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Mapping the field

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Researching social relations in super-diverse neighbourhoods

Mapping the field

Susanne Wessendorf

Abstract

In recent years, there has been a surge in studies on immigration-related diversity and, more specifically, super-diversity. This paper aims to give an overview of recent academic debate on social relations in super-diverse contexts. It draws together studies focusing on how people of different backgrounds relate to each other in such contexts, with a particular focus on the role of the neighbourhood regarding social relations. Findings of some recent studies have shown how diversity has become commonplace and is not experienced as something particularly unusual in such areas. At the same time, however, negative attitudes towards others can persist. Although primarily conceptual, the paper also draws on empirical qualitative data from an ethnographic study undertaken by the author in the London Borough of Hackney.

Keywords

Citation

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Introduction

The study of diversity has gained much attention in the last few years and in the context of the emergence of 'super-diversity'. Vertovec (2007), who coined the term 'super-diversity', has described how in the context of the 'diversification of diversity' (Hollinger 1995), we can find a multiplication of social categories within specific localities. These differentiations not only refer to an increase in different ethnic and migrant minorities, but also variations in migration histories, educational backgrounds, religions, legal statuses, length of residence and economic backgrounds, both among ethnic minorities and migrants as well as the majority population. In this paper, super-diversity is not understood as an analytical device, but as a lens to describe an exceptional demographic situation. While the notion of super-diversity has been picked up across various academic disciplines to describe these processes of differentiation and their consequences in urban settings across the world, the term 'diversity' has also seen an unprecedented proliferation in public and corporate language and discourse (Vertovec 2012). I here refer to 'diversity' in regard to 'multiple modes of social differentiation and fragmentation' which are 're-ordering society', economically, socially and culturally (*ibid*.: 308).

This paper aims to give an overview of recent policy and academic discourses concerning immigration-related diversity. It draws together studies which have looked at the nature of social relations in contexts characterised by diversification. The particular focus here is on the role of the neighbourhood regarding social relations. Relating to this, the paper also discusses the concept of 'social milieus' to describe social relations formed locally as well as beyond the local. While this is a conceptual paper, primarily discussing academic and, to a lesser degree, policy discourse, it also draws on empirical material resulting from 18 months of ethnographic fieldwork in the London Borough of Hackney during the period 2008–2010.[1] However, the bulk of the ethnographic material is published elsewhere (Wessendorf 2013a, 2014a [forthcoming], 2014b [forthcoming]).

The first part of the paper describes developments in academic and policy discourses regarding multiculturalism, cohesion and integration. This is followed by a review of the more recent literature on everyday encounters in contexts of super-diversity. I then move on to discuss the role of the neighbourhood regarding social relations, and the concept of social milieus as a useful way to think about urban social relations. The following section looks at contestations of diversity, asking when diversity is perceived as a problem. This is followed by a section which draws more heavily on my fieldwork and looks at the issue of disadvantaged young black people and continuities of racism despite positive attitudes towards diversity. I conclude by summarising my arguments and posing questions regarding future research.

From multiculturalism to cohesion

Research on diversity in the UK has been dominated by a focus on the relationships between postcolonial migrants from South Asia and the Caribbean and the majority population. Such studies have shown the complex interplay of both tensions and positive relations within and between these minority groups (Back 1996; Baumann 1996; Hewitt 2005; Tyler and Jensen 2009). This focus has

