

RESEARCH ARTICLE



From culturalisation to individuation: the role of urban spaces in shaping intergroup contacts and symbolic boundary perceptions

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ABSTRACT


This article investigates ethnic boundary perceptions among people without a migration background living in majority-minority neighbourhoods in six western European cities. The main research question is whether people without migration background who have contact with migrant groups in their everyday life surroundings perceive ethnic boundaries as blurred (i.e. individuation) or as bright (i.e. culturalisation). The main argument of this article is that boundary perceptions are importantly shaped by the specific urban micro-setting in which people come into contact with migrant groups. Drawing on data from a large-scale survey conducted in Amsterdam, Antwerp, Hamburg, Rotterdam, Malmo and Vienna, the study examines how urban micro-setting affects ethnic boundary perceptions (i.e. individuation or culturalisation). The results show that contact with migrant groups in parochial spaces is significantly and strongly related to the blurring of group boundaries (i.e. individuation), while exposure in public spaces has no significant effect on boundary perceptions.

KEYWORDS

Urban space; symbolic boundaries; diversity; intergroup contact; majority-minority

Introduction

Western European cities are increasingly marked by demographic diversity. In many of these cities, people without migration backgrounds have become or are on the verge of becoming a numeric minority group (Crul 2016). The so-called majority-minority neighbourhoods in which more than half the population have a first- or second-generation migration background are increasingly the norm in these cities (Scholten, Crul, and Van de Laar 2019). Considering this new urban reality, recent migration research is showing renewed attention to cities and neighbourhoods as key sites of migration-related diversity (e.g. Keskiner and Waldring 2023, in this special issue; Vertovec 2007). In line with the ‘becoming a minority’ (BAM) project, this study zooms in on the local context (e.g. Kraus 2023, in this special issue; Wallace and Favell 2023, in this

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special issue), to better understand the impacts of changing the local demographic landscape.

One of the main challenges is thereby to understand how people without a migration background perceive and construct group boundaries around people they encounter in their neighbourhoods (Crul and Lelie (2023, in this special issue). There are two important lines of thought that can be identified in the current literature. They will be referred to here as the individuation hypothesis and the culturalisation hypothesis.

The individuation hypothesis suggests that in multiethnic environments, people without a migration background perceive group boundaries as blurred and without clear distinctions. Researchers working within the tradition of contact theory (Allport, Clark, and Pettigrew 1954) postulate that diversity offers opportunities for intergroup contact (Pettigrew, Wagner, and Christ 2010; Schlueter and Wagner 2008). Studies show that contact between in-group and out-group members can reduce prejudice and increase trust and the rejection of categorical thinking (Allport, Clark, and Pettigrew 1954; for a meta-analytic review, see Pettigrew and Tropp 2006).

The culturalisation hypothesis, on the other side, suggests that people without a migration background living in multiethnic environments are likely to perceive bright boundaries along cultural, ethnic or racial lines (Duyvendak et al. 2016). In a culturalisation scenario, people are believed to categorise other groups into distinct cultural entities and evaluate those based on socially constructed group hierarchies. Research findings on national levels consistently show that migrant groups that are in terms of language, religion or phenotypical characteristics more similar to people without a migration background are typically evaluated more positively than more dissimilar migrant groups (Hagendoorn 1995; Ponce 2019).

Scholars have constructed several theoretical frameworks to support either the individuation or culturalisation hypothesis. Most explanations tend to evolve around socio-economic competition and power balances between groups (e.g. Blalock 1967; Bobo 1999; Schmid, Ramiah, and Hewstone 2014), the institutionalisation of boundaries across different societal domains (e.g. Alba 2005), available media and elite discourses (Cottle 2000; Van Dijk 1993), as well as different social interaction/contact patterns across groups (Stolle et al. 2013; Vervoort, Flap, and Dagevos 2011).

The focus of this study is on the 'spatial' dimension of social interaction patterns, concentrating on *where* people come into contact with each other. Within majority-minority neighbourhoods, diversity tends to be experienced during everyday life routines in local localities. Yet, the scale of these micro-settings, that is, the level of everyday life encounters such as restaurants, shops, parks, cafes or public transport stations is rarely conceptualised in quantitative research. As noted by Piekut and Valentine (2017), different types of urban micro-settings tend to socially produce different kinds of social interactions, often depending on whether the space is more public or more private. Neglecting *where* in urban space people come into contact might, therefore, lead to erroneous research findings with regard to the question of whether exposure to diversity is related to individuation or culturalisation. This article, therefore, poses the following research question: (1) *How do intergroup contacts in different urban spaces affect boundary perceptions i.e. culturalisation and individuation?*

Building on the existing urban research, this article will contribute to the literature by proposing and empirically testing a theoretical framework to explain how individuation

and culturalisation perceptions are shaped by the particular urban micro-setting in which people come into contact. The focus is thereby on the perceptions of people without migration background towards three culturally salient migrant groups in all six cities: (1) Western, (2) Eastern European and (3) North African and Middle Eastern migrants.

The identification of principles of how urban spaces affect individuation or culturalisation should also provide valuable clues for policy-makers in diverse communities. The demographic trend towards increasing ethnic diversity in today's cities is likely to continue over the coming decades. Policy-makers who have an interest in finding solutions to tensions arising from ethnic encounters benefit from being able to geographically, demographically and psychologically locate the sources of intergroup conflicts. The nature of the relationship between urban space and intergroup perceptions may indicate not only where to concentrate efforts to alleviate racial and ethnic tensions, but also which mechanisms are likely to be effective in fostering better intergroup relations.

