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Group boundaries in the Netherlands: how religion and ethnicity matter for social integration

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Both religion and ethnicity have been found to be important group boundaries for immigrants' social integration into European societies. However, since both characteristics often overlap, their unique influences remain understudied. Conceptualizing social integration as a form of boundary work, this study aims to disentangle religious and ethnic group distinctions and to examine how they matter for immigrants' contact with members of the Dutch majority group. Relying on data from four large immigrant groups in the Netherlands, that allows exploiting religious diversity within ethnic groups, we describe differences in contact with Dutch majority members between 13 ethno-religious group combinations, and we perform multiple-group SEM across the 10 largest combinations. Results indicate that while the importance of religious affiliation and ethnicity is group-specific, the strongest boundary for immigrants' contact with members of the Dutch majority group is that between the religious and non-religious. The relative importance of religion and ethnicity for social integration is explained both by immigrants' own maintenance of group boundaries and their perception of boundary permeability.

Introduction

Group boundaries are crucial for the organization of society. In research on immigrant integration, group boundaries mark the distinction between immigrants and the non-migrant majority (Zolberg and Woon, 1999). These boundaries can be defined according to various characteristics, such as religion or ethnicity. Integration can be viewed as a form of boundary work in which both immigrants and non-migrants (re-)define group boundaries. The success and form of this process varies depending on the content of the boundary (Zolberg and Woon, 1999; Wimmer, 2008). Social integration, conceptualized as immigrants' contacts with non-migrants (i.e., the majority group), is especially interesting to examine from a boundary perspective because social interactions directly determine the contents and importance of group boundaries and are at the same time structured by them (Barth, 1969; Haug, 2003).

Both immigrants' religion and ethnicity are important boundary markers in European societies (Brubaker, 1990; Vasta, 2007), and multiple studies have examined their importance for immigrants' social integration (e.g., Maliepaard and Schacht, 2018). However, in these studies, immigrants' ethnic backgrounds and religious affiliations frequently overlap, as immigrants from one country often share the same religion. This is problematic as analyzing the influence of immigrants' religion without accounting for differences in their ethnic background, or vice versa, confounds the effects of religion and ethnicity. Such results are especially difficult to interpret for groups with comparatively low levels of social integration, such as Muslims (Foner and Alba, 2008; Leszczensky and Pink, 2017). To illustrate, current societal debates depict Islam as the main hindrance to immigrants' integration (Cesari, 2013). However, while sharing the same religious affiliation, Muslims differ in their ethnic backgrounds, with potentially important consequences for their language skills or cultural norms, among others (Statham, 2024). Because of these ethnic differences, some Muslim immigrants might face less and others more integration difficulties but for different reasons than their religion. Therefore, an analysis of religion and ethnicity in isolation complicates drawing conclusions about their unique importance for immigrants' social integration.

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Disentangling the role of religion and ethnicity allows us to examine whether they affect immigrants' integration in different ways. Related research on structural integration (Adida, Laitin and Valfort, 2010; Heath and Martin, 2013) and majority attitudes towards immigrants (Helbling and Traunmüller, 2018) found religious disadvantages net of ethnic group characteristics. We add to these studies by analyzing immigrants' social integration in the Netherlands, which we examine from a minority instead of a majority perspective. We ask: (i) *Do religious or ethnic group distinctions constitute a brighter boundary for immigrants' contact with non-migrant Dutch?* (ii) *What underlying mechanisms explain the relative importance of immigrants' religion or ethnicity for their social integration?*

Empirically, we rely on the Survey Integration of Minorities in the Netherlands (SIM), which includes the four largest non-western immigrant-origin groups: Antillean-, Surinamese-, Moroccan-, and Turkish-Dutch (Dagevos *et al.*, 2007). While Moroccan and Turkish (predominantly Muslim) and Antillean (Christian) minorities are relatively homogeneous in their religious composition, the Surinamese are religiously diverse, including 48 per cent Christians, 22 per cent Hindus, and 14 per cent Muslims (ABS, 2013). This within-group religious diversity as well as the inclusion of religious minorities such as Moroccan and Turkish Christians and the non-religious as a distinct subgroup, enables us to examine the relative importance of religion and ethnicity for immigrants' social integration. We further consider religiosity, ethnic in-group orientation, and perceived diversity climate as underlying mechanisms reflecting both immigrants' own maintenance of boundaries and their perception of the permeability of the boundary with non-migrants.

Theory and hypotheses

Boundary work and social integration

Group boundaries are important for individuals and society. They form the outcome of a two-sided process in which groups define their boundaries in reference to each other—using various and often overlapping criteria (e.g., cultural, geographical, and biological characteristics, Barth, 1969; Wimmer, 2009). Group boundaries can be both symbolic (i.e., distinctions drawn in mind) and social (i.e., emerging from social interactions), but both help create a common understanding of reality and provide individuals with a sense of identity (Lamont and Molnár, 2002; Alba, 2005). Boundary-defining characteristics are a function of the boundary drawn in social interactions. Thus, group boundaries are not fixed and self-evident units of analysis but dynamic constructs, the characteristics and drawing strategies of which should be investigated (Barth, 1969; Wimmer, 2009).

Immigrant integration can be conceptualized as a form of boundary work in which immigrants and non-migrants negotiate the importance, characteristics, and permeability of their boundaries (Zolberg and Woon, 1999). In this process, boundaries can be *crossed* (e.g., regarding citizenship: naturalization), *blurred* (e.g., dual citizenship), or *shifted* through inclusion or exclusion of in-/out-group members (e.g., changing citizenship policies) (Bauböck, 1994; Alba, 2005). The classical understanding of assimilation, according to which immigrants are expected to completely adapt to the host country's culture, can be understood as boundary *crossing* (Alba and Nee, 2003). The new assimilation theory conceives assimilation as a case of boundary *blurring*, thus allowing for overlapping and multiple (ambiguous) group memberships (Alba and Nee, 2003). Bright boundaries imply no ambiguity about in- and out-group status and are, therefore, hard to *cross*, though they can be *blurred* or *shifted* (Zolberg and Woon, 1999; Alba, 2005).

Social integration refers to immigrants' contact with members of the majority group (Haug, 2003; Martinovic, 2010) and, therefore, is an important indicator of the permeability of group boundaries. Contact with majority group members provides immigrants with crucial support and information for their life in the new country (Coleman, 1991; Haug, 2003), fosters other forms of integration (e.g., labour market incorporation) (Kanas and van Tubergen, 2009), facilitates societal cohesion by reducing prejudice (Allport, 1954)—and at the same time is promoted by these processes.

Social integration is particularly interesting to study from a boundary perspective. In contrast to structural integration, which may provide the conditions under which social interactions across group boundaries may occur or be prevented, intergroup interactions are a direct reflection of the presence or absence of social boundaries (Barth, 1969). We consider casual contacts and friendships as measures of social integration (Granovetter, 1974; Martinovic, 2010). Specifically, we examine how groups defined by the combination of their religious affiliation and origin country differ in their friendships and casual contacts with non-migrant Dutch.

