Girls United thus does not mean literally that only girls play football there, but is a critical counterpart to all other football initiatives in the neighbourhood that are focused only or almost only on boys, such as the Futsal School Competition. Notably, there is no gender marker in this name: only the general name for indoor football is used: futsal. This implies that 'general' football, or football without a gender marker, actually means boys' football, and therefore it is necessary for FGU to use a gender marker to point out that their competition takes girls as central players, yet it does not exclude boys. In addition to interviews and talks with the football girls, I held ten in-depth interviews with policymakers, sports professionals and trainers on how they think about this girls' football initiative of FGU. The next section focuses on their perceptions of the embodiment of gender and religion in the context of Dutch cultural citizenship and Islam.

White Dutch sports professionals: Embodiments of gender and Islam in girls' football

Mariet is a policymaker from the municipality of The Hague and is responsible for this specific neighbourhood. I asked her what she thought about youths' sports participation and about the two different football competitions in the neighbourhood: FGU and the Futsal School Competition. She replied:

MARIET: I think having a separate girls' football competition is one of the most backward things you can imagine. Although in puberty it's different, I remember from my own experiences at a girls-only lyceum. I liked being only with girls! It was nice and comfortable. Because boys, yeah they are quite different, they find other stuff important, like this football all the time. But yeah I don't stimulate it here, because the reason is not puberty but completely different motivations.

KATHRINE: Like what kind of motivations?

MARIET: Traditional religious motivations. So I don't support that, I think it's much more normal if you play mixed football with boys and girls. Because now you see it's always a bit tensed. Boys don't know how to deal with girls and girls don't know how to deal with boys.

From this quote, it becomes clear that although Mariet acknowledges from her own experiences that it can be comfortable to be exclusively with girls – especially during puberty – she does not want to ascribe this experience to the footballing girls in the neighbourhood. She assumes that, because these girls

have a Moroccan–Dutch or Muslim background, their reasons to play football with girls are concerned with tradition and religion, and not with puberty, like she experienced herself. She therefore frames her own experiences as ‘natural’, instead of culturally oriented.

Other organisers of youth sports in the neighbourhood too mentioned in the interviews that they recognise the desire to play sports with people of their own gender. For example, Peter played on a volleyball team with only men and experienced it as very different and less ‘natural’ when two women joined their team: ‘with men, it was just more convenient because the net can also be put high’, he said. In the conversations about this topic, the Dutch words *gewoon* [just, ordinary, naturally] and *lekker* [in this context, meaning ‘nice’ and ‘comfortable’] were often expressed. It appears that, for many adults, it feels more ‘natural’ and comfortable to play sports with people of the same gender. For white Dutch people, however, gender segregation in sports is seldom discussed as problematic, as it is seen as a normal consequence of puberty, and as part of ‘natural’ physical differences between men and women. This is not surprising, as the organisation of sports is built on the heteronormative premise of sexed and gender-segregated bodies (Caudwell, 2003). The norm of gender segregation in football serves to materialise sexed and gendered bodies in a heteronormative framework: especially because football in itself is not considered ‘feminine’ enough and therefore often associated with butch and lesbian identities, women football players are increasingly expected to showcase their bodies as heterosexually appealing to maintain the ‘woman-feminine-heterosexual’ order and to make the sport popular and acceptable for a wider (male gaze) audience (Caudwell, 2003:377, 380; see also Blazer, 2015). Furthermore, gender segregation serves to materialise men’s teams and masculinity as the norm (Anderson, 2008; Caudwell, 2003). This is illustrated by the fact that Mariet only criticises the girls’ competition for gender segregation, and not the boys’ competition. When exercised by Muslim or Moroccan–Dutch girls, gender segregation in sports is considered, at least by Mariet, an anomaly based on fundamental religious motivations, and a lack of integration in Dutch society and culture. Indeed, Alpert (2015:30) also poses the question of ‘why religions are criticised for gender segregation when it is a universally accepted dimension of sports culture?’

Mariet, however, was the only person I spoke with who had such strong opinions about separated girls’ football in the neighbourhood as backward and undesirable. Others, such as Marieke from the municipality sports department and Peter who organises sports on public playgrounds, support and facilitate girls-only sports hours, yet do so in a way that also reinforces religious difference through gender and sexuality and vice versa. Marieke deals with gender segregation in sports in the following way:

KATHRINE: How do you, the municipality, think about football being separate for girls and boys in [this neighbourhood]?