Theoretical framework

Boundary perceptions: individuation or culturalisation

Most social scientific schools of thought agree that people's ability to navigate in a particular social environment depends on their mental representations of social groups. In multiethnic urban environments people tend to be exposed to a variety of different groups which is why their mental constructions of group boundaries become crucial.

The literature on boundary work (e.g. Lamont and Molnár 2002; Wimmer 2008) shows that boundaries have both social and symbolic dimensions; the focus in this article is on symbolic boundaries. Symbolic boundaries are mental distinctions that people make to separate others into groups and separate between those who are welcome and those who are not welcome to be part of a community. Conversely, social boundaries are institutionalised forms of social differences manifested in unequal access to resources and opportunities. Symbolic and social boundaries are closely related. Only when symbolic boundaries are widely agreed upon can they take on a constraining character and become social boundaries (Lamont and Molnár 2002). Symbolic boundaries are constructed differently in different societies. While race is, for example, an extremely salient symbolic boundary central to discussions in the United States, its relevance is contested in Western Europe and typically displaced by ethnicity, language, culture, religion or immigrant background (e.g. Lentin 2004; Wieviorka 2010). Determining whether boundary constructions emerge from religious, ethnic or racial differences (e.g. phenotypical features) is complex, and it is possible that in the public mind, these elements are often conflated.

The most relevant symbolic boundary in western Europe concerns Islam and Muslim 'otherness'. Muslim citizens are consistently identified as a distinct ethnic and cultural group despite considerable internal ethno-racial and national diversity (Brubaker 2013). Most western European cities share a similar post-war immigration history of low-skilled guest workers coming from middle eastern (turkey) and north African (morocco) countries. Their stays were expected to be temporary, and migration policies were often constructed to make permanent residence difficult and undesirable (D'Amato 2011, 168). Portrayed as backward and intolerant, Muslim citizens are commonly

perceived as incongruent with dominant liberal value schemes (Bilsky 2009; Spruyt and Elchardus 2012). Islamic practices like the wearing of headscarves are typically opposed based on gender equality and respect for individual autonomy. The idea that Islam is an inherently sexist religion is one of the constituting myths of Islamophobic discourse (Kumar 2012).

Another symbolic boundary concerns eastern European migrants. Their immigration largely followed the addition of ten new and predominantly Eastern European member states to the European Union in 2004. Eastern Europeans are typically not considered racially distinct from the host populations as they are white Europeans. Yet, eastern European migrants, in particular Poles, Bulgarians and Romanians are still widely perceived as low-status groups who take away jobs and social security benefits while bringing crime to local communities (Dagevos and Gijssberts 2013).

Importantly, scholarship on boundaries has pointed out that due to their social constructedness, symbolic boundaries are mutable and context-dependent (Nagel 1994; Omi and Winant 1993). People's perceptions of group-level boundaries may vary in different local environments. In some cases, boundaries might be perceived as blurred, while in others, they might be perceived as bright (Alba 2005). The question is whether multiethnic diversity in different urban localities translates into the perceptual blurring of group-level boundaries. That is, do people without a migration background perceive the symbolic boundaries between western, eastern European and north African/middle eastern migrants as blurred or bright.

The individuation hypothesis

The individuation hypothesis proposes that group-level boundaries in multiethnic settings will appear blurred to most people. Blurred boundaries refer to those symbolic distinctions that are porous and less definite, allowing some level of movement between in-groups and out-groups. Individuation, therefore, involves an ambiguous perception with respect to boundaries between groups. From the perspective of people without a migration background, people's origins become less and less relevant (Alba 2005).

Research within the contact theory tradition (Allport, Clark, and Pettigrew 1954), in particular, the decategorisation model (Brewer and Miller 1984) has contributed to this idea. The decategorisation model suggests that individuals who have regular contact with individuals with diverse backgrounds will reject group categories, as they realise that each category is heterogeneous, comprising many individuals with different characteristics. In this way, the original categories lose their usefulness for organising people's perceptions, emotions and behaviour. Group stereotypes gradually become disconfirmed as more and more individuating information is acquired (for reviews see Crisp and Hewstone 1999). Moreover, it has been demonstrated that the effects of intergroup contacts seem to generalise even to groups not yet met in the original contact situation (Pettigrew and Tropp 2006).

Recent social cognition research similarly finds that as contextual diversity increases, people perceive social groups as more similar. Bai, Ramos, and Fiske (2020) demonstrate throughout three studies with worldwide, statewide and longitudinal data that people who are exposed to contextual and perceived ethnic diversity, evaluate ethnic groups as being more similar. The authors argue that with more exposure, people tone down

previously exaggerated stereotypes while realising latent and deep commonalities across groups.