Religion and ethnicity as barriers to immigrants' contacts with members of the majority group

Religion and ethnicity are prevalent boundary markers for immigrants that both provide enacted content. For religion, this includes the dimensions of religious identification, practices, and beliefs (Voas, 2007), whereas

ethnicity comprises ancestry-based cultural norms and values, forms of communication, and traditional cuisines (Brubaker, 2015).

As boundary markers, religion, and ethnicity possess both symbolic and social dimensions. They are sources of immigrants' group belonging (Verkuyten and Yildiz, 2007) but also manifest in social differences, e.g., neighbourhood segregation (Zolberg and Woon, 1999; Alba, 2005). In the two-sided process of boundary work, they are created internally and externally. Internally, immigrants and non-migrants each categorize themselves into religious/ethnic groups, and they seek the in-group's company, for instance, during religious services or cultural festivals (Brubaker, 2015). Externally, immigrants categorize non-migrants, while non-migrants categorize immigrants into religious/ethnic out-groups. These boundary configurations are not necessarily identical. Non-migrants' perceptions of religious and ethnic group distinctions might differ from immigrants' own categorizations.

Although religion and ethnicity frequently intersect, they are not always intertwined. Additionally, religion and ethnicity serve as distinct group boundary markers because religion allows for less boundary blurring compared to ethnicity. Practising multiple religions simultaneously is less accepted, whereas individuals can speak multiple languages or identify with multiple ethnic groups (Brubaker, 2015).

The relative importance of religion and ethnicity

Previous research found both immigrants' religion and ethnicity to be important for contact with members of the majority group. Regarding religion, frequent contact with majority group members was related to decreased religious practice (van Tubergen, 2007; Maliepaard and Phalet, 2012). Leszczensky and Pink (2017) indicate that religious affiliation rather than religiosity matters for friendships with majority group members, as majority youths had lower preferences for Muslim peers, independent of Muslims' degree of religiosity. Maliepaard and Schacht (2018) discovered no connection between Muslim and Christian immigrants' degree of religiosity and their contacts with members of the majority group, suggesting a greater importance of immigrants' ethnic background. Regarding ethnicity, studies show a clear separation between post-colonial and 'guest worker' immigrants in the Netherlands: the latter started off with lower social integration levels than post-colonial immigrants and did not catch up over time (e.g., Martinovic, van Tubergen and Maas, 2009a; Martinovic, 2013).

In the European context, Islam but also religion per se (as opposed to non-affiliation) have been labelled as barriers to immigrant integration due to high levels of secularization (Foner and Alba, 2008). However, the importance of religious and ethnic boundary configurations has been discovered to vary between European countries (Bail, 2008). This makes it important to examine the relative importance of religious and ethnic boundaries for immigrants' social integration in specific country contexts.

The Dutch context is interesting as it is simultaneously characterized by high levels of secularization and the institutionalization of religious diversity through the history of pillarization (Korteweg and Yurdakul, 2009). A majority of the population is currently unaffiliated (almost 10 per cent describe themselves as convinced atheists; almost 40 per cent as agnostic; SCP, 2022), placing the Netherlands among the least religious countries in Europe (SCP, 2022). This suggests that immigrants who are attached to a religion, especially if they actively practice it, hold a 'double out-group' position within Dutch society. They are separated from the Dutch mainstream by boundaries defined by their migration background and religiosity. However, religion is still strongly represented in the public sphere (e.g., political parties identifying as Christian), and a significant minority of the population maintains a strong allegiance to particular variants of Protestantism (SCP, 2018). Thus, immigrants identifying as Christian might be included in a common in-group by Dutch Christians. Therefore, they might maintain more contact with non-migrant Dutch than their co-ethnics who adhere to religions that are not historically represented in the Netherlands. Muslims are particularly singled out in public debates about migration and diversity, and while they make up about 6 per cent of the adult Dutch population, surveys consistently show that non-migrant Dutch overestimate the share of Muslims at about 20 per cent (SCP, 2022). Simultaneously, the regulation of immigration and access to citizenship are very prominent in the political agenda. This also makes a migration background or non-Dutch ethnicity a non-negligible boundary in the Netherlands (Korteweg and Yurdakul, 2009). Yet, previous studies have discovered clear differences in social integration between immigrant groups, with the least contacts found consistently among immigrants from Muslim-majority countries (Martinovic, van Tubergen and Maas, 2009a). Therefore, we expect that descriptively immigrants who are religiously different from non-migrant Dutch (i.e., Muslim or Hindu) will have less contact with non-migrant Dutch than those immigrants who are Christian and non-religious and thus only differ ethnically but not religiously from the Dutch 'mainstream' (H_1).

Examining mechanisms for the relative importance of religion and ethnicity

Adopting a minority perspective, we test three mechanisms that help explain how religion and ethnicity

relate to immigrants' contacts with non-migrant Dutch. Two of them capture immigrants' own maintenance of group boundaries (i.e., internal boundaries), whereas the third captures external boundaries as perceived by immigrants. Specifically, we examine *religiosity* (assessed independently through identification and service attendance) and *ethnic in-group orientation* (assessed through identification and ethnic closure combined) as internal boundary mechanisms. While data constraints prevent us from including majority group members' maintenance of religious and ethnic boundaries, which would objectively measure external boundaries, we incorporate immigrants' *perceived diversity climate*. This captures immigrants' perceptions of how permeable the boundary between themselves and the majority is (Wimmer, 2009; Brubaker, 2015). Our cross-sectional data and the reciprocal relationship between boundaries and social integration do not allow for causal tests. Nevertheless, examining the three mechanisms provides first important insights into the distinct processes through which religion and ethnicity relate to immigrants' social integration.

Internal boundary mechanisms

Religiosity and ethnic in-group orientation represent the degree of immigrants' attachment to their in-group, defined either in religious or ethnic terms. This in-group attachment can be connected to social integration through both preferences and opportunities for contact (Kalmijn, 1998). Regarding preferences for contact, the homophily principle suggests that people, in general, show a greater preference for contacts with similar rather than dissimilar others (McPherson, Smith-Lovin and Cook, 2001). In the case of immigrants, we, therefore, expect that the more attached to their religiously or ethnically defined in-group they are, the more they prefer contact with immigrants who share their religion or ethnicity.

Even though a strong in-group attachment has been connected to in-group bias, this does not necessarily result in decreased preferences for out-group contact (Berry, 1997). However, the possibility of membership in, or contact with, multiple groups can be argued to be weaker for bright group boundaries. Studies have indeed confirmed a negative relationship between both religiosity (Verkuyten and Thijs, 2010) and ethnic in-group orientation (van Tubergen, 2015) with contacts with majority group members.

