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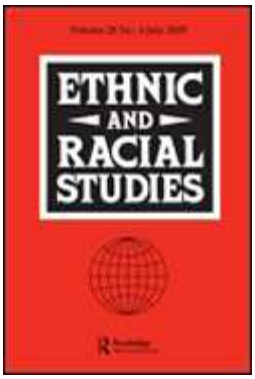

Muslim immigrants and religious group feelings: Self-identification and attitudes among Sunni and Alevi Turkish-Dutch

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Self-identification and attitudes among Sunni and Alevi Turkish-Dutch

Keywords: Muslim minorities, Muslim identity, group relations, minority rights, Sunni, Alevi

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Abstract

Affective ratings of multiple religious (sub)groups (Muslims, Christians, Jews, and non-believers, as well as Sunni, Alevi, and Sjiit Muslims), the endorsement of Islamic minority rights and religious group identification were examined among Sunni and Alevi Turkish-Dutch participants. The findings show that both groups differ in important ways. Some Alevi participants considered themselves Muslims but others interpreted Alevi identity in a secular way. The Sunnis were quite negative towards Jews and non-believers, they more strongly endorsed Islamic minority rights and they had very high Muslim group identification. Furthermore, the Sunnis were negative towards Alevis and the Alevis were negative towards the Sunnis. Muslim group identification was positively and strongly related to feelings towards Muslims and to the endorsement of Islamic group rights.

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Numbering more than thirteen million, Muslims are the largest religious minority in Western Europe (EUMC 2006). Muslim immigrants are trying to integrate into historically Christian societies that have become increasingly secular. This raises all kind of important issues such as the recognition of Muslims' religious minority rights and the relationships between different religious groups. Research indicates that the public tends to see religious viewpoints as contradictory and the differences between them as insurmountable. For example, in the Netherlands where the current study was conducted, a national survey showed that 50% of the Dutch as well as 50% of the Muslim minority consider the Western and Islamic ways of life as opposites that do not go together (Gijsberts 2005). The Dutch majority tends to consider particular Muslim beliefs and practices as incompatible with the Dutch way of life and immigrant Muslims tend to reject the corresponding beliefs and practices of the Dutch. In other countries, cultural conflicts between host societies and Muslim immigrants also have resulted in an atmosphere of mutual wariness (see Modood, Triandafyllidou and Zapata-Barrero 2006). This indicates that it is not only important to examine the attitudes and behavior of the majority group but also of Muslim minority groups. By publicly expressing quite negative opinions about, for example, Jews and non-believers some Muslims hamper the development of more harmonious religious group relations.

An additional important reason for examining Muslim minorities is the tendency to treat them as a homogenous group by ignoring the important religious distinctions within immigrant Muslim communities. Negative attitudes are related to generalized and monolithic views about 'the' Muslims. However, Sunni, Shiite, and Alevi Muslim immigrants, for example, might differ in their attitudes towards the host society and these different Muslim groups might also not get along very well.

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The present study focuses on Sunni and Alevi Turkish immigrants living in the Netherlands which is one of the most secular countries in the world (Te Grotenhuis and Scheepers 2001). The focus was on their feelings towards Muslims, Christians, Jews, and non-believers as well as their feelings towards different Muslim groups: Sunni, Shiite and Alevi. In addition, the endorsement of Islamic minority group rights in the Netherlands was investigated. Furthermore, the degree of religious group identification was examined as was the association of identification with the respondents' feelings towards the various religious groups and with their endorsement of Islamic group rights. The theoretical basis we used to examine these issues is derived from social psychological work on intergroup relations. The advantage of this perspective is that feelings and beliefs that Muslim immigrants have about different religious groups are examined in terms of group identities and social relationships, rather than as following from the nature of Muslim identity or 'intrinsic' characteristics such as authoritarianism and dogmatism. Research on religious groups and religious fundamentalism increasingly uses an intergroup perspective (e.g., Herriot 2007; Hunsberger and Jackson 2005).

Religious group identification

Social psychology has a long tradition of examining people's attitudes and behaviors towards their own group (in-group) and other groups (out-groups). These attitudes are typically examined in relation to group identification and the existing intergroup context. One of the most influential social psychological perspectives is Social Identity Theory (SIT; Tajfel and Turner 1986). The concept of social identity is fundamental to this theory and is defined as one's knowledge of membership in social groups and the emotions and values attached to group membership. According to SIT, individuals seek to belong to groups that provide them with a secure and positive social

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identity and are motivated to maintain positive distinctiveness through intergroup comparisons. This tendency and motivation is a function of the intensity of group identification and the specific social meanings associated with the groups and group distinctions concerned.

Group identification is interpreted in terms of individual differences in the degree to which psychologically central and valued group memberships develop. Some people are more inclined than others to see themselves as a group member and to value their group membership. People who feel highly committed to their group are inclined to act in terms of their group membership. Group identification implies that collective beliefs and values that characterize the in-group become normative and part of the psychological self. People start to think, feel, and act in terms of the way that the in-group is understood. These group understandings can be relatively stable or enduring reflecting, for example, deep-seated religious and cultural beliefs, but they are also responsive to social events and current threats (Tajfel and Turner 1986).