Human geography scholars associated with the ‘cosmopolitan turn’ have also argued that people’s exposure to different ethnic groups in the city blurs boundaries while forging new hybrid cultures. It is implied that ethnic boundaries dissolve through cultural mixing and the hybridisation of culture (Bridge and Watson 2002). Paul Gilroy (2004) offers an account of urban spaces framed in terms of ‘conviviality’ referring to the coming together of previously unconnected cultures and the bridging of social and cultural distances. Anderson (2004) writes about the ‘cosmopolitan canopy’, a setting in which people of diverse backgrounds come together, appreciate and enjoy a sense of being together and engage in cultural learning from each other. Wessendorf (2014) develops the notion of ‘commonplace diversity’, referring to ethnic, religious and linguistic diversity being experienced as a normal part of social life and not as something particularly special. Mica Nava (2006) describes ethnic boundaries in many of London’s neighbourhoods as signalling increasingly undifferentiated, hybrid, post-multicultural, lived transformations which are the outcomes of diasporic cultural mixing and indeterminacy.

Overall, the individuation hypothesis suggests that people without a migration background living in majority-minority neighbourhoods perceive group-level ethnic and cultural boundaries as blurred. Being in regular contact with individuals with diverse migration backgrounds should translate into the perceptual blurring of group-level distinctions between western, eastern European and north African/middle eastern migrants. Importantly, the individuation hypothesis predicts that the blurring of group-level boundaries generalises to outgroups who are not part of the original contact situation. That is, even if people are not directly exposed to any of the three migrant groups in their surroundings, their perceptions of symbolic boundaries should still be blurred. Empirically, measuring respondents’ evaluations of these groups should, therefore, reveal similar ratings for each group.

The culturalisation hypothesis

In direct opposition to the individuation hypothesis stands the culturalisation hypothesis. The culturalisation hypothesis suggests that group boundaries are likely perceived as bright and unambiguous in mixed neighbourhoods. It is clear on which side of the boundary a group is located. It has been argued that not everyone sees themselves as part of a cosmopolitan global community (Beck 2002; see also Beck and Sznaider 2006). Tonkens and Duyvendak (2016) point that the dominant discourse in society still tends to revolve around culture as natural, inevitable and, therefore, unchangeable. Cultural categories represent human types, specifying that an individual is fundamentally a certain sort of person. In western Europe, social categories are seldom defined in racial and biological terms, as such definitions are widely seen as racist (Essed 1991). However, culturalised notions of group members share a similar tendency to fix social groups in terms of essential properties of belonging (Meuleman et al. 2019). Studies show that people tend to use reified notions when talking about ethnicity and culture. Presumed cultural differences are often used to sort groups by ethnic origin and historical cultures, whereby each ethnic group is believed to have its own discrete culture (see Verkuyten 1997).

Moreover, research shows that people tend to rank groups along a social hierarchy whereby some groups are ranked higher than others (Hagendoorn 1995; Song 2007). In the United States, for example, white Americans are at the top of hierarchy, African Americans are at the bottom and groups such as Asian Americans and Latinos are somewhere in between (Song 2004). In western Europe, studies have found a similar sequence of preferences from western Europeans to southern Europeans and north African/middle eastern migrants at the bottom (Hagendoorn 1995; Snellman and Ekehammar 2005).

The existence of these social hierarchies is typically explained based on perceived cultural differences. Preferences for the cultural ingroup are believed to indicate the perception of shared group interests, which are central in the explanation given by ethnocentrism theory and realistic threat theory (Blumer 1958; Bobo 1999). Other groups are thereby evaluated based on their similarity or dissimilarity to one's own group and to the extent to which these outgroups are perceived to threaten the symbolic and economic interests of one's own groups (see Riek, Mania, and Gaertner 2006 for a review).

Overall, the culturalisation hypothesis predicts that people without migration background living in majority-minority neighbourhoods perceive bright group-level boundaries between western, eastern European and north African/middle eastern migrants. Being in contact with people with diverse migration backgrounds should not translate into the perceptual blurring of group-level distinctions. Instead, it is suggested that people without a migration background perceive these groups as distinct entities and have higher preferences for western migrants and lower preferences for eastern migrants and north African and middle eastern migrants. Empirically, measuring people's evaluations of these groups should, therefore, reveal dissimilar ratings for each group.

The next section will introduce the main argument of this paper. Individuation and culturalisation are likely affected by spatialised interaction patterns. Depending on whether people are exposed to diversity in more public or more parochial neighbourhood micro-setting, they are likely to perceive boundaries as more bright or more blurred. The following part will first discuss the human geography literature on different urban space typologies. The article will then build a theoretical framework to explain how different urban spaces are related to individuation and culturalisation perceptions.

Urban spaces

In everyday urban life, routines, such as picking up groceries, getting a haircut, stopping for coffee or walking to the metro station, are always bound to particular spaces. As such, people living in multiethnic neighbourhoods are exposed to different groups in a variety of spaces in the city (Piekut and Valentine 2017). The most common conceptual distinction thereby separates public and private space. While public space usually refers to openly accessible space, private space hand is owned by individuals or corporations and usually does not allow strangers free access (Wentz 2010, 452). Being in principle open to everybody, public space offers a higher probability of meeting different migrant groups than other types of space. Such encounters happen within neighbourhood streets, parks, local services (e.g. shops) or public transport (Lofland 1989).

Private space tends to refer to people's homes and is typically reserved for one's closest friends, lovers and immediate family members.

