



**Master Thesis**

Master Programme:

Religion and Pluralism: Ancient and Modern

Religious Pluralism a context that influences the perception of  
Gender Roles and Sexuality:  
Ethnography of young people in the Groningen Feminist Network

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"Human diversity makes tolerance more than a virtue; It makes it a requirement  
for survival." René Dubos



### Special Thanks:

I would like to thank the University of Groningen and the Faculty of Theology and Religious Studies. All the teachers from this master programme that gave me the possibility to learn from an historical and theological perspective challenging my capacities as well as the contemporary subjects for continuously challenging the assumptions that we create as humans and researchers. As well as my supervisor professor Kim Knibbe and second advisor professor Brenda Bartelink

A big thanks to the GFN people that made this project very special.

I would also like to thank my mother, father and brother for supporting my choices and for all the love. A special thanks to my friends Inês, Fábria and Verónica that show me every day how important friends are, and that distance can't separate friendship. To end I would like to thank Lars for making me believe in myself and challenge myself every day.



## **Abstract**

This research was developed for the obtainment of a Master in Arts on the programme of Religious Pluralism: Ancient and Modern. The focus of this is how religious pluralism provides a context where different identities come to play and intersect. When we analyze religious pluralism and politics of gender and sexuality in the Netherlands they seem irreconcilable. This research brings attention from a qualitative approach into understanding how young people from the Groningen Feminist Network navigate different identities in this context. By focusing on how religious pluralism was constructed as well as the discourses of gender and sexuality framed in this notion of the secular we can understand that all forms of femininity are a target of gender discrimination and inequalities, and homosexuality as other non-heteronormative identities and behavior still face discrimination inside and outside the law, there is still a long way to go in these secular-liberal societies that like the Netherlands face this issues, especially now that this confrontation with different religious and cultural “others” force us to confront with our own actions.

## **Keywords**

Religious Pluralism; Gender Roles; Sexuality; Secular; Young people’s identity; The Netherlands; Groningen Feminist Network



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## Introduction

This master thesis was developed in the context of the Master Programme Religion and Pluralism: Ancient and Modern, in the Faculty of Theology and Religious Studies from the University of Groningen. This research aims to understand how religious pluralism influences young people perception of gender roles and sexuality when influenced by their social and cultural context, and constructed concepts of gender and religious influence in a post-modern society. This research is design based on a qualitative approach to explore the emic perspective of young adults that attend the Groningen Feminist Network by the use of strategies like participant observation and semi-structured interviews.

In terms of academic relevance gender and sexuality play a big part in human societies and they're related to all forms of social, cultural and economic structures. In a time where the religious phenomenon is present in all of these structures in the western context contrary to what was expected with the end of Modernity (Duque, 2009), it is crucial to understand how religious pluralism, presents itself in the context of secular-progressive Dutch society. "The acceptance of difference is considered a primary virtue for Dutch people" (Davie, 2007:237), as well as the policies described by the author on dealing with pluralism, this characterization made by Davie (2007) portrays an assumption of the social and political environment in the national context of this research. The influences of religious norms not only present in the private sphere of a specific religion but as a cultural footprint are impossible to separate in modern secular societies. These are shaped by pluralism, generating relevant and important social and cultural phenomenon's when understanding the identity process of individuals. This research will focus specifically on young people from ages of 18 to 33 that attend the Groningen Feminist Network, a network for created for the education and discussion of topics that intersects with feminism in the city and worldwide. With this general picture, we arrive at the objective of this thesis and consequently to the research question, understanding how young people navigate (in the context mentioned above) gender roles and sexuality.

In terms of personal motivation this topic is relevant because of the general social disregard for all of the concepts present in this research, religion is seen as



not relevant anymore or just as weapon for extremists in mainstream media, pluralism is disregarded with the normative cultural aspects of each particular society and religious tradition, gender roles even though they slowly changed in the last 30 years, (and besides the public assumption of equality) is still not a reality in any of the democratic modern states, and has we will also see also not in the Netherlands. Sexuality is in every aspect of culture and media discourse but is still a taboo when it comes to communicate with younger generations.

To be able to answer this research question the thesis will aim first to answer these sub-questions: 1<sup>st</sup> to what extent is religious pluralism a reality within the context of the Groningen Feminist Network? 2<sup>nd</sup> What is the influence of religious pluralism on gender roles in a social secular context? 3<sup>rd</sup> What is the influence of religious pluralism on sexuality in a social secular context? 4<sup>th</sup> How do gender roles and sexuality intertwine in terms of expression and identity? And 5<sup>th</sup> To what extent are the main concepts of the research an essential factor for identity construction of the participants?

### **1.1 What is Religious Pluralism?**

Religious Pluralism is highly influenced by the historical context of ancient Rome as explain by the programme coordinator professor Steve Mason. The times we live in today's world and particularly in the Western context, where this study is framed, is not so different from the religious pluralistic design of ancient Rome. Pluralism is a term that in the social sciences and in particular in anthropology can have at least two different meanings when combined with the study of religion. One is used as a description of diversity, religious pluralism as in, more than one religion in the same environment, indicating interactions between them (empirical and analytical), and the second as a tolerant and accepting position towards different religions from a religious point of view. In a simplified way, one expresses diversity, the other an attitude towards diversity. But as it will be addressed the conceptualization of religious pluralism is more complex than it may appear.

The assumption of religious pluralism as a context comes from the conceptualization of the readings from authors like Peter Berger, *Pluralism*,



*Protestantization, and the Voluntary Principle* and, Grace Davie *Tolerance and Democracy: Theory and Practice in Europe*; based on Berger's (2007) argument that religious pluralism is the natural consequence of modernity.

### **But What Are We Talking About When We Talk About Religious Pluralism?**

Different authors define religious pluralism in the context of their researches. Since the research focus is mainly the European and Dutch context of religious pluralism, for this the work of authors like Peter L. Berger, Grace Davie and James A. Beckford form the basis of conceptualization. Davie (2007) distinguishes three definitions of religious pluralism, adding to what was above mentioned, first in terms of religious diversity "At one level, the word pluralism describes the extent of religious diversity" (Davie, 2007:225), and second the moral stand on religious diversity from a religious an individual or group, "The third meaning of the term is qualitatively different—it evokes the moral or political values associated with increasingly varied forms of religion and whether these changes should, or should not, be encouraged." (Davie, 2007:224). This third definition could be understood as a secular reception and regulation of religious pluralism as a phenomenon. This idea is important to understand how society and groups such as the one this research focus on accommodates religious differences, and crucial to analyze religious pluralism as a context since this accommodation is an inevitable process (even religious pluralism as an ideology is many-sided, as discussed by Beckford (2003). Beckford (2014), adds one more layer to Davie's conceptualization, separating the third meaning into two necessary and different categories:

– Meanings of religious pluralism:

(a) empirical religious diversity (b) normative ideas about the positive value of religious diversity (c) the frameworks of public policy, law and social practices which recognize, accommodate, regulate and facilitate religious diversity (d) the social relational contexts of everyday interactions between individuals and groups in settings where religious differences are considered relevant. (Beckford, 2014:21)

Beckford argues that for analytical purposes it is necessary to separate normative pluralism from empirical diversity, once those distinctions are made for the sake

of understanding what is being analyzed, it is necessary to understand that normative pluralism is a consequence of empirical diversity, and as the author mentioned they overlap, looking on the “outside” as one thing. To aim to study (d) “the social relational contexts of everyday interactions between individuals and groups in settings where religious differences are considered relevant”, is to acknowledge analytical diversity, the normative ideas that result from interactions and the social, political and legal frameworks that accommodate and regulate religious diversity. So when we refer to religious pluralism all the categories above mentioned by Beckford (2014), form the context that these research establishes and purposes to study in the Netherlands and specifically in the GFN.

When we speak of pluralism, it is important to remember that we do not mean a single mode to adjust to and to deal with diversity of culture in general and religion in particular, but we refer to a number of strategies involving religions, the State and the civil society. It is a continuous process of negotiation and re-negotiation, in an ongoing effort to maintain and preserve the boundaries between the different social spheres in a world that makes these boundaries ever more porous and fragile. (Giordan, 2014:9)

Berger defends that religious pluralism is a consequence of Modernity, as it was mentioned previously, contrary to the idea that with modernity religious would slowly disappear. According to Berger (2007) religious pluralism as two implications: institutional, creating a “religious market” and changing the way institutions relate and negotiate; and cognitive (more relevant for this research). These cognitive implications of religious pluralism changed the paradigm of how individuals conceptualize religion, losing its taken-for-granted status:

“Pluralism undermines this sort of homogeneity. Individuals are continually confronted with others who do not take for granted what was so taken traditionally in their community. They must now reflect about the cognitive and normative assumptions of their tradition, and consequently they must make choices. “(Berger, 2007:23)

The consequences of religious pluralism are both an individualization of faith, and

vulnerability, given its new subjective form (Berger, 2007:23), something that is also clearly related with secularism.

## 1.2 What is Secularity?

Clearly secularity is a concept that has value to this research because the practical arrangements that secularity contains depending on the national context creates a unique environment where religion and the secular meet and can potentially clash. When studying religious pluralism, it becomes more evident that secularity is in itself a form of diversity that interacts with religious identities, providing a special environment since secularity and the secular are considered (in democratic-states policies) an ultimate goal, as a neutral ground for the experience of diversity. In this paragraph before conceptualizing secularity it is necessary to distinguish these three concepts that intertwine when we discuss either one of them, the first is Secularism (ideology); the second is Secularity (practical arrangements in society); and third is the Secular (nature of the environment;)

Allegiance to secularity is pervasive in modern-day democratic societies. However, the understanding of its contents diverges between two distant meanings – while most societies claim that their political communities are secular simply because they are separated from religious influence, some societies require that political life and exercise of public authority remain completely blind to the existence of religion, while other conceive secularity primarily as reduction of religion to private sphere. For the benefit of easier understanding, a terminological differentiation should be made between *secularism*, as a doctrine requiring strict separation of state and church, and *secularity*, understood as quality reached at certain level of separation of church from state. (Rakitic, 2015: no page)

Secularity appears as a central concept for this research also, because it's impossible to talk about religion and in particular religious pluralism in modern nation-states without mentioning what the practical arrangements of secularity (separation of state and religion) mean in society and how they take place and influence different environments of social and religious life. With the privatization of religion, the public sphere becomes what is known to be secular. Secularism

appears as an ideology to obliterate the religious influences from public life, but instead we see the secular being a mixture of cultural and societal norms. In itself the secular has no meaning because and is highly influenced by religion. Without religion in society there is no secularity.

I will argue that the scholarly attention on the empirical and normative dimensions of secularization, secularity, and secularism has proceeded to define the “secular” without much attention to what counts as religion. This is problematic because it is now well accepted that the distinction between what is religious and what is secular is generally rooted in the Western Christian tradition and more particularly related to theological responses to pluralization within Western Christianity following the Protestant Reformation and to philosophical challenges posed by the Enlightenment. (Modak-Truran, 2013:1)

With this said, it is important to conclude this conceptualization by presenting one last dimension within secularity. This concept explored by Schuh, Burchardt & Wohlrab-Sahr (2012), is ‘Multiple Secularities’. If secularity captures “the institutionally, culturally and symbolically anchored forms of differentiation between religion and other social spheres”, then different forms of legitimizing secularity in their complex and ever changing historical and cultural grounds create multiple secularities. These different contexts that reveal the need to re-conceptualize the singular form of approaching secularity can be understood because of the “ambivalent” effect which colonial encounters and immigration had in different countries in the world (Schuh, Burchardt & Wohlrab-Sahr, 2012), and as also argued by the authors these “secularities ‘respond’ to specific societal problems as their reference problems and offer ‘solutions’ to them. Having this concept in mind, it is possible to move forward in this research, by being critically aware of its own contextual specificities.

Religion, pluralism, secularity are deeply connected, and their expressions are worth academic focus in the different contexts and groups so we can understand how they depend and shape each other, but also the environment. In the next point attention will be directed to gender roles and sexuality, so we can later explore and analyze how these different categories come together.

### 1.3 Gender Roles and Sexuality individual concepts and how they are related;

The best way to start conceptualizing gender roles is by understanding the category gender, and how it differs from sex (biological term). Scott (1999) explores the definition of gender, “—feminists have in a more literal and serious vein begun to use ‘gender’ as a way of referring to the social organization of the relationship between the sexes. “ (Scott, 1999:57). Feminist scholars were and still are of great importance in this field, and created the solid ground where research is done today. Gender as an analytical category is the subject of study that is explained by Scott (1999):

Its use explicitly rejects biological explanations, (...). Instead, gender becomes a way of denoting ‘cultural constructions’ – the entirely **social creation of ideas about appropriate roles for women and men**. It is a way of referring to the exclusively social origins of the subjective identities of men and women. Gender is, in this definition, a social category imposed on a sexed body. Gender seems to have become a particularly useful word as studies of sex and sexuality have proliferated, for it offers a way of differentiating sexual practice from the social **roles assigned to women and men**. Although scholars acknowledge the connection between sex and (what the sociologists of the family called) ‘sex roles’, these scholars do not assume a simple or direct linkage. The use of gender emphasizes an entire system of relationships that may include sex, but is not directly determined by sex nor directly determining of sexuality. (Scott, 1999:59)

In this paragraph three important points are made, first is the direct link between gender and performance (role), second the separation between sexual differences (biology) and gender, this is crucial to understand gender roles, and underlying discrimination in these categories. Third its connection to culture and society as signifying and shaping how these categories are created shaped. With these explanations we can already extrapolate that gender roles are the roles that one individual plays in a cultural and social context. It is not the goal of this research to assess what determines gender roles, given the complexity of this job requiring first, as shown by Scott, a historical analysis and understanding of different theoretical positions. On the other hand it is important for this research to



understand how individuals navigate these gender roles, as a part of their identity.

In terms of conceptualizing sexuality, Vance (1991) introduces sex as being in the center of humanity and society through times. But once it comes to defining sexuality there is no definition for the concept as an independent aspect of the individual or society, as also supported by Connel & Dowsett (1999), “One of the basic problems in social framing theory is the lack of a definition of sexuality outside the act of scripting or controlling” (Connell & Dowsett, 1999:186). It is important to use sexuality as a category for this research given its relation to religion, being both part of human life and society. It is important to understand the navigation of sexuality in a context where religious pluralism reigns, especially given Europe’s tradition of Christianity hegemony, and the consequent secularization that dictated sexuality. The study of sexuality gained attention through similar routes as gender studies (seen above), as a response to feminists and homosexual scholars studying gender and identity (Vance, 1991:876). Sexuality agglomerates different ideas. Both connected to identity and behavior, and both are important for this research and approached as interconnected. Padgug (1999) distinguishes the biological (preconditions) and cultural (human reality) nature of sexuality, and argues that:

The content of sexuality is ultimately provided by human social relations, human productive activities, and human consciousness. The history of sexuality is therefore the history of a subject whose meaning and contents are in a continual process of change (Padgug, 1999:20)

Foucault is one of the biggest references on the work of sexuality; his contribution doesn’t focus on the biological, nativism perspective, but on the social, and more specifically historical perspective (as cultural historian), viewing sexuality as an historical construct, his work influenced all recent work on sexuality as we can see above in Padgug (1999). One of the most important critiques to the historical approach and sexual politics discourse is according to Connell and Dowsett (1999):

“Sexuality is more than a domain in which history is enacted. It is constitutive of history itself. Society does not simply construct sexuality, society is constructed sexually. Once this is accepted we cannot be content with images of moulding,



regulating, controlling.” (Connell & Dowsett, 1999:189)

Even though history and society provides an inevitable context for sexuality to be enacted, the subjects that embodies sexuality shape society, it is an interchangeable process, which not only includes sexual practices but the narratives and beliefs surrounding sexuality and what is socially accepted (Holland et al., 1999). Which makes it relevant to study in the context of post-modern pluralistic societies.

The study of sexuality then becomes the study of social interactions in a particular social, cultural and political context. “Sexuality includes people’s sexual identities in all their cultural and historical variety.” (Holland et al., 1999). A tradition that started with Freud’s work, where we can understand how the study of sexuality evolved from a biological discourse (Darwinism) to a psychosocial one:

“(…) actual sexualities are not received as a package from biology; that adult sexuality is arrived at by a highly variable and observable process of construction, not only by an “unfolding” of the natural; and that social process is deeply implicated in this construction” (Connell & Dowsett, 1999:184)

Sexuality and gender are separate systems that intertwine (Vance, 1991:876). If gender roles are the roles that one individual plays in a cultural and social context, and sexuality is the expression of sexual behavior and identity mainly constructed with social interaction how do they relate to one and other? “Sexuality involves relations of power within genders as well as between them” (Connell & Dowsett, 1999:187). The way an individual navigates sexual identity, is connected to their gender and intrinsically related to the role that play in society and vice-versa.





## 2. Methodology

### 2.1 Research Design

To understand better the goal of this research how this goal is going to be achieved it is necessary to explore the research questions presented in the introduction section, and how they are going to be answered. To keep in mind that the general question of this research is, how do young people navigate gender roles and sexuality in the context of religious pluralism in the Netherlands? The next points will try explain how the research will focus on answering the sub-questions.

In order to comply with the proposed objectives, this research strategy is designed to apply a qualitative methodological approach using qualitative methods, using data collection techniques, namely semi-structured interviews, and participant observation, as well as literature research that will necessarily follow all phases of the research process. The research paradigm is interpretative as this research is an ethnography/case study, “Qualitative research is a form of interpretive inquiry, in which researchers make an interpretation of what they see, hear and understand” (Creswell & Mason, 2002:176). Because this is a thesis in the field of Religious Studies and Anthropology, which aims to interact with young people, this methodology proves to be the most adequate for its flexibility and the possibility of direct interaction with the social environment and with the subjects studied, with the use of inductive data analysis:

“Qualitative researchers, build their patterns categories, and themes from the bottom up, by organizing the data into increasingly more abstract units of information. This inductive process illustrates working back and forth between the themes and the database until the researchers have established a comprehensive set of themes. It may also involve collaborating with the participants interactively, so that participants have a chance to shape themes or abstractions that emerge from the process” (Creswell & Mason, 2002:175)

Eleven intensive semi-structured interviews, face to face with the participants of the Groningen Feminist Network and board members; and participant observation to have first-hand experience in the field of study, by





participating in weekly meetings, specific events hosted by the GFN and other collaboration events.

1<sup>st</sup> To what extent is religious pluralism a reality within the context of the Groningen Feminist Network? The way to develop and answer this question is to understand the influence that religion may have had and still may has in the participant's lives; Their thoughts on accommodating religious diversity in the Netherlands, (Positive or negative values of religious diversity), and in accommodating religious diversity inside the GFN. As well as getting the board members thoughts and actions to accommodate religious diversity, and how it translates in terms of a plural group. To explore the dimension of religious pluralism it is also crucial to capture the interaction between people with different religious backgrounds inside the GFN from the participant's own experience, and how their own religious and cultural background adds to the group diversity and environment.

2<sup>nd</sup> What is religious pluralism influence on gender roles in a social secular context? In order to obtain an answer to this question it is necessary to understand the influence that religion and religious pluralism may have had and still has in the participant's lives when it comes to understand gender roles, and when it comes to "play" a gender roles in the different contexts of life (family, school/work, politics, etc.). Focusing on their surrounding environment, in this case the Dutch secular context.

3<sup>rd</sup> What is religious pluralism influence on sexuality in a social secular context? It is necessary to understand the influence that religion may have had and still may have in the participant's lives when it comes to sexuality; and how they understand the influence that sexuality may have in their lives (in different contexts). Followed by their perception on how religious diversity and pluralism might influence their sexuality, and the influence of the Dutch social secular context in perceiving sexuality.

4<sup>th</sup> How do gender roles and sexuality intertwine in terms of expression and identity? In order to answer this question it is necessary to understand what the participants understand of both concepts, developed in the questions above, and question how do they perceive the way different gender roles and identities influence sexuality; and their own perception of how their gender identity and



role(s) influences their sexuality, and in what way do they feel its connected?

5<sup>th</sup> To what extent are the main concepts of the research an essential factor for identity construction of the participants? The way to answer this question goes through understanding how does a religious pluralistic context influence the participant's ideas of themselves and others; and by identifying and questioning what is the space and the impact that gender roles has in their daily lives, and how does it reflect in the way you identify and others categorize you, as well as, identifying what is the space and the impact that sexuality has in their lives, and how does it reflect in the way they identify and are categorized.

There were different reasons that made possible the choice of the Groningen Feminist Network as the target of this study. The first one was the necessity to focus on a group that included mainly if not exclusively young people. Second the sample had to have some kind of visible but flexible borders, but at the same time with a reasonable and achievable number of participants for representation of the group during the study, last and possibly most important was the involvement of the participants with reflexive academic topics or at least social ideas related to different and intersectional topics. After this description it is inevitable not to see the GFN as the perfect sample for this study, as this group is not only a group of young adults, mostly students from different national contexts, cultural and social backgrounds but at the same time, what connects them and brings them to this network are different questions and opinions on social problems not only regarding women but all the intersections that feminism includes nowadays, creating the possibility to reflect on the topic of this research. Likewise, this choice was made due to feasibility reasons and given the qualitative and in-depth nature of the present investigation.

The interviewees profile is based on the following data, young people between the ages of 18 and 35 years old living in Groningen, Netherlands; board members, network members, and just regular meeting participants from the Groningen Feminist Network, with different nationalities (including Dutch nationality) characteristic from the group given the amount of international students in the city. The identity of the interviewees will be kept anonymous, with fictitious names being assigned for practical and ethical purposes, and this information is given to the participants first hand as they agree to participate in

the research.

Why are young people such an important group to be studied, to the detriment of other age groups, especially on the subject of religious pluralism, gender roles and sexuality? This study understands young people, as key element in understanding the past the present and the future, since they represent the education given by an older generation and are the main actors of current change that will influence the future of next generations. Given this information, it is crucial to understand how religious pluralism interacts with gender roles and sexuality in the lives of young people who can tell us how this contrasted from previous generations (for example by family relations), and how it tends to manifest itself in contemporary society.

The sample for the study was based on the selection of an intentional non-probabilistic sample of convenience, since it is a qualitative study that does not intend to make generalizations, but rather seeks to deepen the data obtained through the interviews that allow to fulfill the objectives outlined. The focus is thus placed more on the validation of the research, rather than on the statistical fidelity of the collected empirical data. As far as data collection is concerned, a compromise agreement on informed consent has ensured the acceptance by respondents of the provision of information through writing and sound and its use for academic purposes.

## 2.2 Ethics

The purpose of this paragraph is to reassure some already mentioned points regarding academic ethics. This research is designed and conducted with the ethical preoccupation to:

- Ensure quality and integrity by following the ethical guidelines of the Faculty, and always applying a reflexive approach;
- Seek informed oral consent from the subjects, as it was expressed above;
- Respect the confidentiality by anonymity of the research participants by not using the real names or other specific markers of the participants in the thesis;
- Ensure that the participants will participate in the study voluntarily through their oral consent, as it was expressed above;

- Show that the research is independent and impartial by being reflexive and critical of my own limitations as a researcher.

### **3. Theoretical Framework:**

#### **3.1 Understanding the study of Religious Pluralism in Europe and in the Netherlands**

As stated before the social, political and cultural context of this research is the Netherlands. But before exploring critically the Dutch context and its relevance for this research, it is first important to present a wider context where the Netherlands are included, for means of understanding it better and for reflexive comparison.

Europe until very recently and to some degree even today was very homogenous in terms of religious diversity when compared to other regions in the world. Where Christianity reigns (most areas in the south and central Europe with a Judeo-Christian history) and the borders between Protestant and Catholic traditions are clear and somewhat pacific. After the II World War, and as a consequence of the economic boost in central and north Europe there was a big wave of migration from both old colonies and southern European countries, (some permanent and other temporary immigrants) contributed to the religious pluralization of Europe (Casanova, 2007). For this reason, it is impossible to talk about religious pluralism in Europe without understanding the migration waves that happened post-IIWW. Especially given the strong secularization period in Europe with the end of the war.

These two new elements (migration and secularization) created the common ground where each country with its own particularities developed their accommodation to religious pluralism. Casanova (2007) in his paper comparing Immigration and Religious Pluralism in the European Union and in the USA, states, “in continental Europe at least, immigration and Islam are almost synonymous” (Casanova 2007:61). Before coming back to this statement it is important to clarify that this is a reality mainly in countries that had colonies with Islamic traditions, or/and countries that promised more financial stability, giving a picture of



“Europe” highly focused on central and northern Europe (Britain, France, West Germany and the Netherlands). It is important to mention that most of the countries with exception of France (also displays a very distinct process of assimilation) are Protestant; this clarification will prove its necessity later in this chapter. Coming back to the challenge that Muslim are represented as the face of migration in Europe, they face several challenges which is somewhat evident given the homogenous context mentioned above, and the intensification of secular policies.

“This entails a superimposition of different dimensions of otherness that exacerbates issues of boundaries, accommodation, and incorporation. The immigrant, the religious, the racial and the socioeconomic disprivileged other all tend to coincide” (Casanova, 2007:62)

This is the general context of Europe when it comes to religious pluralism. The idea that we are over this process of accommodation is not real. The accommodation policies that were implemented at the beginning of the migration waves, lead Europe to our contemporary situation. Today policies have to adapt to the 2nd and 3rd generation’s needs, “Each generation, moreover, presents particular issues—that is, specific combinations of assimilation and difference.” (Davie, 2007:230), especially in this time of refugee crisis.

A European identity is characterized by “Christian cultural identity” (Casanova, 2007:63), but also a very secular identity is present, and both interact in complex ways. That plays a big role not only in social and cultural expression and behavior but also in policy, fomenting the privatization and individualization of religion. Like Casanova (2007) points out this leads to the characterization done by Grace Davie “believing without belonging”, and also to the contrary showed by Danièle Hervieu-Léger “belonging without believing”. Creating a puzzle of identities inverse to what we see with Muslim immigrants. In European societies characterized by religious pluralism, the conflict is between the private forms of beliefs and the public sphere and how religion is displayed in these spaces. Especially with Islam the limits of religious freedom in the public sphere is challenged, because Islam is a religion that stands outside the norm (Christianity),

and has been under public scrutiny since the 9/11 attack.

The same characteristic that makes protestant tradition more tolerant towards other traditions (with countries like Germany and the Netherlands receiving a great number of Muslim immigrants given their need of labor), and to pluralism, in general, is a double-edged sword; Berger (2007) says that:

Protestantism clearly has what may be called a comparative advantage over other religious traditions (...) in their emphasis on the conscience of the individual, have an a priori affinity with modern individuation and thus with pluralist dynamic. (Berger, 2007:25)

This individuation is a process that does not sit with some traditions that migrated to the Protestant countries, that at first could be seen as accepting of new religious identities given their own religious history; most of this immigrants developed their sense of self according to the relation to their religious traditions (for example Islam), that is different than the individual sense seen in secularized countries.

If we look at religious pluralism in Europe as explored by Davie (2007), “the study of new religious movements and the questions that such movements raise for democracy”, and the “relationship between newcomer and host society”, we are left with different challenges depending on the social and cultural context. What is the particularity of religious pluralism in the Netherlands?

## The Netherlands

As explained before religious pluralism is undeniably connected to immigration, and the Netherlands weren't immune to this process. In fact, the Dutch relationship with pluralism and diversity is prior to the context presented above. Wijzen and Vroom (2015), explore the historical and contemporary perspective of religious pluralism and politics in the Netherlands, starting in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. There are three important moments that characterize the history of tolerance in this early period. As Wijzen and Vroom (2015) explore in their article these 3 moments; the first was the transformation of the Reformed Church into the public church, that made possible for other churches to be tolerated and having more freedom than was what was seen in other countries,



the second moment was the shelter provided to Jews (refugees) that ran away from the Inquisition (Spain and Portugal). The third moment was the active action of granting freedom of religion, which started during the Napoleon occupation and was established in the constitution of 1848 (Wijzen & Vroom, 2015:43). This was the foundation where the tolerant Dutch identity was first built on, and where religious pluralism started.