Religion is often of profound importance to people's lives and religious groups are among the more salient buttresses of identity. The lives of observant believers are organized around their religious beliefs, values, and practices. These ideas and values involve religious truth-claims and absolute moral principles that define what it means to be a believer of a particular religion. Islam is a religion that presents guidelines, referred to in the Qur'an (1:6) as the 'straight way', for living in accordance with the will of Allah. These fundamental principles are known as the Five Pillars of Islam**.** The first pillar is the Shahada or declaration of faith and has a central place in the lives of Muslims. A person becomes a Muslim with the declaration of the Shahada in front of two witnesses, and one either is a Muslim who is committed to Islam or one is not.

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Research has shown that for Muslims living in Western Europe, religion has great importance in the way they live their lives. Among a representative sample from the city of Rotterdam, Phalet and Güngör (2004) found that Islam was considered 'very meaningful and important' in one's life by 87% of the Turkish-Dutch and 96% of the Moroccan-Dutch population. These percentages were similar for younger (18–30 years of age) and older participants (> 30 years). In addition, around two-thirds of the Turkish-Dutch and Moroccan-Dutch had a very strong Muslim identity. For the great majority of these Muslims, Muslim identity was a given and not being a Muslim was not a real option. The same has been found in surveys in Brussels, Belgium (Phalet 2004), and in other European countries (Haddad and Smith 2001; Vertovec and Rogers 1999).

The data for the Rotterdam study were collected in 1999 but it is highly unlikely that these percentages have dropped. In the Netherlands a policy of multiculturalism was adopted in the 1980s in response to the increased influx of 'foreigners'. The recognition that many 'guestworker' migrants would remain in the country led to a policy of 'integration with retention of the own identity' (Entzinger 2003, p. 63). Dutch policy-making saw immigrants according to their group membership and not primarily as individuals. The Dutch 'pillarization' tradition of institutionalized pluralism provided a wide range of cultural opportunities and group rights, such as local voting rights for non-nationals and public funding of Islamic schools. However, much has changed since the 1980s (see Joppke, 2004). The previous 'ethnic minorities policy' has gradually been replaced by a policy of civic integration (Entzinger 2003) and ethnic nationalism (Vasta 2007). In public debates multiculturalism has been described as a 'drama' and a 'failure', and assimilation has been proposed as the only viable option. In the last six to seven years, Islam has increasingly become the 'negative other'. In the Dutch media, Islam has become symbolic for problems related to ethnic minorities and immigration (see Ter Wal 2004) and influential politicians

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have defined Islam as a backward religion and Muslims as a 'fifth column', and have argued that 'a cold war against Islam is unavoidable' (see Verkuyten and Zaremba 2005).

Thus, the current public discussion has a strong focus on the need to compel Islamic groups to assimilate because they are defined as a threat to Dutch values and identity. Hence, Islamic groups in the Netherlands clearly face high levels of threat to the value of their religious identity. The public condemnation of Islam and the pleas for assimilation can lead to strong religious in-group identification among these groups (Peek 2005; Verkuyten and Zaremba 2005). Therefore, we expected that Muslim identity would be very important to most of the our Turkish-Dutch participants.

Multiple religious out-groups

The current public and political debates present a threat to the integrity of the Islamic minority groups struggling to maintain a valuable and distinctive identity in the context of West European societies. According to social identity theory, under identity threatening circumstances, people will try to maintain or restore a positive and distinct collective identity. One possibility for doing so is a strong orientation towards and favoring of the own group. Hence, it can be expected that the participants will indicate very warm feelings towards Muslims in general and towards their Muslim subgroup (Sunni or Alevi) in particular. Furthermore, this orientation suggests that religious group identification should be positively related to the feelings towards the religious in-group. Participants who identify more strongly with their own Muslim subgroup can be expected to have more warm feelings towards Muslims in general and their Muslim subgroup in particular.

Trying to maintain or restore a positive identity can also lead to more negative feelings towards other groups (Rothgerber and Worchel 1997). To enhance the value and distinctiveness of one's own religious group, group members can derogate other religious

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groups. Hence, the participants' feelings towards other religious groups might be rather negative. This is especially more likely for those individuals with a strong Muslim identification in comparison with those that have a less strong Muslim identification. Further, it is likely that there are also differences in feelings towards each of the various religious groups living in the Netherlands: e.g. Christians, Jews, and non-believers.