Regarding opportunities for contact with members of the majority group, in-group attachments become significant due to a channelling effect that directs immigrants even further towards their in-group community and away from cross-group contacts (Martin, White and Perlman, 2003). As social networks show a tendency for closure and transitivity (Wölfer, Faber and Hewstone, 2015), individuals who participate more frequently in their community are likely to have more homogeneous social networks, which provide fewer opportunities for interactions with majority group members (Blau, Blum and Schwartz, 1982). Therefore, immigrants with a stronger attachment to their in-group are likely to encounter fewer opportunities for contact with majority group members, perceived as an out-group. This results from their more homogenous social networks compared to in-group members with lower in-group attachments.

Immigrants' preferences and contact opportunities thus point towards the same direction for the relation between the strength of in-group attachment and the level of contact with non-migrant Dutch. For religiosity, however, we can further investigate the importance of contact opportunities by taking service attendance into account. Specifically, Christian immigrants might have more opportunities to interact with non-migrant Dutch in ethnically heterogeneous congregations compared to their co-ethnics who are non-religious or adhere to minority religions. Although non-religious immigrants share their (non-)affiliation with the majority of the Dutch population, they do not benefit from meeting opportunities with ethnically different but religiously similar others. This is because there is no community infrastructure for non-believers, as opposed to adherents of particular religious communities.

Based on preferences and opportunities, we thus hypothesize that immigrants with higher levels of religious identification (H_{2a}) and service attendance (H_{2b}) will have less contact with non-migrant Dutch. Correspondingly, immigrants who are more strongly oriented towards their ethnic in-group will also have less contact with non-migrant Dutch (H_{2c}).

External boundary mechanisms

Immigrants' religiosity and ethnic in-group orientation help us to understand group boundaries between immigrants and members of the majority group as maintained by immigrants. Yet, the two-sided nature of group boundaries also requires insight into the boundary work of majority group members vis-à-vis religiously or ethnically different immigrants. In the absence of direct measures of contact preferences of Dutch majority group members for immigrants defined by specific combinations of religion and ethnicity, we draw on immigrants' perceptions of boundary permeability.

We propose that the *perceived diversity climate*, measured as immigrants' perceptions of the host society as an environment that supports cultural diversity by, for example, being free of group discrimination, captures the majority group members' contact preferences as perceived by immigrants. In a climate that is

perceived as more welcoming, members of the majority group are expected to show increased openness towards contact with immigrants. This increases immigrants' opportunities for contact with majority group members.

Furthermore, individuals' motivation to engage in groups is led by the aim to use the group's feedback to develop and maintain a positive social identity (Tajfel and Turner, 1986; Tyler and Blader, 2003). Hence, negative feedback such as discrimination can lead immigrants to dis-engage from the national in-group and decrease their preferences for contact with members of the majority group (Jasinskaja-Lahti, Liebkind and Solheim, 2009; Bobowik *et al.,* 2017). In turn, positive feedback from majority group members can foster immigrants' engagement with this group. Based on these arguments, we expect that a less positive perception of the diversity climate is associated with less contact with non-migrant Dutch (H_3).

Research aim: distinguishing the relative importance of religion and ethnicity for social integration

Descriptively, we can observe the importance of religion and ethnicity for social integration via differences in levels of contact with non-migrant Dutch between subgroups of immigrants defined by the combination of their religious affiliation and country of origin. To go beyond this descriptive account, we include religiosity, ethnic in-group orientation, and perceived diversity climate as mediators in our analysis. This helps us shed light on the mechanisms through which religion and ethnicity operate as social boundaries. Further, it allows us to examine to what extent group differences in contact persist after including these individual differences. The relative strength of the coefficients of religiosity and ethnic in-group orientation as predictors of contacts with non-migrant Dutch reveal whether the internal boundary maintained by immigrants towards non-migrants is stronger based on religion or ethnicity.

If the group differences in contacts with non-migrant Dutch are unaffected by immigrants' individual differences in religiosity or ethnic in-group orientation, this suggests that boundaries are external. This is because it indicates that non-migrants engage with immigrants at a similar frequency despite immigrants' individual differences and orientations. Descriptively, we could then still observe whether non-migrants have less contact with those immigrants who are religiously or ethnically different. Our design does not allow us to find out whether non-migrants' (un-)willingness to engage in contact with immigrants stems from perceived religious or ethnic differences. However, the goal of our study is not to examine the relative importance of religion and ethnicity from the non-migrant but from the immigrant perspective.

Methods

Data and participants

We use the repeated cross-sectional Survey Integration of Minorities in the Netherlands (SIM) (Dagevos *et al.,* 2007; Korte and Dagevos, 2011; Andriessen and Kappelhof, 2016). It includes respondents above 15 years from the four largest non-western immigrant groups in the Netherlands: Turks, Moroccans, Antilleans, Surinamese, and a Dutch comparison group. We define respondents as immigrants if they were born outside the Netherlands (first-generation), had at least one foreign-born parent, or migrated before the age of 15 (second-generation).

A large sample size is required to distinguish groups based on combinations of ethnicity and religion. Therefore, we pooled the three waves of SIM collected in 2006, 2011, and 2015 (total $N = 16{,}204$ respondents). In each wave, immigrants were sampled according to their ethnicity using a two-stage random sampling technique. Given our interest in immigrants from the four largest non-western groups and in examining specific ethno-religious combinations, non-migrant Dutch ($N = 2{,}917$), respondents from other immigrant groups ($N = 1{,}755$), respondents who did not report their religious affiliation ($N = 21$), selected the option 'undefined other' ($N = 145$) or a smaller religious group ($N = 10$) were excluded. Further, to ensure convergence of our statistical models, combinations with less than 100 respondents (e.g., Turkish Christians) were excluded from structural equation models but included in descriptive analyses ($N = 71$). This resulted in a final analytical sample of 11,285 respondents.

Measures

All variables were harmonized in reference to the 2006 dataset. *Don't know* and *not applicable* answers were treated as missing values, which comprise 0.10 per cent to 36.86 per cent. Supplementary Appendix Table Aa1a/b provides an overview of all measures, and Supplementary Appendix D provides details on their harmonization.

Contact with non-migrant Dutch is measured with four items: 'How often do you have contact with: Dutch friends or acquaintances; Dutch neighbours or community members' (1: 'never/less than once a year' to 5: 'every day'). 'Do Dutch friends often/sometimes/or never visit you?'; 'In your free time, do you often/sometimes/or never mix with Dutch people?'. We measured contact as a mean score, treating respondents with higher scores on all variables as having more

contact. We assumed equal item weights as the estimation of item weights based on their importance often leads to identification problems in complex models (Kline, 2011).

For *ethno-religious group membership*, we combined immigrants' religious affiliation with their ethnic background into a series of dummies that differentiate up to 13 ethno-religious subgroups (see Table 1; cf. Heath and Martin, 2013). We summarized different religious persuasions into four overarching groups: *non-religious*, *Christian*, *Muslim*, *Hindu,* as the subgroups were too small for trustworthy comparisons (overview in tAa2). Immigrants' ethnic background (measured as respondents' or their parents' country of birth) was included as a pre-defined variable in the dataset, as ethnic groups were specifically sampled from registry data (Alders, 2001; Dagevos *et al.,* 2007).

