

Editorial

Superdiversity: A critical intersectional investigation

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Though the concepts of diversity and inclusion are still widely used in the contexts of management, policy-making, and academic research, the notion of superdiversity is becoming increasingly popular. First articulated by social anthropologist Steven Vertovec (see Vertovec, 2006; 2007; 2012), superdiversity has been described as a concept and theoretical tool that enables us to study our ever-evolving, globalising social reality in great detail by taking the enormous amount of diversity that exists *within* different groups in societies around the world into account as well, in addition to differences *between* different groups. Superdiversity is mainly linked to the growing ethnic and cultural complexity of Western European societies, and is therefore often associated with the rise of so-called majority-minority-cities, such as Amsterdam, Brussels, and London, to name a few – all cities in which ethnic minority groups are about to replace (or have already replaced) the ethnic majority group (see, e.g., Crul, Schneider, & Lelie, 2013; Crul, 2016; Geldof, 2015).

Superdiversity and intersectionality: A complex and edgy relationship?

Superdiversity as such thus focuses on the immense complexity and evolutionary character of contemporary postmodern societies, an endeavour that it, to some extent, shares with several feminist intersectional theories. But, whereas intersectionality and superdiversity at first sight seemingly overlap, both paradigms also clearly differ from one another. They, first of all, have very different theoretical roots and genealogical origins – namely Anglo-American black feminist thought (see, e.g., Crenshaw, 1989; 1991;

Collins, 1990) on the one hand, and (Eurocentric) migration studies on the other. And, secondly, they also differ when it comes to their theoretical and political intentions – with intersectionality theorists offering a feminist political analysis of society that emphasises unequal, distorted power relations versus a more descriptive analysis aimed at better policy-making. Superdiversity certainly has its conceptual benefits, yet, looked at through a critical intersectional framework,¹ many contemporary superdiversity theories appear to lack a clear gender focus, and only reluctantly engage in the project of critically deconstructing power relations and structural injustices that mark these alleged ‘superdiverse’ Western European societies. Other criticisms that are currently being formulated with regards to superdiversity and its uses relate to the apparent lack of situatedness present in various superdiversity theories.² Moreover, superdiversity theorists have been critiqued for helping spread the problematic message of ‘happy diversity’ (see Ahmed, 2007; 2012) by reducing complex realities and unfair power imbalances to a catchy slogan, thereby refraining from critically analysing how processes of minoritisation and racialisation, but also the production of gender and sexuality, are constitutive of ‘superdiverse’ societies.

Reflecting upon these different origins and uses of superdiversity and intersectionality has led us to ask and tackle the following set of questions: Are superdiversity and intersectionality truly theoretically incompatible, or can there be grounds for fruitful dialogue and collaboration? Does superdiversity need to be gendered and politicised, and, if so, what would such an intervention need to entail exactly? Could contemporary intersectionality theories benefit from some of the perspectives and methods that are emphasised in superdiversity theories, and vice versa?

To find an answer to these thought-provoking questions, the guest editors of this special issue have collected several contributions, ranging from pieces written by academic scholars to policy-makers, that, each in their own way, critically investigate the theoretical-conceptual roots of both paradigms, explore commonalities and divergences in both approaches, and evaluate – through concrete applications in a variety of disciplinary fields and topics – if and how superdiversity and intersectionality may be combined to open up novel analytical perspectives for scholars, policy-makers, and professionals working on these topics. Our call for papers has been answered by authors with a variety of professional, organisational, and disciplinary backgrounds, who, each from their specific vantage point, present their reflections and specific takes on superdiversity and intersectionality in this issue.

Superdiversity & intersectionality: A dialogical approach

We are proud to present various writing formats and styles in this issue: three peer-reviewed articles, one essay, one column, and a roundtable conversation, plus an interview with activists and policy-makers, which will be published on the Belgian activist and media website of *Kif Kif* in April 2018.³

The three articles all investigate the possibility of a dialogue between (super)diversity and intersectionality. Starting from different approaches and empirical foci, they arrive at (slightly) diverging conclusions. The first article, by Faten Khazaei, sketches out superdiversity and intersectionality as different epistemological frameworks with their own individual pitfalls. The author examines a challenging situation for intersectional analysis in the context of Switzerland, through a case study of institutional responses to domestic violence. Despite its shortcomings, Khazaei argues that superdiversity can enable intersectionality to overcome some of its own limitations by becoming more theoretically precise and accurate in terms of migration-related configurations. The second article, by Kathrine van den Bogert, offers an analysis of ethnographic fieldwork amongst young Muslim residents of the Schilderswijk, an urban neighbourhood in the Netherlands. According to Van den Bogert, both intersectional scholarship and feminist studies of religion and gender conceptualise religion in a much too narrow manner. The author intervenes in these fields by analysing young residents' football practices through the concept of religious superdiversity. Thirdly, in their contribution, Nikita Dhawan and Maria do Mar Castro Varela compare the concepts of diversity and intersectionality. The article originally appeared in *Wagadu: A Journal of Transnational Women's and Gender Studies* and was slightly revised to incorporate the discussion about superdiversity. Dhawan and Castro Varela inquire how these concepts can be effectively used as tools for achieving (gender) justice in ways that open up spaces for marginalised constituencies.

These three articles are followed by an essay by Margreet van Es, and a column by Anja Van Impe and Inge Arteel. Van Es discusses the invisibility of elderly Muslim women in qualitative research due to a constantly repeated focus on young people – an issue that has both academic and political consequences. Superdiversity and intersectionality perspectives can be used together, according to Van Es, to point at the increased diversity *amongst* Muslim women, as well as to examine the specific power relations that often render elderly Muslim women analytically invisible. Van Impe and Arteel start from the profession of social work to evaluate

the usefulness of superdiversity and intersectionality. They warn against the increasingly inflationary use of superdiversity in contemporary Flemish policy-making praxes and mediated and political discourses.

Last, but not least, this special issue features a roundtable conversation by Evelien Geerts, An Van Raemdonck, Nella van den Brandt, Lieke Schrijvers, and Mariecke van den Berg about Dutch entertainer Claudia de Breij's 2016 New Year's Eve cabaret performance. The authors respond to the performance, which reached a wide Dutch/Flemish audience, by means of a diffractive dialogue. They discuss the numerous ambiguities present in De Breij's performance in relation to the (re)presentations of religious, ethnic/cultural, gendered, sexual, and migration-related alterity and difference.

We are pleased to note that our call has resulted in a special issue that emerges from various European contexts and beyond; from different disciplines and thereby speaking to those situated in anthropology, sociology, gender studies, religious studies, philosophy, migration studies, and political science; and from both scholars and civil society actors, thereby inviting everyone to continue these important conversations and collaborations. The latter are necessary if we want knowledge produced in academia and in civil society to matter to one another. It is our hope that this issue offers a modest contribution to the rethinking of superdiversity and intersectionality, and their (dis)connections, as well as to furthering cross-disciplinary and cross-professional reflections and engagements.

Notes

1. A framework that, by the way, has not been immune to theoretical critique either. See, e.g., McCall, 2005; Davis, 2008; Nash, 2008; Geerts and Van der Tuin, 2013.
2. A lack of situatedness that some scholars consider to be a Western bias, as many African countries, for example, have always been marked by complex configurations of ethnic, linguistic, and class diversity. See, e.g., Makoni, 2012; Ndhlovu, 2016.
3. This interview will be published online by *Kif Kif* in April 2018, under the rubric of 'Gender & Superdiversity', and will be accessible via <http://www.kifkif.be/>.

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