SYMBOLIC BOUNDARY MAKING IN SUPER-DIVERSE DEPRIVED NEIGHBOURHOODS

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ABSTRACT

Neighbourhood-based research on the rise of super-diverse cities has mostly focused on the implications of living in super-diverse neighbourhoods for individual relations, and paid little attention to processes of group formation. This paper focuses on how residents of super-diverse neighbourhoods identify social groups. Drawing on the concept of symbolic boundary making, it provides insights into how residents draw, enact and experience boundaries. Using the results of in-depth interviews with residents in Antwerp and Rotterdam, we show that super-diversity complexifies but does not counteract group formation. Residents draw multiple, interrelated symbolic boundaries along ethnic, class and religious lines and lines based on length of residence, which are sometimes used interchangeably. We also show that group boundaries are dynamic and constantly (re-)created. Finally, we show that discursive boundaries do not necessarily lead to less social contact across these boundaries, thus illustrating that symbolic boundaries do not always result in segregated social patterns.

Key words: super-diversity, boundary making, ethnicity, established–outsiders, qualitative research, urban studies

INTRODUCTION

The character of many urban neighbourhoods is changing due to, for example, migration flows, gentrification, impoverishment and ageing (Butler & Robson 2001; Vertovec 2007; Schuermans *et al.* 2015, Blokland & van Eijk 2010). This diversification of urban life has been widely discussed in the scholarly literature, mostly in the context of European and American neighbourhoods, and is regularly described in terms of 'super-diversity' (Vertovec 2007; Harris 2009; Wessendorf 2014). The literature on super-diversity problematises the notion of group formation along ethnic and cultural lines, which is implied in much traditional multicultural thinking (see for an exception Neal *et al.* 2013). It calls for more in-depth research on the intersection between ethno-cultural diversity and other axes of social differentiation (e.g. educational level, legal statute, gender, socio-economic position) (Vertovec 2007). Studies on super-diversity have mostly focused on interpersonal contacts and interaction by examining the prevalence of meaningful and fleeting encounters, conviviality and daily courtesies (Amin 2002; Noble 2009; Valentine 2008; Wise & Velayutham 2009; Wessendorf 2014;

Hall 2015). These studies have illustrated how 'otherness' is normalised in the daily life of residents of super-diverse neighbourhoods. This article acknowledges the importance of conviviality and 'light' encounters in accommodating super-diversity, but aims to advance the literature on super-diverse neighbourhoods by presenting an analysis of whether and, if so, how residents still conceive separate social groups in the local context of super-diverse neighbourhoods. This was explored through in-depth interviews in super-diverse neighbourhoods in Antwerp and Rotterdam.

To achieve this aim, we mobilise insights from the field of cultural sociology that are gradually gaining currency in urban and neighbourhood studies (Sibley 1995; van Eijk 2011; Jackson & Benson 2014). More specifically, we draw on the concept of symbolic boundary making, which is concerned with 'conceptual distinctions made by social actors ... [that] separate people into groups and generate feelings of similarity and group membership' (Lamont & Molnár 2002, p. 168). The distinctions 'may be fuzzy and ... soft, with unclear demarcations and few social consequences, allowing individuals to maintain membership in several categories' (Wimmer 2013, pp. 9–10), but they may also be static and impermeable, with clearly defined identities. We show how the notion of symbolic boundary making is especially useful in contexts that can be characterised by super-diversity, a notion that has been proposed to underline the fact that group boundaries are increasingly dynamic and diverse. According to the literature on super-diversity, individuals increasingly belong to many, partly overlapping symbolic categories, enabling them to switch identities situationally and making it more complex to decide who belongs to which group (Vertovec 2007). At the same time, however, strong symbolic boundaries between, for instance, minority and majority ethnic groups still exist and may lead to discrimination against minorities. One of the main advantages of the concept of a symbolic boundary is that it enabled us to address this empirical variation in group boundary making and to unpack how the increasing diversification of groups works out in everyday interaction.

To capture the diverse ways in which groups are being conceived and constructed, we focused on three dimensions of symbolic boundary making. First, we investigated which type of boundary was being drawn between residents. People use physical characteristics (such as skin colour, gender, and clothing) to separate groups. These characteristics function as the 'marker' of the group boundary and describe what is distinctive. Rather than focusing on one particular category of marker (e.g. ethnicity, class or religion), as many studies on symbolic boundary making do (for an overview see Pachucki *et al.* 2007), we employed a comprehensive approach, examining the interplay of multiple dimensions of difference in processes of group formation, and also analysed how respondents strategically positioned themselves in relation to these groups. Second, we focused on the dynamic character of group boundaries, namely their continuous making and remaking. Third, we analysed the extent to which symbolic boundaries are 'enacted' in everyday social interaction. This last focus is relevant because boundaries have both a categorical and a behavioural dimension. The former is related to how groups are categorised into 'us' and 'them', while the latter concerns the social behaviour that does or does not result from this (Wimmer 2013).