If we can say that religious pluralism is an old reality in the Netherlands and that the country has a tradition with tolerance, it is not difficult to assume that this is connected to the country's own process of secularization. The process of secularity itself was highly influenced by this approach even before the modern period that leads to the current situation. These moments mentioned in the paragraph above were central for the later process of secularization in the Netherlands, first with pacification of group conflicts, and second guarantying individual liberties (Schuh, et al., 2012:361). This brings us to the very particular way the Netherlands deals with religious diversity, the pillar system. As we move towards the 20<sup>th</sup> century the pillar system determined how religious pluralism was managed and still visible nowadays; this is because this political system is a way of dealing with diversity by creating circles, or pillars (since the constitution of 1848) (Wijzen & Vroom, 2015:48) and guaranteeing their freedom, by recognizing their existence in society and circumscribing their religious or political identity and expressions to those circles. In the Dutch society, the pillarization system is mean to deal with complication regarding religious diversity, and secularity is used 'for the sake of accommodation religious-ideological diversity' (Schuh, et al., 2012). This particular way of establishing the limits between the religious and the secular, and the private and the public was not without flaws when assuming that a unified sense of nationalism would be created in society shared by people from different religious groups. And in this sense with accommodating and integrating diversity, "the liberal project helped sharpen the divide between liberals and religious groups as well as the confessional divide." (Schuh, et al. 2012:363). Schuh, et al. (2012) show that the divide in the society shaped from a confrontation of religious and ideological tradition to a stronger dualistic confrontation between the religious and the secular, now visible in different domains of society, like education, political





parties, press and other associations.

It is now relevant to mention the period after the Second World War, in order to understand how the religious pluralistic dynamic changed. First, we have to understand how the Dutch natives themselves adapted their understanding of religion to the new post-war reality, and how the change of national discourses tended to a focus on individual liberties, and issues of gender and sexuality (for example, abortion). “Significantly, this process of secularization went hand in hand with an accentuated liberalization of cultural values and lifestyles (...) Dutch population have distanced themselves from moral traditionalism;” (Schuh, et al., 2012:365). As a response to the atrocities committed during the Nazi occupation, and the war, and continuing the process that had already started in the 1930’s, Dutch society became a “post-Christian secular majority” when some decades before they were one of the most churched. This was possible given the reinforcement of the ‘depillarization’, that was desired by all the different parts of society including the confessional ranks. If we look from the perspective of multiple secularities the shift from ‘secularity for the sake of balancing religious diversity’ seen in the beginning is no longer as present as “secularity for the sake of individual freedom” a consequence from the ‘ostentatious cultural liberalism’ of modernity. (Schuh, et al., 2012:366)

When confronted with new religious “others” that fell outside the Judeo-Christian umbrella, impacted with an acquired model of progressive secularity (see, Schuh et al., 2012:351), the idea that the secular is the basis of human society and constitutes the normative reality; tensions and conflicts were as we will see unavoidable. It’s an ultimate confrontation “between secular progressivism as a cultural force on the one hand, and the commitment to minority rights on the other” (Schuh, et al., 2012:353). There were two different groups of origins that were attracted to the Netherlands to work given the economic growth. The first group successfully integrated into the Dutch society, this included European migrants from Italy, Spain, and Asian, Chinese-Indonesian. The second group created a bigger challenge in terms of integration that is still visible today, “The Netherlands finally encouraged immigration from colonial territories, notably Surinam, but also from Turkey and more recently from Morocco” (Davie 2007:229). This group was formed of guest workers from Morocco and Turkey,



most of them Muslims. (Wijsen & Vroom, 2015:44). It was not their religious identity in itself that made the process of integration difficult if we understand that mosques were built for the temporary workers and the initial attitude towards the newcomers was based on respect for their traditions language and culture based on cultural relativism:

For a long time, politicians did not take cultural and religious differences seriously. Criticism of the other cultures and worldviews was taboo; They were simply declared equally valid and without any serious study to back up the claim, as sharing the same morality (Wijsen & Vroom, 2015:47)

This attitude is expected if we understand that both parties had something to gain with the arrangement of guest work (work that needed to be done and workers that needed to make money to bring back home). It was only when the guest workers decided they wanted to stay and the work conditions changed that the problems started showing. This change of settings chronologically was from the idea of temporary work in the 60's from the abandonment of going back to the country of origin in the 80's, and the multicultural ideas that were put in practice. To the 90's public debate shift as well as the competing ideas of secularity that were operated within the freedom of speech debates in parliament (Schuh, et al., 2012). This shift was in part due to the change of work circumstances and the fact that guest workers stayed unemployed at the cost of the Dutch social security system, political debates that included the discussion of the social security system had to consider the effects of immigration and religious pluralism (Wijsen & Vroom, 2015).

The Catholic and Protestant that represent statistically the bigger number of immigrants accommodated their religious practices with the secularization of the public and political sphere, even though socially they are not viewed in the same way. The pillar system ends up creating two opposite results in this case, either isolates from social relationships outside of their own group those who choose their faith, or the faith goes second plan (or is disregarded) in favor of integration into the Dutch society.

But it was not until recently with the two incidents involving the murders



of two openly critic figures of Islam (Schuh, Burchardt & Wohlrab-Sahr (2012), and Davie (2007)), that the religious “other” became a “problem” in the political and public debate. “Islam was increasingly constructed as the “other” of Dutch national culture (...)” (Schuh, et al., 2012:350) there was a “change from tolerance and relatively non-problematic integration of some new minorities to suspicion and intolerance” (Wijsen & Vroom, 2015:43). As supported by Schuh, Burchardt & Wohlrab-Sahr (2012), the last two decades were marked by the discussion around “the alleged ‘failures of multiculturalism’, and the complex spectrum of public religious diversity. (...) In these discussions, multi-culturist approaches to integration were fundamentally questioned.” (Schuh, et al., 2012:350). The problem was no longer accommodating a new “different” faith system in a secular country, but how to manage different generations problems and the condition of living “between two cultures” in a situation of “poverty, bad housing, bad health, and youth crime, especially among Moroccans” (Wijsen & Vroom, 2015:46).

The Netherlands that represents a multicultural and religious pluralistic front, is suffering (for some years now) with “the consequences of this postmodern paradigm” (Wijsen & Vroom, 2015:46) that has resulted in cultural dissonance. And in order for Islam to be integrated into the Dutch society, the separation between the public and the private sphere would have to change. This means that the highly secularized dimension of the public sphere in the Netherlands shocks when confronted with a public display of the Muslim identity (less secularized). This shock gives politicians space to create political agendas and an enemy with a face, the Muslim, “The idea that all cultures have the same value has been replaced by the idea that the West is best (...) The question that both right and left wing politicians are asking is: What does Islam do for its own people?” (Wijsen & Vroom, 2015:47). The opposite also happens and the young, new generations when presented with their own circumstances and compare them with their Dutch peers become uncertain of what their country can do for them,

As Wijsen and Vroom (2015) argue, in present days the third generation is much more integrated into the broader society than what was seen twenty years ago (for example when it comes to speaking the language and inner groups, a consequence of socialization). As mentioned by Schuh et al. (2012), it is not that



religious believers are discriminated as a practice but the legal and political discourses problematize religion, shifting the way secularity is imagined and constructed. And as also mentioned by Wijzen and Vroom (2015) Dutch neutrality does not mean anti-religious policies, but the impartiality towards religion. This fluctuation of discourse and policies to accommodate religious pluralism especially towards Muslim communities is also very dependent on the local legislators, and their decision to include or exclude religious groups in the public domain. In the end, only time will tell if the “‘pillarization’ is a useful strategy for managing religious diversity and promoting the emancipation of religious minorities” (Wijzen & Vroom, 2015:63).

### **3.2 Understanding how the study of religion, secularity, gender, and sexuality intersects**

At this point, it is important to understand how different scholars approached in their own work these different concepts. We already know that in theory all these concepts are a part of social interaction and are framed differently depending on its cultural setting. But how does this translate to the field where researchers find themselves studying? Taking especial attention to contexts that resemble this research’s field.

It is only necessary for two of these combinations to intersect (gender and religion, sexuality and secularity and so on) to understand that they’re all connected and express themselves in complex ways through social interactions. The combinations gender and religion (for example Gemzoe & Keinamen 2016; Dubisch 2016), which also translates to gender and secularity, is often the study of gender inequalities, and this means especially the study of matters that affect mainly women (cf. Dubish 2016; Page 20016; etc.). This is a big discussion in social sciences, especially in gender studies.

In countries like the Netherlands and Sweden where specific legal and political discourses are produced on religious and sexual identities (cf. Gemzoe & Keinamen 2016 and Schuh et al. 2012; Butler, 2008; Bracke, 2012) present different problems that are consequences of strategies that deal with pluralism. What is sometimes visible is the use of similar strategies like seen above (chapter

3.1) of dualistic power plays between the figure that is portrayed as the oppressed (women) and the oppressor (men). In some discourses, this oppressor is oftentimes represented by this idea of the “brown immigrant men”, (this discourse is often used when talking about veiling and women in Islam). This produces a ‘rescue narrative’ as we have seen mentioned by Bracke (2012), like ‘rescue women’ and ‘rescue brown women’ seen in the Netherlands and over Europe. Similar arguments supporting this discourse were used after the sexual assaults incidents in 2015 New Year’s Eve in Cologne, Germany. This use of women as symbolically representing the oppressed is central in discourses against Islam and in establishing the idea of secular as a synonym of progressive values and equality while Islam is portrayed as the religious oppressive with opposite and incompatible values from western secular societies like the Netherlands.

Muslim minorities, often symbolically represented by the veiled Muslim woman, have become the main target of racist and antimigration forces in Western Europe, who employ Islamophobic discourses to define boundaries of belonging. (Gemzoe & Keinamen 2016:3)

This created a powerful narrative agglomerating gender, secularity and religion for specific political purposes:

Discourses of gender equality become powerfully located, and feminism is strategically utilized by secular democracies to present support for gender equality (Gill and Scharff 2011; Mahmood 2011; Perrons 2005; Scharff 2012) quoted by (Page, 2016:133).

An example of this narrative is also visible when talking about sexuality, as we learn from Butler (2008), when speaking of sexual freedoms that are used to define Europe and modernity in the umbrella of sexual radicalism, “Often but not always the further claim is made that such a privileged site of radical freedom must be protected against the putative orthodoxies associated with new immigrant communities.” (Butler, 2008:2). This is visible especially when we focus on discourses that oppose multiculturalism and create homonationalist narratives, as the example of Pim Fortuyn, a Dutch politician openly homosexual,

and the filmmaker Theo van Gogh, that defended the exclusion of Muslim from the Dutch society with the argument that the “Dutch cultural and sexual freedoms were under attack.” (Mepschen et al., 2010:964), and were later assassinated as a response to their political point of views; (cf. Davie, 2007; Schuh, et al., 2012; Mepschen et al., 2010; Butler, 2008).

Europe is witnessing a wave of aversion to public Islam. (...) Islam and multiculturalism have become subjects of heated debate in numerous European countries, (...) and the Netherlands (...). Gay rights and women’s sexual rights feature prominently in many of these debates and controversies (cf. Ewing, 2008; Fassin, 2006; Guenif-Souilamas, 2006; Jusová, 2008; Scott, 2009; Van den Berg and Schinkel, 2009) quoted by (Mepschen et al., 2010:963)

This speech on intolerance used for example by Pim Fortuyn and Theo van Gogh is set out by the dichotomy of what constitutes as modern:

“We can see in such an instance how modernity is being defined as sexual freedom, and the particular sexual freedom of gay people is understood to exemplify a culturally advanced position as opposed to one that would be deemed pre-modern” (Butler, 2008:3)

The rescue narratives mentioned above, and explored by Bracke (2012), play also an important role here. The necessity to rescue gay subjectivities is located in this homonationalist discourse and presents in ways of gay imperialism with the narrative of ‘rescue brown gays”, as a “civilizational agenda” (Bracke, 2012:247). This “shift in the social location of gay politics and representations as they relate to the rise of anti-multiculturalism in Europe” (Mepschen et al., 2010:963) highlights the importance of understanding the way sexual politics is instrumentalized, and how the context is defined through this idea of sexual freedom:

In the Netherlands, for instance, new applicants for immigration are asked to look at photos of two men kissing, and asked to report whether those photos are offensive, whether they are understood to express personal liberties, and whether



viewers are willing to live in a democracy that values the rights of gay people to open and free expression. (...) Those who are in favor of the new policy claim that acceptance of homosexuality is the same as embracing modernity. (Butler, 2008:3)

The discourses surrounding gay identity in politics is a very gendered and not intersectional way of dominating and spreading a narrative that is masked as progressive especially when confronted with certain representations of Islam, but lacks the representation of important matters of marginalized idea of queerness and LGBTQ+ minority groups and also other issues regarding women's rights and gender equality. This is visible since the assertiveness of using the gay men as an example stands not in the idea of accepting sexual and gender differences and diversity, but in asserting individual freedom over the group as we see in cultures dominated by Islam, "Gay rights discourses are so powerful in the Netherlands precisely because gay men – as unattached and autonomous subjects – stand for the ideal citizen of neoliberal modernity" (Mepschen, et al., 2010:970), this is even easier to comprehend once as Mepschen et al. (2010) mentions, the transition of discourse accepting gayness from 1998, to 2001, when suddenly gayness could be used as a weapon against intolerant Muslims that were seen as representing Islam in the public sphere. "Whereas lesbian and gay rights have a rather short history in the Netherlands, they have nonetheless mobilized as exemplary of a Dutch "tradition of tolerance". (Mepschen, et al., 2010:970).

But gender and religion are more problematic inside religious pluralistic societies than how they appear through these political agendas that are only focused on Islam. As it is possible to read in Bracke (2012) analysis of Fortuyn's statement back in 2002 in a newspaper, not only are the representations of Muslim women wrong and dismissive of generational struggles, but also they are done so from a perspective of Dutch feminism that is framed for the use of a particular debate about Islam:

First, it is affirmed as an intrinsic part of the Dutch society and culture. Moreover it is contained in time and space: The emphasis on the seventies (...) a suggestion that the feminist struggle was important at that time but is largely 'over and done with' today, (...) in which the current time is understood as a 'post-feminist'



(Bracke, 2012:238)

All women are a target of gender inequalities, and homosexuality as other non-heteronormative identities and behavior still face discrimination inside and outside the law. There is still a long way to go in these secular-liberal societies that like the Netherlands face this issues, especially now that this confrontation with different religious and cultural “others” force us to confront with our own actions.

Moreover, sexual rights are now advanced within secular critiques of religion (Scott, 2009) and in the recasting of citizenship within multicultural contexts. In order to criticize Muslims as backward and as enemies of European culture, gay rights are now heralded as if they have been the foundation of European culture for centuries (cf. Wekker, 2009). Quoted by (Mepschen et al., 2010:965)

To explore better how interconnected these concepts are it is relevant to look at this important question, Dubisch (2016) asks if there is religion without gender. The answer given by the author herself is that since there are no signs of genderless societies, the answer is no. This is important given that the author also assumes that religion both reflects and shapes society, which only means that gender and religion are interdependent. At the same time “Views of religion depend on our own definition of religion, that is shaped by our own cultural perception of gender Dubisch” (2016:34). One of the reasons we have to critically recognize our own limitations in issues regarding gender and sexuality and how this influences our views of religion and vice-versa is the fact that until very recently (70’s more or less) all the anthropological and sociological work produced on the study of religion was done so from the perspective of male scholars, and focusing on male social dynamics culture and experience, leaving women as a mere prop of religious life and dynamics. This is not only visible in works done in faraway locations with non-western forms of religion, but also close to home. This reality does not only presents a distorted version of religious life in general but also feeds into the assumption that as feminist theory argues religion “is one of the most powerful ideological tools that underpin patriarchal normative views of gender and sexuality (...)” (Gemzoe and Keinanen, 2016:6).

Dubisch article asserts that religion as we know and study (besides the discussion



on how and who to determine what is religion) is bound to gender identity and gender roles. The author makes another relevant point for this research; the contemporary phenomenon of spiritualization is introduced as a possible substitute for the gendered dimension implicit in religion. But as the author herself points out, this modern phenomenon is more close to dis-attach itself from the male-dominated patriarchal form than actually becoming gender neutral in its core and target audience. Something that only reflects the societal reaction to the years of male-dominated narratives like we saw above.

All this discussion that gender studies and religious studies scholars are having, like mentioned by Gemzoe and Keinanen (2016), challenges the assumption that religion would lose its importance and space in social life, being substituted by secularity starting in Europe, this unexpected turn asks for new theoretical frameworks in this post-secular period (Gemzoe and Keinanen, 2016:4). This new state of awareness in both fields of studies supports the argument that intersectionality is very important not only in activist feminism but also in academic work.

This new relationship between feminism and religion has contributed to important shifts in the academic understanding of religion and to the “new” relationship between feminist studies and studies of religion (...) (Gemzoe and Keinanen 2016:3)

This research reinforces the importance of new studies and approaches by exploring this post-secular turn (and the deconstruction of tradition/religion and modernity/secularity) encounter with feminism.

Feminism seems to be the ground where the dichotomies mentioned above finds a place to be understood in their complex dimensions and interactions. So instead of ignoring the religious dimension or only referring to religion as contributing to the oppression of women and minorities, feminist theory, and scholars should have in mind the way different forms of religion and religious people influence the Western secular contexts.

A major issue to be explored is Western feminism’s own strong identification with



a political and theoretical tradition defining itself as secular and opposed to religion, a circumstance that lies behind feminism's apparent difficulties in incorporating an understanding of religion in its theory and politics. (Gemzoe and Keinanen 2016:12)

Feminism when only framed inside a secular narrative propagates assumptions about secularity and feminism itself. As it does about religion, "the identification of the secular with equality shapes how diverse religious subjectivities are formed in European countries today." (Gemzoe and Keinanen 2016:3). In other words, actions like the one seen in Sweden mentioned below, that end in re-defining the meanings of religious symbols, and actions have an impact in the way studies of gender and sexuality are framed within their religious and secular contexts.

"To the multiple meanings that have been ascribed to the Muslim veil, yet another was added: donning a veil came to signify a manifestation of feminist solidarity and sisterhood between secular feminists and religious women." (Gemzoe and Keinanen 2016:3) (Sweden)

Once this possibility is created, and as we see different scholars turning their attention towards women's religious lives and its history (see Gemzoe and Keinanen 2016:20, 21), there's a chance of deconstructing the assumption that secularism is an unavoidable evolutionary step for human societies and for equality.

In her research Sarah-Jane Page, explains that religious spaces offer the possibility to experience gender outside of the secular constructed basis, for example in the case of femininity different characteristics are appreciated differently in secular spaces and in religious spaces. The same is possible in queer spaces. Outside of the secular and heteronormative context, gender and sexual expression, roles and identity have a new space to exist, as we will be able to see in chapter 5. Here we can find another way to analyze these concepts in the debate, heteronormativity has a place and similar function as secularism, regulating outside of the norm (one towards sexual minorities and the other towards religious minorities). Even though religious spaces don't solve the problems experienced by gender inequalities and sexual minorities, neither does the

secular. And as Page (2016), describes it originates a “displacement strategy” to an “other” that absorbers and represents the gender inequality, as we have been discussing, usually the “Muslim women”. This gives the possibility to take an identity free from these struggles, and not subject to reflection. This process can take various forms. Page (2016) focused on how religious women position themselves in relation to equality discourses, and the general findings were that conservative women are more likely to be open to issues about gender than sexuality; this might be a result that all women experience somehow gender inequalities but only a few experiences in terms of sexuality, and the fact that sexuality discrimination is a more recent debate in terms of legal protection than gender inequality (Page, 2016:136).

Whereas being liberal on the issue of sexuality also makes it highly likely that you will be liberal on the issue of gender, holding conservative views on sexuality, did not mean that you would necessarily be conservative regarding women’s traditional gender roles. (Page, 2016:136)

In the end the taboos that were visible in page’s participants and their arguments, like gender complementarity and women’s submission to men (that might determine someone’s view on disapproving homosexuality, and also contribute for maintaining the conservative views on gender roles), are part of the wider society (Page, 2016).

To conclude, when we look at the context of the Netherlands, a country that builds a national identity based on progressiveness, and that presents a strong connection between a secularity and the discourse on gender equality and approach on sexuality. It is not possible as we see in (Page, 2016) to make a clear cut between the ideas that arise from a religious core, or from a cultural surrounding. And as the case of most modern and religious pluralistic societies the complexity and diversity of the way that the religious and secular are embedded in each other, the only possibility is to make sense of reality in relation to each individual social sphere. This leads us to our next chapter, where we will try to understand how identity construction theory can help us make sense of how individuals navigate their identities in relation to religious pluralism, gender roles,

and sexuality.

### 3.3 Identity Theories, Constructionism and Intersectionality

When talking about identity as a process that is influenced by social and individual change the theory that has been used in social psychology for some years now is Identity Process Theory. This theory provides the tools to understand the structure of self-identity. There are two ways that the authors mention in which identity is formed, “two universal processes, namely assimilation–accommodation and evaluation” (Jaspal and Breakwell 2014:4),

The assimilation–accommodation process refers to the absorption of new information in the identity structure (e.g. coming out as gay) and the adjustment, which takes place in order for it to become part of the structure (e.g. self-definition as gay and consequently downplaying one’s religion). The evaluation process confers meaning and value on the contents of identity (e.g. viewing one’s sexual identity as a positive thing but one’s religious identity negatively). (Jaspal & Breakwell 2014:4),

There are four original principals that guide these two processes of assimilation–accommodation and evaluation, these principals are according to Breakwell (1986, 1992, 2001) quoted be (Jaspal & Breakwell 2014):

- (1) continuity across time and situation (continuity);
- (2) uniqueness or distinctiveness from others (distinctiveness);
- (3) feeling confident and in control of one’s life (self-efficacy); and
- (4) feelings of personal worth (self-esteem).

(...)There has been some debate about the number of identity principles – (...) For instance, Vignoles et al. (2002a) proposed two additional identities “motives,” namely

- (5) belonging, which refers to the need to maintain feelings of closeness to and acceptance by other people and
- (6) meaning, which refers to the need to find significance and purpose in one’s life.

(Jaspal & Breakwell 2014:4)

Since this research is done from an anthropological background and not psychology it is necessary to understand how this theory can be used to make sense of the data produced inside this framework. For that, we will look at social constructionism, this sociological theory that conceptualizes society as socially constructed, and as the subject of interpretation by individuals and groups, is also used in psychology to understand how the individuals and the environment shape each other.

According to the theory, identity is the product of social and psychological processes. (...) Social representations determine how individuals assimilate, accommodate and evaluate identity components, what is threatening for identity and how individuals subsequently cope with the threat. (...) Crucially, the theory recognizes that individuals have agency in the construction and management of identity. In an interaction with relevant social contexts, individuals construct systems of meaning for making sense of their lives, experiences, and identities. To this extent, IPT can be described as a social constructivist model of identity processes (see von Glasersfeld, 1982.) (Jaspal & Breakwell, 2014:5)

The individual plays according to IPT a central part when it comes to managing self-identity, but how can we understand the way individuals read their surrounding in order to construct their own identity, while also being influenced by what surrounds them. Social sciences like anthropology as we have seen create theories based on the social context that attempt in describing the social relations in specific contexts, which complement the effort in understanding identity not only for the sake of understanding and studying the individual but the groups in which the individual takes part.

Within social constructionism, identity can be understood in terms of taking up, according to, resisting and otherwise negotiating subject positions within discourses (Davies and Harré, 1990). Subject positions are understood as sets of images, metaphors, and obligations about the sort of responses people can make

in interactions that are informed by associated discourses. (...) This gives rise to a more fluid, context-specific conceptualization of identity that is found in IPT. (...) However, if we accept that identities are not just located within individual psyches but are negotiated in social relationships, a case could be made for studying identity negotiation through naturally occurring data generated in identity-relevant settings. (Jaspal & Breakwell, 2014:45)

As we have mentioned Identity Process Theory and Social Constructionism, there is also another theory that is worth mentioned since it appeared as a response to constructionism and to the analysis of Foucault's work, the Performance Theory, is rooted in the post-modern reconceptualization of sex and gender in anthropological work (Morris, 1995). The most important idea of this theory as elaborated by Butler, becomes rather obvious once we see the normative system as a failure (in this case sex/gender), "By asserting that the body assumes its sex in the culturally mandated practices of everyday life," (Morris, 1995:573), creating the possibility of re-creating and performing outside of the norm as it is visible not only in ethnographies in non-western context, but clear in the case of transgender, non-binary and intersex people, and their own process through which they challenge the norm while building their identity. Of course, their social and cultural environment limits these performances as it is introduced next, it is very much influenced as it influences the narratives. In this theatrical analogy of performance, we are bound to scripts, as we will see explained by Prins (2006), these scripts provide us ground for performing. Performance Theory as presented by Morris (1995) is central to understanding sexuality and gender as categories for identity that are ever changing and inevitably so is the way we study them.

In this research to be able to understand the way the concepts and ideas we have been analyzing from other authors research and fieldwork, it is inevitable to talk about intersectionality. But to make sense of intersectionality in this research and of the fieldwork, it is necessary to explore how identity is constructed when subject to these intersections. Keeping in mind that the goal is to understand individual's perceptions on their intersections within their social contexts:

"Intersectionality instead emphasizes that the complexity of the process of individual identification and social inequality cannot be captured by such



arithmetical frameworks. Categories like gender, ethnicity, and class construct each other, and they also do so in myriad ways, dependent on social, historical and symbolical factors. "(Prins, 2006:279)

There are two approaches to intersectionality one on each side of the Atlantic Ocean; The approach used in the United States of America "foregrounds the impact of system or structure upon the formation of identities." (Prins, 2006:279), the systemic approach to intersectionality. We see "gender, race, and class are conceptualized as systems of domination, oppression and marginalization that determine or structure identity" (Prins, 2006:279), as explored by Crenshaw (1991) and Matsuda (1991). In the United Kingdom, we have the "dynamic and relational aspects of social identity" (Prins, 2006:279), the constructionist interpretation of intersectionality, that presents a "view of power in terms of the ongoing struggle over hegemony" (Prins, 2006:280).

The approach to understanding how subjects navigate their own intersectional identities that will be used for this research is the one produced by the British scholars, the constructionist approach to the interpretation of intersectionality. The reason why this approach was chosen as the more appropriate for this research is based on the differentiation of approaches made by Prins (2006). It is essential to understand that different theories and approaches are constructed also on the basis of context. It is not by coincidence that in social sciences we can separate schools of thought geographically. As we have seen inside the European context there are social, cultural and political indicators of differentiation marked by history and the study of contemporary struggles. A bigger disparity is visible between the United States of America and Europe, even with globalization, and the way that it affects social life but also academic discourses itself, in the way intersectionality is studied it is visible how these differences above mentioned are real, and it starts with the way people think and construct identity, for example when based on categories of gender, 'race', and class.