There can be many reasons for the different evaluation of out-groups. For example, research has shown (Hagendoorn and Hraba 1989) that cultural differences, negative stereotypes, and the degree to which out-groups are perceived as threatening the status and interests of the in-group, play a role. In addition, concerns about beliefs, values, and norms that define the group identity are important. Religious belief is not so much about personal preferences or social conventions, but rather about convictions. It is concerned with the moral good and divine truth that is difficult to reconcile with moral and epistemic diversity. The observant believer believes that he or she is right and will find it difficult to have positive feelings towards non-religious people that implicitly challenge his or her life. In the Rotterdam study, around 45% of the Islamic participants indicated that they had 'completely no sympathy' for non-religious people (Phalet and Güngör 2004). Hence, it is likely that the feelings towards non-believers will be more negative than those towards Christians. People of the latter group do consider religion important and Christianity has, of course, many similarities with Islam.

In addition, we expected the feelings towards Jews to be quite negative. In many European countries, including the Netherlands, there is a growing concern about increased anti-Semitism, which certainly is not only limited to Islamic groups but which has also been manifest in, for example, Mosques across Europe and among Muslim youth (Antisemitism Research 2002; Schoenfeld 2004). One source for this anti-Semitism is the conflict between Palestinians and Israelis, and between observant Muslims and observant

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Jews in particular. The concern about anti-Jewish tendencies among Muslims is further illustrated by the many books and websites that find it necessary to argue that Islam actually denounces anti-Semitism.

Islamic group rights

Berry and Kalin (1995) argued that groups are more in favor of cultural diversity and group rights when they see advantages for themselves. Several theories have emphasized the role of group interests in the dynamics of intergroup relations (e.g. Sidanius and Pratto 1999). For religious minority groups, minority rights offer the possibility of maintaining and expressing their own distinctive religious identity, and obtaining more equal social status in society. Hence, we can expect that the participants will support Islamic group rights. In addition, the more strongly Muslims identify with their religious in-group, the more likely they are to consider it important to express and preserve their own religion and to participate as religious group members in social and political life. Hence, it is likely that Muslim identification is related positively to the endorsement of Islamic group rights.

Sunni and Alevi Muslims

Around 6% of the Dutch population is Muslim (CBS 2005). Most of them are of Moroccan and Turkish origin and came to the Netherlands as migrant workers in the 1960s and 70s. Currently the Turkish-Dutch are the numerically largest minority group. It is estimated that around 75% of them are Sunni Muslims, approximately 20% are Alevis, and there are also some smaller groups including the Christian Suryoye. We focused on the Sunnis and Alevis. Most of the people of these two groups have a similar history of migrant labor but some Alevi's came to the Netherlands as refugees. The two groups are also comparable in terms of their relatively low socio-economic position in the Netherlands

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(Kaya 2006). Furthermore, in Dutch public discourse and in governmental policies they are both defined and described as Muslims or as Turkish. Typically, no distinction between them is made. However, there are important religious differences between these two groups that can be expected to have an impact on Muslim group identification, on feelings towards the different religious groups, and on the endorsement of Islamic group rights.

There is a wide variety of beliefs and practices among those who call themselves Alevi. Alevi identity is defined in linguistic, cultural, political, and religious terms (Shindeldecker 2006). Some people argue that Alevi identity is a cultural lifestyle that has its roots in pre-Islamic Anatolia and Mesopotamia. Others claim that Alevi identity is more of a political orientation in which secularism and democracy are central as well as a history of opposition towards the Turkish state. Still others argue that Alevi is the Turkish – or Kurdish – interpretation of Islam and thereby different from the Sunni belief that would represent the Arabic interpretation of Islam. Thus, in Turkey as well as within the Alevi communities in Western Europe there is a continuing and intense debate on the most appropriate way to define Alevi identity (Van Bruinessen 1995).

For the present research two issues are important. First, among the different interpretations of the nature of Alevism some are more secular than others. This means that we expected that not all Alevi participants would define themselves as nor identify with Muslims. Second, those who self-identify as Muslims will differ in their religious beliefs and practices from Sunni Muslims. Almost no Alevi people practice the ritual prayer five times a day, go to a mosque, fast during the Ramadan or go on the hajj to Mecca. These are not Alevi religious customs. Rather than visit Mecca, for example, they tend to visit and pray at the tombs of Alevi-Bektashi, and Alevi have congregational or assembly meetings in Cem houses led by a 'dede'. Alevi Muslims tend to interpret Islam and the Qur'an in a spiritual and mystical way rather than in terms of strict rules and regulations. For most of them, the love of

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God and of other human beings, whether religious or not, is central. How a person treats other humans and whether he or she acts as a responsible and caring human being is considered a key issue. This humanistic aspect means that we can expect that Alevi Muslims will have lower Muslim group identification than the Sunni Muslims. Further, compared to the Sunni they can be expected to have more positive feelings towards religious out-groups, especially non-religious people, and Jews, and to endorse Muslim minority rights in the Netherlands less strongly.

We will examine these expectations using data of two surveys among Turkish-Dutch participants. These surveys involve non-random samples because there are no official statistics and registrations of the Alevi and Sunni community in the Netherlands. Both surveys contained similar questions to assess Muslim group identification, general feelings towards the Muslim in-group and religious out-groups, and the endorsement of Muslim minority rights in the Netherlands. Questions on the feelings towards Alevis, Sunnis, and Shiites were only available in the second survey. In examining these issues, two additional variables were considered, gender and age.