MARIET: Yeah that's difficult for us. From a political point of view, with the political parties we have in the city council, that has become a charged topic, around diversity and Islamic background. But we are from the sports section, so we always make the link with sport and not with faith. And there are just physical differences on the basis of which competitions are divided. So in that way we of course try to avoid the faith issue a bit. Because of course it plays a role and it also has to do with why playing segregated is precisely so important, that they from their own belief and cultural background feel safe in there.

Like Mariet, Marieke also makes a distinction between an 'accepted' gender segregation in sports, here motivated by sports level and 'natural' physical differences between boys and girls, and a problematised gender segregation in sports based on Islamic faith. Unlike Mariet, she is, however, not 'against' separate girls' football in the neighbourhood, and actually aims to facilitate it, motivated by the municipality's policy of making sports accessible for everybody. She, however, still thinks that Islamic reasons are at the core of Muslim girls' motivations for playing football separately, yet covers this up by politically focusing on the accepted motivations for gender-segregated sport: the supposed 'naturally' different bodies of girls and boys and the difference in sports level that are a result of that. In this way, she facilitates girls' football by reinforcing sexed and gender differences and stereotypes in football: girls cannot compete with boys in football because of 'natural' differences and therefore need their own competition. This is even more ironic because FGU aims to do exactly the opposite: teaching boys and girls that girls can be as good at football as boys are, and creating a space where boys and girls can play football together equally. Importantly, the pervasive stereotype that Muslim girls want to play sports separately from boys because of their religious background is something that is not the case for the girls in FGU, as I have also shown elsewhere (Van den Bogert, 2018). They play sports in a girls' competition because most other football spaces exclude girls, not because of religious motivations.

Peter from Sportteam facilitates a girls' football hour in his playground too, besides the 'regular' football hours during which mostly boys play. According to Peter, most girls are 'too nice' to play with boys, and then 'it just doesn't work'. Only if girls really want to and if they are good enough, they can play on the 'regular' boys' team. Peter's motivation for a separate girls' team follows the same line of argumentation as Marieke's: based on football performance level and differences between boys' and girls' bodies, it is better to have girls play football separately. Yet, facilitating girls-only football is also a way to implement Peter's informal headscarf policy. He discourages and does not allow girls to wear a headscarf during the sports hours he organises in the playground. This is an informal policy, as Peter explained to me that he cannot forbid them from wearing a headscarf, 'because that would go against freedom of religion'. Rather, he told me that he will have a conversation with

the girls to discourage it. When I asked him why exactly he does not want girls to wear a headscarf during the sports hours, he explained that it is not a matter of safety – they all have special sports headscarves – but more a way of drawing a line:

Actually, yeah, I just don't want it, because where is the line then? What is now a headscarf could become a burqa tomorrow.

Therefore, facilitating girls-only sports without boys or men being present – besides football, girls-only dance classes are also organised in an indoor playground – makes girls more willing to take off their headscarf while playing sports, and this is exactly what Peter aims for.

In the following quote from the interview, Peter's ideas on girls-only sports are further articulated, when I asked him about separated sports hours for girls:

I think it's good for some sports that girls can have their own space where they can take off their headscarves and play football with a female teacher, but then it should be a teacher who's open and who can nuance the things that happened in Paris and teaches the girls about that. And not just put one truth to the front.

As becomes clear, at Sportteam, segregated football or sports is accepted and facilitated, yet for Peter there is always the risk of embodied radicalisation through the headscarf and gender segregation. He relates a separate girls' hour and girls' headscarves in his playground, where mostly girls with Muslim and ethnic minority backgrounds play, to radical Islam and terrorism by referring to the Charlie Hebdo Shootings in Paris in January 2015. A separated girls' team, then, is accepted as long as it has an 'added value', which, for Peter, means teaching appropriate secular embodied norms and values to the girls. These are also based on the white heterosexual ideal of athletic femininity: fit, healthy, strong, sportive and slim female bodies (Evans, 2006; Van den Heuvel, 2017). Muslim girls are presumably not yet embodying this ideal because they are perceived as oppressed and inactive, supposedly because of their headscarf and covered clothing (Azzarito, 2010; Duits and Van Zoonen, 2006).