Conflations of identity categories such as race with a system like racism are rejected on the basis that they assume a static view of both the meaning of the category of race, and of racism as a single system in which Irish people, Jews or



refugees from the Third World have been negatively racialized and subjected to racism. (...) Still, intersectionality predominantly aims to reveal the unilateral power of social representations (Prins, 2006:280)

Instead of looking at individuals from a victim point of view, where systems of marginalization frame them, and take their agency, when it comes to navigating identity and categorization where “Individuals are taken to be the passive bearers of the meaning of social categories” (Prins, 2006:280) in the systemic perspective, the constructionist approach takes the individual into account as part of the process of becoming a subject to categorization:

Markers of identity such as gender, class or ethnicity are not merely exclusive and limiting forms of categorization, but simultaneously provide narrative and enabling resources. (Prins, 2006:280)

This perspective is also seen in Performance Theory and central for the next chapter. As we saw in the previous points, national identity is bound to certain narratives, (Dutch national identity is bound to the ideals of what it means to be progressive). In terms of individual identities according to Prins (2006) in the constructionist approach (mentioned above), narration is central; we become authors and co-authors in our individual and collective stories, that are up to a certain degree part of in a stage that is already set, in semi-written narrative with multilayered and intersectional scripts of gender, ethnicity, class etc. ... (Prins, 2006).

## **4. Data**

### **4.1 Field Work**

As it was explained in previous chapters, the Groningen Feminist Network is the group where this research focused on. This group was created in the city of Groningen in the Netherlands, a city very well known for its numerous population of students, which represent a high percentage of the city population, making the general population very young on average. The University of Groningen and the





Hanze University that we can find in the city have for some years now incentivized and welcomed international students. This is very visible in the city by the different nationalities and by the number of people speaking in English; this international reality is also visible in this group created by Medicine students from the RUG, to not only students but to the city.

The Groningen Feminist Network, also mentioned as the GFN, was created in 2016 as explained by Asa, Robin and Sandra, three of the five actual and initial board members of this Network since its official start. From the two other members, one personally decided that it wasn't comfortable to participate in this research and the other one it wasn't possible to get in contact with. As Asa explain in her interview the idea to create this network originated in the previous experience of the Network president in Belfast, where she was part of an already existing feminist society, as it is very common to be part and create a society in UK universities.

There you just need three people that want to be in the society and you can make it. So there was a feminist society, there were lots of things that needed to be changed in Belfast for example campaigning for abortion and laws to changed and also like there was volunteer schemes to help people who wanted to get an abortion, if they wanted to go to England or if they wanted to go to one of the clinics, because people still protested outside of abortion clinics, with pictures of aborted fetuses, it was pretty extreme. (Interview, Asa, Groningen, 30.05.2018)

When Asa arrived to Groningen, there was no similar organization, and inside the Medicine faculty she decided to question people that might be interested in being part of a group to talk and have an active role of feminism in the city, since some problems of women representation in the faculty were already showing. The first meeting was done with a group of medical students in Asa's bedroom, but as Robin explained after the second, third meeting more people started to join, growing outside the group of medical students.

I've just been there ever since (the second meeting), the first person to stick around was Sandra, and then after the summer of 2016, people just started coming around after they saw our Facebook page like Stella-Marie that came with





Dakota. And then it started to evolve (similar explanation to Asa). And then there was the Women's March in 2017, and we boomed, we just couldn't fit anywhere. I think the most special thing is how much we became a really close net; people who left the city and the country still are in contact with of us. (Interview, Robin, Groningen, 05.06.2018)

Once the group had an official structure, a manifesto that is used as introduction in the beginning of every meeting was created this text resumes what the GFN is and defends.

Welcome to the Groningen Feminist Network. So nice of you all to be here! For anyone who doesn't know us, we are a community-led network of like-minded people inclusive of all gender identities, sexualities, races, religions, ethnicities, education, class and abilities. We meet every week to create a safe space for discussion. We expect everyone to be respectful of each other and give each other the benefit of the doubt, as we are all here to learn and educate and have fun. (GFN, Groningen, 2016)

The network created a mission statement that explains in a more detailed way, the aim, and what they expect from their members and participants that can be found in the appendix section of this thesis, together with the rules for the Facebook group where a lot of discussion and information is shared with their members besides the weekly meetings. Every weekly meeting has a specific topic, based on an initial presentation by one of the board members, volunteers or special guest. During more or less six months of fieldwork, participant observation was done in meetings of the most varied topics:

November 1<sup>st</sup> - GFN Weekly Meeting - Feminism around the World

December 6<sup>th</sup> - GFN Weekly Meeting - Revolution of Sex

January 24<sup>th</sup> - GFN Weekly Meeting - Suffragette movement

February 07<sup>th</sup> - GFN Weekly Meeting - Circumcision in all genders

March 07<sup>th</sup> - GFN Weekly Meeting - Amazing People who happen to be Women

May 30<sup>th</sup> - GFN Weekly Meeting - Mind your friends: tips on supporting friends with mental health issues

And in other different events organized by the GFN and other sister organizations



in the city of Groningen:

November 29<sup>th</sup> - GFN - Pancakes against the patriarchy

March 10<sup>th</sup> – GFN- March for Women Groningen

April 10<sup>th</sup> GFN & DAG – “What should the university care about?”

The number of participants per meeting can vary depending on the month and week, usually less people during the university exam period for example. The number of members in the total of these two years is 836, and the number of active members is 406. The numbers of participants per meeting is never as high as the active members, and different events (for example the women’s march) and ways of being active (for example online) are possible.

From the participant observation conducted during these six months, from the physical context it was possible to observe that the physical space shared to make the meetings is a space of community where the setting is very informal. The language used in the meetings and events and among the participants during the breaks is always English, being most of the times impossible to know if there were any Dutch participants, and in this case creating a very international environment. During some meetings especially on themes related to medicine the language was more technical but in general the feminist vocabulary used is always attached to explanations and discussion on the same concepts. The majority of the people that attend the meetings are cis-gender women, there are a few non-binary people, a few men and some transgender man and women, even though less than the others, this is most times visible since in the beginning of every meeting an introduction round is done and people say their names and preferable pronouns, and by specific topics that come up in conversations. The group is visually diverse in terms of skin color, gender presentation and varied styles.

During the months of fieldwork in the diverse events organized by the GFN, and especially during the Women’s march event the spirit of unity and community was very visible, not only by the more regular participants that form a group of friends but as different people come and go sharing similar ideas and values with similar purposes.

## 4.2 Interviews

For the purpose of discussion on the next chapter transcripts of the interviews<sup>1</sup> will be used in order to explain in the best way possible what the interviewees expressed, on each topic of the research. The information collected is not only relevant in individual analysis according to the literature where it can be understood and interpreted, but also when compared. Given that the respondents belong to a close range of ages 20-33 and share a similar group identities, as we will be able to see, by belonging to the same group, the GFN, there are common grounds to draw comparisons. Even though participants have different nationalities and different cultural contexts, it is relevant to look at their experiences and form of identity in a comparative way, not only in questions that lead the interviewees to identify with a certain concept or idea of what it means to be religious/spiritual or atheist, but also in the way which one navigates their own gender and sexual identities. From the eleven interviewees eight identify as women (using the pronouns she/her) two as non-binary (using the pronouns they/them) and one as a man (using the pronouns he/him). What the authors and literature offer us on these issues will always be taken as a guideline for the analysis, in order to make sense of the different phenomena.

The common grounds that we can find between most if not all the interviewees is, that they come from a Christian cultural background either catholic or protestant, some of the participants frequented Christian schools, Eric, Robin, Sasha, Asa, Stella-Marie, Lee, Roza, Dakota, Guus; only Sandra and Skylar went to public not religious schools. Most of the participants were raised by their parents from an atheist perspective, where religion was not part of the family life. Except for Robin, their mother is catholic and they went to religious school even though going to an international school in Belgium marked a big part of their life in terms of education; Stella-Marie, is the only participant that is currently practicing Christianity, this came not only from a religious background from both her parents, one was catholic and the other protestant, Stella-Marie after being in contact with the church growing up decided to search for her own sense of

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<sup>1</sup> An overview of the biographic details of the participants is available in the appendix section;



religiosity and spirituality by the age of eighteen after she finished high school, and nowadays is actively involved with a youth group in a church in Groningen, and being Christian is a part of her identity; Lee, comes from a very conservative catholic Polish family, as opposed to Eric who also comes from Poland but his parents weren't religious even though he also went to catholic school. Lee also had the influence of her religious conservative family; since she is living in the Netherlands there is less of a shock, but as a teenager she struggled with her sexual identity and because of her parents religiosity, as she explains; nowadays not sharing her parents religious beliefs seems more problematic then her sexual identity.

All the participants come from countries with secular democracies in Europe, and are Caucasian. Also they share ideas and identify with feminism, and to be more exact with intersectional feminism, which also provides a reason and incentive to be part of the GFN, as that category of identity and common feeling of belonging and all the participants share a safe space.

## **5. Analysis and Discussion**

### **5.1 Religious Identity and Gender and Sexuality Intersection<sup>2</sup>**

Identity is a key subject in the context of this research, in the Groningen Feminist Network; it is the intersection of self-identity with the shared identities that create such a diverse but operational group founded for purposes of education and discussion. The first dimension of identity that we are looking at is religion, the main subject of this master degree. Most of the participants with exception from Skylar, Asa, and Roza recognize that religion had to a certain degree an active influence on their lives, either because of family values, religious education or culture independently of their own current religious identity. Asa and Roza, unlike Skylar, went to Christian schools, but the socialization with the Christian educational systems didn't represent any significant influence in their

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<sup>2</sup> Throughout this chapter (5.) Intersectionality, unless when used in the specific context of framework analysis (Intersectional theory), it refers to the way in which participants reflect on their own identity.



belief system and to their reflection on their own identity. Besides experiencing the expression of diverse identities, especially in the case of Asa who experienced cultural and religious diversity growing up in London, more than Asa in the Netherlands.

When it comes to reflect on their own religious identity we can see two different patterns. The first one seems less common among the interviewees, which is the struggle and necessity to re-frame religious identity when it intersects with sexuality and gender without rejecting it completely. For example, we have Eric that based on the experiences of growing up in a Catholic country and going to Catholic school where policing behavior and forms of identity have shown to be very present. This led him to reframe his ideological standpoint and his own spiritual beliefs. This is a behavior that we can see described by Gemzoe and Keinanen (2016) spiritualization as a substitute for the gendered dimension implicit in religion, a reaction to dis-attach himself from the male-dominated patriarchal society:

At the moment I identify as a witch, and for it's mostly an anarchist statement against organized religion and I kind of want to be my own guide in my religious life, and that is what witchcraft offers us. So I have a very radical view (laugh) about mixing politics with religion, as in organized religions influencing politics, and I believe that it should not happen, which is probably also influenced by the fact that it does happen in my country (Influence that the catholic church has in Poland). (Interview, Eric, Groningen, 24.05.2018)

(...)

I think a lot of religions, especially organized religions focus on a patriarchal system and that is their history, but at the same time I think that in those systems, you can definitely be religious and still not conform to the gender norms. At the same time at least from my experience being in a catholic school and interacted mostly with catholic people throughout my life, religion can shelter children and adults even in a way that they may not even realize that there are alternatives to the gender norms presented by the religion, because they don't interact with people who have different categories and stereotypes. Personally, I think that religion should be your own choice. (Interview, Eric, Groningen, 24.05.2018)

Freedom and especially individual freedom of expression and choice seem to be central in Eric's discourse, not just from the general national context of Poland but also from his own experience with how religion is dictated and framing the cultural and social life. In contrast the Netherlands provides to a certain extent a space for re-framing identity free from these ideas. In his case, we can see that the religious influence shaped not only his religious identity but also because of how it intersected with his own gender identity and the roles he performed in order to navigate his own identity:

And then I went to catholic school, which was very conservative, and I think that is one of the reasons why I realized relatively late that I was Trans because it was one of those environments where they would have the cookie cutter of the perfect person, and if you didn't fit you were a rebel and a troublemaker. (...)I came out as pansexual one month after leaving catholic school and one year after I came out as Trans, so I would say that this religious aspect limited me for many, many years. (Interview, Eric, Groningen, 24.05.2018)

In the case of Robin the religious context is not as strict and culturally strong as in Eric's case. Robin grew up in a very international environment and their mother is catholic, but as we can see in their interview the same rejection of the institutional aspect of Catholicism is expressed. Even though Robin does not look for another religious or spiritual offer, they don't reject it completely taking the part that they consider essential for their identity.

I was raised catholic although I don't associate myself with the church anymore, the norms and spirituality that I've got from there I still carry with me. One of the most important parts of my upbringing was the internationality because I was born in England when I was four we moved to America, and I went to a catholic school there, it's the perfect time to indoctrinate a child. Then we moved to Switzerland where I went to international school for six years, until we finally moved to Belgium. (Interview, Robin, Groningen, 05.06.2018)

(Religion) It was always present, my mom is quite religious, not in a conservative way, but in a spiritual way, and I think I was very lucky to experience my religion not as a prison or as an oppressive force as much as it was a place of compassion



I was always very much raised in this idea that Jesus is love, love your neighbor, be a good person. (...) (Interview, Robin, Groningen, 05.06.2018)

In Robin's explanation of their own religious experience growing up, in contrast to Eric's case, the religious influence is looser, and that provided to a certain extent more room for experiencing diversity, especially given the contrast of national and international background and contact with diversity. This less conservative experience in Robin's case was important in the way they reframe their religious identity but it wasn't without difficulties. As Robin explains in their interview growing up as the example of the good catholic child also provided the perfect environment to see the world in boxes and this influenced not only how they categorized others, but it is also an individual struggle when exploring their own identity. Has explained by Dubisch (2016), even though pluralism has a positive dimension it also carries the bond that religion has with gender. Robin is also very aware of the normative ideological patriarchal powers that religion carries as Gemzoe and Keinanen (2016) describe:

I'm thinking whether there are aspects that the religious catholic values that like obey and honor your mother and father and like doing the right think according to like commandments and what not whether that has influence in my moral code and my behavior as well, and stick to the rules and also with the thing with the boxes it's a stick to the rules kind of thing. (...) I have questioned my identity a lot when it's easier to see yourself reflected in people who are more accepted by society but in the other hand you fit within the boxes of society more, for me as a kid, I was always very focused on boxes. (Interview, Robin, Groningen, 05.06.2018)

In the case of Stella-Marie, she expresses that religion had a lot of influence in her life and still has. But contrary to some of her friends Stella-Marie's family is not conservative, that gave her the possibility to question her own spirituality and religious identity, regardless of her upbringing.

I think I believed in something, but believing in the Christian God that became more when I went to the UK for a year after my graduation, when I was searching



more for God in way, and started asking more questions and also I started searching for a parish there and started to ask questions and so on that is when I say I became a Christian and that was two years ago. And I also had a renewal of my baptismal vows where they do the proper dive down, and since then, when I came to Groningen I've been looking for a church, and know I have once a week bible study group, I'm active in my church I'm in the leadership team I go to the services, so it has a big influence. (Interview, Stella-Marie, Groningen, 29.05.2018)

These experiences provided the possibility to assimilate different identities with an open mind as she mentions. Even though her own identity as a woman and as heterosexual was not a challenge for herself, like the participants in the study of Sarah-Jane Page (2016) she "(...) had to position their understanding of their religious tradition within the broader contours of egalitarian debates" (Page, 2006:139). For Stella-Marie that challenge lies within every individual to create the space to accept diversity, and so her notions of gender and sexuality are not rooted in the institutional religious moral framework. What we are able to see is, the way she views and accepts others diverse identities as a very big part of the way she chooses to frame herself within her own religious identity, as she explains in the interview:

I think it's misunderstood definitely in Christianity how sexuality is viewed; you can talk about sex before marriage or homosexuality. (...) I say that God created the person the way the person is, with sexuality and gender identity and everything, and as this is just something you do, but I think that is very difficult to explain because often they, on the other hand, don't know people who are on the LGBTQ+ community, and for me it also has to do with the fact that I know people, and they are not doing a bad thing. I think the dialogue is very important and is not there. (Interview, Stella-Marie, Groningen, 29.05.2018)

This shows that when it comes to religious identity the three interviewees were very much aware of how they were influenced by their religious environment growing up and managed to reframe how their religious and cultural framework imposed some values that didn't fit with their other perceptions of diversity and identities, what Jaspal and Breakwell describe as self-identity.



The second pattern when it comes to religious identities highlights the struggle that makes people reframe their identities by rejecting any kind of organized religion that might have been present in their upbringing and going further to accept and identify with atheism and agnosticism, this process seems to on the one hand come from a reflexive process of awareness and on the other just as an easy reaction and assimilation of the secularized nature of society. Both processes are very much facilitated by the shock of the intersection of experienced religion with sexuality and gender roles. These apparent dichotomies and the intersection of identities reflect the idea that Gemzoe and Keinanen (2016) explain about western feminism, which is that feminism equals secularity and it consequently opposed to religion. But as an intersectional feminist that seems only to be a reality when it comes to individual identities. When we look at Sandra's reflection:

I have a complicated relationship with religion, I come mostly from an agnostic family, (...) I come from a very catholic country where everyone is expected to be baptized and to be part of the catholic church I'm not a part of the catholic church but I've been to a lot of religious rituals and I've been culturally exposed to Catholicism, so also have seen how my grandma who is probably the person whom I loved the most that had strong ties to catholic ideas, (...) She lost a child right before my mom was born, and he died at birth, and it was a death that could have been avoided, it was very sad. And she spent the rest of her life feeling tormented by the fact he never got to go to heaven because he was never baptized, that was something that haunted her. And I think that that is fucked up, and I don't think she deserved to live with a feeling like that. I don't believe in a religion that requires you to do all these things just so that you can somehow reach the state of full human, or have a better life. (Interview, Sandra, Groningen, 18.05.2018)

Sandra's experience with catholic values made her question the assumptions present in her culture and with life events, was able to reflect on the reason why she rejected religion:

I also experienced, even though she was a great woman, how she reacted the first time I came out to her, she taught it was gross, women who like other women go to hell. And she was actually known for the little she was religious, so just thinking



about the amount of people in my country and all over the world that their identities are strongly tied to religion and to a code of conduct, that is what the bible is, that is very distressing, because I also don't want to completely shit on religion because for a lot of people is a source of a lot of peace and for their identity, and a source of happiness, and that is cool, I just think that it is completely outdated, because they also have the potential to cause a lot of harm, and they perpetuate a lot of gender stereotype and gender roles, homophobia, racism, in a lot of cases. It's not religion itself but the texts religion is based on that are outdated. (...) Even though I'm an atheist I don't identify with the atheist community around the world, I just don't think I'm capable in believing in something that I don't have proof of, and that is something I struggle with, not being able of having a belief. (Interview, Sandra, Groningen, 18.05.2018)

Lee comes also from a strict catholic country. Her whole family is very catholic, and because this limited her for some time to come to terms with her own identity and also shield her from knowing diversity in the early years of her life, the way she found to deal with religion was by not caring much about it, but also by not rebelling totally against it. Even though she understands the negative effects that conservatism had on her own life.

(I have a) Very strong religious catholic family and they live in a very religious environment, going to church and being involved in other catholic communities, being very strongly for the church opinions. This was a big part of my upbringing. (...) I was in the closet for a very long time, about four five years, and then I decided to come out to my parents as homosexual when I was leaving the country before I came here to study, because then I was not so concerned anymore. I, of course, heard that it was a phase, I still hear that it is a phase, I hear a very interesting thing, that is God who is testing me to see if I'm loyal enough to him or if I'm going to fall for this. (Laughs) But it's getting better I guess. I believe that right now not sharing their religious identity is more of a problem than the fact that I have a different sexuality. (Interview, Lee, Groningen, 17.05.2018)

Dakota like Stella-Marie is German and both their parents were one catholic and the other protestant, but in this case, Dakota got the catholic baptism and education, and her experience with religion was different in some ways opposite

to Stella-Marie:

My father is roman catholic my mom is protestant, and my father insisted apparently that is what I have been told, that I was too, so I was baptized, and I went to a catholic girls school for some years, until I change to a boarding school. I like having debates about it because I think religion can be a positive influence in your life. And I think sometimes it was actually something I perceived as negative because there were definitely things specially when I was a teenager that I saw that (were negative) there are so many people who do not think like my mother, and sometimes my father would also say some sketchy (inadequate) things. (...) (When reflecting on her contribution to a discussion with religious diverse identities) I wouldn't be the right person to present this topic, because I also have very strong criticism. And that might not have anything, because it's too controversial. And even discussing about someone who is very religious it would be interesting because I also had that religious education but I have a different perspective. (Interview, Dakota, Groningen, 23.05.2018)

We can clearly see the way Dakota reflected on her own experience growing up in different spaces with catholic narratives, and even though she finds the space to comprehend the positive aspects, her secular feminist ideological standpoint takes a bigger role in her identity, especially as she experiences conservatism take a role in limiting expressions and identities, not only in her experience but in politics.

Guus is Dutch and even though she didn't have a religious education at home or at school, the socialization with some friends drew her attention to the matter, as she explains she went to church a few times, even though she never identified with religious beliefs. Recently she went to a religious wedding that confronted her with her own identity as a queer feminist woman, she explains that while attending a very traditional and conservative religious wedding she didn't feel comfortable as she felt that the essential factors of her own identity were clearly opposite to the people who participated in that event. Not only had she observed conservative narratives on heterosexuality but also regarding women's role in society, family and marriage, where as she describes the bride was expected to be obedient in all cases to the future husband. But as she explains

that was not the only encounter she had with the intersection of religious identities and matters of sexuality:

But religion on its own it didn't really affect me in life per se. But regarding my sexuality it has because I was afraid to talk about it with some people. I had a friend who I was very close with and then I came out to her, and she was very religious, and we stopped being friends, and that was very scaring I guess. The older I get the less it affects me I guess. I don't meet very close-minded people anymore. (Interview, Guus, Groningen 06.06.2018)

The case of Guus is very similar to Sasha, even though Sasha went to a very strict Christian school and their mother was Christian their identity is not bound to religion beliefs. Nevertheless they recognize the influence that some of the community aspects of religion influenced them. Sasha's lost their mother and more recently their father. When their father got sick they experienced the positive effects of religious people surrounding them and the traditional rituals associated with this identity group, and that played an important part in grieving. Both Sasha and Guus experienced similar Christian education that provided the tools to develop a critical view on religion especially conservatism associated with Christianity, as also visible with Dakota.

The three different groups that were mentioned that describe three different phenomena when analyzed by identity process theory (social constructivist model) respects the assimilation-accommodation and evaluation process Jaspal & Breakwell, (2014). The absorption is done by natural socialization of each individual that varies as we were able to see. The accommodation seems to have three different results; either complete dismissiveness of religion, re-framing notions of religiosity and spirituality and rejecting religion. The evaluation part takes place as individual realize their self-identities in relation to these structures. One important phenomenon that was possible to identify while going through the interviews was that transgender and non-binary interviewees were more self-aware of how their upbringing and environment influenced them like Sasha and Roza. And in Eric's and Robin's case with a focus on religion as we can see more clearly. This shows how the individual plays a central role in managing self-identity as a negotiation of subjective positions in different discourses. This seems

an obvious reflection but, if we keep in mind that all the interviewees have also other identities that separate them from the normative society, that we saw described in the previous chapters, (like being homosexual or queer, or even religious) there has to be another explanation. There is something about distinctiveness (2) and belonging (5) in (Jaspal & Breakwell, 2014:4) that plays a bigger role in self-identity when it comes to gender identity and the performance of specific gender roles than sexuality, regardless of nationality or age. We will be able to look at this better in chapter 5.3.

## 5.2 Pluralism in the Netherlands and in the GFN

Most participants expressed the lack of visibility of religion and consequently of diverse religious identities in the Netherlands, specifically in Groningen and in the GFN. By making this realization they showed interest in starting conversations that includes the topic of religion and the way it is dismissed. As well as diversity, as they feel that there is almost no conversation and debate about it. There is a general feeling for dialogue as a necessity to understand those whose identities differ from the cultural secular narrative that is mostly lived in the Netherlands. When it comes to experience religion in the Netherlands, all the interviewees share similar experiences:

It's interesting because from my perspective and of course from my Christian surrounding there are Christians but other than that I don't really see it that much. For example, I just found out some weeks ago that a friend of mine who's from Indonesia she's Muslim and she's doing all the five prayers a day and I know her for one and a half years and I haven't noticed, and we never talked about it. So I think that religion is more something that you do in private but don't talk about much. (Interview, Stella-Marie, Groningen, 29.05.2018)

But I don't know in the Netherlands is not as visible, the only thing I've seen that it hasn't been a church is the Synagogue and that's it. Not as much as I've seen in Belfast or in London. (Interview, Asa, Groningen, 30.05.2018)

(Talking about Belgium) but like most people are like raised in Catholic tradition



so I come here, and especially because we are in the north of the Netherlands the main religion is the protestant religion and I feel like there is more open-mindedness towards, not like open-mindedness per se more like in a Dutch way, we accept all religions like, but on the other hand you don't see a lot of other religions most people you see are like atheist and then the people you see are either raised catholic or protestant of various different kinds, but also there are like a lot of different religious student societies. (...) There's also a bunch of people who were raised Muslim, I don't think I've met Jewish people, I probably have. But like it's not something that it's talked about. (Interview, Robin, Groningen, 05.06.2018)

I feel that I've never met a lot of people who have said that or talked to me about being from a different religion than Christianity or being atheist. So actually I don't know I can't make a judgment about that. Generally, you don't see in the city a lot of people wearing hijabs, for example, maybe students in the university, but not people who actually live here from Groningen. (Interview, Dakota, Groningen, 23.05.2018)

The Dutch participants have a very reflexive perspective when it comes to religious accommodation and pluralism which shows that they are informed on Dutch history and developed their own opinions when it comes to the problems related with handling diversity, Roza, after explaining in a detailed way the pillar system and the historical context that is presented in chapter 3, Roza expresses her opinion on how the integration measures failed in the Netherlands:

So anyways into that system a lot of the post-war years with more immigrants that came to the Netherlands or even asked to come to the Netherlands to boost the economy. They were kind of given their own pillar, which doesn't work at all; that kind of prevented kind of a natural integration process. This way of thinking those are those people and we don't have anything to do with them because they have different ideologies they have different backgrounds they can be part of our society but as long as they stay in their own little bubble or something but then, of course, everybody has opinions of the people inside that little bubble so I don't know I don't feel like it went very well the integration of immigrants in the Netherlands and there's always been a tendency to blame immigrants for all kinds of problems. (...)but I understand immigrants who stay in their own little bubble because



I can completely understand how we can be kind of hostile and unfair to most people who come here, and how any racist tendencies are very strongly denied right and that's when we say that we are very open-minded and we're not racist but we are super racist it's just our inheritance of colonialist past also in which we for many years we had colonies and we suppressed people of color in this colonies and we looked at them as less important and that still plays on. (Interview, Roza, Groningen, 05.06.2018)

Sasha on the other hand is more critical of the Christian influence in general society and of how politics influence pluralism, not only for believers of other religions but also for non-believers, in their case, they believe that being in contact with religious others and diversity is the solution and should be embraced as it contributes to acceptance not only in the big plural and 'progressive' cities but also in the 'conservative' small towns.