Religiosity is measured with two constructs to reflect its multidimensional nature (Voas, 2007). For *religious identification*, three items were selected: 'My belief is an important part of myself'; 'It hurts if someone talks badly about my belief'; and 'It is annoying when your daughter wants to marry someone of a different faith' (1: 'strongly agree', 5: 'strongly disagree'). We measured religious identification as a reflexive factor ($\alpha = 0.87$), where higher values indicate stronger identification.

Respondents' frequency of *service attendance* was also included across all three questionnaires ('How often do you attend a religious meeting?', 1: 'never/less than once a year', 5: 'every day'). This item showed moderate correlations with the three religious identification items ($\rho = 0.46$–0.54). We included it as a single indicator—noting that it does not conclusively capture respondents' religious practices.[1]

Ethnic in-group orientation is measured by three items: (i) 'Do you identify more as <*ethnic group*> or more as Dutch?' (5: 'I feel completely <>', 1: 'I feel completely Dutch'). (ii) 'To what extent do you feel <*ethnic group*>?' (5: 'very strongly', 1: 'not at all'). (iii) '<*Suppose you had children*> Would you mind if one of your children chose a <native Dutch person> as a partner?' (5: 'strongly mind', 1: 'not mind at all').

The second item was not included in the 2006 dataset, leading to 4,161 missing values (36.86 per cent). We nevertheless decided to include it in our analysis as it is a crucial indicator of ethnic in-group orientation, and missing values are missing by design. Answers to all three items can be argued to be dependent on an underlying latent variable, thus, we constructed a reflexive factor, which showed an acceptable internal consistency: $\alpha = 0.72$; threshold = 0.70 (Cortina, 1993).

Perceived diversity climate is captured by five items. First, participants' perceptions of discrimination towards immigrants were included: 'Some people say that foreigners are discriminated against by Dutch people. Does this never/almost never/occasionally/often/or very often happen?'. Second, respondents' image of the Netherlands as a welcoming country was included: 'In the Netherlands, as an immigrant, you: get every opportunity; your rights are respected'. 'The Netherlands is: a hospitable country for immigrants; open to all immigrant cultures'. All items were measured on five-point scales. A reflexive factor where higher values indicate more positive perceptions had good internal consistency ($\alpha = 0.80$). A measurement invariance test indicated partial scalar measurement for all three reflexive factors (see Supplementary Appendix A).

We control for participants' *gender* (female), *education*, *Dutch language proficiency, immigrant generation*, *time spent in the Netherlands*, having a *Dutch partner,* and having *paid work*, which can be linked to both contact with non-migrant Dutch and the four mediators (e.g., Kalmijn, 1998; Martinovic, van Tubergen and Maas, 2009a,b).

Table 1 Overview of the ethno-religious groups in the analysis

		Ethnic groups				
		Turkish	**Moroccan**	**Surinamese**	**Antillean**	**Total**
Religious groups	**Non-religious**	183	103	935	1,098	2,319
	Christian	*36*	*11*	962	1,773	2,782
	Muslim	2,619	2,681	*255*	*17*	5,572
	Hindu	0	2	*676*	5	*676*
	Total	2,838	2,795	2,828	2,888	11,349

Abbreviations: AN, non-religious Antilleans; AC, Antillean Christians; AM, Antillean Muslims; SN, non-religious Surinamese; SC, Surinamese Christians; SH, Surinamese Hindus; SM, Surinamese Muslims; MN, non-religious Moroccans; MC, Moroccan Christians; MM, Moroccan Muslims; TN, non-religious Turks; TC, Turkish Christians; TM, Turkish Muslims.
Note. Italic values indicate groups that were not included in the test of hypothesis 2 and hypothesis 3. Light grey values indicate groups that are not included in any of the analyses and the total numbers.

Analysis

To test our hypotheses, we performed multiple-group structural equation modelling in Mplus version 7, with ethno-religious categories as grouping variable. Missing values were handled using full information maximum likelihood (FIML). To test the first hypothesis, we used all 13 ethno-religious groups and examined whether immigrants' levels of contact are more similar to ethnic or religious in-group members. Therefore, we fitted a multi-group model, estimating the mean and variance of contact for each ethno-religious group. From these values, we calculated Cohen's *d* as a measure of similarity between co-religious and co-ethnic groups. Negative values indicate less contact and positive values indicate more contact than the comparison group. The smaller the absolute value of Cohen's *d*, the more similar the groups are to each other (Cohen, 1988). To examine the gross effects of religion and ethnicity (i.e., all influences that make up the effects), no control variables were included in these models.

To test underlying mechanisms of religious and ethnic boundaries ($H_{2a/b/c}$, H_3), ethnic in-group orientation, religious identification, service attendance, perceived diversity climate, and controls were added as mediators to the multi-group model. In this model, only the 10 largest ethno-religious groups were included to ensure converge. For readability, we present only the final multi-group model (Table 3). Tables for the preceding models can be found in the Supplementary Appendix.

Results

Hypothesis 1

Including the mean and variance of contact per ethno-religious group (Table 2), non-religious Moroccans ($M = 9.04$) are shown to have the most and Turkish Muslims the least contact with non-migrant Dutch ($M = 6.81$). Table 3 displays the results of the ethno-religious group comparisons. The distinction between religion and ethnicity can be analyzed the best for Surinamese Muslims by comparing them with their religious in-group (Antillean, Moroccan, and Turkish Muslims) as well as with their ethnic in-group (non-religious, Christians, and Hindu Surinamese). Cohen's *d* values indicate that Surinamese Muslims have similar levels of contact than non-Muslim Surinamese (insignificant *d* value: $d_{\text{SMvs.\{SN\_SC\_SH\}}} = -0.081$, $p = 0.118$) but maintain significantly more contact than non-Surinamese Muslims ($d_{\text{SMvs.\{AM\_MM\_TM\}}} = 0.148$, $P < 0.001$).

Surinamese Hindus cannot be compared to a religious in-group but are observed to be the closest to Surinamese Muslims. Thus, to rule out the possibility that Surinamese Muslims are only similar to their ethnic in-group due to their closeness to Surinamese Hindus, we tested whether Muslim and Hindu Surinamese together are closer to their ethnic in-group or Muslims. Cohen's *d* again confirms that all Surinamese subgroups have very similar levels of contact with non-migrant Dutch ($d_{\text{\{SH\_SM\}vs.\{SN\_SC\}}} = -0.082$, $P = 0.121$). This indicates that religious subgroup differences are not very consequential for the social integration of Surinamese.