While all urban spaces have physical locations and particular spatial configurations, it has been pointed out that space is always also a social product (Lefebvre and Nicholson-Smith 1991). Spaces are made meaningful by people's actions and behaviours. People's activities create and constantly re-create spaces (Peterson 2017). To better account for the complexities of urban encounters, the public-private dichotomy has, therefore, been broken down into more fine-grained typologies. Scholars have, for example, introduced the notion of parochial spaces (Wessendorf 2014).

Parochial spaces are open to the public as well but have a more private character to them and tend to be characterised by communal relations among neighbours or acquaintances through associations or schools (Wessendorf 2014). Most neighbourhoods have parochial spaces such as corner shops, libraries, community centres and sports clubs. Schaeffer (2017) pointed out the importance of schoolyards and playgrounds as spaces for children-related activities. Children-related spaces are where parents get to know other parents (Small 2009). While playing, children draw their parents into interacting with each other if, for example, a fight over a toy breaks out, they hurt themselves or they are about to do something dangerous. Parochial spaces provide environments where social relations are often voluntarily initiated and related to deeper and more enduring interactions between people. As such, parochial spaces tend to offer opportunities for social interdependence and equal-status relations.

Although not conceptualised as the 'parochial realm', there has also been much discussion about the role of 'semi-public' spaces (e.g. Amin 2002; Peterson 2017). The term semi-public space is generally applied somewhat differently from the term parochial space. Scholars typically use the term semi-public space to refer to spaces where stricter behavioural rules and greater entry barriers apply (e.g. entry fees or dress codes) than in public spaces. Local libraries, for example, often require visitors to lower their voices when entering. Consumption areas, such as cafes, bars, restaurants or shops, require some sort of purchase or entry fee. Activities unrelated to the purpose of buying are typically not unlimitedly permitted.

However, the conceptual distinction between semi-public spaces and parochial spaces is fluid. For example, cafes or bars can be conceptualised as semipublic and as a parochial space because the social relations developed in these spaces can become habitual and frequent (Wessendorf 2014). Research at a local indoor market in Philadelphia shows that many lunch counters encourage strangers to interact, as they rub shoulders while eating. At certain counters, in particular, talking with strangers seems to be the norm (Anderson 2004). As such, acquaintances can develop more easily than with people occasionally encountered on a public street (Laurier and Philo 2006). Semipublic consumption areas can, therefore, have elements of parochial spaces where people develop sustained interdependent relationships. Following this distinction, semi-public spaces, such as local libraries, can be conceptualised as either being more public or more parochial depending on the kind of interactions being facilitated. This paper will mainly distinguish between public and parochial urban spaces.

The argument here is that public and parochial spaces mainly differ in the type of contact they facilitate. While interactions in public spaces are mostly fleeting with little interdependencies between people, parochial spaces tend to facilitate longer-lasting

social relations with greater interdependencies (Piekut and Valentine 2017). The effect of public and parochial spaces on people's group-level boundary perceptions is hypothesised in the next section.

Hypotheses

The main argument of this article is that individuation and culturalisation perceptions are importantly shaped by different types of contact people have in public or parochial urban spaces. Two hypotheses are proposed.

First, culturalisation is more likely in public spaces than in parochial spaces. Recent scholarship has pointed out that modern public spaces typically lack viable interdependence structures. While public spaces are often used by a range of different groups, this does not necessarily mean that public spaces facilitate any lasting interactions across these groups (Holland et al. 2007). There is often simply no reason for people to go beyond fleeting interactions in public places and people can usually manage well without cooperating. It has been argued that urban spaces often provide only 'illusory contact' with other groups (Wessel 2009). Especially public streets in larger cities have been described as spaces of transit that produce no actual meaningful connection or exchange between strangers (Amin 2002). There is increasing evidence from ethnographic studies that superficial encounters between different social groups alone are not sufficient to break down ethnic boundaries. Holland et al. (2007) found in a study of nine public spaces within one English town that different groups often coexist and even observed each other, but rarely actually mixed and interacted. Instead, they often self-segregated within particular spaces, carving out their own territories. Some have, therefore, characterised mixing within some public spaces as simply an act of cultural voyeurism where people perceive each other but do not actually interact with each other (May 1996). Bauman (2013) refers to this ambivalence in terms of mixophilia and mixophobia.

Moreover, interactions in a public space are often constructed around general rules of civic inattention towards others (Wessendorf 2014). Civic inattention refers to disinterested forms of interaction in which the individual implies that she has no reason to suspect the intentions of others to be good or ill (Goffman 2008). Ahn (2017) points out that daily encounters with difference in public spaces involve two different levels of interactions between people: at an individual level performed within the rules of civic inattention, and at a group level, featured by often persistent prejudice towards specific groups. From her ethnographic findings she concludes that interpersonal interactions that are performed within the rules of civil inattention are guided by a mere mode of being together in public. Evidence from quantitative studies seems to suggest that among individuals without close inter-ethnic friendship ties, ethnic diversity in neighbourhoods can even lead to hardened inter-ethnic boundaries and increased threat perceptions (Laurence 2014; Ramos et al. 2019; Schlueter and Scheepers 2010; Stolle et al. 2013). For that reason, individual-level interactions in the public space are unlikely to translate into changes in group-level boundary perceptions. It is, therefore, hypothesised that the contact with migrant groups in public spaces will not translate into the blurring of group-level boundaries, i.e. individuation. In fact, intergroup contacts in public space might relate to culturalised group perceptions.