As in more diversity, I think the thing with religions is, I'm all for people doing their religious thing as long as they do it, or as they don't bother people in general, or impose like the SGP trying to dictate Christian ideals on the rest of the population. I really like that the Synagogue here in Groningen is open for all kind of activities, and I think that is good that we have more Muslims here. The fact that you come in contact with diversity it makes you understand it more. And not be afraid of it. The more diverse and spread the more and the best they'll integrate into larger society, but fewer laws dictating it. (Interview, Sasha, Groningen, 06.06.2018)

When it comes to the GFN the opinion varies a bit but there seems to be a general feeling surrounding the invisibility of religion, and religious diversity as much as in society, as we are able to see in the next transcriptions:

(Talking about the GFN) I think that just from what I see is just more atheist or agnostic, or in general more negative towards religion, but maybe people are also not saying what they do believe in, maybe to avoid conflict. I would say that represents the same, as in general society with a tendency towards agnosticism and atheism, I don't think it's that diverse. (Interview, Stella-Marie, Groningen, 29.05.2018)





I think a little bit and I think there is some religious diversity but I don't really know actually I haven't really talked to many people about their religious identity it's not a topic that comes up in the discussions. (Interview, Roza, Groningen, 05.06.2018)

The only people I know there're religious are the people that I know personally. But I think what can happen sometimes in activist spaces or in feminist spaces is that people are predominately atheists, people can be quite dismissive of religion (discussion about circumcision). I feel like maybe there are a higher number of people who are atheist or agnostic. (Interview, Asa, Groningen, 30.05.2018)

I think that it's difficult to tell at the end of the day most of the GFN, even though we are open to all the religions, most of the people seem to be from an atheist or catholic or protestant background and I think that there are two people from Muslim background but that's it, as far as I know. I think maybe that is also a problem, which you don't realize that there is diversity unless it comes up in a very specific situation, for example in a discussion. I don't think that there're any conflicts and that's important, I have never seen any discriminating behaviors, and I think that is good. (Interview, Eric, Groningen, 24.05.2018)

This invisibility follows the behavior that is lived in Dutch society and culture when it comes to the private dimension that religion takes, this is also visible in spaces like the Groningen Feminist network. As we have seen in Gemzoe & Keinanen (2016), feminist spaces tend to assimilate a very secular narrative and be dismissive of religion, visible in feminist literature until some years ago. As most of the interviewees tend to express when talking about religious diversity in the Groningen Feminist Network, regardless of their obvious respect and pluralistic standpoint. Robin and Asa share their experience as part of the board when it comes to accommodating diversity:

There is a lot that we can do, and try and make it more explicit, like at every meeting we say the CGW's but I don't know if we actually, I think the main thing that we do try to do is like for example in the Facebook group saying that religious bashing is not allowed. (...) I think that's the main thing we don't want to be



harmful towards others, but we could probably do more to be more active.  
(Interview, Robin, Groningen, 05.06.2018)

It's weird because when people belong to feminist circles they kind of get used to being very like deliberately open and careful with language to be respectful of other people, but then when religious come up, possibly because people who are feminist are sometimes queer, religion can have had a bad effect intersection with that identity in the past, so there's sometimes hostility or just dismissiveness which is sometimes offensive to people who like for them religion is very important, and during that meeting (on circumcision) (...) And I wish I had said something about religious identities and respect. Because you just think you don't need to say that to a group of feminists, but I don't know I think there is a lot of people have hang-ups about it and it comes up when we have discussions about it, and people feel alienated and left out, and feel that their beliefs are pushed aside. (Interview, Asa, Groningen, 30.05.2018)

Different participants when confronted with the question regarding accommodation of religious diversity seem to remember the discussion on Circumcision. This topic was discussed at one of the weekly meetings. This discussion represents a very good example of the intersection of identities in the group, something that doesn't always occur. This presentation was done from a medical perspective, as we can see in Asa's testimony, since it was this was the background of the speakers. What is expressed by some individual experiences as a conflict was the different sensibilities to the topic. Circumcision carried a lot of opinions and assumptions especially when it came to religion. This confrontation that did not escalate in grate matters was divided between some people who firmly defended a more relativist position when it comes to censoring female genital mutilation in some Muslim communities. And other group that regarded the practice as wrong in all its forms and justifications, which lead to a feeling of disregard for religious and cultural differences.

All participants believe in respect and tolerance for religious identities and diversity (in different degrees), and in active policies that contribute to accommodate religious diversity, both inside the GFN, in Europe and the Netherlands especially as religious pluralism intersects with gender and sexuality.



As pluralism undermines the idea of homogeneity as Berger (2017) shows, the same idea that is very much contested inside this group. By the idea that individuals are confronted with new different realities that challenge what is taken has tradition.

### 5.3 Intersection of Identities

We have seen by now that besides one person, Stella-Marie, the participants of this research and that the GFN as a group (from the participant's perspective) does not take religion as an important marker of their identity. But as we were able to see above religion, and discourses produced by religion either through politics, institutions or education had a lot of influence in individual lives, even if it is not visible in the group when topics related to feminism are discussed. We have seen at the beginning of this chapter how the influence of religion and pluralism or the lack thereof, influenced the religious identities of the interviewees and how that possibly influenced other intersecting identities. Now in the last point of this chapter to be able to answer our research question it is relevant to understand how participants reflect on how their gender and sexual identities were constructed always keeping in mind their surroundings, and finally how that led them to the GFN. During this analysis as we have seen the participants are seen as owning agency in navigating their identity. As it was shown in chapter 4.3 by Prins (2006) this is the systemic perspective to the constructionist approach also mentioned and applied in chapter 5.1.

And most part of my life like I said I was trying to figure it out my identity, at the moment and I feel like the situation I'm in at the moment with the GFN and being here, with the relationship I'm currently at and the people who I live with I have a freedom to figure it out what masculinity means for me and how it applies to who I am as a person. That's how I'm navigating, I'm learning as I go, and I do what it feels right as far as, for a long time I was stuck on this idea I can't do that because I identify with masculinity, and that's not a thing, you can, for example, hug your friends even though you identify as a masculine person or you can hold hands with them, and I've only recently been realizing that. (Interview, Eric, Groningen, 24.05.2018)

I was very invested in like becoming part of the norm because I was a bit of an outsider and it took me so long to realize that that wasn't me. I've been rambling about this but I feel like that drive to become part of the norm and fit in was the most gendered experience I had. (Interview, Robin, Groningen, 05.06.2018)

Gendered experiences by rebelling to the normative idea of femininity in conservative contexts while exploring own identity are also visible in Eric's rebel phase. This vs. the gendered experience of trying to assimilate the norm in its constructs of femininity expressed by Robin in a more progressive and international environment are two different processes. These processes are depended on national identity narratives, providing the stage, which in the end gave the possibility to question the rules outside of the predetermined gender expectations of each individual that was present in their upbringings. Religious pluralism seems to have a positive influence on both Eric's and Robin's case.

(Religion) I don't think it strongly, well I suppose it did influence how I perceived other sexualities and religions, I was always very open-minded and I think that the combination with Catholic and international school took a very liberal role, like everyone can do what they want in a very individualistic view, that was definitely something that made it easier for me to accept who I was, because it was easy for me to accept who others were. (Interview, Robin, Groningen, 05.06.2018)

Gender roles and gender identities that don't fit into the social norms seem to be more problematic from the experience of the participants than sexuality and sexual identities. When analyzing it from the perspective of the participants, there is a relative normalization and to some point invisibility of other sexual orientations. This is visible from the secular society context, in situations where religion intersects it becomes more complex especially because, it also depends on what religion we refer to and how equality discourses are framed in that specific context, and how they are understood by the people who are part of that context. This is the particular context and stage that predominates in countries with a strong narrative of being secularized and progressive. These are some testimonies on how participants experienced their sexual identity in terms of

categorization:

It doesn't really come up (in university) (...) It doesn't really come up in any other contexts, people are always surprised that I'm not straight which is annoying.

Hmm... I don't know if I've ever met anyone who felt threatened by me being bisexual. (Interview, Robin, Groningen 05.06.2018)

In contrast with:

Well because I've only recently been coming out more outside of the feminist network, so within the feminist network it's all been good, everyone has been open-minded and accepting and I think within the Netherlands it's more like (...) There's another side of Dutch tolerance, it's only as long as you fit in and you look normal, and I think my luck, in this case, is that people don't often read me as someone who's confusing in gender. (Interview, Robin, Groningen, 05.06.2018)

On the other hand it is important to remember as we saw in previous chapters that the secular context plays the bigger part in framing these discourses. It is crucial to understand that the secular is a space embedded in heteronormativity and gender normativity, and that both of these systems play a role in restricting gender fluidity since most times gender presentation and sexual orientation as seen regularly as different sides of the same coin, limiting a variety of both to exist separately. As Page (2016) mentions in her article even though religions (and consequently religious pluralism as it assumes accommodation of religious identities and diversity) are seen as the enemy of sexual minorities, including women and LGBTQ+, the secular is usually portrayed as protector to these identities. We learn through Schuh et al. (2012) that there was a 'shift of narratives of secularity for the sake of religious diversity for the individual liberties'. This is visible when we look at the history of pluralism in the Netherlands and at the change of narrative since the 2000's in terms of secular narratives and diversity policies and connect it to the discourse on sexuality, seen as a way of Dutch tolerance. This is possible to identify in practice on this research, by reading the testimonies of the interviewees. As it seems, not all individual



liberties are included here, and consequently from this shift neither are all forms of religious diversity that don't fit the dominant Christian culture. Page (2016) notes, "feminists have documented the sexual inequalities that remain pervasive in secular contexts, such as expectations on women to subscribe to a narrowly defined femininity (...) (Gill 2007; McRobbie 2011)" quoted by (Page, 2016:133). These secular narratives dominate all spheres that fall inside the public life. As we clearly saw in Robin's discourse, this is a reality for different forms of femininity and for different roles that are played inside the gender spectrum; it is a reality that we find also in Guus's interview (cis-gender woman). It is a reality lived in society but very visible inside communities like the LGBTQ+. As we can read in Roza's testimony of her experience of being a transgender woman in the Netherlands:

A man or anybody who is perceived as a man who dresses or behaves in a feminine way is really thought of as funny or as a joke and is made fun of and in the same with women who are more masculine it's people are like oh you must be a Dyke or so something and they don't mean that in a good way so I think that makes it very difficult especially for transgender people who are a little bit outside of the binary (...) I want to identify as a woman and not as a non-binary person but my expression how I show my self is outside of the binary I guess and so that's how I noticed that specially very clearly when I was still dressing in a more feminine way which I actually don't do anymore because I just don't want to deal with shit from random people on the street but if I wear a skirt or a dress on the street probably people would feel the need to comment on it or to just make a joke about it which is just... I don't know you feel like, kind of a fool and that you're being made into a joke. (...) It's strange because when somebody makes like to full transition really passing then they get so much praise for it as well so it's a double side, very binary trans people that are very passing they get a lot of praise it's not that people are against trans people necessarily but they are very much against androgyny and against queerness and against anything outside of this binary I think. (Interview, Roza, Groningen, 5.06.2018)

In chapter 3.2 we saw through Bracke's (2012) article that political narratives are highly focused on policing femininity and what constitutes as womanhood

especially when it comes to Muslim women. And how their bodies are used as political instruments. This gives the false idea that we overcame the discussion about gender, femininities and masculinities as white secular bodies. Becoming easier to police what is allowed in terms of gender identity and expression and consequently gender roles. And even though violent and extreme behavior against Queer people is not as common as in other countries where violence against Queer people is a serious issue, as Roza mentions, it is still problematic, with subtle forms of showing itself.

When we look at homonormativity being the new face of neo-liberal sexual politics, it is possible to expect that the gender dimension be again ignored. As we have also seen the Dutch gay politics not questioning heteronormativity assumptions in society (Bracke, 2012), while exporting them to the discourse of accepting gay men. Which exposes a much gendered focus (the idea of masculinity, and gay men) and targeting Muslim identities and consequently religious pluralism. If as written by Butler (2003) defenders of this strategy that centers gay identities as a synonym of embracing modernity, what how does one conciliate modernity with gender and religion. As we have seen before Dubisch explores gender and religion, it is through ideas of gender that religion and modernity maintains its patriarchal norms;

The Christian patriarchal values are quite spread and they do have strict views of gender roles and even if they aren't made explicit they're very implicit in how faith is performed. (...) I think patriarchy stands on its own as well, religion feeds it but it doesn't determine it. (Interview, Robin, Groningen, 05.06.2018)

In this sense, the participants don't show any negative direct experienced correlation, besides the already mentioned assumptions that are both part of religious values as they are of secular society. This tends to vary depending on the country of origin of the participants and their upbringing but it does not fluctuate. There seems to exist an interesting dynamic between gender contesting the secular, the secular embracing and politicizing the sexual (sexuality) and on the other end religion contesting sexuality by what we have seen in both theory and practice in this research. These dynamics influence very much how individuals

navigate their identities and are framed within the idea of tolerance and religious pluralism as part of Dutch politics, as much as they might be suffering now. This process is an ever-changing accommodation of social and political action, especially in times of globalization with international politics generating such strong influence in national contexts.

#### **5.4 Final Considerations and Discussion of the limitations of the research and the theoretical-practical scope**

Deverell and Prout (1995) describe group identities within the social constructionism framework. By establishing as a conclusion from their work in an English HIV project, that identity is neither transparent nor unproblematic, and it is constantly being produced and dependent on representation there is a parallel to be drawn here. While talking about identity as an homosexual on the topic of HIV can be very complex as they explain, this idea that identity and in this case sexual identity involves trading other identities where social worlds can be brought together this process is central to this research; the nature of this research even though it has in nature individual identities, it has the same complex reality. In terms of group identity it is more homogeneous, because in diversity where the GFN finds the connection between individual differences. This is in part because, in the process as conceptualized by identity construction theory, feminism as a part of identity does not require an adjustment in order to become part of a structure, because it already assumes the possibility of the intersection. For example being queer or being religious, as Jaspal & Breakwell describe one has to prevail over the other, in this case, we see that for one identity to exist the other doesn't have to be downplayed. This is visible when the participants share their opinions on the importance of religious pluralism for matters of gender roles and matters regarding sexuality, regardless of their religious, gender or sexual identity:

I think it helps when you're confronted with different views that you then think about your own of course if you're open to it. If you live in your own bubble it doesn't matter if there are ten different bubbles around you or just two. So I think





if there is diversity within a society then it's very important for that to have an impact on things like our gender identity or sexual orientation, if you're open to listening which I think is very difficult and not really what people do, because why challenge the place where you feel comfortable. (Interview Stella-Marie, Groningen, 29.05.2018)

The more accepting honestly accepting, not just like basically tolerated if you're actually interested in it this can be a real part of our culture and plural and the very diverse culture it helps yes. (Interview, Roza, Groningen, 05.06.2018)

To conclusion this research reinforces the importance of new studies and approaches by exploring this post-secular turn (and the deconstruction of tradition/religion and modernity/secularity) encounter with feminism. Because as we saw outside of the secular and heteronormative context (GFN), gender roles and sexual identities, have a new space to exist. This work was developed as a final assessment for a one year Master in Religious Pluralism: Ancient and Modern, which carry some practical limitations that were not impediments in the accomplishment of the same, but conditioned in terms of scope. First of all the time restrictions made it impossible to conduct and deepen more interviews. Secondly, the theoretical-methodological choices of this work on the object of study always generate conditionings. So as particular view third-party researchers on the same subject, through inter-subjectivity, cannot replicate that. By using other theoretical paradigms and analytical and technical tools other conclusions would be drawn. That said what was proposed in this work is validated by the result of what was presented to be studied.

Regarding the theoretical-practical scope, although the theme of religious pluralism gender roles and sexuality is not new, it is not insignificant to assert its relevance, since, as we could see, it draws attention to important phenomenon in small identity communities with regard to young people which should have an expression in the academic world in order to create a practical impact on society, and this is only possible if we identify how people in society and especially young people observe and understand the world around them. And that is the ultimate goal of this work.



## 6. Conclusion

To conclude this thesis we will see how the research question was answered through the development of the previous chapters. The central goal of this research was to understand how young people navigate gender roles in the context of religious pluralism. We can conclude that not only as they themselves considered religious pluralism to be important, on their own individual's narratives with ideals like diversity and tolerance being very much central in their identities. And so they play a central role especially as much as the individuals were in contact with religion and with diversity growing up. Religious pluralism in contexts of multiple identities creates the possibility of managing and incorporating through assimilation pluralist identities, instead of rejecting them, religious pluralism requires the acceptance of diversity, and diversity in religion in this globalized post-modern world is just one of the multilayered forms that one can choose to identify with.

We were able to see that religious pluralism is a reality within the context of the Groningen Feminist Network, even though steps to accommodate more diversity can be done in the future. We understood that that religious pluralism influenced gender roles by comprehending how they manage to challenge re-frame their gender roles and identities, how this was done in different contexts of society and how the Netherlands provided narratives for this process in either national or international participants. We looked at religious pluralism through Schuh et al. (2012), and with the study of sexuality in a social secular context we viewed how the narratives changed with time, as they seem to be more strongly used and to some degree be accepted in secular society. With secularism focusing on individual liberties instead of religious-ideological diversity, a hyper focus on how to actually provide the grounds for all the diverse individual liberties is central; we saw that neither religious diversity, nor individual freedom is fully accommodated in the secular society, especially once individuality steps outside the norm. These secular narratives that dictates heteronormative and gender normative discourses showed that gender fluidity turned out to be more problematic both in the secular and religious context. And last it was possible to conclude that the main concepts of the research are an essential factor for identity



construction of the participants, as that is one of the reasons why they belong to the group that was studied, the Groningen Feminist Network. This process of taking a hold of self-identity presents to be connected to an imaginary scale of normative identities, the more you distance yourself from the norm when it comes to gender roles and sexuality the more probable it is that you also re-think and reframe forms of the normative religion and assumptions that are loaded with exclusivist behavior. This provides an explanation for the wide spread idea among the participants regarding religion as conservative and for those reasons feeding into the ideas that they reject. The form of feminism that is visible in the participants and includes the multitude of identities that were influenced by their context accepts and includes the different forms of pluralism.

In closing, it is relevant to produce broader studies that focus more academic attention on young people's identities and their intersections, as well as young people religious identities in western societies like the Netherlands in order to understand how they are influenced by their social and cultural surroundings.



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## Appendix

### Biographical Information:

Name	Nationality	Age	Religious Identity	Gender Identity	Sexual Identity	GFN
<b>Eric</b>	Polish	21	Witch	Trans Men	Pansexual	Member
<b>Dakota</b>	German	23	Atheist	Woman	Pansexual	Member
<b>Sandra</b>	Spanish	21	Atheist	Woman	Bisexual/A-romantic	Board Member
<b>Lee</b>	Polish	20	Atheist	Woman	Homosexual	Member
<b>Robin</b>	Belgium	21	Christian	Non-binary	Bisexual	Board Member
<b>Asa</b>	British	22	Atheist	Woman	Pansexual	President (Board Member)
<b>Stella-Marie</b>	German	21	Christian	Woman	Heterosexual	Member
<b>Guus</b>	Dutch	19	Atheist	Woman	Queer	Member
<b>Roza</b>	Dutch	33	Atheist	Trans Woman	Bisexual	Member
<b>Skylar</b>	Dutch	22	Atheist	Woman	Homosexual	Member
<b>Sasha</b>	Dutch	33	Atheist	Non-binary	Heterosexual	Member

### Interview Transcripts<sup>3</sup>

#### Biographical

- Name and pronouns: Eric, He/Him

<sup>3</sup> Only present the transcription of the interviews that had permission;





- Age: 21
- Nationality: Polish
- Occupation: Student of psychology

#### Thematic

- Sexual Orientation: Pansexual
- Religious/Spiritual filiation: Witch

#### 1. Tell me a bit about your upbringing.

I grew up in a pretty atheist family, but I went to catholic school. So there was always a big contrast between what was happening in family and what I studied in school. I was born and raised in kalish it's the oldest city in the country but it's very beautiful, I'm an only child, and for six years of my live I wasn't living in the city I was living in a village next to it. And my parents are divorced, they separated when I was twelve and since then I've been mostly living with my mom.

#### 2. How did you become involved in GFN? And what is your motivation for attending the meetings and events?

Over the summer I met [REDACTED] they were a freshman around the GFN, they were much excited about everything that was happening there and at some point they just invited me to come over for a meeting, so I thought why not. That's how I got in. Mostly I want to educate myself because I feel like growing up in Poland I knew about the existence of different cultures and stuff but Poland is a very mono cultural country, and so we didn't have much contact with people who come from a different cultural and ethnical background. So when I came to Groningen, before I didn't even see that I lacked this experience and knowledge in a more practical sense, so when I came here and started interacting with people from different cultures I realized that I had a lot of stuff internalized and yeah I wanted to work on it.

#### 3. Is sexual orientation and gender identity an issue you actively reflect on?

Yes it is (laughed), because I've been recently started questioning my gender identity again, so when I started transitioning I was still in this polish binary culture, so I transitioned from the 'feminine' state to 'masculine' state, because I



thought this was the default and the main option I could follow, I knew about the existence of non-binary people but I didn't have anyone around me to sort of identify with in that regard. And I had some FDM (Female to Male) friends so, at first I transitioned from female to male and I came to Groningen and I met a lot of non-binary people I thought hmm, that is a thing that is happening for many people around me and now I'm questioning myself. And the also being in a relationship with someone who is non-binary means a lot of conversation about your sexuality and your gender, so yeah I think I've been reflecting more on those issues recently because of those circumstances.

4. So how were you raised in terms of expectations given the gender you were assigned at birth? Woman/man/non-binary, other?

At the beginning I think my parents wanted to raise me neutrally, so I would wear a lot of clothes from my male cousins, and I was generally allowed to do a lot of things, but at the same time because our family was not on the same page I would get presents for girls. I never had that narrative, a lot of trans people were asked by their doctors about when did you first feel that you were trans, and they have to create this narrative and usually is just pointing to this idea of being super masculine and hide all the other stuff that a cis-normative person who just wants to see a linear transition wouldn't understand. So I don't really have the experiences or the memories of rejecting the toys, just because I didn't have a concept of gender at that point and later on I don't have any concept of rejecting anything either feminine or masculine, only until later on in my life like fifteen sixteen. During my rebel face, thinking screw you I'm going to wear my face full of makeup and just get suspended, but over all within my close parents my parents tried to raise me neutrally, or at least not raise me to belief that I was less of a person because I was assigned female at birth. My mom is also much better educated and has much more money than my father so perhaps also having that power dynamic that is so different from what you usually see it also influenced my idea of what it means to be a man and what it means to be a woman.

5. How do you understand the influence that religion has in your life?

Before went to catholic school, so before I was seven I didn't have any connection



other than my grandparents who were religious and I remember a story that apparently I went with my grandfather to an exposition where they showed the birth of the Christ and my grandfather told me that I should show respect and I instantly started bowing in front of it, so that is how little I knew about religion then. And then I went to catholic school, which was very conservative, and I think that is one of the reasons why I realized relatively late that I was Trans because it was one of those environments where they would have the cookie cutter of the perfect person, and if you didn't fit you were a rebel and a troublemaker. And I was labeled that because basically I wanted freedom of expression and they didn't want me to have it so I think at that point in my life I was more focus on my identity as being a rebel, and then when I went to high school which was not catholic I went through the experience of very intense figuring out who I was, and I think I did what people usually do throughout three or four years when they are fourteen fifteen I did it when I was sixteen in one year, and it was very intense. I came out as pansexual one month after leaving catholic school and one year after I came out as Trans, so I would say that this religious aspect limited me for many many years.

7. Do you have a particular political/activist position on these issues?  
(Religion and gender and sexual issues)

At the moment I identify as a witch, and for it's mostly an anarchist statement against organized religion and I kind of want to be my own guide in my religious life, and that is what witchcraft offers us. So I have a very radical view (laugh) about mixing politics with religion, as in organized religions influencing politics, and I believe that it should not happen, which is probably also influenced by the fact that it does happen in my country.

10. What are your thoughts on accommodating religious diversity in the Netherlands? (Positive or negative values of religious diversity)

I don't think I've ever seen the university actively accommodating to other religions, but at the same time my current religious identity does not make me look for different facilities that the university provides, so I guess that is different for other students. I think that the university should be providing spaces for prayer in the UB for example. I haven't seen anything, but I also haven't seen anyone

working against any religions, as far as I know.

11. What are your thoughts on accommodating religious diversity inside the GFN?

I think that it's difficult to tell at the end of the day most of the GFN, even though we are open to all the religions, most of the people seem to be from an atheist or catholic or protestant background and I think that there are two people from Muslim background but that's it, as far as I know. I think maybe that is also a problem, which you don't realize that there is diversity unless it comes up in a very specific situation, for example in a discussion. I don't think that there any conflicts and that's important, I have never seen any discriminating behaviors, and I think that is good.

16. What do you think is the influence that religion has in determining gender roles? What about your own experience

I think a lot of religions, especially organized religions focus on a patriarchal system and that is their history, but at the same time I think that those systems, you can definitely be religious and still not conform to the gender norms. At the same time at least from my experience being in a catholic school and interacted mostly with catholic people throughout my life, religion can shelter children and adults even in a way that they may not even realize that there are alternatives to the gender norms presented by the religion, because they don't interact with people who have different categories and stereotypes. Personally I think that religion should be your own choice and I think speaking from the perspective of a psychologist even though you theoretically can leave a religion in some cases, in practical is not that simple because for example your entire family is in the religion, so leaving the religion would mean leaving a lot of people behind, perhaps also that fear of losing contact with people you care about is also something that can limits people who want to explore their gender and different ideas of gender norms

17. What do you think determines someone's characteristics that we frame as feminine, masculine, or non-binary? (Besides religious influence)



An interesting thing that happened when I finished catholic school was that suddenly I had the freedom of expression but like I said I had no idea who I was and how wanted to express so at first after leaving the school even though I thought I was very tom boy(ish) this school was particularly hateful towards people dying their hair wearing make up wearing nail polish, I did all those things, and I didn't even think if I felt comfortable with that until much later, I started figuring out that maybe it's actually not me but just acting out.

20. How do you navigate your gender role(s) in your own personal relationships, in different contexts of life (family, school/work, politics, etc)?

My family know that I'm trans, but they are not fully comfortable with that idea so for example my dad is kind of not ok, he is ok with the fact that I identify as masculine but he is not ok with the fact that I identify as my own idea of masculinity rather than this macho idea that he may perceive as the 'true masculinity', so we do not keep in contact for many reasons, like this one. And most part of my life like I said I was trying to figure it out my identity at the moment and I feel like the situation I'm in that the moment with the GFN and being here, with the relationship I'm currently at and the people who I live with I have a freedom to figure it out what masculinity means for me and how it applies to who I am as a person. That's how I'm navigating, I'm learning as I go, and I do what it feels right as far as, for a long time I was stuck on this idea I can't do that because I identify with masculinity, and that's not a thing, you can for example hug your friends even though you identify as a masculine person or you can hold hands with them, and I've only recently been realizing that.

22. What are your thoughts and experiences in the Netherlands when it comes to be a Woman/Man/Non-Binary (gender identity)?

It's nice to live in country where I can medically transition and is completely covered by my insurance, which is Dutch insurance because Polish insurance is shit. And also marry whomever I want etc. etc., it's definitely nice to have this range of possibilities, and especially because of all this process of rethinking my way of viewing masculinity, also I only speak in English here, and for example in Polish if you speak in the first person you have to apply a gender, so you either use



a masculine I or a feminine 'I', but in English this doesn't exist, which means that going through that change of language sort of changed my perception of myself.

23. What is the influence that sexual identity has in your life in your personal relationships and in different contexts of your life (family, school/work, politics, etc.)?

Well, when it comes to my family again it's complicated. They accept and respect my sexual orientation more than respect and accept my gender identity, and could be just because they don't really have a stereotype of being bisexual to what is being a true man. So there is no idea so they don't compare and they don't think oh, you're not the real thing. My family especially my mother, never knew about any relationships I was in but that's because we also have a difficult time talking about especially about our relationships, romantic relationships. And when it comes to my friends, I was very lucky to go to an high school, and to a class that was very open, I sort of had this liberal bubble like we have at the GFN, but a polish high school version of it. So I don't think that it influenced any of my current friendships negatively, if anything my sexual orientation kind of influenced some of them positively, because when some people are uncomfortable around straight men, for obvious reasons, and having that identity out in the open makes other LGBT people more likely to talk to you, so I think my identity influenced also because I'm very open with it, and so most of my friends are not cis-straight-white people, well still most of them are white (laughs). Of course it's pretty straight forward because I date all genders I have dated and I'm dating people who are also not straight.

25. Would you say that religious pluralism is contributing for gender equality and for the understanding and acceptance of matters of sexuality?