The role of women in Islam is a highly contested issue in Western Europe and increasingly so among Muslim immigrant groups. From the standpoint of some people, the Islamic faith demands female submission to men. Others disagree, and argue that the Qur'an teaches the spiritual equality of women and man. It is clear, however, that a relatively strong gender distinction exist in Islamic beliefs and practices. Muslim men, for example, tend to attend religious services more often than females (Horrie and Chippindale 1990). Furthermore, this gender distinction is more pronounced among Sunni Muslims than among Alevis (Erman 1997; Shindeldecker 2006). For the Sunnis and Alevis we will explore whether gender makes a difference for Muslim group identification, feelings towards religious groups and the endorsement of Muslim minority rights in the Netherlands.

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Finally, we will explore whether there are age differences. Previous research in the Netherlands has found no age differences in Muslim identification (Phalet and Güngor, 2004. However, it is possible that compared to older Muslims, younger Muslims are more integrated in the Netherlands and that integration implies a more positive attitude towards religious out-groups.

Method

Participants: Survey 1

In the first questionnaire study, there were 181 Turkish-Dutch participants. On an open-ended question, 133 of these participants described themselves as Sunni Muslim and 48 described themselves as Alevi Muslim. Of these participants 70.2% were males and 29.8% females. The participants were between 18 and 42 years of age and their mean age was 28.5 (*SD* = 7.00). There were no significant gender and age differences between the two groups of Muslim participants.

All participants were recruited in the Utrecht region and were asked to participate in a study on contemporary social issues. In the introduction it was explained that the study was on people's opinions about the 'Netherlands and Dutch society' and that we wanted to know what people think about the societal situation in the country. The participants were recruited by Turkish-Dutch assistants.

Participants: Survey 2

There were 276 Turkish-Dutch participants in the second survey. Of these participants, 51.4% described themselves as Sunni and 49.6% described themselves as Alevi. Of this latter group and on an open-ended question, 45.5% defined themselves as Alevi Muslim, whereas 54.5% indicated that they did not consider themselves to be Muslim. These participants did

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not complete the questions on Muslim identification and for present purposes we will label them as secular Alevis. In total, 59.1% of the participants were male and 41.9% female. The participants were between 18 and 68 years of age and their mean age was 30.07 (*SD* = 12.12). There were no significant gender and age differences between the three groups of participants.

All participants were recruited in the Utrecht region and in eastern parts of the country. The recruitment of the participants and the introduction of the research was the same as in the first survey.

Measures

In order to measure religious group feelings, the participants were given the well-known 'feeling thermometer'. This thermometer has been successfully used in many studies of both ethnic and religious majority and minority group participants (e.g., Cairns et al., 2006), including studies in the Netherlands (e.g., Verkuyten 2005). It is intended as a global measure of in-group and out-group feelings. The exact wording of the instructions was: "Use the 'feeling-thermometer' to indicate whether you have positive or negative feelings about different religious groups living in the Netherlands. You may use any degree between 0 and 100, but you have to choose one. One hundred degrees indicates very positive or warm feelings, zero degrees indicates very cold or negative feelings, and 50 degrees means neutral feelings". Following this instruction, four 'religious' groups were listed in the following order: Christians, Muslims, Jews, and non-religious people. Under each target group a scale was presented running from 0 to 100. In the second survey, the participants were also given the feeling thermometer to indicate their feelings towards Sunnis, Alevis and Shiites.

To assess the attitude towards Islamic group rights in the Netherlands**,** six items that are relevant in the Dutch context were used. These items were partly taken from Verkuyten and Yildiz (2006) and focus on public rights. Three sample items are, 'The right to establish

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own Islamic schools should always exist in the Netherlands', 'some Islamic holy days should become official Dutch holidays', and 'in the Netherlands the wearing of a headscarf should not be forbidden'. Items were measured on scales ranging from 1 (disagree strongly) to 7 (agree strongly), and the 6-item scale was internally consistent with Cronbach's alpha which was .88. A higher score indicated a stronger endorsement of Islamic group rights.

Muslim group identification was assessed by six items using 7-point scales (with 1 as 'disagree strongly, 4 as 'neutral', and 7 as 'agree strongly'). The items are similar to questions used in many social psychological studies and in Dutch studies on ethnic identification (e.g., Verkuyten 2005). Three sample items are 'I identify strongly with Muslims', 'Being a Muslim is a very important part of how I see myself', and 'I am proud of my Islamic background'. Cronbach's alpha was .94.