recently begun to shift towards a more complex view on new patterns of immigration and the emergence of super-diverse areas (Hudson *et al*. 2007; Hickman *et al*. 2008; Hall 2012), a shift which followed increasing criticism of multiculturalism policy, practice and ideology (cf. Vertovec and Wessendorf 2010; Berg and Sigona 2013). This backlash against multiculturalism came to the fore in reaction to events such as the riots in northern UK towns in 2001 and the 7 July 2005 terrorist attacks in London. A government report written in response to the riots claimed that groups were living 'parallel lives' characterised by a lack of contact and meaningful interchanges. The report highlighted the urgent need to build social cohesion in the ever more ethnically diverse British society (Cantle 2001; Home Office 2004).[2] While multiculturalism policies were blamed for enhancing such parallel lives and widening the gaps between different ethnic groups, discourse about cohesion emphasised the need to facilitate more interaction between different ethnic and religious minority and majority groups, and create a shared sense of belonging and civic pride (Grillo 2010). This was also conceptualised with Putnam's (2000) notion of 'bonding social capital' within groups, supposedly encouraged by multiculturalism policies, as opposed to 'bridging social capital' across groups which should be enhanced by the cohesion agenda. Putnam's much criticised claim that the more diverse an area, the more people 'hunker down' and develop bonding social capital (Putnam 2007) has been very influential in the policy shift towards cohesion with its emphasis on the need for ethnic minorities, rather than the majority population, to bridge ethnic differences. The cohesion agenda has been widely criticised for its culturalist stance, interpreting the tensions in northern towns on the basis of cultural difference, especially regarding Muslim communities within these towns, and emphasising ethnic polarisation rather than focusing on socio-economic divisions (Amin 2002; Hickman *et al.* 2012; Bloch *et al*. 2013). While this 'segregation and crisis approach' (Neal *et al*. 2013: 309) has dominated public and political debates since 2001, it intensified in the aftermath of the London bombings in 2005 when identification with British culture and community cohesion were stressed even more by national government (Bloch *et al*. 2013). More recent policy approaches have focused on 'integration' which, although described as a two-way process in which members of the majority society as well as ethnic minorities and newcomers are involved (Jenkins 1967; CIC 2007), has been criticised for placing the main responsibility on migrant and ethnic minority communities (Bloch *et al*. 2013).

Importantly, the debates dominating public policy and discourse since 2001 and focusing on different groups leading 'parallel lives' were based on observations of tensions in areas characterised by clear-cut minority/majority relations rather than super-diverse contexts. These contexts were described as having high degrees of residential segregation of different groups, namely Muslims and non-Muslims. In fact, the Cantle report sparked new debates within the literature on segregation, some of whose protagonists challenge ideas of 'ghettoisation' and 'self-segregation' among ethnic minorities. They show how many minority ethnic residents move out of their arrival settlement areas and into more mixed areas (Butler and Hamnett 2011; Finney and Simpson 2009).[3] Independent of these debates surrounding segregation, the debates about 'parallel lives' and cohesion drew on experiences made in contexts which are not super-diverse, while ignoring areas like Hackney, but also places like the London Boroughs of Haringey or Newham as well as Handsworth in Birmingham, which have seen

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[2] This picture of groups leading parallel lives as a result of 'state-imposed multiculturalism' was reiterated by Prime Minister David Cameron in a speech at the Munich Security Conference in May 2011 (http://www.number10.gov.uk/news/pms-speech-at-munich-security-conference/, accessed 10/11/11).

[3] For an overview of debates about segregation across the social sciences see Vaughan (2011).

similar developments of diversification (Hudson *et al.* 2007; Phillimore 2013). However, in recent years, a body of academic literature from the UK and elsewhere has emerged which looks at super-diverse contexts and the ways in which people negotiate their multiple differences on a daily basis (see following section). The so-called 'contact theory' and debates surrounding 'interculturalism' which became prominent during the public debates on cohesion, could be described as the forerunners of this newly emerging research field, also described as an 'everyday multiculture approach' (*Neal et al.* 2013).

Contact theory forms part of a research tradition in social psychology with its long-standing interest in inter-group relations (Allport 1958) This approach looks at how individuals categorise themselves and others into 'in-groups' and 'out-groups' and thereby construct collective categories to which they feel they belong (Hewstone *et al.* 2002). Such social categorisation and identification processes contribute to intergroup dynamics, particularly in light of the fact that individuals belong to multiple social groupings with different levels of inclusiveness. Groups are thereby not necessarily defined by ethnicity or country of origin, but may be associated with language, locality, socio-economic position, immigration status or other variables of super-diversity. Importantly, positive contact with individual out-group members has been found to reduce prejudice and promote positive attitudes towards the out-group under certain conditions (Allport 1958; Brown and Hewstone 2005).

Interculturalist approaches are more closely linked to the criticism of multiculturalism, emphasising the fluidity of cultural boundaries by questioning ideas of unified group identities, and underlining the need to facilitate dialogue and understanding between people of different cultural backgrounds (Bloomfield and Bianchini 2004; Sandercock 2004; Wood and Landry 2007). They are thus concretely linked to ethnic and religious diversity, whereas social-psychological theories of inter-group contact draw on research with more openly defined 'groups', ranging from school classes and professional groups to religious congregations or age groups, an approach particularly suitable to studies in super-diverse contexts.