There is an explicit connection between sports, education and culturalised citizenship in this case. Sports is used to 'draw a line' between which bodies are desired and which are not – such as covered bodies – in dominant Dutch, presumed secular, norms and values of sexual emancipation and freedom. Sport is used here to cultivate a secular embodied citizen – one who looks at the world in an 'open' and 'nuanced' way. I find this corresponds strikingly with how Wekker (2016:166) critically describes white Dutch self-representations as 'deeply tolerant, ethically elevated and justified, colour-blind, and anti-racist'. By emphasising these values, it is assumed that white Dutch secular norms and values are ethically elevated, and Muslim girls do not yet have an

open mind and tend more towards Islamic fundamentalism ('this and that is the truth'), embodied radicalisation ('it could become a burqa tomorrow') or even terrorism ('Paris'), especially if they play sports in gender-segregated spaces. Although gender-segregated football hours support the no-headscarf policy, it is, for Peter, also intimately connected with 'radical Islamic' ideas. As mentioned before, when it concerns white Dutch people, gender-segregated sport is seen as a 'natural' consequence of physical differences between gendered bodies rather than associated with radical ideologies.

Mariet, Marieke and Peter explain Muslim girls' gender-segregated sporting practices from a purely Islamic perspective. They see the girls' gendered and spatial sports practices as only originating from a traditional religious and ethnic background. FGU becomes criticised for gender segregation, although the segregation of gendered bodies is inherent in sports. In the following event, which I call the Al-Qaida case, I will further describe the discursive connections that are made between gender, the embodied practice of sports and radical Islam in public spaces.

In an interview with Noor and Aliya, both volunteers and players at FGU, we talked about wearing a headscarf while playing sports, and Noor told me the following story:

One day, it was so funny, it was a comment about us, I laughed about it a lot. We were playing football and most of us were wearing a headscarf, we were with five girls. Then a Dutch guy passes by on his bicycle, and, when he sees us, he says: 'Is this a training camp for Al-Qaida or something?' Hahahaha. And I had to laugh about what he said. And I thought, how can you make this up, how could you possibly be thinking about Al-Qaida?!

Islamic clothing is associated with a radicalised body and bodily practice ('training for Al-Qaida') on the football field. I asked Noor and Aliya how they felt about this situation, to which they both mentioned their laughter about such comments, and expressed a certain resigned attitude towards the issue. They mentioned that they do not really care about such comments, and framed it as ignorance on behalf of the people who say such things:

NOOR: Yeah, what can I say about it; it's a comment they make, and we just don't pay attention to it. I don't care because they don't know what a headscarf means, so then I don't talk to these people. If you know what a headscarf means, you don't talk about Al-Qaida, because then you know what it really means.

ALIYA: Yes, I actually don't mind when they say something to me about a headscarf. I really don't mind; if I were to receive such a comment, I think I would also laugh! It's just a joke. Perhaps I would say 'Hey, join us! Then you can also wear a headscarf!'

NOOR: Indeed! Hahahaha.

Just like in Peter's playground, in this case there is also an immediate association of Muslim girls who wear headscarves and play football with terrorism and Islamic radicalism (see also Nyhagen and Halsaa, 2016). When girls wear a headscarf, they are more directly recognisable as Muslims than boys are, invoking a reaction based on Muslim girls' embodied religious difference (Smiet, 2014). In addition, for (Muslim) *boys*, exercising and playing football in public playgrounds are seen as 'normal' and therefore not suspicious. For Muslim girls, playing football is not related to 'just' playing football, but is seen as an outstanding presence of 'Islamic' bodies in supposed 'secular' and 'masculine' public spaces of football. The connection with radical Islam or Jihad is then apparently obvious, even if it is a joke. The Muslim girls in this case could be said to participate precisely in Dutch society and embody Dutch norms of emancipation and integration by playing the national Dutch sport, football, in public playgrounds, but, since they always already embody visible 'Islamic otherness', their football activities in public spaces are primarily read as related to Islam and seen as problematic and a threat, rather than as emancipation (see also Henkel, 2009; Sunier, 2009).