I think that this freedom of religion and also acceptance of other religious views can potentially increase variety of gender norms I guess and decrease the gender stereotypes, it's very interesting because I've never thought about any further than yes it would, but how through what mechanism, but I guess maybe also acceptance for others religions encouraged you to critically think about your own,



and critically thinking is a key for open mindedness, so maybe through that it could influence gender norms and stereotypes.

### Biographical

- Name and pronouns: Asa She/Her
- Age: 22
- Nationality: British
- Occupation: Student Medicine

### Thematic

- Gender Identity
- Sexual Orientation
- Religious/Spiritual filiation: No filiation

- Tell me a bit about your upbringing.

I grew up in London Deptford, which is kind of a working class area; I grew up in a flat. Then I went a primary school that is a bit fancy, which is where my accent comes from.

- Tell me about how the Groningen Feminist Network started?

I went to Queens University in Belfast, before this for a year and there they had a feminist society, and they have it pretty much in every University in the UK, because it's quite easy to have a society it's not like difficult like you have here, that you have to have money etc. There you just need three people that want to be in the society and you can make it. So there was a feminist society, there were lots of things that needed to be changed in Belfast for example campaigning for abortion and laws to changed and also like there was volunteer schemes to help people who wanted to get an abortion, if they wanted to go to England or if they wanted to go to one of the clinics, because people still protested outside of abortion clinics, with pictures of aborted fetuses, it was pretty extreme. That it was when I started to be actually interested in feminism, my mom is a feminist and kind of brought us up feminist (ish), but I never took an active part in it and then when I came here I was kind of expecting it to have something like that, but there wasn't so I started thinking about starting something, and then there was this symposium where we spoke about the future of medicine and most medical





students at the moment are women which that the balance kind of shifted, it is seen as one more accessible science job for women to study. So it was actually a room full of women with the future of medicine being discussed by a bunch of white men. And I mentioned that to a few people and they were like yes, and one of those people was Robin who I study with and [REDACTED] and [REDACTED] and a few other people. And after that I thought that I wanted to be able to talk about this with people because I've also discussed with other friends from medicine that didn't get why that was an issue, saying oh they probably just couldn't find any women, and that is not acceptable. So made a post on Facebook saying, Hey would anyone be interested in taking part if I made a feminist group where we would be able to talk and meet up and have discussions and stuff, and a bunch of people said yes so we had the first meeting in my bedroom and then other meeting in Het Concerthuis. It was very chill we would just meet out and speak to other people, then we had a craft night and that was when we met Sandra and she wanted to get involved as well, and so it was starting to get more organized, and then we were getting to big to meet in a café, so then we started meeting The Crown, and then we came back from Christmas break or something and then Sandra because she had been in other committees before kind of knows what is needed to be an official committee, so we had to write statutes we need to have rules and regulations and stuff and then it was when it became official, and it started growing and growing from there.

- How would you describe the GFN?

It's a community led network of light-minded people... (Laughs). I feel like mainly there is like a core group of friends really, people that meet outside of the GFN as well, but form like a friendship group, and then there is like the whole group with everyone who comes to the meetings sometimes, and that is kind of a bit more changeable, people come people go and it used to be more educational we had like several educational events last year and I think at the moment we want to get back to that social stuff is nice but we also want to educate people and create change. And I guess we are activists.

- Is sexual orientation and gender identity an issue you actively reflect on?



For myself I never really had any internal struggles about it which I'm pretty lucky, like my half-sister, I have a half-sister biologically, because my dad used to work with this woman [REDACTED], and she's a lesbian and she wanted to have kids with her partner, and so my dad donated his sperm to them, so it would be kind of a bit ridiculous for me to be scared of coming out, you know what I mean? But I don't know I never really thought of it as a big deal, I remember one time I kind of realized I fancied girls as well as boys and I was like oh my god, at that time you weren't allowed to get married, so I was like shit, it's going to be difficult if I want to be with someone who is not a man. I was like fourteen. So it was never a big drama for me. But in terms of politics I think that is super important because so many people get too comfortable with the way things are now and like first of all things are not perfect people still get attacked in the street for being visible queer and there is still not equality and in terms of gender equality, people still don't understand gender for a start, never mind how to pay everyone the same or treat everyone the same, so I think it is very important to like actively engage in this conversations. And it's kind of frustrating to try and make people care all the time, but that is kind of what we have to do.

- So how were you raised in terms of expectations given the gender you were assigned at birth? Woman/man/non-binary, other?

Well, I think my parents were very like neutral they never felt that there was something like I couldn't do because of my gender, definitely have had grandparents that were not such. My mom is from Ireland so pretty much all the Irish were a little bit more conservative and a little bite more like ohh, when are going to get married and when are you going to have kids. So when I said I wanted to study medicine pretty much all my relatives I spoke about it were like how are you going to have kids? You're going to be so busy with your study. But I think that was always an expectation that I knew it was bullshit cause my mom and dad had always been like that doesn't matter.

- How do you understand the influence that religion has in your life?

Well, it's weird I feel like the only experience I had ever had with religion was like indirect because my mom was raised kind of religious, cause she's from Ireland,

where religion cause a lot of problems I mean the view isn't so positive. The primary school I went to was religious we did all the kids songs about God, but remember starting learning about Adam and Eve, but they didn't teach us about any other religious stories or any other faiths, which is weird for me because I grew up in Deptford which is quite a diverse place, and I went to a primary school there and we had the Diwali celebrations and we talked about different religions, and the other primary school was very Christian. The middle school I went to was very religious it was called Christ the King we had a chapel, but I kind of never really engaged in it to be honest.

- What are your thoughts on religious diversity in the Netherlands based on your experience?

I don't know... That are a lot of committees from various religions that I've seen and Christian fraternities that is kind of interesting. Because in Belfast it was very much like that as well, there was a whole street of religious societies, so it was quite good because they would all do free meals (laughs). But I don't know in the Netherlands is not as visible, the only thing I've seen that it hasn't been a church is the Synagogue and that's it. Not as much as I've seen in Belfast or in London.

- Do you have a particular political/activist position on these issues?  
(Religion and gender and sexual issues)

I guess my position is that everybody should be not just tolerated but accepted regardless of any of those things (religions, gender, and sexuality). People use religion, as a reason not to do that and that intersection is the only thing that really bothers me, when somebody's religious beliefs are a reason for discrimination.

- What are your thoughts and actions to accommodate religious diversity, and how it translates in terms of a plural group?

There are probably a lot of things that we can do, think the best way for us to reach out to a group that are feminist and might want to engage in our events and our meetings and discussions but also belong to other groups and have other identities as well is by collaborations. In general we want to be more visible in the city and hopefully being more visible will reach to other people who don't



necessarily see themselves as classic GFN person, because they have another identity as well or something like this. We just want to be deliberately inclusive of marginalized groups, that's kind of our priority and generally accepting of anyone else that is feminist. It's weird because when people belong to feminist circles they kind of get used to being very like deliberately open and care with language to be respectful of other people, but then when religion comes up, possibly because people who are feminist are sometimes queer, religion can have had a bad effect intersection with that identity in the past, so there's sometimes hostility or just dismissiveness which is sometimes offensive to people who like for them religion is very important, and during that meeting (on circumcision) I was like, really tires, after a heavy week or something and I was like man, I wish I had prepared more, to kind of talk about religion because we kind of just mentioned it from the medical point of view. And I wish I had said something about religious identities and respect. Because you just think you don't need to say that to a group of feminists, but I don't know I think there is lot of people have hang ups about it and it comes up when we have discussions about it, and people feel alienated and left out, and feel that they're beliefs are pushed aside.

- Do you think that the GFN is a religious diverse group?

I feel like we have all people, including people that are not religious but in terms of the religious people there's some diversity I think. I'm not sure it's hard to say. The only people I now there're religious are the people that I know personally. But I think what can happen sometimes in activist spaces or in feminist spaces is that people are predominately atheists, people can be quite dismissive of religion. Like when we had the discussion about circumcision (mentioned above) and people being kind of disrespectful about people's religious beliefs. I feel like maybe there are a higher number of people who are atheist or agnostic.

- What do you think is the influence that religion has in determining gender roles? What about your own experience

I think that there are correlations probably if you take like a very traditional Christian view for example of what it means to be a man and what it means to be



a woman, then probably yes. But I think it probably does, it's funny a lot of people you have a very religious upbringing sometimes they become very strict within those roles, and sometimes they completely rebel against them, and then sometimes people who are brought up in a very agnostic or atheist way rebel against that, by really fitting into the roles that religion lays out, but I don't think that is like completely correlated.

- What do you think determines someone's characteristics that we frame as feminine, masculine, or non-binary? (Besides religious influence)

Everything! Society, media, religion also plays a part in it. I don't know it all comes together I think. I think it's mostly what you have been allowed to believe is true, and religion would have an impact on that.

- How do you navigate your gender role(s) in your own personal relationships, in different contexts of life (family, school/work, politics, etc)?

It depends on the day, I think. In terms of the roles I feel like its quite fluid, not my gender but the roles that I play. But it's not a conflict in any way.

- How do you feel that it reflects in the way other categorize you?

I feel like, it's a lot of women, because there is so much pressure of like a close way placed on the role you're playing and what that means so like if you're being too assertive in mind of people who are viewing or being very feminine, I don't know if it's just me, but I feel quite able to manipulate that, so whenever I feel like I need a more masculine energy to do what I'm doing on that day like a presentation, and I know that they'll take me seriously if I'm standing in a certain way or speaking in a certain way then I'll do that. But if I feel more comfortable doing something else then I do that. It's very strategic for me I think, I feel like as a woman you're kind at a disadvantage from the beginning in a lot of settings and situations, and so I just use whatever I can to just make it more even.

- What are your thoughts and experiences in the Netherlands when it comes to be a Woman/Man/Non-Binary (gender identity)?



I definitely get more catcalled here, it's difficult because there are lots of things that I have experienced in the Netherlands that I've never experienced back home. We had an issue with our supervisor where we were being too emotional and there is no way that he would ever have said that to a man, and I don't know if I'm just being naïve but I can't imagine that happening in London, somebody saying that to me, like a professional man, saying that to me that I was being emotional. I think that it is an harassment thing, because maybe I'm biased because when I lived in London I was younger and I didn't go out as much, and the only place that I did go out like I go here was in Belfast where I feel like people are a bit more respectful, because there is kind of a bigger presence of religions, people are more respecting of gender roles and respecting women, is a bit more chivalrous perhaps. And here people just feel so entitled to touch you and like talk to you, and shout to you in the middle of the street, and here I don't know a single person that hasn't been touched without their permission in a club, that is femme.

- What is the influence that sexual identity has in your life in your personal relationships and in different contexts of your life (family, school/work, politics, etc)?

It doesn't really come up (in university), weird I mean with family, well I have an Italian grandma who I will never tell because it's not worth it, but that is not really a lost for me. It doesn't really come up in any other contexts, people are always surprised that I'm not straight which is annoying.

- Would you say that religious pluralism is contributing for gender equality and for the understanding and acceptance of matters of sexuality?

I feel like when you're open to diversity in terms of religion and you're doing it with good intention. The logical next step is to look at all of the other areas which there's inequality and prejudice, so I feel like if you're open to being more religiously diverse then you can help but also be open to other forms of diversity. I feel like that would affect the way that gender and sexuality impact the makeup over group but sometimes people don't make that connection. And sometimes people are just doing it for numbers and statistics and stuff. But think once you stop paying attention to diversity from whatever place that you come from, so if you're

talking about religion, for us it would be talking about gender if you want to talk about gender inequality you can't help but extended it to sexuality and to religion and everything else, because really where are you drawing your line. That is what I think, I feel like it opens a door.

#### Biographical

- Name and pronouns: Robin They/Them
- Age: 21
- Nationality: Belgium
- Occupation: Student Medicine

#### Thematic

- Gender Identity: Non-binary
- Sexual Orientation: Bisexual
- Religious/Spiritual filiation: Christian

- Tell me a bit about your upbringing.

I was raised catholic although I don't associate myself with the church anymore, but the norms and spirituality that I've got from there I still carry with me. One of the most important parts of my upbringing was the internationality, because I was born in England, when I was four we moved to America, and I went to a catholic school there, it's the perfect time to indoctrinate a child. Then we moved to Switzerland where I went to international school for six years, until we finally moved to Belgium, so before that I had never been in Belgium but my parents, well my mom is from Belgium my dad is Dutch. In Belgium I also went to catholic school. My mom was the most influential, because when my second sister was born my mom stayed at home and my dad worked. We were raised bilingual, we would speak English with our classmates, and Dutch at home. It was a very warm home, especially before we moved to Belgium everything was very loving and wholesome. When we moved to Belgium things got a bit more difficult, because my dad was still working in Switzerland, so it was a bit demotivating or disillusioning for my mom because she was expecting to have more help and



family support and like they didn't get as involved. One the whole we still had this very warm and caring home.

- Tell me about your involvement with the Groningen Feminist Network?

I didn't know Asa very well we sort of were friends but like we were both kind of like loners within the medical faculty, and we didn't have a lot of friends in our first year, and she had been talking to start the feminist network for a while and in February she just did, and I wasn't there for the first meeting cause I was at home, and the second meeting was at Het Concerthuis, there were five or six people. And they were all medical students, and the only ones who still are involved from that group are me, [REDACTED], Asa and [REDACTED], some people still come and go but are not involved like us. I've just been there ever since, the first person to stick around was Sandra, and then after the summer of 2016, people just started coming around after they saw our Facebook page like Stella-Marie that came with Dakota. And then it started to evolve (similar explanation to Asa). And then there was the Women's March in 2017, and we boomed, we just couldn't fit anywhere. I think the most special thing is how much we became a really close net, people who left the city and the country still are in contact with of us.

- How would you describe the GFN?

"We are community led network of light-minded people..." (Laughs), I think it's a space where everyone feels free to express themselves, and feel safe to express themselves. In a way is like a family you know, when I was in England the last three months, the thing I missed the most was the weekly meetings and seeing people and having this context where I know that people wouldn't judge me and accept me for who I am. My family would probably describe it as a cult; I think there is something that makes it difficult for society stuff, and for network, because we became so closed that is difficult for other people to get involved and feel welcomed, especially when there is only a few people at the meetings. That is something that we have to find a balance in, and finding a way not to scare of newcomers, I think that is something that a lot of people felt and feel about other organizations in the city that aim to be a close and safe space, but it's hard to be inclusive if you've got your friend group it can be intimidating.



- Is sexual orientation and gender identity an issue you actively reflect on?

A lot! Yeah, it's been a bit of a journey getting here and I think the nature of my identities, as non-binary, bisexual person and it feels like being in the middle of the road, very often, and I have questioned my identity a lot, when it's easier to see yourself reflected in people who are more accepted by society but in the other hand you fit within the boxes of society more, for me as a kid, I was always very focused on boxes I remember when I was in high school when a kid who wasn't in our year group would join mine, because they had to be in their year group, and that's like a stupid thing, I'm like, I don't I agree with it anymore but it's still something that influences my thinking and sometimes I still have to put that way. I think in that case this is the framework which I often I'm reflecting on my identity.

- So how were you raised in terms of expectations given the gender you were assigned at birth? Woman/man/non-binary, other?

I think I'd like to think that there weren't a lot of expectations put on me, but no one ever forced me to do something I didn't want to do, but since coming out to my parents I've noticed that there are some expectations that have been there. I'm naturally not a quite person I don't know if it's because I was very shy as a kid, and there's that idea that girls are quite, but nah, I think I was just very shy. But like for example I loved fairies I loved ballet, I would play with all the dolls, but also like Lego and Play mobile, and trains we had a lot of gender neutral toys. But then there's also the type of books you read, and as a kid I would always get the princess Lego, I never asked for anything else, but people also never considered maybe they'd like to have a really cool Bayonical, I thought those were pretty cool but I never asked about it, because you know that was not something that was expected of me and like needed per se. And I think that has led to a sum of thing even if most of the things weren't that gendered the some of that has led to me being a strong gendered person in my family, and there are still gendered expectations of me today. I cut my hair the first time two years ago, I had blond very curly hair until the middle of my back, and I catted shoulder length and then this short. And literally a year later my mom was asking if I wasn't going to let my hair grow. I



think also in terms of presentation like my mom is very into fashion and like we got the most fashionable clothes, and like I didn't have a problem with that I liked wearing dresses and that until like I didn't. At the same time when I started being a teenager I started thinking that I felt discomfort in my body, and I thought that was just because I couldn't present as the most normal girl that there was, I felt like that was very difficult for me because I didn't know how to shave my legs, see that's another thing my mom never told me to shave my legs, I asked her about shaving the arm pits because of ballet, and I was embarrassed with the hair in my arms but I never asked how to shave my legs, I asked that to a cousin of mine or something, but there was always this weird dichotomy with like so here I am presenting like a girly girl, I try to look pretty and like a normal girl because I was very invested in like becoming part of the norm because I was a bit of an outsider and it took me so long to realize that that wasn't me. I've been rambling about this but I feel like that drive to become part of the norm and fit in was the most gendered experience I had. I don't think that my princess Legos were like a gendered thing, I also had princesses and like I said there were complex narratives surrounding these characters and proto-feminist stories.

- How do you understand the influence that religion has in your life?

It was always present, my mom is quite religious, not in a conservative way, but in a spiritual way, and I think I was very lucky to experience my religion not as a prison or as an oppressive force as much as it was a place of compassion I was always very much raised in this idea that Jesus is love, love your neighbor, be a good person. It was all about compassion always maybe the, hm... I'm thinking whether there are aspects that the religious catholic values that like obey and honor your mother and father and like doing the right think according to like commandments and what not whether that has influence in my moral code and my behavior as well, and stick to the rules and also with the thing with the boxes it's a stick to the rules kind of thing. I was the goodest kid, I tried very much to be good according what society thinks, and also according to my own moral code, but also like a good catholic child. I don't think it strongly, well I suppose it did influence how I perceived other sexualities and religions, I was always very open minded and I think that the combination with catholic and international school



took a very liberal role, like everyone can do what they want in a very individualistic view, that was definitely something that made it easier for me to accept who I was, because it was easy for me to accept who others were. And I know that other people weren't so lucky when I was in high school, it was also a catholic school and there were a lot of catholic people, and I know that one of those people there was one gay boy in my class he only came out in the last two years of high school, and in the first four years he was vocally homophobic and vocally it's not natural it's a sin, and he came from a very conservative upbringing but also very catholic. So I think that Catholicism conjunct with liberal identity that my parents had that made me a very accepting person and a very open minded person, and also I was very lucky that it didn't go the other way.

- What are your thoughts on religious diversity in the Netherlands based on your experience?

Ohhh, I really love this so much because, Belgium not so religious diverse I mean there's like a bunch of people who are like sort of catholic but not very catholic anymore especially in Flanders, the you've got a very large Muslim community and then a very small Jewish community, not a lot of protestants, and a lot of atheists everywhere, but like most people are like raised in catholic tradition so I come here, and especially because we are in the north of the Netherlands the main religion is the protestant religion and I feel like there is more open mindedness towards, not like open mindedness per se more like in a Dutch way, we accept all religions like, but on the other hand you don't see a lot of other religions most people you see are like atheist and then the people you see are either raised catholic or protestant of various different kinds, but also there are like a lot of different religious student societies. But first let me finish, there's also a bunch of people who were raised Muslim, I don't think I've met Jewish people, I probably have. But like it's not something that it's talked about, I'm interested from like a historically point of view, because I'm quite interested in the history of the Netherlands and Belgium and how they interacted, but like no one really talks about religion. I know that my faculty has a bathroom that is also reserved for like washing for prayer but I've never noticed like any holiday for like non-Christian religions, or a break for non-Christian religions. So even though I do see more



diversity I also don't see it being accommodated so much, other than standard like stuff, but there's no especially prayer quarters. So you can still see like the Christian world view and the Christian traditions are still very much in place here, and they are stronger than they are in Belgium like you walk around the city on a Sunday morning nothing is open, more people are actively religious I was quite surprised like I know a lot of students who actively go to church and stuff and people that I knew in Belgium I think I knew three and they were all in my catholic high school. There is a more active interest in religion but it's not coming from the city and it's not coming from a diverse point of view. And on the other hand more people identify as atheists as well whereas in Belgium is all more 'wishy washy' like I did my communion so I can get presents, my brother did his confirmation the other week and I think like three people in his group I think there were like twenty-six kids that were getting conformed in that church in a tiny church full of people that it was probably the first time they went to church in like months all these kids are like there to get presents, and it's like you are actively subscribing to like a big worldwide community and they're twelve and so they are not aware of like the controversies around the church and the significance of being part of the church and the power, not the physical power, it is a power that they are giving the church so they can say they have so many members. It's really interesting how religion is treated differently.

- What are your thoughts and actions to accommodate religious diversity, and how it translates in terms of a plural group?

There is a lot that we can do, and try and make it more explicit, like at every meeting we say the CGW's but I don't know if we actually, I think main thing that we do try to do is like for example in the Facebook group saying that religious bashing is not allowed. But we try to not make a big deal of people's identifiers it's not important, it's important to us to like you should identify as a communist. I mean you don't even have to identify as a feminist you just need to be interested in feminism and be respectful of others beliefs and others opinions unless they're actively harmful towards others. I think that's the main thing we don't want to be harmful towards others, but we could probably do more to be more active.

- Do you think that the GFN is a religious diverse group?

I think that the majority of people are probably atheists, and most people have rejected or have had bad experience with the church, but I know that have been Muslims that come and go, people who identify as Muslims, [REDACTED] is Muslim, and it's still involved. There's a lot of pagan people, people who have chosen to reframe their spirituality in their own way, and like I think that's a really interesting thing, is that people who come to the GFN there's probably a mix of atheist and spiritual people but they chose to reframe there spirituality in a way that is more open minded and more accessible then organized religion. But I know I've met someone who is very Christian and still is a feminist (probable speaking about Stella-Marie by the more elaborate description), for me as well I don't think that my spirituality is a contradiction to my feminism, it is important though and I think everyone at the feminist network has probably gotten complicated relationship with they're religion just because you have to examine the structures that you grew in, and whether that's made them reject organized religion entirely and chosen to build their own spirituality in pagan tradition, and people who chose to accept their religious institutions with its flaws and try to change it from within. So I would say that I'm still Christian but I don't identify with the church, I think it's quite a diverse perspective on religion on the GFN. And I also appreciate that no one ever bashed religion, and that is also part of what we defend. And I think in a lot of leftists spaces there can often be religion bashing and a lot of atheism is the way to go, and I don't think we have that, and I think that's very beautiful.

- How do you feel that your own religious background ads to the group diversity and environment? (if applicable)

I think only insofar as it offers me the perspective of, if there's like a conversation about abortion I understand why people are against it like based on religious grounds, but I don't think that my back ground in Catholicism plays a very large role in conversations. Especially because it's not a new opinion or an opinion that needs another voice.

- What do you think is the influence that religion has in determining gender roles? What about your own experience



Well God created Adam and then God created Eve and rather if Eve came from a rib or on her own, she's always created second, speaking only from my own religious experience so much generals like being a mother or being a protector the gendered language always used to describe God as the father and the only like important, even though there are a lot of important woman in religion, I did feel like very inspired in my only attempt to try and read the bible they are all background figures, expect for Mary and the whole book of Mary is about caring and virginity and even like the idea of women caring the original sin, and no one is actively saying, well some people are, but saying that women are the sinners or like you know all women are secondary to men, but like it's there, and the way that Christianity has impacted the world because it was the colonizers language and religion, it's Christian values and Christian views of gender roles have been spread across the whole world and impacted the whole world in such a significant way and they are very patriarchal, very much husband protector no sex before marriage, you know if I do it as a man it's still better if I do it has a woman because women are sinners. The Christian patriarchal values are quite spread and they do have string views of gender roles and even if they aren't made explicit they're very implicit in how faith is performed.

- What do you think determines someone's characteristics that we frame as feminine, masculine, or non-binary? (Besides religious influence)

I think there's like a not, nowadays. There's also like this idea of people who want to go back to the paleo roots, again like men are protectors and women are careers, culturally and historical this has been the norm and patriarchy has existed in many different places regardless of religious backgrounds, I think patriarchy stands on its own as well, religion feeds it but it doesn't determine it. And I think maybe also new movements have influenced the way we perceive gender roles, feminism as a movement has influenced gender roles influences and has broader what is allowed to be feminine at the same time it also polices it, like feminism polices womanhood, patriarchy is still the number one I got say. There is also the same policing behavior inside the LGBT community, maybe also like within smaller communities that femininity and masculinity are sort of like redefined and challenged, like the gay community, the lesbian community there are different





roles for masculinity and femininity which aren't necessarily tied to man and women but are still gender affiliated, like no one would say that a Butch woman is a man, but you know butch women do adhere to some kind of masculinity and at the same time within the lesbian community a lot of people are strongly identifying as non-binary cause of the fact that sexuality in a way is also attached to gender, and part of the patriarchal expectations of women is that they are sexually attracted to men if you are not attracted to men you kind of lose that connection to traditional womanhood and I think that's why a lot of non-binary people identify as lesbians because of that disconnection to manhood I guess. So there's like this very interesting interplay between gender and sexuality and I guess feminism comes into it, it's so complicated I get it, but within mainstream society still very much patriarchal ideas and opposing feminist ideas but like there's still like policing people, like old fashion feminists who have this idea that you shouldn't wear heels or make up, or vice versa. There is still a lot of policing gender.

- How do you navigate your gender role(s) in your own personal relationships, in different contexts of life (family, school/work, politics, etc.)?

Yes one hundred per cent I perform different gender roles, yeah. Like for example if I have to ask for something at the university or like ask something from anyone I notice that I put in a much more feminine role, it's not even like a conscious decision, my voice will go up I'll be like more gentle and more shy and like because it works, and people are more inclined to give things to feminine people or to feminine women, because feminine men have other complications that they are not always perceived as feminine, their perceived as wrong, but for me it is beneficial to perform femininity in a lot of contexts, but for example having this conversation with you I don't feel the pressure to perform in kind of gender role versus if I'm going to the cash register and I'd be more actively trying to perform more masculine, or if I'm walking through the street and I don't want to be bothered by anyone I'll perform a more masculine gender role, I'll do what I can to be perceived as masculine and when I can't I do notice the difference, the other day when it was very hot I had a low



cut top and I was wearing a sports bra and not my binder so like people read me as someone who's a woman, and like twice literally in five minutes people just like started talking to me for no reason, it was not like a bad thing like cat calling or anything but like one person was like oh you're putting on sunscreen that's good that's wealthy, and I was like thanks ok, and it was like a friendly interaction but kind of awkward, and I was like would you have done that if you didn't read as a woman. And later I was on my phone and I was texting someone that I was going to be late and someone was like, oh always on the phone, you cannot go anywhere without a phone these days, and like I thought is this like me, are people like following me, and like Jesus Christ. And people wouldn't have done that, it was two people, they wouldn't have felt that they had the right to address me and the entitlement to address me if I was presenting more masculine possibly. And possible if I looked older, and if they read me as a kid instead of an adult, if they see me as a boy there's also like a sort of entitlement there. But yeah I definitely do perform different gender roles.

- What are your thoughts and experiences in the Netherlands when it comes to be a Woman/Man/Non-Binary (gender identity)?