Table 1. Hypothesised effects.

Type of space	Public spaces	Parochial spaces
Type of contact	Involuntary, fleeting interactions with little interdependence	Voluntary social relations and friendships with higher interdependence
Effect on Boundary Perceptions	Culturalisation	Individuation

The second hypothesis proposes that individuation is more likely for people who have intergroup contacts in parochial spaces than those who do not have these contacts [Table 1](#).

Implicit in the role of parochial space is the higher degree of interdependence across contacts. Ash Amin (2002) demonstrated that proximity on its own is not enough to break down group boundaries. Rather, he argued that it needs spaces that allow for stronger forms of interdependence. For Amin (2002) this is best achieved in everyday social contacts and encounters in community organisations, sport clubs or other spaces of association that constitute grounds for effective inter-cultural communication. These spaces allow for constructive dialogues in local communities, as they offer the potential for friendships that build upon identities shared across ethnic lines. Parochial spaces in that sense allow for the kind of interpersonal contact that was originally emphasised by Allport, Clark, and Pettigrew (1954) contact hypothesis. Allport, Clark, and Pettigrew (1954) emphasised the importance of positive interdependence and equal-status relations within the actual contact situation. Piekut and Valentine (2017) show that interethnic contacts in sport clubs, interest clubs activities around children's schools, voluntary associations and places of religious meetings, have greater effects on improving intergroup attitudes than contacts in public spaces. Similarly, Stolle, Soroka, and Johnston (2008) finds in a study in Canada on the effects of neighbourhood diversity that those who engage in neighbourhood life by talking to neighbours have more positive attitudes towards outgroups.

As such, it is hypothesised that intergroup contacts in parochial spaces are related to the blurring of symbolic group boundaries, i.e. the individuation of group boundaries. Those who do have intergroup contacts in parochial spaces should be more likely to rate western, eastern European and north African/middle eastern migrants similarly (i.e. individuate) than those respondents who do not have these contacts.

Methodology

Data and methods

Dataset

To test the hypotheses, the BAM survey with 2357 respondents in six western European cities, i.e. Amsterdam, Antwerp, Malmo, Rotterdam, Hamburg and Vienna, will be used. The surveys were collected from April 2019 to June 2019. Respondents are nested within 166 neighbourhoods. On average, 14.2 respondents were sampled per neighbourhood. Neighbourhood population size ranges from 1989 to 29481 inhabitants with an average population size per neighbourhood of 9976. The population with migration background in each neighbourhood ranges from 37.6 per cent to 91.9 per cent.

Respondents' age is from 25 to 45 years. All respondents are without a migration background (defined as both parents born in the research country). Crul et al. (2023, in this special issue, see appendix) further discusses the sampling strategy.

Measures

Dependent variable. The dependent variable tries to capture individuation versus culturalisation perceptions. Individuation perceptions are operationalised as an individual's propensity to equally evaluate different outgroups. Culturalisation perceptions are operationalised as an individual's propensity to differently evaluate outgroups. The evaluation of outgroups is measured using the feeling thermometers of three outgroups: (1) western, (2) eastern European and (3) north African/middle eastern migrants. In all six cities, respondents were asked about their feelings towards each of these three migrant groups: Each scale ranges from 0 (cold) to 100 (warm). A variance score across all three groups was computed to test whether respondents evaluate all three groups equally (individuation) or differently (culturalisation). A low variance score indicates that there is little variation in people's ratings of these three groups. A high variance score on the other side indicates that people rate these groups differently.

Explanatory variable: exposure to diversity in urban space. The main explanatory variable tries to capture *where* (i.e. in which urban micro-setting) people without a migration background come into contact with individuals with a migration background. The variable is based on a multi-response question asking whether respondents usually come into contact with people of a different migrant background in specific neighbourhood sites. The question was formulated: *Which of the following would you name as a location in your neighbourhood where you come into contact with people of a migration background?* On the basis of the human geography literature, respondents could choose different spaces from a variety of sites of contact: (1) shops for daily necessities, (2) sport facilities, (3) playgrounds, (4) parks, (5) health facilities, (6) community centre, (7) cultural venue, (8) local library, (9) cafes/bars/restaurants, (10) primary schools, (11) religious institutions and (12) the street. The space item was coded as 1 if respondents self-reported to have intergroup contacts at these spaces. The item was coded as 0 if respondents do not have contacts at the site.

Respondents were additionally also asked how frequently they visit these spaces. Answer categories ranged from 1 (never) to 5 (daily). The space items were automatically coded as 0 if respondents make use of the particular space less than at least once a month. Spaces that were visited by less than 20 per cent of the respondents were taken out of the analysis. Overall, the procedure resulted in eight dummy variables coded 1 or 0. Four of which are taken to represent public spaces (streets, shops for daily necessities, parks and libraries) and the other four were taken to represent parochial spaces (Cafes/bars/restaurants, sport clubs, playgrounds and cultural venues). Finally, mean scores were computed for public and parochial spaces.