Part of this move in academic research and policy towards a focus on inter-group relationships and interaction has been an increasing interest in specific places where people of different backgrounds live and rub shoulders. As described by Amin (2005) and Tyler and Jensen (2009), the policy focus on cohesion and interaction is closely related to an increasing interest in 'local communities'. It is in neighbourhoods that civic pride and responsibility, positive inter-ethnic and inter-faith relations and public participation are to be fostered. This policy shift towards the local, which, following the Localism Act in 2011, has become key government policy, has also been reflected in academic research. Although neighbourhood studies have been an integral part of urban sociology and anthropology for several decades (see, among many others, Bott 1957; Young and Willmott 1957; Mitchell 1969b; Baumann 1996), there has been a recent increase in studies which specifically look at multi-group contexts within urban neighbourhoods. These studies have shown the existence of both social separation and social interaction, while primarily focusing on how and whether people interact across ethnic and religious differences, without including other categories of differentiation (Sanjek 1998; Blokland 2003b; SHM Foundation 2007; Jayaweera and Choudhury 2008; Ray *et al*. 2008; Tyler and Jensen 2009).

However, within the broader field of urban studies, an increasing number of studies have looked at the growing demographic complexity of cities and the multi-categorical differentiations found in

specific areas. While the discourse on cohesion has resulted from the assumption that the co-presence of groups with different cultural backgrounds creates tensions and conflict, studies on urban neighbourhoods have shown the convivial nature of living in a super-diverse context and the ways in which people navigate super-diverse spaces in rather unremarkable or 'perhaps quite banal intercultural interaction' (Sandercock 2003: 89). The following section focuses on this emerging literature on social encounters in contexts of diversity.

Commonplace diversity: unremarkable encounters across differences

There have been two types of discourses about diversity on the local level which are quite similar, but vary slightly in their emphasis and arguments. Although they have been around for a while, they have gained increasing attention in recent years. One discourse portrays the normalisation of diversity in people's everyday lives and on the local level, an issue I describe as 'commonplace diversity' (Wessendorf 2014a [forthcoming]). I will discuss this discourse in further detail below.

The other discourse tries to move away from the assumption that ethnicity is the dominant category of differentiation for people who live in diverse contexts. Already in 1982 in her study on Battersea in south London, Wallman showed how 'ethnic origin has little bearing on the business of livelihood' (Wallman 1982: 187), and how it plays no role regarding perceptions of who belongs to 'us' and who does not. Rather it was length of residence, living up to rules about cleanliness and order (e.g. not leaving rubbish outside the door, not being noisy) and participation in local activities which made a 'local' (Wallman 1982). This not only shows that 'cultural or phenotypical difference which counts in one situation does not count in another', but also that 'difference which counts for some does not count for others' (Wallman 1978: 201).

In his ground-breaking work on ethnic boundary making in three Swiss towns, Wimmer (2004) shows how, despite the persistence of social networks along ethnically defined lines, the dominant criterion of classification as 'us' or 'them' is defined by notions of order and descent. Thus, long-established Swiss nationals perceived a group of young, Swiss newcomers to an area in Basle as more foreign than long-established residents of Italian and Spanish origin. This resonates with Elias and Scotson's classic study on relationships between established residents and newcomers in an English village (Elias and Scotson 1994). In Hackney, similar discourses about young newcomers, also described as 'Hipsters', can be found. The Hipsters (young middle-class people, some of whom seek to distinguish themselves from the mainstream) are blamed for breaking the social order of the area by dominating certain public spaces and being noisy and disorderly. However, in a super-diverse area like Hackney, it is not the newcomer status alone which categorises people as 'other', because it is simply too difficult to know who is new to the area and who is not. Rather, it is the combination of being new, visible *and* disrupting the local sense of order (Wessendorf 2013a).

In his study on Southall, Baumann (1996) discusses the emergence of a shared local culture despite ethnic heterogeneity. In this area, this shared culture is based on economic commonalities. He also discusses how people appropriate the local authorities' 'dominant discourse' of ethnic differentiation and the ways in which on the local level, people accommodate this discourse of ethnically reified communities in order to gain access to locally distributed resources. At the same time, there also

exists a lived everyday multiculturalism, especially in the public realm where people of different backgrounds mix (Baumann 1996).