Well because I've only recently been coming out more outside of the feminist network, so within the feminist network it's all been good, everyone has been open minded and accepting and I think within the Netherlands it's more like, do you remember when there was this saying that, were the NS was like from now on we are going to say Dear passengers instead of dear sirs and madams, and like people had a big discussion about that? Like that was kind of shitty, because that's when you see the other side of Dutch tolerance, it's only as long as you fit in and you look normal, and I think my luck in this case is that people don't often read me as someone who's confusing in gender, either they see me as a masculine woman, or if I'm lucky they see me as a young man or a boy, people don't feel threatened by my presence, the way that they would by a non-binary person who was assigned male at birth who's tall or very obviously confusing in their gender presentation, I know when I was in London that people with I was with were also quite open minded and accepting, and people did asked me what my pronouns were, and



were super respectful about it as well, but on the whole if people aren't in that sort of open bubble then I still see people miss gendering me, people still read me as a woman and treat me like a woman, in things like shopping interaction sometimes I get away with like passing between big air quotes as a man but as soon as I open my mouth I know that's gone, like people hear that I'm an adult and that my voice is high pitch so they read me as a woman, and at home that has been especially uncomfortable, you know I did grow up in a family that saw me as a girl and still sees me as a young girl and has their daughter has their sister and despite me telling my siblings and my parents that I don't want to be addressed as such they still do, and yes it has been kind of rough because even though I know that they love me and respect me they clearly don't see me in the way I want them to see me, I think I'm very lucky to live in a place that doesn't really give a fuck how you identify and in some way that's good like it doesn't give a fuck as long as you fit in into the hegemonic sort of role I think it would be more problematic if I were a brown person, or if I had physical disabilities, that's like a blessing and a curse that people don't give a fuck in the Netherlands, you can identify as a Taco if you want, that's the kind of joke that you get in the Netherlands because people like just act normal and you'll get by, and whatever else you do it's in the private sphere so like, I've experienced a lot of shitiness but also a lot of respect. For me it's not enough for people to like be like I guess if you want, it has to be ok I might not entirely get how you feel but I do want to be a respectful human being and like treat you with the respect you deserve has another human being, and Dutch people aren't always good at that. As I mean it's complicated because Dutch is also a gendered language and like society doesn't see gender has a not binary, I mean more and more even my dad said that well you know gender is a complex thing, and I was like yeah dad, maybe I can come out to you some day, I'm out to them now but they still call me girl and like their daughter and their oldest daughter, and it feels so weird, and is it so hard for them to just call me their child is it so hard, but you know it's tricky I think, because people know you in a certain way and in a gendered certain way.

- What is the influence that sexual identity has in your life in your personal relationships and in different contexts of your life (family, school/work, politics, etc.)?

Hmm... I don't know if I've ever met anyone who felt threatened by me being bisexual, with feminist network friends it's all very open with each other, and we joke around a lot about it it's very open, and with other friends I don't think I talk about this this much. I have a funny situation where me and like one of my guy friend we always hit on the same people and that is always very awkward, I mean not very awkward but I don't think his is even aware of that, it's awkward to me because I always feel like a bit threatened in the sense of like of course you are going to succeed at this because you are a big manly man and I'm wimpy skinny person, but you know I have charm. Yeah I don't know I don't think that it has ever been a problem, if I want to go out with someone I can make it clear that I'm attracted to people of your gender, and I've also been lucky enough to never have dated someone who had a problem with my sexual orientation, and even when I was dating a man when I thought I might be bisexual and even though that relationship was very shitty in a lot of ways it was not a big deal for him, and he was very supportive of that particular struggle that I was dealing with at the time. It never had a negative impact for me, but that's my luck I guess.

- Would you say that religious pluralism is contributing for gender equality and for the understanding and acceptance of matters of sexuality?

I think it opens conversations about gender right, like the obvious debate here is like between big air quotes, a Muslim woman oppressed, and between a personal choices. I think religious pluralism, but ideally any kind of ideological pluralism unless it's like an actively harmful ideology, but any kind of ideology and religious belief or identity that is not trying to actively pursue or do damage to another identity or group I think opens conversations and opens people to perceptions that they're unaware of and I think that is important to cultivate and cultivate space where a lot of identities are there, and sometimes you'll have conflict and sometimes you'll have contradicting ideas and beliefs but I think it's really important especially in this day and age, you really can cultivate who you are following on the internet, like you don't have to follow someone that you disagree

with, but I think that sometimes is important to talk to people you disagree with, as long as is not, I mean I wouldn't say give an ear to Nazis or to islamophobes, but to people who may be saying like I don't know but like religion should play a more important role in society I'd like to know why do you think that and the perspective in this, I think it can open people's minds to other perspectives and identities, and hopefully in the long turn it leads to... for example I think different religions have some kind of ideas of what gender equality means and what gender roles are, and I think that organized religion is especially not very gentle towards women, and that is not in their original texts, it's just like the stands of today's organized religion is misogynistic, and this is historical. But I think that that could change I don't think that through religion that's how it has to change but it's a possibility, especially this idea that you describe as religious pluralism everyone gets a space and a voice and it's actively encourage to like look at diversity and stuff, I think that could definitely help.

#### Biographical

- Name and pronouns: Roza, She/HER
- Age: 33
- Nationality: Dutch
- Occupation: Phd Student of documentary film

#### Thematic

- Sexual Orientation
- Religious/Spiritual filiation: No

- Tell me a bit about your upbringing.

My parents were both kind of hippies, and they were really loving parents but it did affect me quite a bit that they split up when I was about six or seven, and that was kind of a shock, and I had to get used to first them dating a few other people, and then finally settling with other partners And both of them married at a later point they were never married to each other they feel that it was necessary so yes I don't know. I think my upbringing was even though my parents were separated

both of them and I kept very good relationship with both of them and also with my stepparents. I tried to have a really good relationship with them even though it was difficult sometimes some of the people at my parents sometimes dated sometimes people do you really want to acknowledge them that their partners had kids they couldn't really deal with that which was difficult sometimes. The thing is when I was little I was bullied a lot in school maybe that's another topic.

- How did you become involved in GFN? And what is your motivation for attending the meetings and events?

I think I learned about the GFN and through the music matters festival like these events the music matter events they were organized by he was part of the organization and I was really interested in and I was also not out as a trans person then but I was very interested in feminist issues so I went to one of these events and I was like really an outsider very much but then I learned that some people of the GFN are organizing and they are involving in this organization and then later I was also at the women's march Then I thought who are amazing awesome queer people, Were there for the March and I just rolled his people are awesome but I just felt way too shy to talk to them but I'm glad I did you know because I followed these Facebook events and pages and then I start to find better about the GFN the page recommended to me and so I realize it was a parallel to each other As always it be too shy to just go to one of these events and meetings and then Michael started the which sounded really awesome So queer feminists who organize a little group about cult stuff that is so much my interest I have to go there I thought so I would dare together with Ruben my best friend and it was really awesome and I also got to know Nick and Jorje and some others and they invited me also to other things.

- Is sexual orientation and gender identity an issue you actively reflect on?

Yes very much it's something that has been a process of discovery for me my entire life first I had a hard time dealing with the fact that attracted to women but also to men that was a real kind of shock to me because apparently I was really homophobic and I never thought I was homophobic because you know my parents



raised me in this really progressive excepting kind of worrying me now so it's not everybody's equal but at the same time discovering for yourself then you have a romantic or feelings for people "on "the same gender well now I don't really identify as a man anymore but you know there was already like a big shock to me anyway because it doesn't really matter how your parents raised you even if your parents try to raise you with an open mind you're still in high school and in high school when everything that I did was seen as too feminine by my peers and my peers were really like I remember person from COC coming to do like a dog in our school and was in my high school she explained that she was a lesbian and have that for her it was like in shock and then I remember we sat in a little circle and the idea was to have a group discussion open without no judgment but the opposite of course happened because the most ages around 15 and 16 so like everyone was asked to say something and almost everybody said no I don't really have a problem and gave me but I'm definitely not gay and looking back that was such a clear signal for me as well I can't say like anything but I cannot also be open on some things I was already like having romantic feelings for some of my friends in high school but I really I didn't say anything because they were usually kind of more macho guys. I thought that they were just easily just getting out of their friend group. So that was already kind of process to so I was in Luxemburg for a few years and when I return to the Netherlands to study here in Groningen I had a lot more liberty to just be myself as a student you're not anymore in this toxic control environment around teenage boys anymore this toxic environment so after I broke up with my first girlfriend I joined a student Association and there I met really amazing guy and I completely fell in love with that that was super confusing to me because I I couldn't acknowledge I was to you in denial about my own sexuality so I so that whole potential relationship was sabotage by myself With me cheating on him with a girl because I couldn't do it with the idea that I might be you know so that took me years to finally get to grips with the fact that it doesn't matter OK so I like man I like women and bisexual it's OK it's not a reason you are really weird which is strange because I would never judge so harshly another person if somebody told me I'm bisexual I would be like OK fine but for myself apparently double standards or something .



- So how were you raised in terms of expectations given the gender you were assigned at birth? Woman/man/non-binary, other?

I think I was raised in a way that it didn't matter and for example that the men or women do not need to correspond to traditional gender roles but I was never raised with an awareness of the idea that you might not really fit in the gender you were assigned at birth I was much more raised in this way that there's a lot of flexibility for men and women you can just be whatever you want to be and it doesn't matter your gender your gender doesn't matter but in the real world of course in interaction with people who think in a more traditional binary it's not that simple and so it took a long time for me to know to get to the point where I actually acknowledge that I couldn't live as a man not in this current state of society.

- How do you understand the influence that religion has in your life?

I think that's a very difficult question I don't really I was raised in such an atheist environment and that I was in a Christian high school in the Netherlands before I went to Luxemburg but the Christianity was more like in the background he didn't really seem to have a strong influence and maybe that's the only influence you had that then speaking about issues of diversity or sexuality or gender things like that we're certainly not a priority for the school when I was in high school and then Luxemburg in an American high school so there wasn't really a priority either it was actually the American kind of system that wasn't even like I am like sexual education they really avoid this kind of topics a lot so maybe in that sense a little bit but that's more cultural and religious I never really had the feeling. In the Netherlands depending on where you grow up of course but the Netherlands especially where I grew up which was Utrecht in the middle of the country and the urban area there's very little influence I'd say at least for me it had very little.

- What are your thoughts on religious diversity in the Netherlands based on your experience?

The Netherlands used to have this system postwar years difference and society was split in this billers and that has influenced integration of people in a very



powerful way in a sense that we don't believe in this polarized society anymore even though it's fading a lot because it used to be. Dead if you were Catholic you couldn't tell your parents that you were dating someone that was protestant or was a socialist or something like that. It was very much in this different ideologies and they all went to their own church, order on buildings and they had their own newspapers and TV and radio station. It is all done in this very dead kind of democratic kind of way. Just all just have a little part and we all have a little saying politics as well. It is very clearly organized like that but of course gay people were kind of in between because if they fall in love for someone from a different pillar... So anyways into that system a lot of the post war years with more immigrants came to the Netherlands over even asked to come to the Netherlands to boost economy. They were kind of given their own pillar which doesn't work at all, you know that what is I think, that kind of prevented kind of a natural integration process. This way of thinking those are those people and we don't have anything to do with them because they have different ideologies they have different backgrounds they can be part of our society but as long as they stay in their own little bubble or something but then of course everybody has opinions of the people inside that little bubble so I don't know I don't feel like it went very well the integration of immigrants in the Netherlands and there's always been a tendency to blame immigrants for all kinds of problems and criminality even things to do with economy everything, which might have correlations for example with criminality certain groups of immigrants those are simply the results of very failed integration process which also suffers very much from this way in which Dutch people view themselves we are doing lightens other people can come here and they can integrate but we will tell them how to do that it's not an equal process like I would like to get to know you, most Dutch people don't seem very interested in getting to know the immigrants who are coming here they're much more interested that they become part of the identity and that is way much more applauded then, so for example if they really become important intellectual figure and then nobody will object to that but I understand immigrants who stay in their own little bubble because I can completely understand how we can be kind of hostile and unfair to most people who come here, and how any racist tendencies are very strongly denied right and that's when we say that we are very open minded and we're not

racist but we are super racist it's just our inheritance of colonialist past also in which we for many years we had colonies and we suppressed people of color in this colonies and we looked at them as less important and that still plays on.

- Do you have a particular political/activist position on these issues?  
(Religion and gender and sexual issues)

I do have an opinion I'm one of those sad people who have who has an opinion about almost everything I think you know there are a lot of people who identify as LGBTQ+ who feel that you are either dead or you're a Christian or your Muslim like you can't be both and I think that's a very toxic opinion and I think that it's very important to understand that everybody, each person's identity is a complex interaction in very diverse choices and everybody, you could say that this is it bit hypocritical but no but I think everybody he's kind of a paradox of different things that have influenced you and that are important to you and I think it's very important for the LGBTQ+ community to Be open to people of different ethnic's and religious backgrounds and except them I think that something that even though you can still be critical of how did traditional ways in which people were shape than the surgeon religion like Christianity and how some people and then on ones are super and excepting of LGBT people in general but that makes it even more difficult to be in the position I mean you don't choose to be born gay you can also come from this very strict religious background and the people who are in the LGBTQ+ community and they were excluding you because you don't want to give up that important part of your identity which is your religion then there's never any programs that can be made without these people to be themselves it's important to open your arms as a community for people doesn't matter if they're Muslim or Christian.

- Do you think that the GFN is a religious diverse group?

I think a little bit and I think there is some religious diversity but I don't really know actually I haven't really talked to many people about their religious identity it's not a topic that comes up in the discussions.

- How do you see sexual identity intertwine with religion? What about your own experience?

In a cultural sense I do see that it intertwines. Of course is Traditionally Christian into men and women are divided according to tradition based on gender roles and so in that sense very much so and also the higher value of men in general it also has to do with the fact that from the brightest in the background it's a bit different from the Catholic background in a sense that in Protestantism we're all equal in the eyes of God and you are responsible for your own kind of salvation so only through really hard work or something can you save yourself and I'm not for sure but it is kind of the feeling I get hard work is something that is very highly valued Protestantism and dad has an impact on the ditch way of thinking and people are valued based on how hard they work and then the work of men is generally valued more and more measurable then the kind of traditional work did you women used to do at home and the emotional labor it was done by women was completely disregarded and I think that's very destructive and so now in another I think it please also into feminism in the sense that the Netherlands and the only way that women seem to to be able to get more respect and what a verse of a say is to actually show very clearly we don't care we can do everything at the same time children and they feel that they have to do that because it's the only way that they can prove them self in this kind of work I'm having a very successful careers kind of like show to this mail that you are equally important and I think that is ridiculous it's good but I think that is with ridiculous that is there still this huge gap but at the same time I still think that it's ridiculous that we value people on the basis of how much they do for their company or something I think is the neo-liberal kind of way in the Netherlands was very welcoming because of that idea that, also like the effect of globalism already based how your valued for your work, like if I say to my peers that I'm thinking of quitting my PhD I can feel right away people being scared and saying oh but what are you going to do how are you going to make money.

- What do you think is the influence that religion has in determining gender roles? What about your own experience

In traditional Christian value system the man works and the woman stays in and takes care of the children and even though we've had so many years of feminism now it's still in practice it's still the norm and a common scenario the women working part time and the men working full-time and the women take the side a part-time job also have the majority of the responsibility with the children in the house so I'm still not sure how much was one regarding that might even be better not to work part time because I feel like women are usually taking a lot of work because if you just say that taken care of children is a full-time job they on top of that still work part time and some women still work full-time so it depends very much on the family. I do think there is a lot some development already of men who are taking a much more active role in the care of their children or who try to keep at least one day free in the week so they have more time but I think it's too easy for men to be assholes and skip on a lot of these tasks, they can do it much easier and it's because it's still not very much expected of them and they excuse themselves and it's easier on the basis of what is traditionally expected of them.

- What do you think determines someone's characteristics that we frame as feminine, masculine, or non-binary? (Besides religious influence)

I think in general they're all these kinds of stereotypes Men would be more active and women would be more festive evening relationships are in the beginning of relationship that mention take charge And women should just be the person to be seduced I think in general Women are just expected to do to be more caring for others the idea that women would want to have children regardless of what they want to be the main caretaker somehow while man I expect it looks very much embedded into the Dutch culture not to be too attached to their girlfriends or wives because it shows weakness or something like it's a weakness to show emotion or to really care for someone cost and kind of competition with other men I think that's a very sad situation and I think it still continuing all the time I see these groups of men who play soccer together or something or are in some other kind of team or in a student Association and I feel so sorry for these people they are still so locked in this way of thinking and living you know, I'm not in their heads



of course but you know in my experience, When I started studying here in Groningen I lived in a student flat and most of my flat mates were men A group of men just basically and of course I was way too feminine for them so they would always joke that I was more like a woman which in the end of what I chose to do to be but back then sometimes it was very funny other times it was kind of brutal also often made me because I was still not out about my gender identity so I would often want to show off to these guys Which plays into so many like toxic things you know like example I learned from the time spent in the group of men even though this wasn't the most macho man the one thing that really determines your value in being in a group of men in the Netherlands is whether you have sex with women ( says: of course and laughs) that's like the only thing I felt kind of pressured to get a girlfriend or do you have a girlfriend and it's like a man-made is kind of strange ranking of themselves like a picking order and you feel like you're on the bottom of the picking order and you find a girlfriend then you suddenly jumped to the beginning but then if the girlfriend seems to have any kind of influence on you if you kind of actually decide to prioritize time with her instead of a night of drinking beer and eating meat with your friends that you see all the time anyway so if you make that choice then you will immediately drop on that chart on the picking order saying that you are being controlled by a woman or something like that so this is kind of a prehistoric kind of attitude, that's stupid and that's how many groups of men function and it's usually presented in a joking way so if you would ask somebody if you had a serious conversation about this topic then I think they would correct the ideas and attitudes and they would be more self-aware and realize how that might be problematic, but this is my experience from groups of men in the Netherlands. I like sharing these experiences because this has been a crazy ride for me to place where I am now.

- How do you navigate your gender role(s) in your own personal relationships, in different contexts of life (family, school/work, politics, etc.)?

Yes I do perform different gender roles. Are used to really perform very different and I used to have kind of a split life where we in a very small group of friends very close friends I could just be myself and be a woman and while for the most of the



world I would continue pretending to be a man, being a teacher for me was very difficult because I felt very insecure so the only way that I knew to get authority over students and what turned out to be super affective was to be like a Sir, you know to kind of pretend that I was really a man who knows a lot about things which is totally all those things I like most teachers would also say that I mean but that they are not literally themselves when they are teaching but also towards my family I was not out for a long time so I'm trying to kind of show on the see how I really felt really healthy and that has been a process for me in the last two, three years to be really honest with my friends and my parents also my colleagues just really show how I actually am now I find it very difficult to continue doing some of the things that I usually love to do because I don't really care about them anymore I mean maybe that's like kind of the sexist thing I don't now but being an academic research or do you kind of have to have perhaps it's nonsense but you have to have authority and have a way of serious this and I don't feel like that anymore and it's maybe just because I'm now finally room to another side of me which has been hidden for so long so I don't know if this is kind of an intuitive emotional side which I always felt very part of me but I couldn't express in this space that was male-dominated.

- How do you feel that it reflects in the way other categorize you?

I think it has such a big influence you can just pretend to be anyone at anyone but you can show and people will completely different so many people stealing people I don't know well and I don't know sometimes I think example that I do about the class situation is a very good example of this if you perform any kind of way like a male teacher would usually perform people tend to see you And they tend to treat you more like that and so many and they came to me and I have a question which in the Netherlands is still actually unusual to have this kind of difference but apparently I was so good at communicating these kind of distance professor nonsense influence the way they saw me.

- What are your thoughts and experiences in the Netherlands when it comes to be a Woman/Man/Non-Binary (gender identity)?

(Laughs) That's another book, I'm sorry. Think it still felt by many people that it's strange and it's kind of a joke I think that it makes it very difficult to be transgender





in the Netherlands but also we have a much better system and situation then in many other countries where is still illegal or you can just expect like mobs to come and beat you up so officially we pretend I never been very tolerant culture and so that makes very violent and open trans phobia somewhat frowned upon in that sense I think I'm very lucky but I do still think that I think I wouldn't even call it just trans phobia I think it's also more like queer phobia, a man or anybody who is perceived as a man who dresses or behaves in a feminine way is really thought of as funny or as a joke and is made fun of and in the same with women who are more masculine it's people are like oh you must be a Dyke or so something and they don't mean that in a good way so I think that makes it very difficult specially for transgender people who are a little bit outside of the binary or that their expression is outside of the binary identify in a sense of binary as a trans person because I want to identify as a woman and not as a non-binary person but my expression how I show my self is outside of the binary I guess and so that's how I noticed that specially very clearly when I was still dressing in a more feminine way which I actually don't do anymore because I just don't want to deal with shit from random people on the street but if I wear like a skirt or a dress on the street probably people would feel the need to comment on it on to just make a joke about it which is just I don't know you feel like kind of a fool and you're being made into a joke by people and of course you shouldn't let yourself be affected by people on the street and that's totally true but it's not always equally easy I don't know when you feel good about yourself ready it's easy to just let comments like that slide past you but when you feel kind of shitty when you have a hard day and then something like that happens it's very hurtful and a Dutch are very notorious for just saying whatever is on their minds even to just like totally random strangers so that's not very nice for a trans person. It's strange because when somebody makes like to full transition really passing then they get so much praise for it as well so it's a double side, very binary trans people that are very passing they get a lot of praise it's not that people are against trans people necessarily but they are very much against androgyny and against queerness and against anything outside of this binary I think.



- Would you say that religious pluralism is contributing for gender equality and for the understanding and acceptance of matters of sexuality?

I think it would contribute yes because there are different ideas of gender in sexuality different religions and different uses of life and if you just make it even broader and the more accepting honestly accepting, not just like basically tolerated if you're actually interested in it this can be a real part of our culture and plural and the very diverse culture it helps yes I'll do I have to say that a lot of this monotheistic religions have been themselves imbedded in a very strong code against any kind of homosexuality they are very gendered and a lot of monotheistic religions are very gender essentialists.

#### Biographical

- Name and pronouns: Sandra She/Her
- Age: 21
- Nationality: Spanish
- Occupation: Student of International and European Law

#### Thematic

- Gender Identity: Cis-gendered Woman
- Sexual Orientation: Bisexual and Aromantic
- Religious/Spiritual filiation: atheist

- Tell me a bit about your upbringing.

I come from a weird family, I have five siblings, I'm the fifth out of the six, and we have different moms, but that doesn't change anything, I don't think of them as half siblings, and I have difficult relationship with my dad cause we both have a very strong temper but I have cool understanding, and feminist mom even though she doesn't call herself that, she once told me that she understood that she could not raise me and my brother the same because he is a boy, so she made a conscious effort to teach when I was a kid that my body is mine, and if I didn't want to kiss someone didn't have to kiss, and if I didn't want to be physically affectionate with someone I didn't have to. I she know that she had to teach him different things

because the world already teaches him that his body is his, I have to teach him that other people have boundaries that he has to respect, so I think that the kind of upbringing I had, a mom that is very intuitive even though she doesn't read feminist literature.

- Tell me about your involvement with the Groningen Feminist Network?

I came to the feminist network in 2016, I was the last person from the board to join, because I'm not a medicine student like the rest of the board. But I just joined, because of how interested I was and how involved I was pretty soon it became apparent that I should be one of the people involved in the direction and the management of the GFN and it has been like that ever since. This will be my last few weeks in the board, of all of us. It has been an interesting ride, and I have all kind of mixed feelings. My job is to manage the different committees and make sure that everyone is communicating and everything is going smoothly and I also take care of a lot of weekly meetings and other stuff.

- How would you describe the GFN?

(Manifest) It is basically a safe space; a lot of people don't like the concept of safe space even though we all have one. And it is weird for me how especially men get so critical of the concept, but are the first to demand one once they get married with the idea of a man cave, and a space free of woman, which is very problematic, but is the same concept, in the end is the same thing. It is a place where I don't have to watch what I say, and I don't have to explain everything I say where I can be myself more comfortably and joke about the things I want to joke about without having to give explanations. Of course we have our problems, but it tends to be very conflict free in general because we are honest to each other and everyone's identities are respected and it's a space that I know I won't have to tell someone that that's not funny that is not a joke that you should be saying because most people there they know the limits, while other groups, and among other friends I always have to at some point be like, hey that's actually really racist you shouldn't say that or really homophobic and makes me very uncomfortable. And it is not fun to be that person. I'm very tired of being that person, and in the GFN, is the space where I don't have to be that person.



- Is sexual orientation and gender identity an issue you actively reflect on?

I was told that I was a woman when I was younger, and I feel comfortable with that. So I don't really question that. I remember that being a boy was more fun, and I was envious of that but I never rejected my own gender identity it was like, things are easier for them, this was when I was five or six. I like being a woman.

So how were you raised in terms of expectations given the gender you were assigned at birth? Woman/man/non-binary, other?

So I had a pretty gender-neutral upbringing up until I was confronted with gender expectations where it was a shock to me when I was exposed to them. My dad even though he is a very cis-normative human being and he doesn't like trans people and doesn't like gay people, he still surprisingly enough doesn't treat anyone different regarding their gender it's a really weird dichotomy, how he talks about how he hates gay people, because they're anti normal, because girls should like boys and boys should like girls and that kind of bullshit, but then he is not going to expect from you any differently just because you're a boy or a girl. He did start saying problematic things when I was twelve or thirteen, that I wasn't very feminine and that was very weird, and why did I cut my hair short and that kind of things but my childhood in general was very much just I would get the presents that I wanted. I liked construction games a lot and books, and cooking things. And that is what I got, I remember when I was six my uncle who didn't know me at all and my aunt gave me a doll, and I remember being very confused, and wondering why are they giving me this, I don't like this. I have nothing against women who plays with dolls, I just didn't like dolls I thought they were boring I didn't know the point of it. Because they didn't know what I liked it was easier for them to rely on gender assumptions, and to me that was like, so this is how it works. And you just start realizing those little things. I remember the attitude that boys had about girl's things when I was in school, I was very confused by that also, why are things that are like pink and mainly for girls and about girls like "ugh", but me as a girl when I show interest on sports, suddenly I'm the coolest girl, I remember not liking that. I remember noticing those things, especially because Spanish is also a very gendered language, and how when you make a list of things, masculine things



always come first, so “Hola todos y todas” so like women are always like the extra, and you always come last and be thankful that you’re even remembered. That shocked me because in my house your gender didn’t matter, so I think I was very lucky because of my mom. And so the gendered expectations came from an outside source, aunts, uncles, school and all of that.

- How do you understand the influence that religion has in your life?

Even though I’m an atheist I don’t identify with the atheist community around the world, I just don’t think I’m capable in believing in something that I don’t have proof of, and that is something I struggle with, not being able of having a belief.

- Do you have a particular political/activist position on these issues?  
(Religion and gender and sexual issues)

I can tell you that there a few things that I care about in Spanish language, there is something that I really believe in and is ridiculed in Spain and people make fun of, and that is using grammatical neutral form for the words, that is something I defend, I think you should introduce it in your speech, and it’s hard when on one else is doing it ask you why you are talking like that. My roommate is non-binary I have several friends who are non-binary, and I’m also in a circle where if you assume someone’s gender which is something that people make jokes about, if someone is miss gendered people might feel like shit about it, so it’s better if you don’t assume anyone’s gender, and navigate life in that way. So that is why it’s something I care about, even if people say that is difficult and it takes effort.

- What is your experience with the influence of religion on these issues?

I have a complicated relationship with religion, I come mostly from an agnostic family, my older siblings are baptized but I’m not, I come from a very catholic country where everyone is expected to be baptized and to be part of the catholic church I’m not a part of the catholic church but I’ve been to a lot of religious rituals and I’ve been culturally exposed to Catholicism, so also have seen how my grandma who is probably the person whom I loved the most that had strong ties to catholic ideas, I saw her reaction on several things that happened in her life being influenced by the ideas of the church and I didn’t like that. She lost a child



right before my mom was born, and he died at birth, and it was a death that could have been avoided it was very sad, and she spent the rest of her life feeling tormented by the fact he never got to go to heaven because he was never baptized, that was something that hunted her. And I think that is fucked up, and I don't think she deserved to live with a feeling like that. I don't believe in a religion that requires you to do all these things just so that you can somehow reach the state of full human, or have a better life. I also experienced, even though she was a great woman, how she reacted the first time I came out to her, she taught it was gross, women who like other women go to hell. And she was actually known for the little she was religious, so just thinking about the amount of people in my country and all over the world that their identities are strongly tied to religion and to a code of conduct, that is what the bible is, that is very distressing, because I also don't want to completely shit on religion because for a lot of people is a source of a lot of peace and for their identity, and a source of happiness, and that is cool, I just think that it is completely outdated, because they also have the potential to cause a lot of harm, and they perpetuate a lot of gender stereotype and gender roles, homophobia, racism, in a lot of cases. It's not religion itself but the texts religion is based on that are outdated.