Turning to a comparison between specific religious groups and the non-religious, we find that all non-religious subgroups (except non-religious Antilleans) are distinct from their co-ethnics with a religion (*d* values for the comparison with ethnic in-groups are significant) compared to which they consistently have more contact (*d* values for the comparisons with ethnic in-groups are all positive and $d_{\text{\{all\_non-rel\}vs.\{all\_rel\}}} = 0.329$, $P < 0.001$). Hence, having any religion versus being non-religious is an important social boundary, resulting in less contact with non-migrant Dutch. Simultaneously, we observe variation within the group of non-religious (except for non-religious Surinamese, *d* values for the comparisons with non-religious in-groups are also significant)—ranking the non-religious from Moroccans (most) to Turks (least contact).

Considering the religious, all Christians (Antilleans, Surinamese, Moroccans, and Turks) maintain similar levels of contact regardless of their ethnicity (all comparisons with co-religionists are insignificant). Remarkably, within the Muslim groups, there is more diversity in levels of contact with non-migrant Dutch as all contrast with fellow Muslim groups are significant: Antillean Muslims have more contact with non-migrant

Table 2 Level of contact with non-migrant Dutch per ethno-religious group, $N = 10{,}389$

Ethno-religious group	Contact *mean*	*SD*
Non-religious Moroccans	9.04	0.272
Non-religious Antilleans	8.66	0.082
Non-religious Surinamese	8.41	0.088
Moroccan Christians	8.40	0.863
Antillean Muslims	8.36	0.536
Non-religious Turks	8.12	0.205
Antillean Christians	7.72	0.072
Surinamese Christians	7.72	0.092
Surinamese Hindus	7.48	0.112
Surinamese Muslims	7.41	0.188
Turkish Christians	7.32	0.459
Moroccan Muslims	7.03	0.057
Turkish Muslims	6.81	0.058

Note: Missing values could not be handled with FIML in this model but are evenly distributed across the 13 ethno-religious groups.

Table 3 Cohen's *d* values for different sets of ethno-religious group comparisons, calculated from the mean and variance of contact with non-migrant Dutch, $N = 10{,}389$

Comparison	Comparison Group	Cohen's *d*
(1) *Surinamese Muslims*	SM	
vs. other Muslims	{AM MM TM}	0.148**
vs. other Muslims without AM	{MM TM}	0.147**
vs. other Surinamese	{SN SC SH}	–0.081
Surinamese Hindus	SH	
vs. Muslims	{AM SM MM TM}	0.169***
vs. Surinamese Muslims	{SM}	0.020
vs. other Surinamese	{SN SC}	–0.061†
Surinamese Hindus and Muslims	SH SM	
vs. other Muslims	{AM MM TM}	0.149**
vs. other Surinamese	{SN SC}	–0.082
(2) *Non-religious Surinamese*	SN	
vs. other non-religious	{AN MN TN}	0.081
vs. other Surinamese	{SH SM SC}	0.180***
Non-religious Antilleans	AN	
vs. other non-religious	{SN MN TN}	0.146*
vs. other Antilleans	{AC AM}	0.081
Non-religious Moroccans	MN	
vs. other non-religious	{AN SN TN}	0.250**
vs. other Moroccans	{MC MM}	0.512***
Non-religious Turks	TN	
vs. other non-religious	{AN SN MN}	–0.247**
vs. other Turks	{TC TM}	0.337***
(3) *Surinamese Christians*	SC	
vs. other Christians	{AC MC TC}	0.102
vs. other Surinamese	{SN SH SM}	0.082
Antillean Christians	AC	
vs. other Christians	{SC MC TC}	0.099
vs. other Antilleans	{AN AM}	–0.170
Moroccan Christians	MC	
vs. other Christians	{SC AC TC}	0.277
vs. other Moroccans	{MN MM}	0.334
Turkish Christians	TC	
vs. other Christians	{SC AC MC}	–0.277
vs. other Turks	{TN TM}	0.129
(4) *Antillean Muslims*	AM	
vs. other Muslims	{SM MM TM}	0.435**
vs. Surinamese Muslims	{SM}	0.268†
vs. other Antilleans	{AN AC}	0.180
Moroccan Muslims	MM	
vs. other Muslims	{SM AM TM}	0.057**
vs. Turkish Muslims	{TM}	0.056**
vs. other Moroccans	{MN MC}	–0.353
Turkish Muslims	TM	
vs. other Muslims	{SM AM MM}	–0.057**
vs. other Turks	{TN TC}	–0.129
(5) *All non-religious*	{AN SN MN TN}	
vs. all religious	{AC AM SC SH SM MC MM TC TM}	0.329***
vs. all Christians	{AC SC MC TC}	0.202
(6) *All Christians*	{AC SC MC TC}	
vs. all Muslims	{AM SM MM TM}	0.124

***$P < 0.001$,
**$P < 0.01$,
*$P < 0.05$,
†$P < 0.10$.
Note: Cohen's $d_{Avs.B} = \frac{M_{Group\_A} - M_{Group\_B}}{\sqrt{V_{Group\_A} + V_{Group\_B}}}$.

Dutch than all other Muslim groups ($d_{\text{AMvs.\{SM\_MM\_TM\}}} = 0.435$, $P < 0.01$), Surinamese Muslims have more contact than Moroccan and Turkish Muslims ($d_{\text{SMvs.\{MM\_TM\}}} = 0.147$, $P < 0.01$), and Moroccan Muslims have more contact than Turkish Muslims ($d_{\text{MMvs.TM}} = 0.056$, $P < 0.01$). However, some of the subgroups included in these contrasts are very small (particularly Antillean Muslims ($N = 17$), Moroccan Christians ($N = 11$), and Turkish Christians ($N = 36$)), which limits the statistical power for these comparisons. Only in the case of Surinamese, a full crossing of ethnicity and religion is possible with reasonable power.

Based on these comparisons, we conclude that having a religion (vs. being non-religious) is a first and essential boundary for immigrants' contact with non-migrant Dutch. Considering the religious, results are mixed. All Christians maintain similar levels of contact with non-migrant Dutch, at a similar level compared

to the non-religious and co-ethnics who are Muslim or Hindu. This suggests that for Christian immigrants' social integration, ethnicity is less consequential than the shared religion with a part of the Dutch majority population. Interestingly, Christian immigrants' levels of contact with non-migrant Dutch overall are neither significantly different from their non-religious ($d_{\text{all\_non-rel.vs.all\_Christ.}} = 0.202$, $P = 0.107$) nor their Muslim co-ethnics ($d_{\text{all\_Christ.vs.all\_Musl.}} = 0.124$, $P = 0.280$). For Muslim immigrants, however, the results point towards a greater role of ethnic group distinctions: first, Muslims have similar levels of contact with non-migrant Dutch compared to co-ethnics who are non-religious or Christian (all d values for these comparisons are non-significant). Second, there are significant and substantial differences in levels of contact between the different Muslim subgroups. These do not only divide post-colonial from previous 'guestworker' immigrants (Surinamese vs. other Muslims without Antillean Muslims, $d_{\text{SMvs.MM TM}} = 0.147$, $P < 0.01$; Surinamese vs. Antillean Muslims, $d_{\text{AMvs.SM}} = 0.268$, $P < 0.1$) but also indicate differences between Moroccan and Turkish Muslims (e.g., $d_{\text{MMvs.TM}} = 0.056$, $P < 0.01$).