While Baumann's study was situated in an area which is dominated by South Asians of various backgrounds, Afro-Caribbeans and whites (many of Irish background), super-diverse contexts are characterised by a more confusing picture of many different minority groups, with none of them dominating. In her historical review of Britain's diversification since the 1960s, Mica Nava shows how, by the 1990s, 'race and cultural difference in the UK was normal and ubiquitous, even if not always accepted' (Nava 2007: 12). She links this normalisation of diversity with the concept of cosmopolitanism and emphasises that this cosmopolitanism has emerged from a historical 'engagement with otherness and elsewheres in the local zones' (Nava 2007: 13).

> So the continuity not only of co-residence but of *interaction*, of mutual acknowledgement and desire, is what marks out domestic and vernacular cosmopolitanism, and, importantly, in the case of London today, does so not only for the one-in-four Londoners born abroad (Kyambi 2005) or for the many more whose parents were, but also for the several million native British subjects who inhabit the metropolis and take pleasure in its cultural mix (Nava 2007: 13).

Already in 1999, Stuart Hall spoke of 'creeping multiculturalism' which he conceptualises as 'multicultural drift', meaning 'the increasing visible presence of black and Asian people in all aspects of British social life as a natural and inevitable part of the "scene"' (Hall 1999: 188). He describes this development as the 'unintended outcome of undirected sociological processes' (Hall 1999: 188), and posits it against ongoing institutionalised racism (especially by the police) and the continuing disadvantage of black residents. As described towards the end of this paper, these developments of continued disadvantage among black youngsters can also be found in Hackney. At the same time, however, diversity has become commonplace in this area. Rather than seeing cultural diversity as something particularly special, it forms part of local residents' everyday lived reality and is not perceived as unusual. 'Commonplace diversity' does not mean that people are not aware of the diversity of the people around them, but they do not think that it is something particularly unusual. Diversity has become habitual and part of the everyday human landscape (Wessendorf 2013a, 2014a [forthcoming]).

Neal *et al*. show how an increasing number of studies focusing on how 'people routinely manage social interactions and relations in multicultural environments' (Neal *et al*. 2013: 309) form a counter-discourse to the political discourse which emphasises social disintegration, ghettoisation and isolation. They describe the emergence of this literature which focuses on conviviality and everyday negotiations across difference as a 'convivial, everyday turn' (*ibid*.: 316).

Within the literature on conviviality and everyday encounters, there have been a number of studies which emphasise the importance of places where people meet on a more regular basis than in public space, and where more meaningful encounters take place, for example local organisations, voluntary groups, or sports clubs. These more regular encounters are described as having a positive impact on people's attitudes towards each other. Amin (2002: 989) calls such places micro-publics where 'prosaic negotiations' between people of different backgrounds take place, and he lists places such as communal gardens, community centres, child care facilities, and youth projects. Sandercock similarly describes such 'successful sites of intercultural interaction', where people can overcome

'feelings of strangeness in the simple process of sharing tasks and comparing ways of doing things' (Sandercock 2003: 94). Greg Noble, who developed the notion of 'unpanicked multiculturalism' (Noble 2009), and Amanda Wise with her descriptions of everyday multiculturalism (Wise 2009) have similarly described how people negotiate difference in daily encounters in unproblematic ways.

Van Leeuven (2010) questions the calls made by urban theorists such as Amin (2002), Sandercock (2003) and Wood and Landry (2007) to enhance social interactions in 'micro-publics' where people actively 'negotiate diversity and difference' (Amin 2002: 971). He describes these approaches as 'interactivist' because they are based on the idea 'that it is necessary to seek contact with "the other", to interact, and in doing so to recognise the relevant cultural and ethnic differences in the process' (van Leeuwen 2010: 637). He uses the example of research undertaken in a car factory in Genk, Belgium, where Schippers and Wildemeersch showed that ethnic diversity did not play a role within the workplace and that it was rarely mentioned. Other differences, for example between men and women, were far more important. Schippers and Wildemeersch described workers' attitudes to diversity as 'mild indifference' (Schippers and Wildemeersch 2007: 170). Van Leeuven raises the important question whether 'indifference to ethnic or cultural differences might be a mode of "dealing with diversity"' (van Leeuwen 2010: 639). My own study in Hackney has similarly shown how other differences can be more important than cultural ones, namely socio-economic, racial and generational ones (Wessendorf 2014a [forthcoming]).