SYMBOLIC BOUNDARY MAKING

The concept of boundary making has a long but 'fairly well-acknowledged' intellectual history (Lamont *et al.* 2015) that goes back to the work of Weber and Durkheim, as well as more contemporary authors such as Frederik Barth and Pierre Bourdieu (Lamont & Molnár 2002). Although literature on boundary work is proliferating across a wide range of topics and disciplines (see Lamont *et al.* 2015), it has been particularly influential in cultural sociology and ethnic and racial studies. Recent work, for instance, has aimed to document variation in ethnic boundaries and how this is linked to institutional context,

trying to understand why ethnicity matters in some contexts but not in others (Lacy 2007; Wimmer 2013). This literature entails that 'ethnicity is not primarily conceived as a matter of relations between pre-defined, fixed groups … but rather as a process of constituting and re-configuring groups by defining the boundaries between them' (Wimmer 2008, p. 1027). Other research fields have adopted this conceptualisation of boundary making to study the construction or reconstruction of other social categories, based on for example the intersection of culture, religion, class and gender diversity (Lamont *et al.* 2015).

We use the concept of symbolic boundary making for several reasons. First, it acknowledges that social groups are never predefined. This means that ethnic and cultural minorities should not by definition be seen as social groups and that their members are not necessarily perceived by others or themselves primarily on the basis of ethnic and cultural markers. Second, the concept of symbolic boundary making draws attention to the dynamic interplay of multiple dimensions of difference (referred to as, for example, ethnic, religious or class symbolic markers) in processes of group formation, which is important for understanding the creation of group boundaries in super-diverse neighbourhoods. People draw symbolic boundaries to construct their own identity and can position themselves and others in multiple and changing social groups (Sibley 1995). Third, it acknowledges the intersubjective and contested nature of boundary making. Symbolic boundaries are culturally shared, but are also open to interpretation (and hence also to contestation) and can be employed differently according to the situation. Furthermore, people can use a particular symbolic marker (for example 'black Africans') to distinguish members of groups, but give a different meaning to them (for example perceiving black Africans as hospitable, or as loud and having other values than 'us') (Cohen 1985). Hence, a symbolic boundary consists of one or more symbolic markers combined and the meaning that a person attaches to it/them. Finally, symbolic boundaries are changeable and can vary in strength and clarity. In some societies or contexts, social groups can be neatly demarcated, and members easily classified, while in other cases group boundaries are fluid and contested, allowing individuals to switch between groups. Thus the distinction between bright and blurred boundaries is not static: a bright boundary can get blurred, and vice versa (Alba 2005; Wimmer 2013).

As will have become apparent from the examples given, symbolic boundaries can be based on different characteristics. Ethnic symbolic boundaries are the first type whose contemporary relevance we wanted to test in super-diverse neighbourhoods. Different ethnic markers can be used to construct symbolic boundaries, like ethno-national, ethno-cultural or ethno-linguistic markers. Our interest in the degree to which ethnic boundaries are still salient in super-diverse neighbourhoods is motivated by a range of studies that show that ethnic markers are commonly used and negative meanings are often attached to these markers (see e.g. Brettell & Nibbs 2011; Schuermans *et al.* 2015).

However, sometimes other types of symbolic boundaries can be used to downplay or overcome ethnic boundaries. One can blur, for instance, an ethnic boundary between Berbers and Arabs by emphasising that both groups are Islamic (Kanmaz 2002). Hence, the second type of symbolic boundary we explore are religious ones. The recent distinction between Muslims and non-Muslims in public and political debates in Europe is an example of the construction of such a religious symbolic boundary (Zolberg & Woon 1999; Kanmaz 2002; Karlsen & Nazroo 2015). Yet, it is often difficult to make a clear-cut distinction between ethnic and religious boundaries as they are often used in close connection (Ecklund 2005).

The same can be said about class boundaries, the third type of boundary we explore. Elwood *et al.* (2015) demonstrated that middle class interviewees assume poor people to be 'non-white'. Hence, the ethnic marker 'non-white' is connected to a class boundary in order to construct strong symbolic boundaries setting apart the poor from other social groups in the neighbourhood (Saperstein & Penner 2012). Classes as symbolically

delineated and constituted groups are not to be perceived as homogenous groups and are not only about socio-economic position; these are also about education, lifestyle, consumption patterns and self-identification (Butler & Robson 2001; Elwood *et al.* 2015). Literature indicates that certain fractions of the middle classes distinguish themselves from other fractions of the middle classes, for instance by drawing cultural or moral boundaries (Lamont 1992; Hazir 2014). Elwood *et al.* (2015) found that middle class people living in Seattle also draw moral boundaries within the lower class and distinguish between the 'good' poor, who grab opportunities to become middle class, and the 'bad' poor, who do not.