Regarding our hypothesis (H_1) that those who are both religiously and ethnically different from the Dutch 'mainstream' would have least social contact with non-migrant Dutch, we find considerable confirmation, but the order of religious boundaries from non-religious (most contact) via Christians to Muslims and Hindus (least contact) is nuanced by significant ethnic variation in social integration among Muslim (but not Christian) subgroups and the comparatively lower levels of contact with non-migrant Dutch of non-religious Turks. The latter finding indicates that not all Muslims are equally excluded, and not all non-religious equally included in social interactions with non-migrant Dutch despite their shared (non-)religious affiliation.

Multi-group model

To examine mechanisms underlying the importance of immigrants' religion and ethnicity, we consider a model in which ethnic in-group orientation, religious identification, service attendance, and perceived diversity climate explain differences in contact between ethno-religious groups. Effects of the ethno-religious contrasts on contact and the mediators can be calculated as the difference in means to a comparison group, for which we chose Turkish Muslims. These analyses rely only on the 10 largest ethno-religious combinations and exclude the smaller subgroups of Antillean Muslims and Turkish and Moroccan Christians, as model convergence was otherwise impossible.

A structural invariance test indicated that the constrained model, in which the paths of all mediators and controls were set equal across ethno-religious groups, had a better model fit in terms of AIC values than the unconstrained model, which allowed all paths to vary across groups (tAa7). Moreover, all unconstrained paths ran in the same direction (tAa8). Hence, for parsimony, we chose the constrained model for interpretation, which shows a good model fit ($SB\chi^2$ (1,382) = 3,291.79, RMSEA = 0.035, CFI = 0.937, TLI = 0.926, SRMR = 0.037).

Hypotheses $2_{a/b/c}$ and 3. All four mediators are significantly related to contact with non-migrant Dutch (Table 4). In support of $H_{2a\&c}$, immigrants with a stronger religious identification and higher ethnic in-group orientation have less contact with non-migrant Dutch ($b_{Religious\_ident.} = -0.464$, $SE = 0.098$, $P < 0.001$; $b_{Ethnic\_orient.} = -0.500$, $SE = 0.032$, $P < 0.001$). In contrast to H_{2b}, higher levels of contact are observed for respondents who regularly attend religious services ($b_{Service\_Attend.} = 0.134$, $SE = 0.029$, $P < 0.001$). Importantly, ethnic in-group orientation, religious identification, and service attendance explain the effects of the ethno-religious group contrasts on contact with non-migrant Dutch. For example, a positive indirect path via religious identification is observed for Surinamese Muslims ($b_{\text{iReligious\_ident.\_SM}} = 0.287$, $SE = 0.069$, $P < 0.001$)—meaning that compared to Turkish Muslims, Surinamese Muslims have a lower religious identification, which partially explains their higher levels of contact.

Supporting H_3, immigrants who perceive the Netherlands as more welcoming have more frequent contact with non-migrant Dutch ($b_{Perceived\_cult.dv.climate} = 0.309$, $SE = 0.071$, $P < 0.001$). For this mediator, significant indirect effects in comparison to Turkish Muslims are observed for all ethno-religious groups except non-religious Moroccans and non-religious Turks. Apart from gender and time spent in the Netherlands, all control variables are significantly associated with contact in the expected direction.

Despite the inclusion of the four mediators, residual significant direct paths indicate that substantial parts of the differences between ethno-religious groups in their contacts with non-migrant Dutch remain unexplained. Hence, other variables explaining differences in contact must have been omitted in the model.

An estimation of the multi-group model for each contact item separately revealed that the four mediators work similarly across the four contact types (tAa9). Only for *visits by Dutch friends* and *spending free time with Dutch people* does service attendance show no significant connection. The total effects across the models indicate that the least boundaries between the ethno-religious groups and Turkish Muslims seem to exist for *contact with Dutch friends*. Interestingly, while no distinct boundary appears between non-religious Moroccans and Turks and Turkish Muslims

Table 4 Constrained multi-group model of contact with non-migrant Dutch, ethnic in-group orientation (E), religious identification (RI), perceived diversity climate (DC), and service attendance (SA). Beta (SE)), *N* = 11,285

	DV Ethn. orient. (E)	DV Rel. ident. (RI)	DV Div. climate (DC)	DV Service att. (SA)	DV Contact with non-migrant Dutch					
	Direct	Direct	Direct	Direct	Direct	Ind. (E)	Ind. (RI)	Ind. (DC)	Ind. (SA)	Total
Ethno-rel. group										
Comp. group TM	1.48*** (0.042)	4.01*** (0.155)	−0.067*** (0.017)	2.75*** (0.026)	6.51*** (0.380)	—	—	—	—	—
AN	−1.48*** (0.042)	—	0.067*** (0.017)	—	0.262* (0.107)	0.741*** (0.052)	—	0.021** (0.007)	—	1.02*** (0.101)
AC	−0.711*** (0.033)	−1.06*** (0.054)	0.051** (0.016)	−0.296*** (0.039)	−0.333* (0.132)	0.356*** (0.028)	0.491*** (0.104)	−0.016** (0.006)	−0.040*** (0.010)	0.490*** (0.093)
SN	−1.53*** (0.039)	—	0.124*** (0.019)	—	−0.099 (0.114)	0.766*** (0.053)	—	0.038*** (0.011)	—	0.705*** (0.109)
SC	−0.832*** (0.038)	−1.24*** (0.066)	0.094*** (0.019)	−0.464*** (0.047)	−0.669*** (0.152)	0.416*** (0.033)	0.574*** (0.122)	0.029** (0.009)	−0.062*** (0.015)	0.288* (0.112)
SM	−1.12*** (0.063)	−0.619*** (0.078)	0.093** (0.034)	−0.443*** (0.075)	−0.770*** (0.195)	0.561*** (0.048)	0.287*** (0.069)	0.029* (0.012)	−0.059*** (0.016)	0.047 (0.189)
SH	−1.21*** (0.041)	−0.793*** (0.058)	0.156*** (0.022)	−0.808*** (0.047)	−0.721*** (0.135)	0.605*** (0.044)	0.368*** (0.080)	0.048*** (0.013)	−0.108*** (0.024)	0.192 (0.122)
MN	−1.49*** (0.110)	—	0.110* (0.051)	—	0.782** (0.266)	0.742*** (0.072)	—	0.034† (0.017)	—	1.56*** (0.267)
MM	−0.272*** (0.026)	−0.031 (0.025)	0.033* (0.014)	−0.027 (0.038)	−0.023 (0.076)	0.136*** (0.016)	0.015 (0.012)	0.010* (0.005)	−0.004 (0.005)	0.134† (0.077)
TN	−1.09*** (0.084)	—	0.035 (0.041)	—	0.123 (0.193)	0.543*** (0.054)	—	0.011 (0.013)	—	0.677** (0.197)
Ethn. orient. (E)					−0.500*** (0.032)					
Rel. iden. (RI)					−0.464*** (0.098)					
Div. clim. (DC)					0.309*** (0.071)					
Serv. att. (SA)					0.134*** (0.029)					
Controls										
Female					−0.035 (0.054)					
2nd generation					0.373*** (0.061)					