Individual-level controls. Several controls for basic demographic characteristics are included. Education was measured using the internationally harmonised ISCED 2011 mappings for EU and EFTA countries. Educational levels were coded into three categories: lower secondary education or less, higher secondary education and higher

(post-secondary) education. The economic position was measured by a composed indicator based on the average monthly disposable household income, welfare dependence and a subjective indicator that measures how well one's income allows one to make ends meet. A categorical principal component analysis on these characteristics reveals one dimension (Cronbach's $\alpha = .68$). The economic position was then recoded into three levels: Low, Middle and High. Social status is based on a subjective self-evaluation ranging from 0 (lowest) to 10 (highest). Age was recoded into three categories 25-30, 31-39 and 40-46. Political self-placement was measured by a scale ranging from 1 (left) to 7 (right). Finally, to account for possible self-selection issues a 'diversity seeker' variable was introduced covering if people intentionally moved into the neighbourhood because of its ethnic diversity. While there are some respondents who haven't moved into the neighbourhood because they have been born there, the variable might still capture a large part of those people who just generally have favourable attitudes towards ethnic outgroups.

Analysis

The analysis continues with a linear regression analysis. The survey was administered at the neighbourhood level. Therefore, there is reason to assume that there are similarities among individuals who cluster in the same neighbourhood. Common neighbourhood factors may significantly influence. To check whether the assumption of independence of linear regression is violated, the intraclass correlation was calculated. However, this was below 5 per cent, which means that observations within clusters are no more similar to each other than the observations from different clusters. The findings can be explained by the particular sampling design on a neighbourhood level. There is little variance across the neighbourhoods due to the selection of majority-minority neighbourhoods in six selected cities. The analysis continues, therefore, with a linear regression model.

Results

Ethnic boundary perceptions

The goal of the linear regression model is to explore respondents' general perceptions of the three migrant groups. As can be seen in [Table 2](#), on average, people without a migration background have the highest preference for western migrants ($M = 72.02$, $SE = 19.62$), followed by eastern European migrants ($M = 58.36$ $SE = 20.81$) and then north African and middle eastern migrants ($M = 51.80$, $SE = 24.26$). The results are in line with earlier research on ethnic hierarchies in western societies, revealing that on a group level, migrants from Islamic-majority countries are consistently evaluated as the lowest in western European societies.

However, only looking at the average numbers does not reveal how these preferences are distributed among people without a migration background. When looking at the dependent variable (Individuation versus Culturalisation) it can be seen that most people without a migration background are in fact equally evaluating the three migrant groups (i.e. individuation). The mean score of the dependent variable is 341.7

Table 2. Descriptive statistics.

	N	Min	Max	M	SD
Amsterdam	2962	0	1	.11	
Antwerp	2962	0	1	.2	
Hamburg	2962	0	1	.23	
Malmö	2962	0	1	.19	
Rotterdam	2962	0	1	.14	
Vienna	2962	0	1	.13	
Females	2942	0	1	.52	
Age 25–30	2962	0	1	.34	
Age 31–39	2278	0	1	.42	
Age 40–46	2278	0	1	.23	
Education Low	2896	0	1	.15	
Education Mid	2896	0	1	.45	
Education High	2896	0	1	.39	
Economic Position Low	2962	0	1	.29	
Economic Position Mid	2962	0	1	.27	
Economic Position High	2962	0	1	.42	
Social Status	2917	1	10	6.67	1.65
Political Self-Placement	2797	1	7	3.31	1.48
Diversity Seeker	2962	0	1	.08	
Types of Urban Spaces					
Parochial Space	2962	0	1	.33	.28
Public Space	2962	0	1	.53	.24
Interethnic Perceptions					
Western Migrants	2772	0	100	72.02	19.62
Eastern European Migrants	2753	0	100	58.36	20.81
N. African/M. Eastern Migr.	2766	0	100	51.80	24.26
Individuation/Culturalisation	2766	0	3612	341.7	545.1

which is at the lower end of the scale. It is a smaller subset of the sample that has more culturalising perceptions of the migrant groups. Culturalisation perceptions among respondents are more thinly spread from moderate to extreme culturalisation. That is, lower evaluations of north African and middle eastern migrants are mainly due to a smaller subsection of respondents rating this group much lower than the rest of the respondents. To better understand the difference between individuation and culturalisation perceptions, it is necessary to take individual-level factors into account.

In the next step, it was analysed which respondents lean towards individuation or culturalisation. The main hypothesis was that those respondents with intergroup contacts in parochial spaces are more likely to show individuation perceptions than those who do not have these contacts. In contrast, respondents with intergroup contacts in public spaces are hypothesised to be more likely to show culturalisation perceptions. The statistical model to test the hypothesis was built in four steps. First, a model including only the control variables was tested. Second, a space-irrelevant model is introduced. Public and parochial spaces are averaged (collapsed across spaces) to resemble contact approaches in the current literature (effects of contact with diversity on group perception). The third step will add granularity by separately testing the effects of contacts in public and parochial spaces [Table 3](#).

The results of the null model show that among individual-level characteristics, gender and political self-placement are the only two variables that are significantly related to the dependent variable. Males are, on average, more likely to culturalise than females ($b = 60.7$, 95% CI [22.8, 103.1], $p = 0.002$). This is in line with earlier findings that suggest that men are generally more likely to hold prejudiced views against certain migrant

Table 3. Regression analysis.