Results

Thermometer ratings for religious groups: intercorrelations

For the thermometer questions the focus was on the affective ratings of Muslims, Christians, Jews and non-believers. Table 1 shows the correlations between the different ratings and for the three groups of participants. For the Sunnis (first column in Table 1), the rating of the Muslims was negatively related to the feelings towards non-religious people and was not related to the feelings towards the other religious out-groups. In contrast, among the Muslim Alevis (second column), the feelings towards Muslims was not related to feelings towards non-religious, and related positively with feelings towards Christians and Jews. For the secular Alevis (third column), feelings towards Muslims were positively related to feelings towards the other three groups, but the correlations were lower for the feelings towards non-religious people.

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- Insert Table 1 about here -

Thermometer ratings for religious groups: mean scores

A repeated measures MANOVA was conducted with the four religious groups' ratings as a repeated measures factor. Participant group (Sunni, Muslim Alevis, secular Alevis), gender, and age (18-30 and > 30 years) were the independent factors. The analysis yielded a significant main effect for group ratings.[1]

These group ratings differed, however, for the three groups of participants. The repeated measurement analysis showed a significant interaction effect between group ratings and participant group.[2]. Simple main effect analyses indicated that there was no significant difference between the three groups' feelings towards Christians (see in Table 2 the Mean scores for 'Christians' of the three participant groups). The Sunni Turks, however, were much more positive towards Muslims than the two Alevi groups.[3] More than 60% of the Sunni Turks indicated the most extreme positive feelings (score 100) whereas these percentages are much lower for the two Alevi groups. The three groups of participants also differed significantly in their feelings towards Jews, and their feelings towards non-religious people.[4] Post-hoc analysis (Tukey) indicated that the Sunni, compared to the secular Alevis, had more negative feelings towards Jews. The score for the Muslim Alevis was in-between and did not differ significantly from the other two groups. Among the Sunni Turks, almost 30% indicated the most extreme negative score (score 0) and around 55% scored below the neutral mid-point of the scale. These percentages are lower for the two Alevi groups but here also a substantial number of participants indicated negative feelings towards Jews (around 45%).

- Insert Table 2 about here -

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Post-hoc analysis showed that the feelings towards non-religious people were most negative among the Sunni Turks with more than a third having the most extreme negative score and more than half scoring below the mid-point of the scale (Table 2). Feelings towards non-religious people were most positive among the secular Alevis, and these were significantly more positive than among the Muslim Alevis. There were no other main and interaction effects for gender and for age.

Muslim sub-groups

For the Sunni and secular Alevi participants, there was no significant correlation between the feelings towards the Sunni and the Alevis (see Table 1, last three rows). This correlation was negative and marginally significant for the Muslim Alevis. Further, for all three groups, the thermometer ratings of the Sunni and Shiite were positively and significantly related. For the Sunni participants there was also a positive association between the feelings towards Alevis and Shiites. This association was lower for the Muslim Alevis and for the secular Alevis.

A repeated measures MANOVA was conducted with the three Muslim sub-groups' ratings as a repeated measures factor. Participant group (Sunni, Muslim Alevi, secular Alevi), gender, and age were the independent factors. The analysis yielded a significant main effect for group ratings. This effect was qualified, however, by an interaction effect between group rating and participant group.[5] Post-hoc analyses indicated no religious group difference for the feelings towards Shiites (see in Table 3 the three Mean scores for the Shiite target group). However, compared to the two Alevi groups the Sunni had more warm feelings for the Sunnis and more negative feelings towards the Alevis. More than 45% of the Sunni Turks reported negative feelings towards Alevis and almost half of the participants of the two Alevi groups

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indicated negative feelings towards the Sunni. The two groups of Alevis did not differ in their feelings towards the three Muslim sub-groups.

- Insert Table 3 about here -

Minority group rights

The score for Islamic group rights was examined in an analysis of variance (ANOVA) with participant group (Sunni, Muslim Alevis, secular Alevis), gender, and age as factors. The full model explains no less than 42% of the variance in the endorsement of Islamic group rights. There was a significant effect for participant group[6], with Sunnis (M= 5.72, SD = 1.11) endorsing these rights much more strongly than the Muslim Alevis (M = 3.61, SD = 1.26) and the secular Alevis (M = 3.64, SD = 1.44). There were no significant main or interaction effects for gender and for age.

The role of Muslim identification

For the Sunni and Muslim Alevis we can examine the role of Muslim identification in the feelings towards the various religious groups and the endorsement of Islamic group rights. First, we examined the differences in Muslim identification. An analysis of variance with participant group (Sunni and Muslim Alevis), gender and age showed a strong significant effect for participant group.[7] Sunni Muslims had a much higher Muslim identification compared to the Muslim Alevis (M = 6.39, SD = 1.12, and M = 3.01, SD = 1.69). Among the Sunni, the distribution of the Muslim identification score was negatively skewed (-2.60) and the mode was 7.0. In total, 51.1% of the participants had a score of 7 indicating that for half of the sample their Muslim identity was an integral or inextricable part of how they saw themselves.

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There was also a significant effect for gender.[8] Males had a higher Muslim identification than females (M = 5.85, SD = 1.28, and M = 5.02, SD = 1.43). There was no significant interaction effect between religious group and gender indicating that the gender difference was similar among both groups. There also was no significant effect for age.