While ethnic, class and religious boundaries are well-known categories for the symbolic constitution of groups, we also explored a lesser known group boundary, namely the established–outsider boundary. The idea of a symbolic boundary between 'the established' and 'the outsiders' is derived from Elias and Scotson's theory, which posits that group boundaries are essentially defined by the length of residence (Elias & Scotson 1965). This theory has been frequently used in urban sociology to study community dynamics (see e.g. May 2004; Hogenstijn *et al.* 2008; Nieguth & Lacassagne 2012). It describes the process of an established resident group constructing boundaries between them and newcomers (the outsiders) because the former is socially cohesive and has resources to stigmatise the outsiders and exclude them from power resources. We call all symbolic boundaries that are based on the length of residence 'established–outsider boundaries'. While the established–outsider theory is not often explicitly used to study boundary making in neighbourhoods (see for exceptions, Southerton 2002; Tilly 2004), we distinguish this boundary because it allowed us to analyse whether ethnic, religious or class boundaries are not 'simply established–outsider relations of a particular type' as Elias and Scotson (1965, p. 15) argued. The distinction between established and outsiders also draws attention to the importance of place as a basis for boundary making, which is less emphasised in the literature.

As mentioned, symbolic boundaries are dynamic. Wimmer (2013) described the strategies that can be used to change boundaries in detail and distinguished between 'shifting' and 'modifying' boundaries. By shifting, people change the location of the boundary, for instance by creating a subdivision, in order to create more inclusive or exclusive boundaries. Such a subdivision is created when people distinguish between, for instance, 'Western' migrants who belong to 'us' and 'non-Western' migrants who are perceived as 'them'. The other strategy, 'modifying boundaries', can be used in different ways. First, people can challenge the 'ethnic hierarchy' (Hagendoorn 1995) by contesting their position within the hierarchy. Second, people can emphasise other categorisations, for example religion instead of ethnicity. Third, people can change their own position, without contesting the symbolic boundary itself. In this case, they place themselves as individuals on the 'good' side of the boundary (Wimmer 2013). In this paper we demonstrate how strategies of changing the boundaries are used in super-diverse neighbourhoods.

A persistent challenge in the literature on symbolic boundary making is understanding the connection between symbolic boundaries and what are often called 'social boundaries', which are described as 'objectified forms of social differences manifested in unequal access to and unequal distribution of resources (material and nonmaterial) and social opportunities' (Lamont & Molnár 2002, p. 168). From the point of view of the literature on super-diversity, the impact of symbolic boundary making on actual social opportunities and social interaction in super-diverse neighbourhoods seems an important issue: does the symbolic distinction between 'us' and 'them' lead to more durable social boundaries and to less frequent and less positive social contacts between groups? To address this, we draw on research that examined how positive or negative perceptions of social differences (i.e. symbolic boundaries) translate into everyday social interaction (Valentine 2008; Blokland & van Eijk 2010; van Eijk 2012; Jackson & Benson 2014;

Wessendorf 2014). These studies show that negative perceptions about neighbours are often not related to negative interaction experiences. In a study of diverse urban neighbourhoods in Germany, Weck and Hanhörster (2015), for instance, showed that middle-class families can appreciate socially diverse neighbourhoods but in practice avoid interactions with diverse local others. In contrast, van Eijk (2012) found that negative narratives about neighbours in a multi-ethnic neighbourhood in Rotterdam can go hand in hand with positive everyday social encounters with these neighbours. So far the mechanisms behind these apparent contradictions remain unclear. In our case study, we also explored the extent to which symbolic boundaries have an impact on social interaction.

Finally, the literature highlights the importance of context-specific factors for understanding concrete practices of symbolic boundary making. The starting point of this study was that current conditions in disadvantaged and super-diverse neighbourhoods are transforming well-established forms of symbolic boundary making. Processes of diversification and gentrification are changing the context in which individual and collective actors can (or have to) draw boundaries between social groups. Building further on recent literature, we therefore investigated how residents of diverse neighbourhoods draw and practise symbolic boundaries (see e.g. May 1996; Southerton 2002; Tersteeg & Pinkster 2015; Mepschen 2016).

DATA AND METHODS

This paper draws on qualitative research in several disadvantaged and super-diverse neighbourhoods in Antwerp (Belgium) and Rotterdam (the Netherlands). By focusing on territorial units such as neighbourhoods or cities we avoided the 'ethnic lens' that takes for granted the existence and continuity of different ethnic groups and categories (Wimmer 2013). We focused on the types of group categorisation that are employed in disadvantaged and diverse neighbourhoods to gain insight into how commonalities and differences between residents are constructed within this specific context. Such a broad analytic approach enabled us to, for instance, distinguish ethnic group boundaries from non-ethnic established-outider boundaries which are based on length of residence. Although we observed disadvantaged and super-diverse neighbourhoods in different cities and even countries, our aim was not to compare Belgium and the Netherlands, or the cities of Antwerp and Rotterdam. Rather we aimed to explore in detail the different forms of symbolic boundary making within the context of this type of neighbourhood, while also paying attention to the specific socio-demographic processes to which they are subject such as gentrification and the inflow of migrants. In other words, we focused on the specific neighbourhood context, and did not dwell on the territorial level of the city and nation-state, although these contexts do shape the contexts for these neighbourhoods.

Within the neighbourhoods, in-depth interviews were conducted with 110 residents (54 in Antwerp, 56 in Rotterdam). By means of purposive sampling, we interviewed 45 majority ethnics and 55 minority ethnics. We spoke with people from 26 different ethnic backgrounds. The youngest interviewee was 18, the oldest 88. Some interviewees had lived in the neighbourhood for decades, whereas others had just moved in. As regards socio-economic position, most interviewees had a middle to low or a middle to high income. Potential interviewees were approached through local organisations and institutions, such as community centres. We also used the snowball method; we asked interviewees to suggest other possible participants they felt were different from themselves.