Football girls: Embodiments of winning and citizenship in girls' football

From the girls themselves, I seldom heard Islamic explanations or motivations for playing in a girls' football competition. Most research participants never expressed any interest in having their own segregated sporting space according to Islamic ideologies or because of their Muslim backgrounds. Most girls rather want to have their own football space as an alternative to the male-dominated public football playgrounds and to resist dominant gender norms in football (Van den Bogert, 2018). Samie (2013) argued also that the sports participation of the British Pakistani Muslim women in her research was not so much shaped by Islamic or religious factors, but by discourses and norms of female bodies exhibiting heterosexual appeal by being fit and sexy ('hetero-sexy') (see also Budgeon, 2003). In my research, the girls were not so much interested in becoming 'hetero-sexy', but implicit heteronormative ideals were part of their embodied football practices: they wanted to impress boys with their football skills and possible sexual relations between boys and girls were negotiated during girls–boys football tournaments, for example, when one player from FGU, Nina, was playing with a boys' team. This is an important issue, as often research on heteronormativity, sexuality, body politics and gender in sports focuses solely on white able-bodied women, and 'Muslim women... have traditionally been left out of such literature' (Samie, 2013: 259). Negotiations with dominant norms of femininity and sexuality in sports are often only attributed to white (presumably secular) athletes, and not to Muslim athletes, as it is assumed that only religiously gendered norms matter to them. This overlooks the ways in which gender and

heterosexuality norms in sports also shape Muslim girls' experiences, and not only religious ones.

In relation to the competition aspect in football, sometimes *ethnic* identifications were explicitly performed or mentioned on the football field rather than religious identifications. I talked with Mona and Sabia, two football players in their 20s from a women's football team in Amsterdam, about how one's ethnic background influences playing football. At first, they mentioned that ethnicity does not play a role because everyone on the field is just a football player:

MONA: I want to enter the football field as a footballer and not as a Moroccan or Dutch or whatever. And we also leave the field as a footballer.

SABIA: Except when we win.

MONA: Indeed, then we are Moroccan, haha!

Although they were clearly joking, it is also a playful but serious engagement with dominant perceptions of Moroccan–Dutch Muslim women as 'unintegrated' and 'unemancipated'. A football player from FGU also told me that, especially when a 'Moroccan' team plays against a 'Dutch' team, they insist on winning: 'then you just don't want to lose, definitely not from Dutch people'. These girls performatively reclaim and play with ethnic identification markers and perform a dominant position on the field through winning. In this way, the girls resist the 'othered' and marginalised position that is often attributed to them in dominant perceptions of Moroccan–Dutch Muslim girls as inactive, bad football players and as oppressed. El-Tayeb (2011:xxxvi, emphasis added) has conceptualised this reclaiming of ethnicity as 'queering ethnicity' in the case of hip-hop in European public space and describes it as 'forms of resistance that destabilize the ascribed essentialist identities not only by rejecting them, *but also through a strategic and creative (mis)use*'.

The strategic and creative misuse of identities, as El-Tayeb described, is also the case with the football girls in the neighbourhood. They use gender, ethnic and religious identities, and the attached stereotypes, in their strategies to win the game: some girls told me that when they play a football match against boys, the boys immediately think that they can win:

Before the match, they are like 'Yes, come on, come on, we can handle you', and that is the fun part. We act as if we cannot play football and then we prove otherwise, and then they get scared.

Some other girls told me that they employ stereotypes about Moroccan–Dutch Muslim girls in their football strategy also: 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 defeat the opponents by making one goal after another. In these ways, they use gender, ethnic and

religious difference and stereotypes to win the match, and, as Nora (16 years old) explains, winning is in the end what matters most:

NORA: People underestimate us. A lot. Two years ago, we played the National Street Football finals. The final was against a team from Heerenveen, and this was really a group with 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. But they really didn’t expect that, because they thought we couldn’t play, and they really underestimated us, so they played very nonchalant.

KATHRINE: How did you notice this during the match?

NORA: They ridiculed us, laughed, such things. If we play against another team, then you see them laughing at us from the stands. Not that we care, because in the end we are the ones who run off with the cup!