A repeated measures MANOVA was conducted with the four religious groups' ratings as a repeated measures factor. Participant group (Sunni, Muslim Alevi) and Muslim identification were between-subjects factors. Because of the skewedness of the Sunni's distribution of Muslim identification a median split was used for making a distinction between high (M = 5.58, SD = 1.34) and 'total' (M = 7.0) Muslim group identification. For the Muslim Alevis, a median split resulted in a distinction between high (M = 4.47, SD = 1.05) and low (M = 1.73, SD = 0.81) Muslim identification.

Apart from the significant effects for group ratings and for the interaction between group ratings and participant group that were discussed earlier, there was a significant interaction effect between group ratings and Muslim identification.[9] Muslim identification was positively associated with feelings towards Muslims and negatively with feelings towards non-religious people. Muslim identification was not related with feelings towards Christians and towards Jews. These associations were similar for the Sunnis and the Alevis because the interaction effect between group rating, participant group and Muslim identification was not significant.

We also examined whether Muslim identification was related to the feelings towards the three Muslim subgroups. For the feeling thermometer, the repeated measures MANOVA showed a significant interaction effect between subgroup ratings and Muslim identification.[10] Muslim identification was not related to the feelings towards Sunnis and Alevis. However, high Muslim identifiers were more positive towards Shiites than less high identifiers (M = 64.8, SD = 29.1, and M = 52.8, SD = 28.9).

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We further examined (ANOVA) the role of Muslim identification in the endorsement of Islamic group rights. Muslim identification had a main positive effect on the endorsement of Islamic group rights. Participants with 'total' or high Muslim identification were much more in favor of Islamic group rights than less strong group identifiers (M = 5.81, SD = 1.08, and M = 3.63, SD = 1.72). This difference was similar for the Sunnis and Alevis because the interaction effect between religious group and Muslim identification was not significant.[11]

Discussion

Using an intergroup perspective, we have examined religious group identification, feelings towards multiple religious groups, and the endorsement of Islamic group rights among two groups of Turkish-Dutch Muslims; Sunnis and Alevis.

The findings show that there is a clear and strong difference between both groups and that they differ in important ways. First, some Alevi participants considered themselves to be Muslims but others did not interpret Alevi identity in this way. This difference reflects the continuing debate in Turkey and in Western Europe on the most appropriate way to define Alevi identity (Van Bruinessen 1995). Alevi people can consider Alevite identity as the Turkish (or Kurdish) interpretation of Islam or rather interpret this identity in cultural and political terms. Second, Alevi participants that did consider themselves to be Muslims had a much lower Muslim group identification than the Sunnis. The mean score for the Alevi Muslims was a little below the mid-point of the scale whereas for most Sunni participants, Muslim identity is very important. No less than half of them had the highest possible score on the six-item Muslim identification measure indicating 'total' group identification. Hence, for many Sunni participants, Muslim identity does not seem to be optional or a matter of strength of identification. Other Dutch studies among Sunni Muslims have found similar results (e.g. Phalet and Güngör 2004). This 'total' Muslim identification is probably related to global and

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national developments. For example, the increased global tensions and divergences between the Western and Islamic world may also force Turkish-Dutch Muslims to a position of having to defend and stress the importance of their religion. In addition, in the Netherlands, the public condemnation of Islam and the calls for assimilation has increased the salience and importance of Muslim identity (Verkuyten and Zaremba 2005). Islamic immigrant groups face high levels of threat to the value of their religious identity. As argued by social identity theory, this can lead to increased in-group identification among these groups (Tajfel and Turner 1986).

However, the 'total' religious identification found among the Sunnis is probably also related to their interpretation of Islam. Very strong Muslim identification was not found among the Alevi Muslims who also face high levels of religious identity threat but tend to have a more spiritual and mystical interpretation of Islam and the Qur'an. Furthermore, very strong Muslim identification among West European Sunni immigrants was also found in the 1990s when the intergroup tensions were much less strong (e.g. Modood et al. 1997). For the Sunnis being a Muslim seems to imply a normative group commitment that is related to Islamic religion. For them, the declaration of faith symbolizes one's belief and commitment to Islam: one either is a believer or one is not.

The importance of examining different Islamic immigrant groups is also evident from the results for the affective ratings of the various religious out-groups. The findings show that the affective ratings towards Christians were around the neutral mid-point of the scale and did not differ between the Sunnis and Alevis. For the Sunnis, however, the mean scores for Jews and non-religious people were clearly negative, with around a third of the participants indicating the most negative or cold feelings on the thermometer question (zero degrees). These results support the idea that religion can be an important dimension for making meaningful and strong in- and out-group distinctions. Religion unifies a community of

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believers around a consensus of moral values and divine truths. The observant believer will feel that he or she is 'right' which makes it difficult to have positive feelings towards other religions, dissenters, and non-believers in particular (Altemeyer 2002). The feelings towards non-religious people were very negative. In addition, for the Sunnis the affective rating towards the Islamic in-group was significantly and negatively related to the feelings towards non-religious people only. This suggests that the non-religious constitute the negative contrast for Sunni Muslims and for 'total' identifiers in particular. The results for the two Alevi groups differ from those for the Sunni participants. These two groups were less negative towards Jews and indicated positive feelings towards the non-religious. Furthermore, for the Muslim Alevis the affective rating of Muslims was not negatively related to the feelings towards the non-religious, and for the secular Alevis a positive association was found.