The interviews focused on symbolic boundary making at the neighbourhood level. In order to examine how residents categorise and give meaning to the diverse population, they were asked to describe their neighbours and other people living in the neighbourhood, and the extent to which they feel similar to or different from them. Interviewees were asked to use their own definition of the neighbourhood. Most interviewees defined their neighbourhood in terms of a geographical area composed of one or more streets

around their house. We then asked interviewees to describe their relationship and activities with neighbours and other local residents in order to examine how symbolic boundaries are reflected in everyday social interaction. Most interviews were held at people's homes; the rest were held at other quiet places suggested by the interviewees, such as a community centre. All respondents were asked to sign an informed consent form that guaranteed anonymity and asked for permission to use the interview in publicly available reports and articles. This did not result in any withdrawals. Only Dutch or English speaking adults were interviewed. Some interviewees spoke and understood only very basic English or Dutch and had only recently arrived in Belgium or the Netherlands. The interviews were taped and transcribed, and then analysed using the software NVivo (QSR International, Brisbane). The fieldwork was conducted between September 2014 and May 2015. In this paper we refer to respondents by their pseudonyms.

The population of the selected case study areas is highly diverse (in terms of parental country of origin, socio-economic position, religion and length of residence). The super-diverse and dynamic character of these neighbourhoods provided an excellent context in which to examine how symbolic boundaries are drawn within super-diverse neighbourhoods. In Rotterdam, the research focused on all the neighbourhoods in the Feijenoord district, which has about 73,000 inhabitants.[1] Feijenoord is located on the south shore of the Meuse river and is connected to the city centre by the Erasmusbrug (Erasmus bridge). Sixty six per cent of its inhabitants have a non-Dutch background, mostly Turkish, Surinamese and Moroccan, compared to 48 per cent in the city of Rotterdam (van Dun & Roode 2010). The district is also characterised by a high unemployment rate (11%) compared to the city average (8%) (van Dun & Roode 2010). However, there are differences between neighbourhoods within the district. The neighbourhoods closest to the Erasmusbrug, for example, are characterised by high-rise business buildings and luxurious apartments, while an adjacent neighbourhood is dominated by social housing. Furthermore, the district is changing quite rapidly. Katendrecht, for example, was well known for prostitution activities until the 1980s. It is now a gentrifying neighbourhood.

In Antwerp, three adjacent neighbourhoods with a total a population of almost 100,000 people were selected, namely Antwerpen Noord, Borgerhout Intra Muros and Deurne Noord. The first two neighbourhoods are inside the urban ring-road, whereas Deurne Noord is outside it. The neighbourhoods have diverse populations: 68 per cent of the residents have a non-Belgian background, compared to almost 50 per cent in the city of Antwerp. The unemployment rate in the case study area is high (9%) compared to the city level (6%). Like in Feijenoord, there are some differences between the neighbourhoods. While parts of Borgerhout are gentrifying and experiencing an increasing inflow of Belgian middle classes, the number of minority ethnics is rapidly increasing in Deurne Noord.[2]

MAKING SYMBOLIC BOUNDARIES TO DEMARCATE SOCIAL GROUPS

Interviews with residents of the super-diverse neighbourhoods revealed that residents draw multiple, interrelated symbolic boundaries when demarcating social groups in their residential environment. In this section we discuss which types of symbolic boundaries are constituted and how these intersect.

The residents constructed symbolic boundaries using multiple markers related to ethnicity, class, religion and length of residence (established–outsider boundaries). Most interviewees used ethnic markers to describe their neighbours. Some used general ones, distinguishing between the categories of 'Dutch' or 'Belgian' on the one hand and 'foreigners'[3] on the other, whereas others used more specific markers, for instance between 'Moroccans' and other ethno-national groups. Both distinctions were made by interviewees from different ethnic backgrounds; neither the general nor the specific marker appeared to be dominant. The meaning people attached to these categories varied. Some interviewees, for

example, emphasised that 'people of foreign origin' are helpful, while others attributed negative characteristics to this group. A wide range of interviewees from diverse ethnic and socio-economic backgrounds linked the presence of minority ethnic groups to negative experiences, including noise, nuisance and criminality, in the neighbourhood (see also Brettell & Nibbs 2011; Schuermans *et al.* 2015). Categorising people as 'dirty' and 'noisy' is a commonly used strategy of boundary making (Elias & Scotson 1965; Sibley 1995; May 2004).

> I am not supposed to say it but [I'd like to live in] a neighbourhood with more native Dutch people … For example, the foreign children make much more noise. (Arjan, Dutch, long-term resident, Rotterdam)

Other residents used more specific ethno-national markers. Eric (Dutch, long-term resident, Rotterdam), for instance, linked the presence of Moroccan Dutch residents with nuisance. He used the same meaning as other residents but related this to a more specific ethno-national marker. His categorisation of Turkish Dutch as being on the 'right' side of the ethnic boundary and Moroccan Dutch as being on the 'wrong' side of that boundary, shows that he does not perceive minority ethnics as a homogeneous group.