- What are your thoughts on accommodating religious diversity in the Netherlands? (Positive or negative values of religious diversity)

I don't know... I cannot tell you because I'm not religious, and the friend I have who are, are so in a very loose way. I don't know anyone who actively goes to church, mosque or temple. I have friends that are culturally religious but their believe is loose at best, and so is the way they base their identity on.

I have seen Muslim students praying in the University Library, and I think there should be a space for that, it's not that I care that they're praying there, they can do whatever they want, I'm comfortable with it. However I think it must not me very comfortable to do a very private thing in front o a bunch of other people and there should be a small room just for them, so they could be able to that if they want to. And the university should have one room like this in every building, I think is something very easy to do. It's probably not comfortable to be doing such a private thing and having to deal with people's comments and whispering. I think



in this regard this University is very secular, no visible religion at all. And so if you have any beliefs or if you need anything that's on you, in this sense I don't think that is very accommodating, but I don't think it's the opposite I don't think it bothers you from doing whatever you want with your religion. That is my perspective.

- Do you think that the GFN is a religiously diverse group?

I think the GFN is pretty culturally diverse, several of our members are culturally Muslim or culturally catholic, or from completely secular families. There is a little bit of everything, and there are people from all over the world and that helps.

- How do you see the interaction between people with different religious backgrounds inside the GFN?

It is very interesting when people share their family life's, and tell you their part about it, and even people who are from Europe their families are from all over the world, from other countries. And that is interesting. That are a lot of people who bring their perspective in feminism and intersectional feminism, which is the kind of feminism that we believe in the GFN. (With so much cultural diversity) We acknowledge that different identities require different levels of attention and different ways of approaching femininity, it is different being a white woman or a black woman in our society, there are differences of being a black woman in Africa while being disabled and gay. Some forms of femininity are harder than others. And there for having people from all over the world helps us keep that in mind. When the GFN was set up, we only had cis-gendered people for a long time, and then a bunch of Trans people started to show up, non-binary and trans men and women. And suddenly we had to confront how cis-normative we have been the all-time, and how that was a problem and what we had to change. And so we also started realizing that we have very few people of color, why is that, and then we changed certain things and more people of color came and now we are a pretty diverse group. I think that it is learning process, and it shows you how limited your own point of view is and suddenly realizing oh this day for me means nothing but for this other friend is very important in their country and is an occasion to celebrate and it keeps your mind open at all times, so people who say that the only



diversity that is important is diversity of thought those people are stupid and really dumb. Diversity of identity diversity of culture diversity of race, diversity of ability, diversity of everything is what is important, including diversity of thought but that is a very tiny part. If a group of white cis-gender able people are discussing politics even if they don't agree it excludes important factors, like race for example, or any other perspective for people who navigate the world in a different way. It is a necessity to be exposed to diversity.

- How do you see sexual identity intertwine with religion? What about your own experience?

For example it is easier to 'slut shame' in countries that are more religious because in secular views the justifications are more obviously stupid, if two people are having sex and its consensual these two people are responsible, why is that the woman becomes a slut and the men doesn't. If without religious arguments it is easier to makes this point. Whoever in a religious context this changes, it is really easy to make use of religious texts, talking specifically of the Catholicism that I have been expose to the most. The bible is used to justify any argument, because it's considered sacred. It is complicated.

- What do you think is the influence that religion has in determining gender roles? What about your own experience

I think there is a lot of influence absolutely. From the texts that I know of, they are very strong in determining gender roles. Being able to use a religious text to police's women behavior is something that has been happening for thousands of years. And there for I think that in a more secular country the excuses that people use to police women behavior come from different sources, and therefore there are certain behaviors that are not policed anymore, I'm not saying that it is ideal either, we still live in a patriarchal society, it is what it is. But in religious texts in Catholicism for example women have a very particular role of like the house wives, care takers, and they are supposed to obey their husband, and that texts are used to justify violence and have been for a long time. Of course there are a lot of ways of justifying this sort of behavior but I think that countries that are extremely religious just go

very easily back to this arguments. Every time I look at the news in Spain and I see something related to women and church is bad news, always bad news. Like some religious authority saying something about women belonging in the kitchen and I think a bishop in Spain co-wrote a book in which giving oral sex to men is justifiable if you do it thinking of Jesus, which is objectively hilarious. Recently I remember seeing a religious authority saying something good about women and religion and this authority validated the feminist movements saying that this female religious figure would go to the march's that were happening in Spain if she was alive.

- What do you think determines someone's characteristics that we frame as feminine, masculine? (Besides religious influence)

This is very complicated, because I think they are very connected to each other. So the concept of marriage for example, is any economic concept, not a religious concept but I think that is one of the earliest examples of women becoming property of men instead of them being able to lead their own life's. A for example capitalism is also very tied to gender roles, and I also think that capitalism is very tied to religion because they need each other to thrive be controlling people's behavior, and you can do this by subjecting half of the population to the other half. I think that is where a lot of gender roles come from . I think that gender roles would have emerged any way without religion however I think religion is a very enforcement mechanism and the real thing to blame is capitalism and the idea that people's value is measured by their wealth.

- How do you navigate your gender role(s) in your own personal relationships, in different contexts of life (family, school/work, politics, etc.)?

I like to be in spaces where I'm not constantly reminded of my gender identity, and I can just rejoice. Like for example the GFN. It doesn't feel like a burden at any point to be a woman in a space like that, and in many other spaces too, but most of the spaces I occupy being a woman has a meaning and it carries a burden starting with the university. It is not a secret that in my university most of the teachers grade women way less than men and they usually grade two



points less based on your gender, and the kind of comments that we have to hear, and I'm tired of hearing that being a woman is a burden, not because being a woman is worst but because society turns being a woman into a burden very often, for example, whenever I'm in a public space there's the very real treat of men harassing me or becoming aggressive because they did not get what they want from me. This happens in bars for example. I was sexually assaulted when I was eighteen, I was raped, and so I cannot stand being in a very pact bar or club anymore, I'm deeply uncomfortable in those spaces, I wasn't assaulted because I was attractive or because I was available, it was because I was a woman, and that is...I don't feel comfortable in a lot of spaces, when there are lot of drunk men outside I don't leave the house. Classrooms are uncomfortable any situation where there are a lot of cis-gendered heterosexual men I'm uncomfortable with because they tend to be very unaware of the things they say and how it hurts other people. I can also see how I'm expected to work more, now that I'm an adult, I'm expected to be more responsible and work more than my cousin who is two years older and behaves like is a fifteen, and he has an actual paying job. I'm expected to do more and help more where he doesn't have to. It is also difficult when most of your friends are guys, like I had a period that I separated myself from friendship with women. And I remember how that weighed me down so much, because men are not thought to be emotional empathetic towards other people like women are. So at that point I had no way of understanding and navigating what was happening, it was just very exhausting. So being a woman almost always carries a lot of work.

- How do you feel that it reflects in the way other categorize you?

(OUTSIDE of spaces like the GFN) Then I get called for being a snowflake for wanting a safe space or a space free of men, and free of all that tension and work.

- What are your thoughts and experiences in the Netherlands when it comes to be a Woman/Man/Non-Binary (gender identity)?

It is way worst here than in Spain, I have never seen men being so entitled to my time like here. And so too much of emotional labor. The entitlement of having to

explain in the wrong context that something is for example homophobic and not being able to just end the conversation until I'm convinced of their point or the other way around. AND I'VE NEVER SEEN THAT TO THE DEGREE I see here. And it comes to the point where the argument is not consensual anymore. This happens when people are making sexist jokes for example, and if I don't laugh I'm almost forced to and to explain myself, and it is taken like some sort of attack, to the point I'm called a 'feminazi'. This happens a lot, they just feel entitled to everything that you do. It's just so much work, oh my god Dutch people.

- What is the influence that sexual identity has in your life in your personal relationships and in different contexts of your life (family, school/work, politics, etc)?

I think it helps me hating men. And it makes my patience for men dramatically drop. Because I have been involved with women, I can see how little effort men make in their relationships. It's similar to what happens with the friendships I described, very much based on porn culture, that everything has to be like porn.

### Biographical

Name and pronouns: Stella-Marie She/Her

- Age: 21
- Nationality: German
- Occupation: Student of Psychology

### Thematic

- Sexual Orientation: Heterosexual
- Religious/Spiritual filiation: Christian

- Tell me a bit about your upbringing.

You never think about it unless you're in a different context, I grew up in Hamburg in a flat with my older brother and my parents. If I compare it to what youth are doing now I think I was playing a lot outside, and we only had one computer that we shared with for people and we weren't allowed to use it that much. I always wanted a Nintendo or a TV in my room but I wasn't allowed so I was kind of forced



to do other stuff. I think that influenced me in a positive way, if I would tell my parents that I was bored they would just tell me to be bored for a while. That helps your creativity, and I think that is different from now even though we cannot generalize. School wise I changed primary school from a normal school to one that was catholic even though we wouldn't do that much stuff, I think we had like two extra holidays, and a few services a year. And in high school it was just normal it's interesting because you don't know what is important about your own upbringing. When it comes to friends in these things I had friends in school of course but I think the friends I got a long with better were the ones from my hobbies, so I started at the choir when I was five or six, and later I had piano lessons. Music education was important for my parents, they didn't force, but they thought I should try it. I started swimming quite early. I kind of was involved in the youth ministry but there was more hanging out with the people more than anything faith related, I had a lot of friends there, and we would go on trips with the youth ministry, we went to Spain by bus. I had singing lessons for one and half years that was also quite influential.

- How did you become involved in GFN? And what is your motivation for attending the meetings and events?

I heard of it from [REDACTED] I studied with them, we were in the same programme, and [REDACTED] told me that I should come to a meeting several times, and at some point I said ok, I'll just see how it is. I think my general motivation is to educate myself more, because before I met Charlie I didn't know that there were more pronouns than she and him, and I just figured that there is so much more that I don't know and I just want to be aware, also of privileges, also to see how I can be an ally to others, and just because the group is so diverse, the last meeting I was in the one about A-sexuality and A-romanticism, and also to see that there were representatives of that group within there, that could speak from their own experiences is great, and you wouldn't get that otherwise. It's also for me a bit of a balance, so the biggest motivation is to learn and be aware, but also the side thing is to have a balance because a lot of my Christian friends are very conservative and it's a bit exhausting sometimes, and I don't agree with them in a lot of things, but

it's also good to have the GFN as something to balance it out, also to get different input from different views, also to have maybe arguments.

- Is sexual orientation and gender identity an issue you actively reflect on?

Maybe but not much, no not really, I remember that I've never had a relationship before and sometimes comes up with my parents, and they say oh maybe is girls, I tell them I don't think so. So maybe in a way I reflect on it on who I'm attracted to, but not much. I don't think I've reflected on it before I started to come to the GFN, but now I think I reflect on it more, in a sense that I think it's a stigma in society that you base so much in gender or sex, which I think is very unhealthy and I think it separates people and also, also this very binary way of thinking, that only females can do this or can do something better and I think that is more like the upbringing, so for me personally I don't think I reflect much on it but more on the society level it's not really good the way it is at the moment.

- So how were you raised in terms of expectations given the gender you were assigned at birth? Woman/man/non-binary, other?

I think it was really free, I hated pink and I hated Barbie's and I think it was more because I had an older brother that I was playing with him often, we played football or we had more like this fighting games with other friends as well, and actually as a child I had more guy friends and girls friends, and I remember that there was this one birthday where I only invited guys, and another one where my brother only invited girls. So it was really not what you would expect, but it doesn't really matter, because as a child you don't care who your friends are. It's hard to say how something influenced me or not, because these things are very subtle. (Teenager) I think maybe in school, when girls started wearing mascara but I think also then I didn't like wearing make-up, I did it sometimes and then I would forget to take it off (laughs), or using nail polish, I think I saw that on other people but for me was never that I would do it because I'm a female. I think I never really like doing it and I did it for some time until I realized that it's not something I like to do. Another thing is on school sports you get graded differently, but I think that is something that makes sense in a way the amount of muscles just physically.

- How do you understand the influence that religion has in your life?

A lot (laughs), I mean it started when, well I was baptized as a baby that is quite common in Germany. I mentioned that I went to a catholic school for some time but I was baptized protestant because my dad is protestant and my mom is catholic and at this time in school in the catholic tradition you have this 1<sup>st</sup> communion, and because I was in this environment where most of the kids were catholic and did this communion, and became acolyte, then I was like oh I want to do this too. And I remember then that I had a protestant first communion because we knew one of our pastors well and you can get like a blessing, and it was the first time I said I want this (or not), then in Germany is also common that you have a confirmation process that is from the Protestant traditions, and then you have classes for a year once a week. I think I believed in something, but believing in the Christian God that became more when I went to the UK for a year after my graduation, when I was searching more for God in way, and started asking more questions and also I started searching for a parish there and started to ask questions and so on that is when I say I became a Christian and that was two years ago. And I also had a renewal of my baptismal vows where they do the proper dive down, and since then when I came to Groningen I've been looking for a church and know I have once a week bible study group, I'm active in my church I'm in the leadership team I go to the services, so it has a big influence.

- What are your thoughts on religious diversity in the Netherlands based on your experience?

It's interesting because from my perspective and of course from my Christian surrounding there are Christians but other than that I don't really see it that much. For example I just found out some weeks ago that a friend of mine who's from Indonesia she's Muslim and she's doing all the five prayers a day and I know her for one and a half years and I haven't noticed, and we never talked about it. So I think that religion is more something that you do in private but don't talk about much. Now it's Ramadan and I'm really curious because she's fasting, and in this crazy weather she's not allowed to drink and I mean. In general I don't think you see it that much. Well you have the Synagogue, my friend told me that there is also a mosque but a Turkish one, so she wouldn't feel comfortable going there because



she's not wearing the headscarf; it's culturally not a thing. I mean you have churches but I think that it's mostly atheism or agnosticism.

- Do you have a particular political/activist position on these issues?

(Religion and gender and sexual issues)

Oh yeah, (laughs). I actually still need to answer a Christian friend of mine who started a discussion on WhatsApp, but we changed it to e-mail because it got too long. I think it's misunderstood definitely in Christianity how sexuality is viewed; you can talk about sex before marriage or homosexuality. I think that is very difficult to talk to people that are convinced of a different view than I have, so I would like for them to understand they don't have to see homosexuality as something they need to cure because as see it as, how do you know what's best for the person, how do you know that that's a sin, I say that God created the person the way the person is, with sexuality and gender identity and everything, and as this is just something you do, but I think that is very difficult to explain because often they on the other hand don't know people who are on the LGBTQ community, and for me it also has to do with the fact that I know people they are not doing a bad thing. I think the dialogue is very important and is not there.

- Do you think that the GFN is a religious diverse group?

I think that just from what I see is just more atheist or agnostic, or in general more negative towards religion, but maybe people are also not saying what they do believe in, maybe to avoid conflict. I would say that represents the same, as in general society with a tendency towards agnosticism and atheism, I don't think it's that diverse.

- How do you feel that your own religious background adds to the group diversity and environment? (if applicable)

I think it could add something but generally I'm not very active in the discussions and I think I wouldn't dare bring up my religious perspective it's weird but sometimes I think it doesn't really fit in the context.

- How do you see sexual identity intertwine with religion? What about your own experience?

It's different for example back in Hamburg the director of the Christian choir is married to another man, but here I think even if there would be somebody who is homosexual they wouldn't say it, and they would say that is something bad or to get rid of. It depends in what type of religious context you are, again. Actually I don't think that they have anything to do with each other, but I think if you happened to be in a more conservative religious surrounding and figure it out for yourself that you are bi or homosexual or anything than it can be very difficult. There was an event, sleep over at the church and [REDACTED] told me that for some reason they got an advertisement on Facebook about it, and the whole event was framed girls against guys, and he asked what would they do if I come there (laughs). And I actually asked someone about that later, and he said, that we would just have different groups but honestly I'm not sure how everyone would react and honestly that is actually something I find really sad, so I think that makes you more close-minded. I don't want to say anything bad about them. But yeah.

- What do you think is the influence that religion has in determining gender roles? What about your own experience

Oh, I think that if you are born in this conservative view of religion it has a lot to do with it. I have a friend of mine she grew up with missionary parents and so a really Christian background all the time, she went to Baptist church and she said well, also again this is very bible focus and view and they can get very interpretational also because the bible was written in a time were females didn't have anything to say. But also she said, that at first she didn't want to accept that but now she sees that she has traits like being more caring or more loving and now she sees as something that she is. And I think that is probably because she grew up with it so much the she thinks it's how it should be. So if you're in this kind of religious context, I think it plays a huge role or in liberal religious community I think not that much, but I also don't know enough about other religions to say anything. I think it's more common that it has a huge impact on saying this is manly or not. Not if I think about myself or my belief, God doesn't limit us to gender roles or identity, no.

- What do you think determines someone's characteristics that we frame as feminine, masculine, or non-binary? (Besides religious influence)

I think it's mostly nurture, if we think in a nature nurture dichotomy. I mean physically genes play a role, but I think the reason why that turns out to look like certain personality characteristics is I think entirely or mostly due to the upbringing.

- Do you think these qualities and characteristics determine/influence gender roles, if so how? Or why not?

There this experiment where kids receive the treatment and presents depending on the assumption of their gender based on their clothes, and depending on kids looking like girls or boys or more neutral people behave in different way and that is going to influence the baby regardless of their biological sex or they're actually assigned gender.

- How do you navigate your gender role(s) in your own personal relationships, in different contexts of life (family, school/work, politics, etc.)?

I don't think there should be a difference, and I hope I don't. I wouldn't know how could there be a difference in the way I act within my gender role. At least I try to just make it the way I like regardless of the way I'm supposed to do it. For example in locations where you should dress up, if I have to, sometimes you need to, and I adjust to it, but the question of the shoes is something that annoys me a lot, why do women need to wear heels, I can't walk in them why would anybody need to walk in them. So I just wear my sneakers, which then looks weird with other stuff. So I try not to make a difference.

- How do you feel that it reflects in the way other categorize you?

Possibly the contrast between what I do and what is expected of me makes people categorize me. In the end I don't want people to judge me based on how I look or what I do but who I am. So if people see me walking with sneakers and a fancy dress, if they see it and judge me and I don't know them I should I care, and people



who are closer to me if they know me then they know that there are reasons for this, not only out of principle but physically I just can't walk in the other shoes, and the other aspect why I'm I supposed to wear them as a female. I mean we always categorize people and if we can choose the way we behave I think we can choose the categories that other people put us in so if I would always wear a lot of make up like perfectly styled something I'd call Barbie style I would put that person in a certain category of being very feminine, I don't know what but when that is not me and I behave differently I just end up in a different category.

- What are your thoughts and experiences in the Netherlands when it comes to be a Woman/Man/Non-Binary (gender identity)?

I don't think that is very different from Germany. And from the three countries I have lived in so far I don't think it makes any difference. The culture does not make as much of an impact as the kind of people you surround yourself with. I think it depends more on the groups. But there are still things as for example when I see female professors all dressed up and then I see male professors that just wears what he usually would wear I think why? This stupid. I think if it was a different culture that there would be a bigger difference.

- What is the influence that sexual identity has in your life in your personal relationships and in different contexts of your life (family, school/work, politics, etc.)?
- Would you say that religious pluralism is contributing for gender equality and for the understanding and acceptance of matters of sexuality?

I think it helps when you're confronted with different views that you then think about your own of course if you're open to it. If you live in your own bubble it doesn't matter if there are ten different bubbles around you or just two. So I think if there is diversity within a society then it's very important for that to have an impact on things like our gender identity or sexual orientation, if you're open to listen which I think is very difficult and not really what people do, because why challenge the place where you feel comfortable. So think it definitely doesn't harm, I mean without diversity and different views there's a possibility, even though



having diversity doesn't mean anything is going to change or people's attitudes change.

#### Biographical

- Name and pronouns: Guus She/Her
- Age: 19
- Nationality: Dutch
- Occupation: Student Social Work

#### Thematic

- Sexual Orientation:
- Religious/Spiritual filiation: Agnostic

- Tell me a bit about your upbringing.

My parents divorced when I was six, I have a very close bond with my mom we are very good friends. With my dad I used to have better bond then I have now, but he moved in with his girlfriend and I don't feel comfortable there. My mom also has a new boyfriend, he is nice, and we had our issues in the beginning, for now we are doing ok. I'm an only child.

- How did you become involved in GFN? And what is your motivation for attending the meetings and events?

There was this party the Glitter Glamarchy, and [REDACTED], invited me to perform spoken words, and in the end I ended up not performing. But at the party there were several people from the GFN, and I met some of them and there were really nice so I was there for the next meeting. I think the fact there are not a lot of places were you able to do that, and where you have so many light-minded people, of course we have some differences but it's still very light minded. I think it's really beautiful, and you learn a lot, I really like that.

- Is sexual orientation and gender identity an issue you actively reflect on?

I do actually, I found out quite young that I was interested in the same sex, so I was working on that for a while, and eventually exploring myself I found out that I was



not a lesbian, so I say I'm queer, I'm not really sure about that, and what I identify as, but I'm working on that and thinking about that as well. Gender as well, but I kind of knew that I'm not trans or something, but I used to not be that comfortable with my gender, and I had a phase when I cut my hair, and stopped wearing girls clothes. Eventually it didn't feel comfortable so I stopped doing it, but I did experiment. I try to be very conscious of other people identities and gender a sexuality. I find it very interesting and I like learning about it.

- So how were you raised in terms of expectations given the gender you were assigned at birth? Woman/man/non-binary, other?

I think mostly by my dad, he wasn't comfortable with me not being straight as well, in the umbrella of it's not going to make it easy for you but he is also quite gendered about things I can do what clothes to wear. And his girlfriend is like that much more than him so that is also what makes me uncomfortable in the house. So when I was dating someone my own sex, nobody ever asked about it there, and her sons dating girls everyone is talking about it and they were invited to every family gathering, so that kind of did hurt. And I think my mom was always kind of open with me doing whatever, she went with me when I cut my hair and she tries really hard, but she has difficulties thinking about people who are trans, I have a friend who is FTM, and she keeps saying she and the past name, and also you know [REDACTED], [REDACTED] came over and the whole they concept is even more alien to her, so she struggle but she tries to be respectful and do better. So also if I wanted to be a fireman I could be it wasn't that gendered.

- How do you understand the influence that religion has in your life?

While growing up I had a few religious friends, I myself was not religious, but I was very interested about church and the beliefs around it, so I went to church with them a few times. I went recently to a Christian wedding with my mom, and it was a very homophobic environment, so I felt very uncomfortable, and very based on gendered stereotypes woman serves the man. But religion on it's own, it didn't really affect me in life per se. But regarding my sexuality it has because I was afraid to talk about it with some people. I had a friend who I was very close with and then I came out to her, and she was very religious, and we stopped being

friends, and that was very scaring I guess. The older I guess the less it affects me I guess. I don't meet very close-minded people anymore.

- What are your thoughts on religious diversity in the Netherlands based on your experience?

I haven't met that many people with different religious identities, a few, I don't happen to find them in my circle and the town I grew up with has a lot of Christian and atheist people, and so not religious or culturally diverse, especially in the part of the town I grew up in, They weren't at my school, or anything. Nowadays I have met quite a few people that are Wicca

- Do you have a particular political/activist position on these issues?  
(Religion and gender and sexual issues)

I still think that the church as a very big influence on the state, a lot of people still hold to certain parts of religion influencing regulation of matters of sexuality and gender, but because there are so many parties I do think it's more diverse and so close to neutral.

- What are your thoughts on accommodating religious diversity in the Netherlands? (Positive or negative values of religious diversity)

I think we could be better at accommodating, I think if you look around, not every town has a synagogue or a mosque, I think there are very few of those and every town has several churches. Assen the town I was born in has like three churches, and has one meeting place for Muslims, not even a mosque, I think that shows as well how it could be better.

- Do you think that the GFN is a religious diverse group?

I know that there are people that are Wicca, and I would say that there is more spiritual diversity than religious diversity, but also I haven't really talked to people about whether they are religious or not.

- How do you see sexual identity intertwine with religion? What about your own experience?



I think in a lot of ways, I think some people who are brought up with a close minded opinion about the subject, so that influences the way they behave they vote, the way they vote influences the policies, I think everything influences everything. I don't want to stereotype, because you have also religious people that are very open minded on the subject. I'm not sure but it does in a lot of ways.

- What do you think is the influence that religion has in determining gender roles? What about your own experience?

Like I said at the wedding for example, what I said about the man having to work and provide, and not having to explain himself, and the woman in the marriage has to serve, and take care of the children, like the standard. But they also went as far as to say that the men shouldn't have to be the one to speak, like to explain himself, and that she had to do everything for him, and feel the way he was feeling. That kind of shocked me, but I don't think that every family is brought up like that. And it's mostly the family but also the church they're in. And they have the belief that only they're church that aspect of Christian belief they have it's the only one that goes to heaven. (Exclusivist).

- What do you think determines someone's characteristics that we frame as feminine, masculine, or non-binary? (Besides religious influence)

I think generally, it's very stereotypical it starts when you're a child, like the girls are not allowed to play in trees and football, and they are not very encourage to do sports, boys on the other hand they play with trucks and trees and whatever. It starts young, but then after, feminine behavior and feminine clothes and having a high pitch voice, wearing make-up nail polish that kind of thing, things that are advertise has for women, when a masculine person does those things it's automatically gay, and that kind of thing. I recognize those things because I grew up surrounded by that idea, and that there are two genders and this is this and this is that. And I do notice that in myself sometimes, I do feel like when someone I would assume that is like masculine, they were to say I'm she, I would definitely see them as feminine. I don't know I try to be very open minded in it. My upbringing does help. I think people sometimes find it very difficult to look outside



of the boxes, like non-binary for example, or like being gay or straight no in between.

- How do you navigate your gender role(s) in your own personal relationships, in different contexts of life (family, school/work, politics, etc.)?

I think maybe I perform different roles, but not really. I think gender roles as difficult, if you look at traditional gender roles, and if you were to say that in a relationship between two people the same sex, sometimes I have the more masculine gender role, being more caring or doing most of the work, but I don't consider that I'm being like the men in the relationship. But I think I usually don't make the decisions on things, and that would be more a women gendered role, so if you were to look at gender roles I do think that sometimes I have one sometimes the other. But I think the gender you have is the gender role you perform, so everything that a man does would be a male gender role, because they're a man. I guess that is not really how it works.

- What are your thoughts and experiences in the Netherlands when it comes to be a Woman/Man/Non-Binary (gender identity)?

I think looking at the Netherlands it can be better than some other countries, people try it to have it very equal, but I do think that is not that equal, because you are still brought up with very gendered ideas as a child. There was this entire discussion last year about gendered toys and everybody was like dolls are for girls and trucks are for boys, and people still think that way. So I do think that being a woman you are brought up with different expectations. My mom is a social worker, and her mother was nothing because she wasn't allowed to work, my aunt also went into care giving, all my mom co-workers are women in care giving profession, and I myself went into care giving profession by choosing social work. And I think that is also how you dependent on how you're brought up, because maybe I would have been a policeman you know, I don't know. Let me think anything else about being a woman in the Netherlands, I think that everything you do is sexual, like me just walking down the street, I was cat called by a twelve year old boy the other day just by walking down the street, saying "were are you going



with those pretty legs you should come to my house”. I think that everything you do is sexual, for example man don’t get whistle at or masculine presenting people, and I think that feminine presenting people are always a target. Even just having a relationship with someone my own sex is sexualized. I think that matters as well.