From a very different point of view, Valentine (2008) cautions against generalisations about the positive effects of regular encounters on intercultural understanding. In her research on prejudice, she shows how 'positive encounters with individuals from minority groups do not necessarily change people's opinions about groups as a whole for the better' (Valentine 2008: 332). Valentine criticises the above-mentioned discourses about conviviality and everyday multiculturalism as celebratory by demonstrating the co-existence of daily courtesies in public space and the continuity of privately held prejudiced views. This is also exemplified by Lee (2002) who describes how in the context of relations between Jewish and Korean merchants and their black customers in US cities, 'an individual may have experienced hundreds or even thousands of positive encounters with individuals from out-groups, [but] one negative experience can easily conjure up negative stereotypes that have little do with the situation at hand' (Lee 2002: 185). Valentine (2008) makes the important point that negative attitudes are often related to narratives about victimhood and injustice about the allocation of local resources such as social housing, an issue I discuss further below. She emphasises the importance of contextualising encounters within history, material conditions and relations of power. According to her, contemporary debates about cosmopolitanism and everyday multiculturalism bear the danger of over-estimating 'the potential of everyday encounters to produce social transformations, [and] potentially allow the knotty issue of inequalities to slip out of the debate' (Valentine 2008: 333). In the context of young people of various black and ethnic minority backgrounds in Leicester, Clayton similarly found that the simple 'knowledge of and physical co-presence with those seen as different is no guarantee of progressive relations, particularly for those in fragile economic and social positions' (Clayton 2009: 265). Importantly, social psychologists have long been emphasising that contact only has positive effects under certain conditions such as equal status, the need for cooperation towards a common goal and the legitimisation of contact through institutional support (Allport 1958; Hewstone *et al*. 2007). Clayton, however, points to an important aspect of social life in the city: the co-existence of different social milieus which are not only defined by socio-economic differences, but also by ethnicity, lifestyle and generation.

Social milieus in urban contexts and the role of place

What is the role of the neighbourhood in people's personal social relations? Can we assume that place is important in the social networks people form? It is one of the pitfalls of neighbourhood studies that they assume social connectivity among a neighbourhood's inhabitants. Academic and policy research has long been debating this relationship between place and social relations. One of the assumptions of neighbourhood studies is that 'the neighbourhood fosters the development of social networks through interaction in local public space' (Bridge 2002: 2).

The classic urbanisation studies of Simmel (1995 [1903]) and Tönnies (2005 [1887]) assumed that communal relations would break down with urbanisation and that rather than knowing each other as neighbours, co-workers, friends and kin, urban inhabitants would develop specialised relations and only know each other in one rather than several of these functions. Bridge describes the literature in this field of urbanisation studies as 'decline-of-community' literature (Bridge 2002: 4). It led to various studies which argued that rather than a decline of community, cities saw the formation of tight-knit communities based on neighbourhood networks. The research by members of the Chicago school of sociology who studied 'urban villages' created by ethnic minorities provides examples of this (Gans 1962; Park *et al.* 1968), as do studies of London's East End which documented a vibrant community life among working-class residents (Young and Willmott 1957).[4]

These 'community studies' which limited their focus on place were criticised for not looking at social networks beyond the locality. From the 1950s, social network analysts started looking at social ties which existed both on the neighbourhood level *and* beyond and they showed how neighbourhood could not be equated with 'community' (Mitchell 1969a; Wellman 1979; Kusenbach 2006).[5] The large body of literature on transnationalism and diaspora probably most clearly exemplifies the co-existence of local social relations and transnational networks.[6]

A super-diverse context is thus not only characterised by the co-existence of these different types of social networks among its residents, but also by different roles which the locality plays in individuals' social relations. Albrow shows this in his study on the role of place in Tooting in southwest London, a place where 'geographical mobility is an accepted fact of life' (Albrow 1997: 38).

> ... individuals with very different lifestyles and social networks can live in close proximity without untoward interference with each other. There is an old community for some, for others there is a new site for community which draws its culture from India. For some, Tooting is a setting for peer group leisure activity, for others it provides a place to sleep and access to London. It can be a spectacle for some, for others the anticipation of a better, more multicultural community (Albrow 1997: 51).

In order to capture these different life-worlds and the various ways in which individuals engage with the local, Albrow develops the notion of 'socio-spheres' to refer to social groupings which leave 'open whether older categories like family, community, friendship or newer ones like partnership, enclave and lifestyle group apply to these formations' (Albrow 1997: 51–52). Dürrschmidt uses the

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[4] But see Cornwell (1984) for a critical account of 'community life' in London's East End.
[5] For overviews of the literature on 'neighbourhood as community' versus social network approaches see Bridge (2002), Blokland (2003b) and Kusenbach (2006).
[6] For one of the most comprehensive reviews on transnationalism see Vertovec (2009).

notion of 'extended social milieus' to conceptualise the ways in which 'the individual's familiar field of action and experience can no longer automatically find situatedness in the constancy of the social and material environment of the locale' (Dürrschmidt 2000: 3). And, more specifically referring to transnational relations, but also including those who do not directly engage in cross-border activities, Levitt and Glick Schiller (2004) conceptualise such relations beyond the local with the idea of 'transnational social fields'.