> Turkish people, they don't bother you, but Moroccans, the younger generation, they are often messing around. … They steal, hack, all that kind of things.

Ethnic boundaries were used interchangeably with religious boundaries (see also Ecklund 2005).

In the following quotation, for instance, an ethnic category ('Dutch') is opposed to a religious category ('Islam'):

> [At the soccer club] where he [my son] used to be, you feel that there were fewer Dutch children, and more Islamic. You see a difference in how they speak. That was a pity … [The Islamic children] curse very often, that kind of thing. (Rachel, Cape Verdean Dutch, long-term resident, Rotterdam)

Other residents, however, carefully differentiated ethnic from religious boundaries when giving a negative meaning to some minority ethnic groups. Myrthe (Belgian, long-term resident, Antwerp), for example, said that she was worried about social control within the Moroccan community and a lack of openness to others, which she connected with religion rather than ethnicity.

> For me, it is a difference in openness. I mostly speak about the Moroccans, because the Turkish community here in Antwerpen Noord and Borgerhout are mainly Christian Turks.

Overall, residents of all the neighbourhoods referred less to class distinctions. When they talked about less wealthy people, most of interviewees used a purely financial marker, without giving a specific meaning to it. The 'middle class' category is more often the object of symbolic boundary work, particularly by long-term residents of parts of the research area where processes of gentrification are most tangible. These boundaries are primarily based not on financial markers, but on attitude, behaviour and lifestyle (see also van Eijk 2013). In addition, in boundary work within classes there was often no clear distinction between the marker and the meaning attached to it. For example, several interviewees distinguished between middle class people like themselves, who are tolerant of people with a lower socio-economic position, and others who tended to look down upon lower status groups. A long-term resident who lives in a deprived part of the research area bordering a gentrifying neighbourhood called Zurenborg, said the following about newly arrived gentrifying middle-class residents:

> Everything is like … we are the cool people of Zurenborg … A Turkish restaurant wanted to start in Zurenborg and they [the residents] immediately started a petition that it shouldn't be there, because it was of lower status … And that didn't fit in the nice, cool Zurenborg … Then, I think, well, there you are with your tolerance and openness. 'We are the progressive Zurenborgers' so

> far. (Eloise, Belgian, long-term resident, Antwerp)

This long-term resident drew moral boundaries within the white middle class by criticising the 'self-proclaimed' progressive and tolerant character of middle-class people living in gentrified parts of the neighbourhoods, which she compared to the attitudes of middle-class people living in deprived parts (see also Butler & Robson 2001; Elwood *et al.* 2015). We also came across interviewees who drew the same moral boundary between middle-class people within gentrifying areas. Myrthe (Belgian, newcomer, Antwerp), for instance, lives in a gentrifying part of the neighbourhood (and could be seen as a gentrifier herself) and she distinguished between herself and other middle-class residents of her neighbourhood who claim to be open towards minority ethnic groups and criticise the right-wing mayor for his minority ethnic group policies, yet send their children to 'white schools'. Although Myrthe agrees with some of the mayor's policies concerning minority ethnic groups, she considers herself more progressive, among others because her children go to a mixed school in the neighbourhood. Earlier research also demonstrated that morality is a commonly used strategy to distinguish groups within the middle classes (Lamont 1992; Hazir 2014). A context of gentrification can give renewed salience to such moral boundaries.

One reason why interviewees tended not to use class to construct symbolic boundaries is because many of them used ethnicity as a 'proxy' for people's socio-economic position. The identification of ethnic with socio-economic boundaries was also observed in earlier research (see e.g. Elwood *et al.* 2015; Saperstein & Penner 2012; Schuermans *et al.* 2015). Several interviewees talked about minority ethnic groups as being part of a lower social class. Myrthe, for example, did so and used a behavioural marker to reinforce the boundary by claiming a lack of ambition among 'foreign people':

> I think that the standard in this neighbourhood is living on the poverty line … But among the Moroccan families and also the others … I miss … some ambition to get more out of life, than living on the poverty line. (Myrthe, Belgian, newcomer, Antwerp)

Established–outsider boundaries are also constructed in super-diverse neighbourhoods, but unlike what Elias and Scotson would claim, they do not always take precedence over other types of social distinction. Rather, they are bound up in complex ways with other types of symbolic boundaries (see also May 1996; Southerton 2002; Mepschen 2016). Katharina (German Belgian, long-term resident, Antwerp), for example, at first seemed to draw a clear ethnic boundary by describing the distance between herself and her Moroccan neighbours. However, when she explained why there is little contact, she drew an established–outsider boundary:

> But there is some distance between our Moroccan neighbours and the others [not Moroccan families] …You don't share the same experiences. … We saw our children growing up here. They played together … The new families … you miss 30 years together … It is something different. The old structure disappears to some extent.