	Model 0			Model 1			Model 2			Model 3		
	b	(SE)	sig.	b	(SE)	sig.	b	(SE)	sig.	b	(SE)	sig.
(Constant)	-40.89	69.75	0.558	-2.58	70.74	0.971	9.66	70.83	0.892	-37.71	74.87	0.615
City												
Antwerp (ref Amsterdam)	-22.02	38.01	0.562	-21.96	37.95	0.563	-20.64	37.91	0.586	-23.67	37.93	0.533
Hamburg (ref Amsterdam)	12.14	36.98	0.743	4.41	37.00	0.905	10.50	37.04	0.777	5.09	37.13	0.891
Malmo (ref Amsterdam)	-36.94	39.43	0.349	-39.89	39.38	0.311	-38.02	39.34	0.334	-33.46	39.39	0.396
Rotterdam (ref Amsterdam)	35.43	40.25	0.379	31.04	40.21	0.440	29.76	40.17	0.459	34.09	40.21	0.397
Vienna (ref Amsterdam)	33.85	43.92	0.441	39.05	43.88	0.374	44.04	43.88	0.316	35.60	44.07	0.419
Individual Characteristics												
Males (ref. females)	62.68	20.61	0.002	64.26	20.58	0.002	62.13	20.58	0.003	63.94	20.59	0.002
Age 25–30 (ref. 40–46)	-42.65	27.95	0.127	-43.61	27.91	0.118	-47.38	27.92	0.090	-46.91	27.90	0.093
Age 31–39 (ref. 40–46)	6.37	25.75	0.805	6.22	25.71	0.809	2.77	25.72	0.914	3.38	25.71	0.895
Higher Education (ref. Low)	-23.80	35.24	0.500	-27.31	35.20	0.438	-24.35	35.18	0.489	-24.91	35.16	0.479
Mid Education (ref. Low)	36.29	23.03	0.115	33.84	23.00	0.141	35.77	22.99	0.120	35.38	22.98	0.124
Higher Economic Position (ref. Low)	-20.17	27.66	0.466	-18.95	27.62	0.493	-20.34	27.60	0.461	-18.69	27.59	0.498
Mid-Economic Position (ref. Low)	-52.81	27.85	0.058	-52.28	27.80	0.060	-51.33	27.77	0.065	-49.22	27.78	0.077
Higher Social Status	-10.61	7.55	0.160	-9.96	7.54	0.186	-9.06	7.54	0.230	-9.15	7.53	0.224
Political Self-placement	138.56	7.12	0.000	136.30	7.15	0.000	135.32	7.15	0.000	136.15	7.16	0.000
Has Children younger than 14	-7.09	24.17	0.769	0.15	24.24	0.995	41.76	29.28	0.154	43.53	29.28	0.137
Moved to Neighbourhood because of Diversity (Diversity Seeker)	-68.15	37.21	0.067	-55.22	37.39	0.140	-49.40	37.42	0.187	-51.64	37.41	0.168
Interethnic Contact in Urban Space												
Interethnic contact in all spaces				-146.60	49.40	0.003						
Public Spaces							7.73	46.54	0.868	82.62	49.32	0.094
Parochial Spaces										-215.80	48.44	0.000

Note: Standardised coefficients used. *** = $p < .001$ ** = $p < .01$ * = $p < .05$.

groups than females (Meuleman et al. 2019). Secondly, respondents who position themselves as politically leaning to the political right are significantly more likely to culturalise than respondents leaning to the political left ($b = 138.5$, 95% CI [124.6, 152.5], $p = 0.000$). Interestingly, having children below the age of 14 is not related to individuation or culturalisation perceptions.

The first model shows the effects of the general interethnic contacts across all spaces on individuation vs culturalisation perceptions. The model results reveal that generally, having interethnic contacts in urban spaces is significantly related to individuation perceptions ($b = -146.6$, 95% CI [-243.6, -49.6], $p = 0.003$). That is, respondents who have regular interethnic contacts in local urban spaces are more likely to equally evaluate the three migrant groups than respondents who have few or no interethnic contacts in local urban spaces.

The second and third models test the different effects of contact in public and parochial spaces. The results partially support both hypotheses. The third model first introduces interethnic contacts in public spaces. The effect is related to culturalisation perceptions but not significantly so ($b = 7.7$, 95% CI [-83.5, 99.01], $p = 0.878$). That is, respondents who have regular interethnic contacts in public spaces and those who don't have these contacts do not differ in their evaluations of the three migrant groups. The effect of interethnic contact in parochial spaces, however, is highly statistically significant and related to individuation perceptions ($b = -215.8$, 95% CI [-310.8, -120.8], $p < 0.001$). That is, respondents who have regular interethnic contacts in parochial spaces are more likely to individuate the three migrant groups than respondents who have few or no interethnic contacts in parochial spaces.

An additional analysis was conducted to check for respondents' general feelings towards the three migrant groups. This analysis resembles more traditional contact research looking at the relationship between contact and feelings towards migrant groups. While this type of analysis is more prone to reverse causality issues, it still gives some insight into outgroup-specific perceptions. In the first step, a mean score of all three migrant group perceptions was computed. Cronbach alpha for this variable was .81. The results of the model show that younger respondents ($b = 2.34$, 95% CI [.57, 4.1], $p = 0.01$), higher social status respondents ($b = 1.43$, 95% CI [.95, 1.91], $p = 0.000$) and respondents placing themselves on the political left ($b = -3.4$, 95% CI [-3.84, -2.94], $p = 0.000$) generally feel warmer towards migrants. Also, respondents who actively chose their neighbourhood because of ethnic diversity are more likely to feel warmer towards migrant groups.