Table 4. Continued

	DV Ethn. orient. (E)	DV Rel. ident. (RI)	DV Div. climate (DC)	DV Service att. (SA)	DV Contact with non-migrant Dutch				
	Direct	Direct	Direct	Direct	Direct	Ind. (E)	Ind. (RI)	Ind. (DC)	Ind. (SA)	Total
Dutch lang. prof					0.627***					
					(0.050)					
Education					0.351***					
					(0.030)					
Dutch partner					0.474***					
					(0.090)					
Time in NL					0.004					
					(0.003)					
Working					0.116*					
					(0.056)					

***$P < 0.001$,
**$P < 0.01$,
*$P < 0.05$,
†$P < 0.10$.
Note: The model has no overall intercept but intercepts-per-group. To contrast a religious with a non-religious group, an average score on the two religiosity mediators was assumed.

for contact with *Dutch friends* and *neighbours*, non-religious Moroccans and Turks seem to experience fewer boundaries compared to Turkish Muslims for closer contact with non-migrant Dutch (*visits* and *spending free time*).

Summing up, the multi-group model revealed that immigrants' own maintenance of group boundaries in the form of religiosity and ethnic in-group orientation partially explains their levels of contact with non-migrant Dutch. Immigrants' perceptions of how permeable the boundary between themselves and the majority is, are positively related to their level of contact and partially explain ethno-religious group differences in social integration.

Additional analyses

To test the robustness of our findings, we conducted seven additional analyses, details of which can be found in Supplementary Appendix B. First, as the assumption of no unobserved confounding in our multi-group model is likely to be violated, we assessed whether an unobserved confounder, such as residential segregation (i.e., contact opportunities), could invalidate our conclusions. Based on effect sizes found in previous research on social integration, our results indicate that the inclusion of contact opportunities in our model seems unlikely to change our inferences. Nevertheless, overestimations caused by omitting an unidentified unobserved confounder cannot be ruled out. Furthermore, we analyzed the gross effects of religion and ethnicity for each contact item, estimated the multi-group model separately per survey year, switched the reference category, repeated the analysis including only scalar items, re-ran the model with only religious respondents, and re-estimated the multi-group model without the factor items *opposition to religious and ethnic intermarriage*. None of these analyses yielded substantially different results. Only when Antillean Christians are used as the reference category, perceived diversity climate partially mediates the importance of religion and ethnicity on contacts with non-migrant Dutch for less ethno-religious groups.

Discussion

The present study set out to disentangle how religious and ethnic group distinctions matter for immigrants' social integration in the Netherlands. Two central conclusions emerge.

First, our results showed that while the importance of specific religious and ethnic affiliations differs between groups, a clear social boundary runs between the religious and non-religious. In line with Foner and Alba (2008), we found religion per se to be a bright boundary marker for immigrants' social integration

in the Netherlands. Despite different ethnic backgrounds, all non-religious immigrants have similar and consistently high levels of contact with non-migrant Dutch compared to their co-ethnics who adhere to a religion; a partial exception being non-religious Turks who have relatively lower levels of contact with non-migrant Dutch than non-religious migrants with other origin countries, but still are more socially integrated than their religiously affiliated co-ethnics. Among the religious, our findings differ between Christians and Muslims. For Christian immigrants, ethnic differences are of minor importance as they all maintain similar levels of contact with the Dutch despite different migration histories and cultural characteristics. For Muslim immigrants, however, there is a clear hierarchy in social integration that places Antilleans at the top, followed by Surinamese, then Moroccans, and finally Turkish Muslims. The significant and substantial differences in social integration within this most politicized religious minority group are remarkable and bring important nuance to public and scholarly debates on 'Muslimification' (Statham, 2024), where Muslims are expected 'by default' to be separated or targeted for unequal treatment such as labour market discrimination (Di Stasio *et al.,* 2021).

These findings concur with Korteweg and Yurdakul's (2009) observed salience of religious boundaries in the Dutch context—with our findings indicating that in the secularized context of the Netherlands, being non-religious is even more beneficial for social integration than sharing the majority's historical religion (Christianity). At the same time, although overall, Muslims have the lowest level of contact with non-migrant Dutch, our results showed that in contrast to Foner and Alba (2008), Islam is not genuinely a bright boundary for immigrants' social integration, but particularly so for Turkish, and to a lesser degree Moroccan Muslims. Surinamese Muslims showed comparatively higher levels of contact that were similar to their non-Muslim co-ethnics. Moreover, Antillean Muslims (though being the smallest subgroup in our sample) had higher levels of contact than all other Muslims. In line with studies that discovered higher levels of contact with members of the Dutch majority group for Caribbean than Mediterranean immigrants (e.g., Martinovic, 2013), Surinamese and Antillean Muslims' ethnic background possibly provides them with advantages (e.g., familiarity with the Dutch language and customs) which outweigh disadvantages arising from their religious affiliation.

Furthermore, Surinamese and Antillean Muslims, forming relatively small subgroups among their co-ethnic communities, might be less recognized as Muslims by Dutch majority members compared to Turkish and Moroccan Muslims and might, therefore, be less affected in their opportunities for contact with members of the Dutch majority group by the high levels of prejudice towards Muslims (Zick, Küpper and Hövermann, 2011). Additionally, our results showed that non-religious Moroccans and Turks have higher levels of contact compared to their Muslim and Christian co-ethnics. The differences between the non-religious and Muslim subgroups are, moreover, not mediated by higher perceptions of a diversity climate but seem to be connected to lower internally generated boundaries for non-religious immigrants. In accordance with Leszczensky and Pink (2017), these results suggest that Islam might predominantly be a bright boundary through being used as a form of categorization by non-migrants (i.e., external boundary). For Surinamese and Antillean Muslims, however, this explanation only holds to the extent that they share similar levels of understanding of Islamic religiosity as Moroccan and Turkish Muslims. Yet, we found lower levels of religiosity for Surinamese Muslims (tAa10), indicating that both external classifications and internally enacted religious contents may contribute to the enactment of Islam as a social boundary in the Netherlands. Hence, while ethnicity is crucial for Surinamese and Antillean Muslims' social integration, they seem to be atypical Muslim groups with different enactments of Islamic religiosity.