Following Elias and Scotson (1965), we could say that the ethnic boundaries in this particular case are established–outsider boundaries of a specific type. Gentrification and other socio-demographic shifts give renewed salience to established–outsider boundaries. Who exactly is identified as 'outsider' and as 'established' is hence highly contextual.[4] In Katharina's relatively deprived part of the research area,[5] she and her majority ethnic neighbours are the long-term residents and hence perceived as the established, while the Moroccan Belgian families are seen as the newcomers and hence the outsiders. However, in some gentrifying parts of the research area, the minority ethnic groups are the long-term residents, hence the established, and the majority ethnic gentrifiers are the outsiders. Rajesh (Antillean Dutch, long-term resident, Rotterdam), for instance, said that the new, more wealthy people moving in complain more and that there is hardly any

contact with this group. However, he emphasised that there is a good connection with other wealthy people, indicating that what marks the difference is not the socio-economic position, but the length of residence and contrasts in lifestyles.

> Sometimes, I don't like it [diversity] … For example, in Katendrecht, it was always like, everyone could always play music, nobody complained … But now, there are new people who moved in, then they immediately come like 'no, it is not allowed' etc., noise … Yes, there are people with [more] money who connect with us … But, they are also people who have lived here from the beginning, who grew up in the neighbourhood.

This section has shown how in super-diverse neighbourhoods, where residents differ from each other along a multiplicity of axes of differentiation, there is still ample scope for processes of symbolic group formation. Residents construct various symbolic boundaries, which are often articulated with each other in complex ways. Super-diverse neighbourhoods are by nature also dynamic neighbourhoods. Symbolic boundaries are open to continuous attempts to transform them as a result of the inflow of new waves of migrants from all corners of the world and through different migration channels.

RE-POSITIONING RESIDENTS AROUND EXISTING SYMBOLIC BOUNDARIES

In this section we show how residents, in addition to demarcating social groups through boundary making, also strategically position themselves and others in relation to existing symbolic boundaries, thus changing positions with regard to boundaries rather than changing the symbolic boundaries themselves. They do so in one of two ways, that is, by de-emphasising or undermining the importance of group boundaries (blurring boundaries) or by highlighting their importance (brightening boundaries).

We observed how people specified the marker as a strategy to blur a boundary, for instance between 'foreigners' and 'non-foreigners', and put themselves on the 'right' side of it. In using this strategy, people contest the marker, but not the meaning attached to it. For instance, Salima (Moroccan Belgian, long-term resident, Antwerp) categorised herself as a person 'of foreign descent', but associated the boundary between 'foreigners' and 'non-foreigners' with nuisance and nuisance with Kosovars rather than with Moroccan, Turkish or Polish migrants. By doing so, she subtly repositioned herself (and others) on the right side of the boundary. Hence, she rejected the general category of 'foreigners' as one homogeneous group and blurred this ethnic boundary by specifying subdivisions. In doing so, however, she brightens another boundary by emphasising that Kosovars cause the real problem.

> There were too many Kosovars, too many foreign-, well I am a foreigner myself, but I found it too busy … The garbage, it always smells there uhm, yes, I don't know. Noisy … Now, it is much better. [Interviewer: Who are living there at the moment?] Either Turks or Poles. You almost don't hear them. (Salima, Moroccan Belgian, long-term resident, Antwerp)

Specifying the symbolic boundary was also used as a strategy by people who had already categorised themselves on the 'non-foreigner' side of the boundary in order to include what they perceive as 'good foreigners'. Hagar (Dutch, long-time resident, Rotterdam) lives in a part of Feijenoord that has a small concentration of long-term Dutch residents like herself. When she explained that she would never want to live in a neighbourhood with too many foreigners, she distinguished between Surinamese and Antilleans (who make up two large communities in Rotterdam) on the one hand and other 'foreigners' on the other:

> It is nothing but foreigners [in an adjacent neighbourhood] …Turks and Moroccans; there are some Antilleans, Surinamese, they are totally different people. [Interviewer: How?] Different … Surinamese

> have of course always been connected with the Netherlands … They of course speak Dutch well and they have yet … a bit of a Dutch mentality.

Hagar did not contest the negative meaning she attached to the group of 'foreigners', but blurred the existing, general symbolic boundary between foreign and non-foreign. She placed Surinamese people higher in the ethnic hierarchy (Hagendoorn 1995) than other 'ethnic' groups, because of the experienced 'cultural proximity' (Wimmer 2013) compared to Turks and Moroccans. She said she would not mind sharing her neighbourhood with Surinamese and Antilleans. In Antwerp, the Dutch are often perceived as 'less foreign'.

A second strategy to reposition residents around existing boundaries is to emphasise other types of boundaries. Paula (Belgian, long-term resident, Antwerp), for example, was very negative about the number of foreigners living in the neighbourhood. However, when she talked about some Armenians in the neighbourhood she said that they are different because they are Christian. Religious boundaries were highlighted to distinguish within the group of foreigners and to blur ethnic symbolic boundaries:

> We sometimes go for a drink around the corner … They [the friends visiting this place] are also all Belgians. But the boss is an Armenian. But he's a Christian, that's different [from a Muslim], right? (Paula, Belgian, long-term resident, Antwerp)

However, stressing ethno-national boundaries were sometimes used to blur religious boundaries. Hagar, for example, also said that she does not want to live in a neighbourhood with a lot of Muslims, but distinguished between Croat Muslims and other Muslims:

> I love all people, it doesn't matter from which country they are … but you have to [treat] each other with certain dignity, and Muslims can't do that … I have had Muslims next door, and I can still cry that they are gone, but well, they were Croats, I had such good contact with them.