What is important for studies on social relations in urban contexts is that many individuals are members of both types of social groupings, those within the neighbourhood and those that go beyond. While the social relations formed in the neighbourhood are often more casual, for example based on encounters in public or associational space, it is the more personal, closer social relations which often go beyond the local. These private relations can be based on shared ethnic or socio-economic backgrounds, but also on shared interests and lifestyles. To refer to these closer social ties, the concept of 'social milieus' is particularly useful. It refers to collectivities based on shared values and attitudes towards life, shared aspirations and ways of carrying oneself. A social milieu can, for example, be a group of youngsters with the same fashion and music taste, or people with the same political orientation and similar lifestyles. Importantly, social milieus often include people who are unknown to each other; they are thus more widely defined than social networks. Furthermore, they can be local but also go beyond the locality (Wessendorf 2013b). The concept of social milieu is useful because it does not just refer to chosen social affiliations, but includes historically developed patterns of socialisation and experience which are directly related to the development of a shared value system. They are thus defined both objectively through the correlation of relationships of, for example, the family, the professional group, political affiliations or religious association, *and* subjectively through the development of a shared value system and the internalisation of a shared habitus (Bourdieu 1977; Vester 2006). Bourdieu's concept of the habitus refers to a system of dispositions which consist of acquired schemes of perception and practices. It 'derives from the thoughtlessness of habit and habituation, rather than consciously learned rules and principles' (Jenkins 1992: 76).[7]

The notion of social milieus helps us to move away from the assumption that social categories like ethnicity, religion or socio-economic background are the binding field of people's private social relations, while at the same time leaving open the possibility that these categories *can* be the primary criteria for social relations. Thus, while some people relate to each other on the basis of, for example, shared ethnicity and history of migration, others build social relations on the basis of shared interests (Wessendorf 2013b). The term 'social milieus' does not deny the possibility that for some people, their categorical background (ethnic, religious, national, etc.) forms the primary criterion for social relations, but it includes the fact that for others, it is other commonalities based on which they create their personal social relations. This closely relates to Anthony Cohen's criticism of describing individuals solely on the basis of social categories without questioning the relationships between group and individual (Cohen 1994).

In a super-diverse context, the kinds of social milieus that can be found are particularly complex and cannot be defined along the more classical lines of milieu theory which identified milieus according

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[7] For a detailed description of the sociological analysis of social milieus, which originally primarily drew on milieus emerging from social stratification and professional groups, see Vester (2006).

to historically arising groups based on social stratification and class hierarchies (e.g. the working-class milieu, or the milieu of the educated bourgeoisie) (Vester 2006). Rather, a super-diverse context is characterised by a variety of social groupings with different histories of stratification, education, religious affiliations, etc. For example, among first-generation Turkish immigrants in Hackney, there are various social milieus which are differentiated by educational background, religious and political affiliation. Some of the first generation Turks have built alliances with Kurds on the basis of their political orientation and have thus formed a social milieu which crosses ethnic origin. Similarly, the children of migrants of Afro-Caribbean and African origin have formed their own social milieu defined by their interest in hip-hop culture and shared experiences of racism (Back 1996; Warikoo 2011; Wessendorf 2014a [forthcoming]).

Regarding these social milieus and private relations within such milieus, social, ethnic and racial backgrounds can continue to play a crucial role, but other factors such as generation and length of residence are important, too.

While many people have private social relations which go beyond the neighbourhood, the existence of a large number of social milieus in urban neighbourhoods sometimes enables residents to develop a sense of belonging because they can find their own 'niche' of like-minded people. Thus, super-diversity does not necessarily have an alienating effect on local residents, but rather, it leads to choices of affiliation (Wessendorf 2014a [forthcoming]).