These results indicate that the interpretation of what it means to be a Muslim is important to understand out-group dislike and negative affect. However, as argued by social identity theory, the intergroup situation should also be considered (Herriot 2007; Tajfel and Turner 1986). Among the Muslim Sunnis and Alevis, the feelings towards Christians were less negative than towards Jews. The negative feelings towards Jews are most likely related to the growing anti-Jewish sentiments in present-day Islam, which is exacerbated by the Israeli–Palestinian conflict. In recent years, anti-Semitism has increased and increasingly so among Muslim populations around the world, including Western Europe (Antisemitism Research 2002; Schoenfeld 2004). Hence, the results support social identity theory by indicating the importance of studying negative group relations in relation to different out-groups and in relation to political and ideological circumstances (Cairn et al. 2006; Verkuyten and Zaremba 2005).

The Sunni and Alevi participants also differed substantially in their affective ratings of Muslims and the endorsement of Islamic minority rights. The Sunnis had very positive

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feelings towards Muslims with more than 60% having the most positive score, and they were also clearly in favour of minority rights for Muslims in the Netherlands. The Muslim Alevis and the secular Alevis had a similar and much lower mean score (around the neutral mid-points) on these measures. Almost 30% of these two groups indicated equally negative or cold feelings towards Muslims.

However, among both the Sunnis and Muslim Alevis, Muslim identification was similarly and positively related to the affective rating of Muslims and the endorsement of Islamic minority group rights. Total Sunni Muslim identifiers and high Alevi Muslim identifiers had more positive feelings towards Muslims and were more in favor of group rights than participants with relatively low group identification. As predicted by social identity theory, these results show that religious group identification plays an important role. Individuals who feel very strongly and normatively committed to their religious group did show very strong in-group favoritism and were also much more in favor of political demands for group rights.

Another result showing the clear difference between the Sunni and Alevi Turkish-Dutch is their attitudes towards the Muslim subgroups. The feelings towards Shiite Muslims were similar, but the Sunnis were rather negative towards the Alevis with around one fourth of them having the most negative score. Reciprocally, the Muslim Alevis and secular Alevis were rather negative towards Sunnis with also around one fourth indicating the most negative feelings. Thus, the relationship between Sunnis and Alevis was quite negative. This might be due to their different interpretations of Islam but is probably also related to the situation in Turkey and Western Europe. In the last 20 years, Turkey has experienced a process of increased social and political mobilization based on ethnic and religious identities. One aspect of this process is that Alevi identity has become more visible in the public domain. Alevis increasingly express their identity and emphasize their culturally and religiously based rights.

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Alevi intellectuals are publicly taking positions on these issues and are trying to mobilize the Alevi community. As a result of these developments, there has been an increase in the number of Alevi associations and foundations. Parallel to these developments in Turkey, Alevis who migrated to Western Europe have started to organize themselves around their Alevi identity. In Germany alone, for example, they have established hundreds of foundations and associations to open Cem Houses. Furthermore, Alevis living in European countries have given strong transnational support to the goals of Alevis in Turkey, both politically and economically. For example, funding the establishment of Cem Houses in the cities they originally migrated from has become one of the core activities of Alevi foundations and associations in Europe.

In evaluating the present results, some restrictions should be considered. For example, religious identification was measured with items that are commonly used in social psychological research. However, it seems important to examine different dimensions of religious identity in future studies, such as religious beliefs, behaviors, and practices. It is possible that for other dimensions, Muslim identification plays a different role in intergroup relations. Furthermore, future studies could investigate religious identification among other Islamic groups, such as Shiite, in different countries and among Islamic minority and majority groups, as well as among different religious groups.

We also examined gender and age differences but there was no information on, for example, socio-economic background, education and generation. These latter factors might be related to religious group evaluations and identification. For gender, a difference for religious group identification was found. Muslim men had stronger group identification than females. This is in agreement with research that, for example, shows that Muslim men tend to attend religious services more often than females (Horrie and Chippindale 1990), and with the finding that immigrant men in general more frequently attend religious meetings than

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immigrant women (Van Tubergen 2006). However, there were no gender differences for the other measures and the results for gender were similar among the Sunnis and Alevis. For age no differences were found which is in agreement with previous research in the Netherlands (Phalet and Güngor 2004).