Hagar thus tended to stress ethnic boundaries within the muslim community to reposition her Croatian Muslim neighbours, with whom she has positive experiences, while still holding on to the general symbolic boundary between muslims and non-muslims.

Third, people can contest on which side of the boundary they are, without contesting the marker or the meaning of the boundary. In fact, by using this strategy people underline or brighten symbolic boundaries. Some interviewees, for instance, related the presence of 'foreigners' to feelings of unsafety, dirt and criminality, yet framed themselves as exceptions on the 'non-foreigner' side of the boundary.

> It's bad that I have to say it, but streets where a lot of immigrants live are simply the dirtiest streets. (Kamil, Turkish Belgian, newcomer, Antwerp)

In this case, the strategy of 'individual boundary crossing' (Wimmer 2013) was used: people place themselves as individuals on the 'right' side of the boundary, without contesting the meaning or the marker. On the contrary, by placing themselves as exceptions on the other side, the ethnic symbolic boundary is confirmed and even brightened.

In this section we showed that symbolic boundaries in super-diverse neighbourhoods are not only multidimensional but also dynamic, and that personal identifications sometimes complicate group boundaries. As population dynamics in these neighbourhoods becomes more complex, people constantly position and re-position individuals, families and even whole social groups around existing symbolic boundaries. Individuals deal with these symbolic boundaries differently, as noted by Wimmer (2008, 2013). While some contest the symbolic boundary, others only contest their own position.

SYMBOLIC BOUNDARY MAKING AND EVERYDAY SOCIAL INTERACTION

Symbolic boundaries were not necessarily reflected in everyday interactions,confirming the findings of scholars like van Eijk (2011), Peterson (2016), Pinkster (2016) and

Valentine (2008). Most of the interviewees emphasised the pleasantness of everyday interaction with diverse others (Wessendorf 2014). Nonetheless, we did come across a few instances in which symbolic boundaries did hinder contact. One interviewee stated that his understanding of female Moroccans as people who are not allowed to have any contact with men (as opposed to non-Moroccans, who are allowed to do so), prevents him from interacting with them.

> Sometimes, I meet the man living downstairs. We have a chat, because you know how Moroccans are, you cannot talk to the woman, only with the man … They also have two daughters, but I can't talk to them either. [Interviewer: Have you ever tried?] No, how? It is not possible. You cannot talk to them. [Interviewer: They don't say anything back or …?] Well, they are not allowed to, right. They should not. [Interviewer: How do you know?] I just know it. I have other Moroccan friends who are relaxed, right. They tell you. (Frank, Surinamese Dutch, long-term resident, Rotterdam)

Although most interviewees did not say that symbolic boundaries hinder everyday social interaction, our results provide a better insight into how symbolic boundaries and everyday interaction are related. Everyday interaction can contribute to blurring symbolic boundaries, but can also lead to brighter boundaries. In line with the findings of van Eijk (2011, p. 1), our study confirms that 'neighbour interaction reconstructs symbolic boundaries rather than breaking them down'. Salima's experiences with noisy Kosovars, Hagar's with her pleasant Croatian Muslim neighbours and Paula's with her Christian foreign neighbours, are all examples of the blurring of general boundaries as described in the previous section. Everyday social interaction hence made them aware that the described general groups are not homogeneous. In this sense, we can say that everyday interactions made them aware of super-diversity within the neighbourhood and the challenges this poses to the construction of neat symbolic boundaries around groups of fellow residents. However, this awareness of super-diversity does not always lead to blurred boundaries. Olga (Ukrainian Belgian, newcomer, Antwerp) said that she does not appreciate Arabs in the neighbourhood because of some negative experiences she had had with Arabs. Positive experiences could not counter her negative opinion.

> Perhaps you would call me a racist, but I already thought [that the neighbourhood is] a little bit too Arabic … I was never against them … But, [once] I was walking and behind me kids shouted at me prostitute … I had it several times … At the [Dutch language] course there were normal [Arabic] guys. They didn't do especially bad things. And well, logically in every nation you have people who are good and who are bad.

Although Olga was aware that not all Arabic people are bad persons, her general opinion about this group did not change as a result of these positive experiences, confirming Valentine's (2008) thesis that positive experiences with neighbours do not necessarily affect the general perceptions about these groups.

Although everyday social interaction can contribute to blurring the boundaries (but does not have to), it can also brighten or create symbolic boundaries. Negative experiences within the neighbourhood can contribute to the creation of a symbolic boundary, as described in the previous sections. Which boundaries are created depends on the type of neighbourhood. Whereas moral boundaries within middle classes, for instance, were often created and practised in gentrifying neighbourhoods, they were virtually absent from deprived neighbourhoods. We can conclude that symbolic group formation is not always reflected in everyday social interaction, but that in some cases social interaction can contribute to the creation of symbolic boundaries, as well as to the re-creation and blurring of existing boundaries.