- What is the influence that sexual identity has in your life in your personal relationships and in different contexts of your life (family, school/work, politics, etc.)?

I think it used to be like a big thing, because when I was like in high school I didn’t get to pick my friends, I got bullied a lot, I had like two friends, and they were ok with it. One of my friends did continuously asked if I was attracted to her, which I was ok with that. But I was partly bullied because of being queer, and because of being in my emo phase, and because I didn’t present feminine enough. I think it does influence my relationships, but I think now I get to pick my own friends, and there is even more people who want to be friends with me, or like associate with me. So when they have opinions that completely disrespect me we are no longer friends, so I think that helps.

- Would you say that religious pluralism is contributing for gender equality and for the understanding and acceptance of matters of sexuality?

I mean if you can be pluralist when it comes to religion no matter if you’re religious or not, that should also include no matter that you are gay, straight or something else, or Trans gender or non-binary. I think it could help, because that is acceptance of other people, and when you accept someone as a person, I think that’s the important part as well, if you accept someone as a person and not because you are thought to accept that just because people are different, you don’t have to accept people because they are different but because they are people.

#### Biographical

- Name and pronouns: Lee, She/Her
- Age: 20
- Nationality: Polish
- Occupation: Student in Arts Culture and Media

### Thematic

- Gender Identity: Woman, as it was assigned at birth
- Sexual Orientation: Homosexual
- Religious/Spiritual filiation: Atheist and Agnostic

- Tell me a bit about your upbringing.

Very strong religious catholic family, and they live in a very religious environment, going to church and being involved in other catholic communities, being very strongly for the church opinions. This was a big part of my upbringing. Before I started having contact with people from the city, because I used to live in a village, and I didn't even know that different gender identities and different sexualities could exist, I was never taught that until I met other people in middle school, and only after I could consider my own life, I always felt like I was behind in knowing about these themes. I was in the closet for a very long time, about four five years, and then I decided to come out to my parents as homosexual when I was leaving the country before I came here to study, because then I was not so concerned anymore. I of course heard that it was a phase, I still here that it is a phase, I hear a very interesting thing, that is God who is testing me to see if I'm loyal enough to him or if I'm going to fall for this. (Laughs nervously) But it's getting better I guess. I believe that right now because I don't share their religious identity is more of a problem than the fact that I have a different sexuality.

- How did you become involved in GFN? And what is your motivation for attending the meetings and events?

So I have known quite some people from the GFN (Annabelle, Nick), I wanted to go there for a long time, since I first heard about it from Annabelle. But since I was always working in the evenings I could never go to the meetings, so it was only since last year that I was able to go, now I'm free so I can go to the meetings and get more involved. And I believe that I wanted it to be an educational space, I wanted to be more involved in the community, and meet more people who are like me, because of course I never met a lot of people who are like me for the majority of my life. And it is also a space for activism.

- Is sexual orientation and gender identity an issue you actively reflect on?

I do have those moments of reflection and I really feel the connection to the queer community in that sense, and I would say that these sort of reflections happen like a few times a month, it is not a daily issue.

- So how were you raised in terms of expectations given the gender you were assigned at birth? Woman/man/non-binary, other?

In these terms it was surprisingly not so harsh (given the strong religious influenced), despite my parents being very catholic, we did not have much money so for example regarding cloths and toys, I got the ones from my previous cousins who were mostly boys. So I was raised in this sort of androgynous way. My parents never really cared with what toys I played with, or what cloths they put on me, literally throughout my whole childhood I had one doll, because I wasn't even interested in that (laughs). I think this was more like an androgynous way, at least until I was like older, and then it was like the expectations of bringing a boy over, or just being into more girly stuff, and with age that gendered ideas became more clear cut. When I was very young it wasn't a big issue.

- What are your thoughts on religious diversity in the Netherlands based on your experience?

Basically I do not care this much about my own religion but I can see that when one of my parents come to the Netherlands there is always a lot of ranting about how a lot of church are for example converted into art galleries that there isn't this huge sacred space, it is more connecting to the daily life so it isn't that sacred and holy. So it's not like everyone has to respect the church like for example in the Martini Church, there can be events organized, that was something totally new to them. It it was not ok, I think there's more religious diversity than in Poland, we can see for example with the synagogue here. I have never experienced any conflicts I think it's quite peaceful, I don't think there's a huge divide between what is happening in politics like in the big cities, with this huge divide going against Muslim communities, and with Islamophobia. I have never seen events like this in



Groningen, but then again that aren't that many Muslim people in Groningen that I know of.

- Do you have a particular political/activist position on these issues?  
(Religion and gender and sexual issues)

I think it is important to be raised in a gender neutral way, because it really helps you, ah it didn't make me feel pressured to be any gender, as I felt this pressure in terms of sexuality in gender it was much more loose. And I think raising children like in a gender neutral way is very important.

- What are your thoughts on accommodating religious diversity inside the GFN?

I think GFN is very accepting towards people with different religious views, of course if someone's religious view is going in the wrong way in the discrimination way, then probably someone is gonna say something that this religious freedom is limiting other people's freedom as well. Other than that I think the GFN are very accommodating towards everyone.

- Do you think that the GFN is a religious diverse group?

I know some people in the GFN who are religious, but I think most people are not really religious or spiritual.

- How do you feel that your own religious background adds to the group diversity and environment? (if applicable)

Yes, I think that is an issue I can speak a lot about, having been in the closet for a long time, being in a religious family, that sort of adds in terms of for example in the Netherlands there are many people that didn't have to come out, you know that, it is overall very easy. I think it is nice for them to see that elsewhere in other countries it might be not that easy and the situation needs to improve in other places too.

- What do you think is the influence that religion has in determining gender roles? What about your own experience

For gender roles for sure, not so much in gender expression, so how I dressed and appeared but, it did influence the gender roles like, my family is very traditional, my parents always wanted me to be married have children you know all of that, and be the stereotypical female performing that gender role. Of course in the house as well, my mother had to work my father as well, but most house responsibilities were done by my mother and me, and I feel like there is this idea, my from my mom that she prefers to do stuff by herself because guys cannot do it that well (laughs).

- What do you think determines someone's characteristics that we frame as feminine, masculine, or non-binary? (Besides religious influence)

Actually I'm very confused about what femininity and masculinity means, personally, gender is not a big part of my identity I don't really care about my gender, so that can be a privilege of course but can also be like I don't really know what separates femininity from masculinity, I feel like there are of course some stereotypical gender roles and gender expressions but after all its just stereotypes and people that identify as women don't have to fit into those stereotypes fully, and people who identify as men don't have to fit into that stereotypy fully, as people who are non-binary can be more to this side or that side, that it should be fine. I think it has to do a lot with identity and I don't support the idea that masculinity and femininity should be very fixed based on the traits that you have or the gender roles that it promotes.

- Do you think these qualities and characteristics determine/influence gender roles, if so how? Or why not?

I would say that those characteristics should not be determined by default, and they do determine that. And what they should be is flexible, more fluid, because different people have different ideas about what is feminine and what is masculine. And this should just be part of identity and not just fixed framework in which you see that your 30% feminine and 70% masculine, you know.

- What are your thoughts and experiences in the Netherlands when it comes to be a Woman/Man/Non-Binary (gender identity)?





I think that the basic difference between Poland and the Netherlands is that the entire religiousness in Poland, but I don't think that it influences in terms of being a woman this much. I feel like the amount of misogyny are comparable, and the amount of discrimination as a woman is comparable to what I experienced in Poland. They are just justified in different ways, so here it would more like women are just weaker and in Poland it would be in religious arguments that for example Eve was made from Adam, so yeah...But the amount of misogyny and sexism is comparable.

- What is the influence that sexual identity has in your life in your personal relationships and in different contexts of your life (family, school/work, politics, etc.)?

I mean most of my friends are queer so, queer people somehow have a magnet for each other, and in Poland was the same, even though back then I had no idea that they were queer, when I became friends with time, and I only found out later on. I feel like that is a good thing because you can talk with queers people about more things, I have of course as well straight cis-gendered friends but, first not that many, and second I feel like I can't talk about these themes like gender and sexuality, they don't understand it this much, and in terms of political views I also prefer to talk about it with queer people. Right in now at work it is not a thing, because people don't know or ask, but in my previous work it was kind of a thing, people were curious and asked and knew about it, there were just, but not like the mean type.

- And how does the way you identify and express it reflects in the way you identify and others categorize you?

The thing is, most times I don't tell people immediately, about my sexual identity. I only tell it later, and it's not because I'm scared I just feel like it's not the most important part of introducing myself. There is so much more, it is only a part of my identity. Many people get to know my sexuality later on after they meet me, and I don't think is this important to how people view me. Unless is like some guy hitting on me in the club and then I say something, and usually there's all this weird questions and the cringe (nervously laughing).

### Biographical

- Name and pronouns Dakota, She/Her
- Age: 23
- Nationality: Germany
- Occupation: Student Arts culture media

### Thematic

- Sexual Orientation
- Religious/Spiritual filiation

- Tell me a bit about your upbringing.

It's hard to explain I had a good upbringing, a lot of different things happened while I was growing up. I lived in a big city, in Frankfurt, with lots of people. My mother and my father were married for most of my childhood, all though I always had this fantasy as a child that they would get divorced. I feel that, that says a lot about the family situation, because they were trying to pretend that everything was fine, but my sister and I knew what was going on. I don't know what my father does now, but he used to work in real estate. I thought always that we had money, but apparently we don't, because my father is bad with money and he was in charge of the money. I think that learning that changed my perspective a little bit on how I view my father. My mom always jokes that she was half of my childhood she was a single parent leaving with someone that pays really good alimony.

- How did you become involved in GFN? And what is your motivation for attending the meetings and events?

The first student association I join here was *ganymedes* (lgbtq+ association), and there I met this one girl who went to one meeting in the beginning of the school year in 2016, and she told me about this new association and that they didn't have many members, and that it was a feminist group. And I thought I



have to go there, I always called myself feminist, but I don't really do anything so I went there, and it was funny we were only ten people, sitting at Het Concerthuis, not very structured like it is now. It was just like one discussion, it was about toxic masculinity. I joined because I thought I like these people there are nice, so I started going every week, and it evolved, we started to grow, and created a campaign and we moved places to places we did more and more events, so yeah it is great I love this.

- Is sexual orientation and gender identity an issue you actively reflect on?

Yes, definitely I do. Because generally I think about things that are political or have like lots to do with how we live. And on my first year here for example I did American studies we did this course, where gender was also a big of that course that was the first time I read Judith Butler and I was amazed and shocked how is it possible that I never read this, why don't we read this at school, this should be mandatory. And this was something I started thinking about, I was like, yes I see how people perceive me, and they don't expect me to be me. I don't know if you understand what I mean, they don't expect me to be like I talk so much and that I'm interested in so many different things, like politics and research weird topics like scientology, they just think that is this blond girl who loves pink and ballet, all the typical girl stuff you know. So I think that was also when I started thinking about it, but less in an academic way and more like oh there are something different about people and how we see each other, but learning in university it was like, now I have words and academic things for it and stuff. In terms of gender identity with things like sexism that all women experience, I struggle sometimes, but that is the world we live in, but it's also quite alright because I'm a cis-gender white woman, so you know, who first lived in Germany now here, and in England, so mostly I have lived in country where I do have quite a lot of privilege. In terms of sexual identity, I feel like sometimes I don't want to tell people that I'm pansexual because people always ask if that is like one of that new age things, or something. And I think it's also weird because people don't come up to you and say hey I'm X and I'm straight. I wouldn't avoid it, if it comes up I would say it but I just think that it is a weird thing to introduce yourself with.



- So how were you raised in terms of expectations given the gender you were assigned at birth? Woman/man/non-binary, other?

I feel like my mother was pretty open about it because I was born in 1994, so when I was quite young I think it was fine, but growing up I definitely noticed some things my mother would tell me or later my sister which parents of other children for example boys they would not tell their children, like for example I got really in trouble because me and my friend climbed somewhere in new glossy shoes and they got pretty scratched up because of the climbing, and I remember my mom being really angry, saying you shouldn't do that, you shouldn't climb on stuff when you wear nice clothes and stuff like that, and I was like, why? And my friend he was allowed to do it, so I didn't get it. But I feel like most of the times my mother was not very strict about it. We had quite a lot of freedom, she let us choose quite a lot our own activity and clothes, and cutting hair or not. But we also heard like, you can't sit like this you're a girl and stuff like that.

- How do you understand the influence that religion has in your life?

My father is roman catholic my mom is protestant, and my father insisted apparently that is what I have been told, that I was too, so I was baptized, and I went to catholic girls school for some years, until I change to boarding school. I like having debates about it, because I think religion can be a positive influence in your life, and I think sometimes it was actually something I perceived as negative, but there were definitely things specially when I was a teenager I saw that there are so many people who do not think like my mother, and sometimes my father would also say some sketchy things or like, for example in Frankfurt we have a lot of diversity in Germany in general also a lot of Muslims, and so I would see that people would get really weird even though it's a really big part of Germany there were activities and plays about Jesus, and we had to change it because now there are a lot of Muslims or other religious identities, but the people that I was friends with who were Muslim or atheist were more uncomfortable with the change, and singling out, and erasing religion. I think religion can be good thing, and it had influence on life, but I'm not a big fan of the Catholic Church the institution itself. Technically I would say that I believe that there is something out there, but I would also like to think that this being or whatever higher power doesn't judge you on

everything that you do and that you need to live a certain life, but is just there to give you comfort.

- What are your thoughts on religious diversity in the Netherlands based on your experience?

I don't know really because I actually find that I don't really talk with people a lot about religion but I have to say that for example in my study for as far as I know there is no one who is let say Muslim, there are probably atheist, there is one person that I think it might be Jewish. I feel that I've never met a lot of people who have said that or talked to me about being from a different religion than Christianity or being atheist. So actually I don't know I can't make a judgment about that. Generally you don't see in the city a lot of people wearing hijabs for example. Maybe students in the university, but not people who actually live here from Groningen.

- Do you have a particular political/activist position on these issues?  
(Religion and gender and sexual issues)

Do you want me to write a five thousand-word essay on that? (laughs), I would say that religion in general doesn't play that big of a role because it is technically something that is quite personal, but the thing that people have turned into, which is an identity or it is like this institutionalized thing like the catholic church, like they say it and that is the word of God, because you know the pope is Jesus or something like that I don't know, because he is the person the catholic church no one is above him besides the actual God. That is why I'm like... it's a bit sketchy. And they also don't let women in, so there's not even a good representation. I mean there is definitely a lot of influence, in Germany Merkel's party, they are Christian democrats, and that is why the party never pushed for the same sex marriage, it was other parties, and that is definitely related to ideas of religion and sexuality. And that is institutional, because I have read the bible and the bible doesn't offer any opinion on that matter, a clear opinion you know, it's what people interpret. And that is a problem for example in America where the people who are in office are super religious. And we can see for example Mike pence, and all the evangelical ideas of gay conversion therapy. Why would you tell the people that and then back

it up with, the bible says it's wrong, and that there is an afterlife and you will be damned. I think that religion should not be a reason to persecute anyone and also you shouldn't be excluded just because you are religious, because that never works, trying to erase something that people want to have, because people will do it anyway.

- What are your thoughts on accommodating religious diversity in the Netherlands? (Positive or negative values of religious diversity)

I feel like there should be an effort especially in smaller towns, because like in Germany the big cities have mosques, synagogues churches, but in smaller towns people have more problems with other religious identities. Sometimes they try to be inclusive but just end up ostracizing, it's not their fault it's just incompetence by the government, which leads to the people not knowing what to do. And leads to resentment maybe, so we should work on that, because I feel like religion shouldn't be a problem as long as you are not like own of those crazy people who doesn't believe in evolution and stuff like that. I have friends that for example wear a hijab, but they don't wear because they have to, it's because they can. It's just another piece of accessory but for them it has another meaning, so why not? But for example in the case of the orthodox Jews no one says anything about the caps, otherwise it would be anti-Semitic, so why would they say it about the Muslims and the hijab, is the same thing.

- What are your thoughts on accommodating religious diversity inside the GFN?

I think they definitely accommodate, but in general most people are from different cultures and even different religions. We had someone wearing a hijab from Saudi Arabia that was from Erasmus, I think we definitely attract different people. Even though I don't know if most people from the city or the university would be interested in coming to the GFN. And I think people are afraid that they would be judge that is why we say we are open and respectful of everyone. I don't think that for example we would attract someone who is pro-life, that would end in the kind of disaster and I think they know that and that's why they don't come. I think in the end it has nothing to do with what religion you have, but with being feminist.



But it would be cool of course to have people from different religions or having a meeting about that where people could talk about it, like what it means for them to be feminist, for someone who is Muslim and there are all this horrible stereotypes. That would be super interesting. I feel like we are doing pretty well especially now that we are doing everything in a more structured way.

- How do you feel that your own religious background adds to the group diversity and environment? (if applicable)

I think so, because I have met and experienced in school or friends who are religious and have a religious identities who are also gay or feminist ménage it, and so I would have example to use in a discussion. And interesting anecdotes, being influenced by the catholic environment, even though I wouldn't be the right person to present this topic, because I also have very strong criticism. And that might not have anything, because it's too controversial. And even discussing about someone who is very religious it would be interesting because I also had that religious education but I have a different perspective.

- How do you see sexual identity intertwine with religion? What about your own experience?

For example the pope now technically said it's ok to be gay, but not really. It looks like he is trying. But it's hard to judge because there is this whole hierarchy structure behind him. So we can't just say something like this because then he doesn't have the support, so I get it that he has to be vague. Like being the president without the support of the parliament. My religious background is not that strict even the schools I was in, so I wouldn't say that it was a bad or good influence, because of course there was still people being very negative about it. In a school with a thousand girls of course some of them will be influenced by this idea that there is this wrong to not be straight because God will punish you, and you'll go to hell. There was a time that I felt that I shouldn't say anything because I feel like some people will react negatively, not necessarily people in my direct family, even though I don't know how my father would react. This catholic guilt is not as strong in me like in some other people but I definitely had that. There was some struggles but like I said I don't think that it was as dramatic as someone





who grew up in a very religious household. In 2014, the boyfriend of a friend of mine came out as bisexual in a school with thousands of boys, and there were some gossip and comments, it wasn't too bad but it wasn't nice and it was homophobic, so the headmaster made a speech condemning this behavior, but it didn't really work because it is very internalized into the system and everything is overtly hyper-masculine and competitive and toxic masculinity. And he didn't fit into that heteronormative stereotype.

- What do you think is the influence that religion has in determining gender roles? What about your own experience

In catholic girls school this one teacher who became a religion teacher because she wanted to be a priest, and she couldn't because she's catholic. And she would probably be a very good religious authority. She can't also because she also doesn't want to change her religious identity. This idea that women are not allowed to be part it's not realistic, because you need to adapt or the religion will die at some point, because people will not take the crap anymore. My school was actually quite progressive, but then I felt that it was very weird that even though we were all girls we had strict dress codes, and usually it's because of the boys, but we didn't have any boys, so I think now that there was a similar reason, like this idea of shame around women's bodies, which was kind of weird, but we actually had male teachers and stuff so it might also have been because of that, and that is also weird, because if you assume that a 50 year old person will sexualize a 14 year old you should not hire someone like that. Just saying, they should not teach. And in England there was the same strict code, even though for boys they could wear shorts and we always had to wear tights in any kind of weather, and also with blouses that could show that we are wearing a bra. And sometimes with the weather that would be the worst, And I think that is very weird and gendered. I think these schools will have terrible problems in the future, with not cis-gendered people or people who simply don't want to be striated by gendered clothes and whatever. And especially my boarding school in England they will have to adapt or they will ostracize this people because everything is gendered. And even though it's not very religious anymore, the rules are still old because monks founded the school.

- What do you think determines someone's characteristics that we frame as feminine, masculine? (Besides religious influence)

That is really hard for me, because when I was younger someone who wears make up and a skirt is feminine, and someone who wears dark clothes and a suit, and that only men were suits, but I realize that makes no sense and it's not even true. So it's very hard for me, especially when making assumptions about someone's gender based on that. I could say that I wear clothes that I see has feminine. But I try to think about it, and not make that assumption when I see someone. Like stores for example Primark where the women's section has for example a t-shirt with a pineapple, how is that gendered I do not see that, also sometimes the men section has better t-shirts. Like that very famous video of the little kid angry with what the t-shirts say about masculine and feminine characteristics in gendered clothes, because technically everyone has masculine and feminine traits, and in behavior and appearance.

- How do you navigate your gender role(s) in your own personal relationships, in different contexts of life (family, school/work, politics, etc.)?

I don't know, I'm not sure, that is a good question. When I'm with extended family for example, they say very weird things that are probably much internalized and they are probably not aware, but they still say it. Like for example act your age, like for example only boys are allowed to be men child, and women have to be grown up, right? And that pisses me, because I'm definitely a child at heart. And many people are like you need to be more grown up because women are more mature. And only man can be immature, like boys will be boys, and girls have to grow up and deal with it. And it is weird to generalize so many people, so I feel like with my family it sometimes annoys me. I would have to think about this more, because this is a very large question. And of course it depends on which school I was, of course in Germany it was easier to navigate because you had for example more freedom of choice in your cloths whether in England you don't. And here is also easier again because I have more choice over what I wear and stuff like that.



- What are your thoughts and experiences in the Netherlands when it comes to be a Woman/Man/Non-Binary (gender identity)?

I don't know, because probably I don't have much to compare it with.

- What is the influence that sexual identity has in your life in your personal relationships and in different contexts of your life (family, school/work, politics, etc.)?

I knew for a long time that I was not straight but then you see this ideas and stereotypes in the media, and it is very hard to question this. So I knew that I didn't fit these categories, but also not as bisexual. But then people also would question the fact that I identify has pansexual, and why I wouldn't fit into this already conceived idea of bisexuality. And that is why I won't tell my uncles because I know that they won't understand.

- Would you say that religious pluralism is contributing for gender equality and for the understanding and acceptance of matters of sexuality?

I think that is very hard, because it depends on the religion perspective that we are talking about. I would say that in a certain degree it helps, like with accepting gay marriage and stuff like that. But it's still not good, like with some ideas and rights, like Ireland with the Catholicism and the ideas of abortion (this was before the law passed). It's the same I feel with gender equality we are going there but still a mental block.

#### Groningen Feminist Network Mission Statement and Social Media Guidelines

# Mission Statement

*What is the Groningen Feminist Network all about?*



## ETHOS

Ethos is the characteristic spirit of a community as manifested in its attitudes and aspirations. For us that is mainly inclusivity, respect and equality - so we are here to provide an environment in which anyone can partake as long as we are respectful of each other- and of course equality, equity and collaboration is the aim

## MEMBERSHIP

There are very few requirements to be a member. It doesn't matter if you are very educated on feminist matters, It doesn't matter your opinions on polarizing issues, you don't even have to identify as feminist - all that is needed is an interest in feminism (whichever flavour, brand or wave of feminism you like) and respect for the opinions of others. There is no 'pushing of the feminist agenda' we just want to have interesting discussions and try and improve things in terms of equality for all genders - and speaking of all genders - whichever way you identify you are welcome in the Groningen Feminist Network.

## ATMOSPHERE

We try to create a safe space for expression, education and campaigning - but also for fun. The aim is a community of like minded people that can discuss books, films, philosophy, whatever, and also work together to create social changes that we all want to see.

## AIMS

- Form a community within which people feel free to share their views and campaign for change
- Take notice of issues regarding feminism that YOU the members think are important
- Discuss contentious issues with the aim of education and thought provocation - not forcing opinions or confrontation
- Collaborating to create events that serve a purpose to the group and the community at large (even if that purpose is just dancing or fun)

## INFLUENCE

The power and influence lies in the members - this is a democratic network and decisions will never be taken alone - always at board, committee or network level - with the views of all taken into account at every opportunity. Everyone is welcome to voice their concerns wherever they feel it is necessary

## ACTIVITY

We hope to organise fun events, educational events, public outreach events, and campaigns for change. We will also look for public opinion whenever possible to ensure we address the issues which people care the most about as a way of prioritizing.



## MEETINGS

Meetings are for checking in on each other - discussing relevant issues from the week posted in the facebook group, discussing current affairs, the current state of any GFN activity, planning future events and discussing campaigns.

Everyone is welcome that comes with an open mind and respect for the opinions of others - no other tools are needed :)



## Guidelines GFN Facebook Group

This is the Group page of the Feminist Network Groningen (GFN). This is a place for members and friends to discuss and share content they find interesting, thought provoking, and/or want other's opinions on.



This is the code of conduct in this group;

1. Respect people's identities. This, amongst other things, means that trans exclusionary radical feminists (TERFS) are not welcome.
2. Don't post hate-speech. This includes slurs, sexist, homophobic, racist, ableist (discriminatory towards disabled people), classist, or transphobic rhetoric, and intentional misgendering (respect people's pronouns)
3. If somebody calls you out on problematic behaviour and/or language see it as a learning experience, not as an attack. We give each other the benefit of the doubt and understand that we are all here to learn and educate, but if you are called out - please listen to the points.
4. No spam or promotion of events unrelated to feminism.
5. Do not harass or threaten members of this group.
6. Add content warnings when asked for. (example: cw: Misogyny, Transphobia, Domestic Violence) - possible addition- The failure of adding content warnings when asked for may result in the removal of the offending threads.

<http://trigger-warning-guide.tumblr.com/triggers>

7. In the GFN group and the weekly meetings it was previously established that "reversed sexism/racism", as well as "heterophobia" and "cisphobia" are not valid theories as they misrepresent and ignore power structures. Underprivileged people may possibly generalize or be prejudiced towards people of privilege but they cannot discriminate against them because they lack the social, and economic basis to do so. Generalisations may furthermore be necessary defense mechanisms of minorities, (example: A person of colour saying "white people suck" is not the same as a white person saying "Black people suck")  
Resources on this matter:

[https://www.vice.com/en\\_ca/article/qbxzpv/white-people-told-me-why-they-feel-they-oppressed-456](https://www.vice.com/en_ca/article/qbxzpv/white-people-told-me-why-they-feel-they-oppressed-456)  
<https://everydayfeminism.com/2014/08/someone-talk-reverse-racism/>  
<http://www.complex.com/life/2017/02/reverse-racism-is-not-real>

If you violate these guidelines administrators may choose to either give you a warning and possibly an opportunity to talk about it, or ban you from the group, depending on the severity of the violation. (example: a dispute that results in aggressive language may result in a warning; directly and intentionally discriminating attacks may result in a direct ban)

If you have questions about terminology, feel free to consult the following list of feminist key words we have compiled (It's work in progress):

[https://docs.google.com/document/d/1HfFI5-PVT6OeZQKI63xNN7ZIDyRfs8uGZIVw8\\_asnMg/edit?usp=sharing](https://docs.google.com/document/d/1HfFI5-PVT6OeZQKI63xNN7ZIDyRfs8uGZIVw8_asnMg/edit?usp=sharing)

## Warning Message

Dear .....,

Something that you have posted on the GFN facebook group violates our code of conduct (link). It has been removed and this is an official warning. If you post something again which violates our code of conduct you will be removed from the group.

If you would like to talk about what happened, explain yourself or get more information on why your post was considered to be offensive - please let us know and we can arrange a meeting.

We hope this can be resolved and become a learning experience. We would love for you to remain active on our page and we look forward to any future posts, but we hope you understand that our page needs to be a safe space for all our members.

Kind regards,

The board and administrators of the  
 Groningen Feminist Network



<https://www.facebook.com/GroningenFemNet/>