The next step was to look at the effects of public and parochial spaces on each migrant group's perception separately. The first model was run on perceptions towards north African and middle eastern migrants. The model reveals that respondents having interethnic contacts in parochial space ($b = 9.1$, 95% CI [5.8, 12.4], $p < 0.001$) have significantly more positive feelings towards this group than respondents with fewer contacts in these spaces. Interethnic contacts in public spaces have no significant effect on feelings towards this group ($b = 3.8$, 95% CI [-.2, 7.9], $p = 0.07$). That is, those respondents having interethnic contacts in public spaces do not have significantly better or worse perceptions towards north African and middle eastern migrants than those respondents without interethnic contacts in public spaces.

The second model was run on the perceptions towards Eastern European migrants. Respondents having interethnic contacts in parochial ($b = 7.1$, 95% CI [4.01, 10.3], $p < 0.001$) and public spaces ($b = 6.7$, 95% CI [2.8, 10.6], $p < 0.001$) have significantly more positive feelings towards Eastern European migrants than respondents with fewer contacts in parochial and public spaces.

The third model was run on western migrant perceptions. Interethnic contacts in parochial space ($b = .13$, 95% CI [-3.4, 3.1], $p = 0.93$) have no significant effects on feelings towards this group. However, interethnic contacts in public spaces are significantly related to warmer feelings towards western migrants ($b = 5.01$, 95% CI [-2.8, 8.67], $p = 0.008$).

To conclude this section, respondents who have interethnic contacts in parochial spaces tend to have warmer perceptions towards eastern migrants and north African/middle eastern migrants than those without these contacts. These contacts are not, however, related to warmer feelings towards western migrants. Interestingly, westerners are more appreciated among respondents who have contacts with diverse others in public spaces.

Discussion

Many recent studies across western Europe have investigated the relationship between growing urban ethnic diversity and inter-group perceptions. Central to many of these studies has been the question of whether multiethnic environments harden ethnic boundary perceptions or blur boundary perceptions. However, most quantitative studies do not sufficiently take into account the fact that people are exposed to diversity in different localities within their cities. In this paper, a more systematic analysis of the role of urban spaces in shaping boundary perceptions was, therefore, conducted. Drawing on data from a European-wide survey conducted in Amsterdam, Antwerp, Hamburg, Rotterdam, Malmo and Vienna, the study set out to investigate the relationship between intergroup contacts in different urban spaces and boundary perceptions.

The main hypothesis of this paper was that interethnic contacts in parochial spaces are related to a blurring of group-level boundaries (i.e. individuation), while interethnic contact in public spaces is likely related to a hardening of those boundaries (i.e. culturalisation). The results are partially supporting the hypothesis. Respondents who have contact with people with a migration background in parochial spaces are more likely to individuate. Interethnic contacts in public spaces are related to culturalisation perceptions but not significantly.

Additional analysis reveals that interethnic contacts in public spaces do not worsen the perception of any one group. The results show that interethnic contacts in public spaces are simply less effective in influencing respondents' perceptions towards north African/middle eastern migrants. This points to the exceptionally bright boundary between Islam and Muslim otherness' in western Europe. It also shows the important role of space in the formation of perceptions in that intergroup contacts in public are not sufficient to break down group-level boundary perceptions towards Islam.

Interestingly, contact with diverse others in public spaces is related to more favourable perceptions towards western migrants. This is not the case for parochial spaces. This could be interpreted through the lens of ethnocentrism theory, suggesting that exposure

to diversity might lead to a preference for migrant groups that are culturally similar to one's own group. However, public spaces are also related to improved perceptions towards eastern European and migrants, making it somewhat difficult to defend the ethnocentrism perspective.

Interethnic contact in parochial spaces is related to a higher liking of eastern European and north African/middle eastern migrants. Statistically, improved perceptions of these two groups elevate their average ratings closer to the level of western migrants. As a result, all three migrant groups are rated more similarly.

As with every study, there are a few limitations that future research should address. First, although the survey takes into account the spatial dimension of urban encounters, it does not address with whom the contact occurs, i.e. whether these are close friends, neighbours or strangers. The study does also not account for what kind of migrant groups respondents come into contact. Moreover, inter-ethnic contacts can be negatively experienced and thereby change how group boundaries are perceived (Koopmans and Veit 2014). Also, it could be worth exploring where exactly in the city space inter-ethnic encounters take place within or outside the respondents' neighbourhoods. Finally, every study dealing with contextual effects has to deal with self-selection issues. It is entirely possible that people without a migration background who are generally more positive towards migrants might be more likely to self-select into spaces where they have more exposure to people with a migration background. Future studies should consider longitudinal survey approaches to better disentangle contextual from self-selection effects.

Overall, the findings relativise Zajonc's (2001) 'mere exposure' hypothesis. Zajonc (2001) predicted that mere exposure to diversity will induce liking towards a range of different target groups and across varied research settings. The results of this study, however, suggest that liking is partially influenced by the group in question and the space in which the group is being encountered. That is, mere exposure does not induce liking, in particular, to north African/middle eastern migrants in public spaces. The findings, therefore, point to the important role not only of the intergroup relations' framework but also for a spatialised interaction framework that includes the role of urban micro-settings.

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