Approaching the embodied practices of playing football and winning as *becoming* and as *place-events* (Budgeon, 2003; Pink, 2011) serves to see how these are ways to challenge and resist dominant perceptions and stereotypes of Moroccan–Dutch Muslim girls in Dutch society. The place-event of playing football destabilises the essentialist identities of ‘Muslim’ ‘girl’ and ‘Moroccan–Dutch’ that are often ascribed to the girls in my research, in which they perform identifications that go beyond these categories, such as ‘winners’ or ‘football players’. By playing football – the Dutch national sport par excellence – the girls claim to be part of the Dutch society, as much as white Dutch girls, *as football players*; they embody precisely a football identity on the field and not so much an identity as Muslim or as religious minority. Noor’s reaction, for example, on the guy in the Al-Qaida case was actually the absence of a reaction: she told me that she was simply too busy with playing football. Another example is Nora, who believes that religious, racial or ethnic backgrounds should not matter on the football field, but that simply playing football is the most important thing:

In the end we are as good as them, or well... Yeah, no one is better than the other. So. 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.

Sport scholar Ratna (2011:261) also found, in her research on women’s football in the United Kingdom (UK), that the women did not want to be described in ethnic terms but as ‘players of women’s football’. Contrary to the policymakers’ and sports professionals’ assumptions and practices, the girls place themselves as part of the Dutch embodied citizenship already by playing football and by winning, and not as girls who still need to be emancipated

and integrated. This is of course always a reaction against how they are framed as Muslims and as not-yet-citizens; therefore, I am not arguing that there are no embodiments of religion and gender in playing football in public spaces, but that by playing and winning, the girls also go beyond just these embodiments and identifications. They are very much aware of Dutch stereotypical representations of them as oppressed Muslim and Moroccan–Dutch girls, and, in response to these stereotypes, they performatively play with precisely these categories of gender, ethnicity and religion through ‘a strategic and creative (mis)use’ (El-Tayeb, 2011:xxxvi).

Conclusion

In this chapter, I have shown how Muslim girls’ embodied football practices become a paradoxical part of culturalised citizenship in which Muslim football players are constructed as unintegrated and unemancipated in Dutch society. According to cultural norms and expectations about who is seen as ‘real’ Dutch citizen, Muslim girls should participate in playing football for their cultural integration and emancipation yet will never become full citizens because they are always already constructed as the essential religious ‘other’ through their embodied religious identity as Muslim girls. The FGU competition becomes criticised as unemancipated, although gender segregation is inherent in most sports. To compare, white girls’ football teams are never problematised regarding gender segregation, nor are boys’ teams. Yet, importantly, citizenship is not only constructed through dominant discourses of culturalised citizenship, but also through the embodied practices of marginalised groups in society, like the football girls in my research. I have shown how they incorporate religion and gender identities into their football strategies, with the goal to win the game, and with the ultimate goal to ‘undo’ precisely these embodied gendered and religious identities on the football field and rather construct an embodiment as football players and as Dutch citizens. Their embodied football practices are not meant towards strengthening religious and gendered identifications, but rather in strengthening their identifications and embodiments as *football players*. The football girls thus embody citizenship in a way that exceeds the category of Islam and that of gender.

To come to this insight, it has been crucial to focus on playing football as embodied practice and to place this practice in the gendered and heterosexualised organisation of sports culture. The relationship between religion, gender and embodiment is often only studied in the context of churches, religious rituals or explicitly religious (sport) spaces; hence, it is not surprising that there the embodiment refers to specific religious identifications or practices. In my research, however, the girls played football in urban public football spaces that were not explicitly religious but constructed through secular gendered and heterosexual norms. It is important to acknowledge that Muslim girls’ sporting embodiments are

not primarily constructed by religious norms, but also by dominant gendered and heterosexualised sports culture. This research shows that the girls' ways of critically engaging with dominant culturalised citizenship, which constructs Muslim girls as not 'real' Dutch citizens, were not performed through a *religious* embodied agency, but through a *football* embodied agency: winning. Embodiment, in this case, is not referring to specific categories of identities, but is conceptualised as an event (Budgeon, 2003), or place-event (Pink, 2011), which encompasses the embodied resistance to the dominant perceptions of culturalised citizenship, religion, Muslim minorities and gender in the Netherlands. This embodied resistance is part of the place-event of the urban football playground, where religion and gender are embodied and performed, but where embodiments also go beyond these identifications. In the place-event of the urban football playground, bodies become constituted every time again through the performative and embodied practice of playing football together.

Note

- 1 As with all other names of organisations, people and specific locations (playgrounds) in this chapter, FGU is a pseudonym.

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