Based on the clear difference between religious and non-religious immigrants and the seeming atypicality of Surinamese and Antillean Muslims, we thus conclude that while the importance of religious affiliation and ethnicity differs between groups, the primary social boundary for contact with non-migrant Dutch runs between the religious and non-religious.

One limitation of our research lies in the groups under study. Next to their religious diversity, Surinamese are also formed of different ethnic subgroups (East Indians, Javanese, and Creoles) (St-Hilaire, 2001), which we could not distinguish in our dataset. Similarly, religious groups such as Muslims can be divided into different persuasions (e.g., Sunnism, Shi'ism, and Alevism). Ignoring this diversity, we fall into the Herderian fallacy of assuming communitarian closure (Wimmer, 2009). Therefore, Surinamese Muslims were not compared to one but multiple ethnic and religious subgroups. If these subgroups vary regarding their religiosity or level of contact with majority group members, conclusions about the importance of religion and ethnicity become less precise. We were able to partially account for this diversity by using Cohen's *d* as a measure of similarity, which normalizes between-group differences within within-group difference (Cohen, 1988).

A larger challenge is that for Surinamese, ethnic subgroups correspond with religious groups (e.g., South Asians are mainly Hindus but also include a sizable

Muslim community, Javanese are mostly Muslims, and Creoles mostly Christian) (St-Hilaire, 2001). Differentiating these subgroups would thus result in a weaker crossing of religion and ethnicity—making it impossible to identify religious and ethnic influences. Therefore, Surinamese are not an ideal comparison group—however, due to frequent correspondences of ethnicity and religion, such a group is hard to find. The study of Heath and Martin (2013) exploiting religious variation within the Indian immigrant population in the United Kingdom is the only other example we are aware of where a full crossing can be achieved with reliable numbers. Acknowledging this difficulty, our study takes a first step by disentangling the importance of immigrants' religion and ethnicity in the Dutch context instead of treating them as interchangeable.

To work towards a broader picture and to extrapolate the importance of religion and ethnicity on immigrants' social integration beyond the Dutch context, it would be promising for future research to examine whether similar findings replicate across different groups and contexts, such as Indians (Christians, Muslims, Hindus, and Sikhs), Nigerians or Middle-Eastern (Christians and Muslims) immigrants as religiously diverse groups. This is particularly interesting, as even though the general boundary framework holds universally, depending on minorities' social position, majority preferences, and political/historical relations, some religions and ethnicities might matter more in certain contexts than others (in the Dutch context: religious closeness of Christian and non-religious to non-migrant Dutch; cultural closeness of Caribbean immigrants).

The second conclusion we can draw is that both immigrants' own maintenance of group boundaries (religiosity and ethnic in-group orientation, i.e., internal boundaries) and their perception of the permeability of the boundary between themselves and non-migrants (perceived diversity climate, i.e., external boundaries) seem to underlie the relative importance of religion and ethnicity. In accordance with Maliepaard and Phalet (2012) and van Tubergen (2015), but contrary to Maliepaard and Schacht (2018), immigrants with a stronger religious identification and ethnic in-group orientation showed lower levels of contact with non-migrant Dutch. This suggests that higher religious identification and ethnic in-group orientation are related to lower preferences for contact with members of the majority group and more homogenous social networks with fewer contact opportunities (Kalmijn, 1998). However, as we did not directly test immigrants' contact preferences and opportunities, we cannot conclude to what extent these mechanisms drive the observed relationships. Furthermore, the cross-sectional design of our study does not allow for causal claims. Hence, reversed connections such as frequent contact with majority group members decreasing immigrants' religious identification and ethnic in-group orientation are possible. As social integration is a dynamic process, the use of longitudinal data is especially important and a key point for future research.

In contrast to Maliepaard and Phalet (2012) and van Tubergen (2015), our results showed that immigrants who regularly attend religious meetings have more contact with Dutch friends and Dutch neighbours. This relationship is not only positive for Christians, a religious group with higher opportunities for contact with majority group members at religious meetings, but also for Hindus and Muslims. In line with Fleischmann, Martinovic and Böhm (2016), service attendance could be positively related to immigrants' general engagement in organizations and thus be a measure for general outgoingness—increasing immigrants' preferences and opportunities for contact with non-migrant Dutch. This finding underscores the importance of distinguishing different dimensions of religiosity when analyzing immigrants' social integration (Voas, 2007).

We further observed that immigrants who perceive the Netherlands as an environment supporting cultural diversity have more contact with non-migrant Dutch. As discussed by Tyler and Blader (2003), positive feedback from non-migrants seems to be positively related to immigrants' motivation to engage with this group. Yet again, reversed paths are possible.

These findings demonstrate that not only immigrants' own maintenance of group boundaries but also their perception of boundaries drawn by non-migrants are related to their level of contact. Thus, even though our study could not directly account for non-migrants' boundary work (especially their attitudes towards immigrants as symbolic boundaries), our results concur with the understanding of boundary work as a two-sided process (Wimmer, 2009).

Due to data limitations, we were not able to account for immigrants' opportunities for contact, such as their level of residential or occupational segregation. However, our sensitivity analysis indicated no substantial changes in our conclusions if contact opportunities had been included. Yet, to work towards an encompassing picture of immigrants' contacts with members of the majority group, future research could conduct a similar analysis that includes immigrants' opportunity structure—also accounting for majority group members' contact preferences.

Conclusions

To our knowledge, this is the first study to disentangle the role of religion and ethnicity for immigrants'

social integration in the Netherlands. Our findings demonstrate that the central boundary for immigrants' contact with non-migrant Dutch runs between the religious and non-religious—indicating the importance of non-affiliation as a defining criterion for national in-group membership in the secularized context of the Netherlands. Furthermore, our results show that religion and ethnicity do not necessarily go hand in hand. Indeed, all Christian immigrants had similar levels of contact with non-migrant Dutch despite belonging to different ethnic groups with varying levels of cultural distance from the mainstream. Moreover, we found significant and sizable differences in social contacts with non-migrant Dutch between Muslims from different origin countries. This is an important finding, considering the widespread prejudice against Muslims in public debates.

Despite comparatively low levels of contact with non-migrant Dutch among Muslim immigrants, our results revealed heterogeneity within the group of Muslims. Hence, contrary to current societal debates that depict Islam as the main hindrance to immigrants' integration, our study speaks against a genuine Islam effect. Lastly, our study indicates that religion and ethnicity are important for immigrants' social integration both as forms of classification by majority group members and through their enacted contents.

Note

1. Non-religious respondents did not answer the religiosity questions and thus held missing values on religious identification and service attendance. As Mplus does not allow using variables that are always missing in groups for multiple-group analysis, we replaced the missing values of non-religious respondents on the two religiosity variables by random numbers drawn from a normal distribution and constrained the effects of religious identification and service attendance on contact for non-religious respondents to zero in the structural model.

Supplementary data

Supplementary data are available at *ESR* online.

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