In conclusion, religion is an important dimension for developing a positive social identity and religion is an important factor in social divisions and conflicts in many societies around the world. The findings of this study underline the importance of making distinctions between groups of Muslims living in Western Europe. Muslim immigrants are not a homogenous group but differ in their identity defining beliefs, values, and norms. In addition, the nature of the intergroup relations and social context is important. Muslim identity and what represents the core of the religion is not a fixed given but is disputed and constructed in different ways and in the context of negotiating intergroup relations and organising collective action (see Kahani-Hopkins and Hopkins 2002; Peek 2005). A context of increasing Islamophobia in Western Europe will affect the way that Islamic minority groups understand and present themselves and react to other religious groups. But these reactions are not uniform because there are important differences between Muslim communities in their interpretation of Islam.

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Notes

1. $F(3, 1377) = 57.23$, $p < .001$.
2. $F(6, 1377) = 66.32$, $p < .001$
3. $F(2, 460) = 58.26$, $p < .001$
4. Analysis for 'Jews', $F(2, 460) = 6.78$, $p = .001$, and for 'non-believers', $F(2, 460) = 74.48$, $p < .001$.
5. Main effect is, $F(2, 384) = 3.63$, p = .028. Interaction effect between group rating and religious group, $F(2, 384) = 93.78$, $p < .001$.
6. $F(2,461) = 110.1$, $p < .001$
7. $F(1, 384) = 390.97$, $p < .001$
8. $F(1, 384) = 7.18$, $p = .008$
9. $F(3, 1155) = 23.46$, $p < .001$.
10. $F(2,376) = 4.77$, $p = .009$.
11. Main effect, $F(1, 384) = 35.17$, $p < .001$, and interaction effect, $F(1, 384) = 2.75$, $p > .05$.

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Table 1: Pearson-Product-Moment Correlations between the Different Measures and for the Three Participating Groups

	Participant group		
	Sunni	Muslim Alevis	Secular Alevis
Muslims-Christians	.04	.65***	.89***
Muslims-Jews	-.02	.62***	.81***
Muslims-Non-religious	-.27***	-.01	.36**
Sunni-Shiite	.51***	.54***	.74***
Sunni-Alevi	.07	-.24[a]	.07
Shiite-Alevi	.50***	.26*	.18

[a] = .07; *p < .05; **p<.01; ***p<.001

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Table 2. Percentages, Mean Scores, and Standard Deviations for the Thermometer-Ratings of the Four Religious Groups by the Three Groups of Participants

	Thermometer-Ratings						
	0	10-40	50	60-90	100	Mean	SD
			Sunnis (N= 286)				
Muslims	1.0%	1.3%	8.6%	28.2%	60.9%	88.2	19.5
Christians	8.6%	22.9%	29.2%	28.5%	10.6%	52.6	27.8
Non-religious	35.5%	19.3%	18.9%	16.0%	6.7%	35.2	34.7
Jews	29.6%	26.7%	19.9%	13.9%	5.7%	36.0	33.6
			Muslim Alevis (N = 96)				
Muslims	20.0%	8.0%	22.7%	18.6%	30.7%	58.4	36.4
Christians	11.5%	17.7%	27.1%	32.3%	11.5%	53.9	28.7
Non-religious	4.2%	7.2%	18.8%	43.7%	26.0%	71.3	26.6
Jews	21.9%	26.1%	25.0%	15.6%	11.5%	43.3	32.4
			Secular Alevis (N = 75)				
Muslims	11.5%	18.7%	26.0%	31.3%	12.5%	55.7	30.7
Christians	20.0%	12.0%	26.7%	9.3%	32.0%	55.6	37.3
Non-religious	2.7%	2.6%	10.7%	32.0%	52.0%	84.3	23.0
Jews	24.0%	17.4%	20.0%	7.9%	30.7%	51.7	38.9

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Table 3. Percentages, Mean Scores, and Standard Deviations for the Thermometer-Ratings of the Four Religious Groups by the Three Groups of Participants

	Thermometer-Ratings						
	0	10-40	50	60-90	100	Mean	SD
			Sunnis (N= 140)				
Sunni	3.6%	4.2%	21.4%	29.9%	40.7%	76.8	27.1
Shiite	10.7%	14.3%	29.3%	30.7%	15.0%	56.3	30.2
Alevites	25.0%	20.7%	30.0%	12.0%	12.1%	41.3	33.7
			Muslim Alevis (N =60)				
Sunni	21.7%	30.0%	23.3%	9.0%	15.0%	40.8	33.9
Shiite	8.3%	11.7%	28.3%	33.3%	18.3%	63.0	29.6
Alevites	1.7%	0.0%	5.0%	30.1%	63.3%	91.8	17.4
			Secular Alevis (N = 74)				
Sunni	27.0%	19.1%	20.3%	5.4%	28.4%	47.4	39.8
Shiite	16.2%	6.8%	16.2%	28.5%	32.4%	63.1	35.8
Alevites	0.0%	0.0%	6.8%	21.6%	71.6%	93.6	13.5

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