Contested diversity

Does the existence of commonplace diversity mean that social relations are generally positive? Research on diversity and cohesion tends to focus on possible tensions arising from immigration-related diversity, and how people of different cultural backgrounds negotiate potentially contentious cultural difference (e.g. Sanjek 1998; Lee 2002; Blokland 2003a). The perspective on neighbourhood relations through the lens of super-diversity, which takes into account not only cultural differentiations but all kinds of other categorical differences, helps us to move away from these assumptions and include these other differences as relevant categories of affiliation, differentiation and possible tensions. In a super-diverse context, but in fact also in any other context of immigration-related diversity, we could ask the question: why should there be tensions along ethnic and religious lines at all?

Tensions in a super-diverse context are as challenging to elicit as social relations. Despite the primarily positive views of diversity among many people in Hackney, and despite relatively positive relations between people of different ethnic, religious, national and socio-economic backgrounds, stereotyping, prejudice and tensions do exist. However, in line with the complexity of the population set-up, such stereotyping goes beyond simple dichotomies between ethnic majority and minority groups, but is much more complex. During my fieldwork and in conversations with numerous local residents, it emerged that stereotyping and prejudice arise between people of different class backgrounds, such as white British working-class and middle-class people; between groups who migrated at different times, such as West Indians and Africans; within groups of people of the same national background who bring their differences with them from their home countries, such as North Vietnamese and South Vietnamese or Kurds and Turks; between migrants of the same national

background who have obtained indefinite leave to remain and those who have not; between people from the same geographical regions, such as Nigerians and Ghanaians or Poles and Romanians; between people of different religious convictions, even within the same religion, such as liberal Jews and strictly Orthodox Jews, and between African Pentecostalists and gay people of various national origins.

In a super-diverse context, patterns of prejudice, the underlying reasons for them and the social practices resulting from them are complex to a degree that only in-depth ethnographies of specific groups within this context would be able to elicit. I have found that despite the existence of such prejudices, people manage to go beyond them in their day-to-day lives out of simple necessity. They do not have the choice not to get along with people who are different, even if only on a superficial level.

However, there are instances where differences do become an issue of contestation, and these primarily relate to issues surrounding cleanliness and order, and the competition for resources such as housing, jobs and education. This has been shown in various studies across Europe and North America (Jones-Correa 2001; Blokland 2003a; Mumford and Power 2003; Wimmer 2004; Dench *et al*. 2006; Hudson *et al*. 2007).

In their study on two multi-ethnic neighbourhoods in Manchester and North London, Hudson *et al*. (2007) show that resentment about the allocation of housing not only existed among long established white British people, but also among Caribbean people who had been living in the areas for a long time and felt that 'newly arriving groups were receiving more favourable treatment from local service providers than others' (Hudson *et al*. 2007: 110). In Hackney, such resentment about the perceived unfairness of housing allocation exists, too, and it is felt towards newcomers broadly defined, rather than a specific group. This is also due to the absence of the kind of housing segregation seen in other areas of the UK like Bradford, Oldham or Tower Hamlets. In these areas, a combination of factors led to tensions. These included the large-scale immigration of specific groups (namely Bangladeshis and Pakistanis), the tendency of migrants to live in close proximity because of racism, the out-migration of white residents, and mass unemployment resulting from the closing down of large-scale industries such as the textile industry in the northern towns and the docks in East London (Kundnani 2001; Amin 2002; Dench *et al*. 2006). In places like Tower Hamlets, this was coupled with the allocation of housing according to need. Because many immigrants had larger families than the long-term white British residents, they had better access to social housing, which led to resentment among the white British population in the area, an issue observed in other areas of London, too (Dench *et al.* 2006; Muir 2008).[8]

Hewitt shows how a similar discourse of resentment emerged among white working-class residents in Greenwich, South London, after the racist murder of Stephen Lawrence in the 1980s. These residents rejected the public interpretations of the murder as racist and expressed frustration about the dominant public discourse of multiculturalism which they did not feel part of and which, in their view, favoured ethnic minorities while ignoring white concerns (Hewitt 2005). Bloch and Dreher have found similar resentments among white Anglo-Celtic residents in a southern Sydney neighbourhood

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[8] See CRE [Commission for Racial Equality] (1984), Solomos and Singh (1990) and Back (1996) on racist practices in housing allocation, including Hackney.

who felt victimised by Muslim immigrants whom they perceived to have 'usurped a cultural-political space in the nation or the neighbourhood, at their expense' (Bloch and Dreher 2009: 200).