CONCLUSION

Whereas many studies on neighbourhood super-diversity have focused on the ways in

which individuals deal with otherness, we have shown that despite the complex social diversity that characterises super-diverse neighbourhoods, people still conceive and form separate social groups (Amin 2002; Valentine 2008; Noble 2009; Wise & Velayutham 2009). They do so through the construction and use of symbolic boundaries. We have analysed the multiple symbolic boundaries that neighbourhood residents use when addressing the diversity in their neighbourhood, but also how both individual and groups of residents are re-positioned towards existing boundaries and how this is related to social interaction.

We found that residents distinguish social groups in super-diverse neighbourhoods, as well as that there is a diversification of group boundaries, and that group formation along clear ethnic and cultural lines has become less important (Vertovec 2007; Wessendorf 2014; Hall 2015). People use a variety of markers, including ethnicity, class, religion and duration of residence, to which they attach different meanings. This leads to multiple and dynamic symbolic boundaries in which the relative importance of the boundaries differs between neighbourhoods as well as between persons. In addition, the boundaries are often interrelated and sometimes used interchangeably. Thus when studying the formation of groups in super-diverse contexts, the most rewarding research strategy is to analyse the construction of different types of symbolic boundaries and how these interact in one particular locale, rather than focusing on predefined, singular boundaries. This calls into question the predominant focus on ethnicity in the current literature on boundary making, suggesting that such studies might not grasp the full picture. However, it also calls into question the claim of Elias and Scotson (1965) that boundary work is in essence based on established–outsider relations. Although established–outsider boundaries should be taken into account, the importance of these boundaries differs per situation and person and does not necessarily take precedence over other types of boundaries.

Our study showed not only that the process of boundary making is complex and dynamic (see also Amin 2002; van Eijk 2012; Hall 2015), but also how people deal with the boundaries and how they are continuously positioning and re-positioning other residents around these boundaries. The dynamic character of boundary making often becomes clear when people experience that they themselves, or people they perceive as being similar to themselves, are situated on the other side of the boundary. The interviewees then used various strategies to contest existing boundaries, depending on the dimensions of diversity that they identify in their residential environment. While some people blur boundaries for individual residents or the whole collectivity, others only contest their own position. Much remains unclear, however, about the social and contextual conditions in which boundaries are blurred or brightened and how individual features shape these processes.

Another way in which the dynamic character of boundary making becomes clear is through everyday social interaction within the neighbourhood. We have shown how the interactions can contribute to the reshuffling and blurring of boundaries in super-diverse neighbourhoods. They can lead to the awareness that earlier predefined groups are internally diverse. In this sense, we noticed a connection between super-diversity, daily contacts and the reshuffling of boundaries. Our results suggest that everyday social interactions in super-diverse contexts can raise awareness of super-diversity and therefore create subdivisions of more general boundaries or blur these boundaries, as Wessendorf (2014) also demonstrated. We have also shown that social interaction can contribute to the creation of new boundaries or the brightening of existing boundaries. Although it remains unclear under which circumstances people brighten or blur boundaries, we showed that everyday social interaction in a context of super-diversity dynamises the process of symbolic boundary making. This idea is supported by the fact that people who did not have any contact with other people in the neighbourhood did not change symbolic boundaries (but in some cases only contested their own position) and used rather general markers to separate people into groups.

More research is needed to get a better understanding of what influences this complex relation between symbolic boundary making, everyday social interaction and super-diversity.

This study has several empirical limitations, which could be addressed in further research. First, our analysis of boundary work in super-diverse neighbourhoods considered only the local context and not the institutional urban and national contexts, although literature has shown how symbolic boundary work is shaped by national policy contexts (May 2004; Alba 2005). It would be interesting to investigate whether and, if so, how specific institutional settings and policy discourses influence patterns of boundary work, using a comparative institutional approach. Second, although our interview data provide first insights into the relation between symbolic boundaries and social interaction, our interviewees' answers might not always accurately reflect everyday realities. Therefore, to investigate exclusionary mechanisms in super-diverse neighbourhoods it would be interesting to complement the interview data with participant observations. Third, we only interviewed Dutch and English speaking adults, while people who speak only other languages probably have fewer interactions with other groups, which might also be reflected in the symbolic boundary making practices. To get a better understanding of the relation between boundary work and everyday social interaction in super-diverse neighbourhoods, it would therefore be useful include this group.

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Notes

1. This includes the neighbourhoods Afrikaanderwijk, Bloemhof, Feijenoord (which is the name not only of the district but also of one of the neighbourhoods), Hillesluis, Katendrecht, Kop van Zuid-entrepotgebied, Noordereiland, Vreewijk, and Wilhelminapier.
2. The statistics is this paragraph are derived from http://antwerpen.buurtmonitor.be.
3. When we use the concepts 'foreign' and 'non-foreign or native' in the paper, we refer to the words that interviewees used to distinguish between minority ethnic groups and majority ethnic groups.
4. May (2004) demonstrated that established–outsider relations are created not only in a local context, but also in a national context and that these local relations are influenced by the national established–outsider relations. In this paper, however, we limit ourselves to the analyses of the local level.
5. Katharina lives in Deurne Noord, a neighbourhood in Antwerp that has only recently experienced an inflow of minority ethnics.

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