Sandercock discusses how the cultural dynamics in these neighbourhoods are 'very different from those in other ethnically mixed cities and neighbourhoods where greater social and physical mobility, a local history of compromises, and a supportive local institutional infrastructure have come to support cohabitation' (Sandercock 2003: 92). She ascribes this to the absence of a 'traditional concept of community based on a shared local culture'. This traditional concept of community is often related to a nostalgic discourse of the loss of a presumably coherent local community characterised by close relations between kin and neighbours (Young and Willmott 1957; Back 1996; Dench *et al*. 2006).[9] With the example of Bethnal Green (Tower Hamlets) in East London, Cornwell (1984) describes the mechanism by which this discourse has emerged. She shows how the idea of a cohesive local community had its origin in the patriotic post-war propaganda of the Home Front, which created an image of cohesion, harmony and cooperation among people who worked together to deal with the destruction of their streets. She also illustrates how Young and Willmott, sociologists from the former Institute of Community Studies, reconfirmed this image and how it became part of the local imagination and discourse. According to her, this idea of community represented 'a mythical ideal of social life which has more to do with morality sentiment and politics than it has to do with historical realities' (Cornwell 1984: 24). She describes this discourse as romantic and one-sided, because it did not address the more difficult aspects of living in poverty and in close-knit communities, such as the degree of social control, domestic violence and turning a blind eye to other people's troubles. She shows how the notion of community within these studies is based on ideas of sameness which implies the exclusion of those who are different (Cornwell 1984). Cornwell's study is important because it contextualises inter-group tensions within both local historical narratives as well as influences of sociological research.

The examples of Tower Hamlets, Greenwich and the northern towns show that tensions between ethnic groups arise out of a history of competition over resources, disadvantage, racism, and the creation of a discourse of who belongs and who does not. These references to the past are very different in Hackney, at least among its current residents, who see the community of the past as already ethnically diverse, even if not yet characterised by today's high number of different groups.[10] Thus, in a super-diverse area like Hackney with a long history of diversification, there is no expectation of community based on a shared local past. This has also been confirmed by Watson with the example of one of Hackney's street markets, Ridley Road Market, where the historicity of ethnic diversity in the market did not lead to nostalgic discourses about a less diverse past (Watson 2009). This does not mean that resentment against newcomers does not exist among long-established residents. According to one of the local councillors I interviewed, these resentments are usually linked to the allocation of housing, and they are not aimed at specific groups. But if people do bring up a narrative about newcomers, it is one in which both the long-established residents as well as the newcomers are imagined as diversified groups which are not defined along clear ethnic lines. For example, both white British people as well as members of ethnic minorities complain when newcomers such as students and Hipsters do not stick to rules of public orderliness, such as with

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[9] See also Blokland (2003) for a Dutch example of such nostalgic discourses of a more cohesive local past among working-class residents in a Rotterdam neighbourhood.

[10] It is possible, however, that people who would express a nostalgic discourse of a different, more homogeneous past have either moved out of the area or died.

regard to rubbish (Wessendorf 2013a). In other words, tensions with people in the area are rarely put down to their ethnic, national or religious origins. Furthermore, the dichotomy between long-established residents and newcomers found in studies such as Elias and Scotson (1994) and Dench *et al.* (2006) does not fit with the complex picture of super-diverse areas where a division between 'locals' and 'non-locals' cannot be identified clearly. This confirms Savage *et al.*'s important claim that 'it is the perceptions and values of incoming migrant groups, which more powerfully establish dominant place identities and attachments' (Savage *et al.* 2005: 29). They criticise the view of many post-war community studies that 'places are characterised by tension between "born and bred" locals and migrant incomers' (*ibid*. 2005: 28). As I show elsewhere, both a long-established group such as the strictly Orthodox Jews, *as well as* a new group such as the Hipsters, are seen as outsiders in Hackney. These perceptions are grounded in patterns of interaction and the way in which these groups are seen to claim and use public space, rather than in claims that they do not form part of a shared past (Wessendorf 2013a, 2014 [forthcoming]).

Issues surrounding the use of public space become particularly relevant in relation to the one group in Hackney which is most stigmatised and which is perceived to threaten the public order: young black people.

Race and generation

The riots in August 2011 across cities in the UK, including Hackney, brought up some of the main social tensions in Hackney: poverty, deprivation, tensions between black youngsters and the police, and what was also described as the 'moral decline' of today's youth. Although after the riots, many people and the media emphasised that not only black youngsters were involved, black people themselves interpreted them along racial lines, pointing to institutionalised racism and frustration with the police as well as limited prospects in terms of jobs and future careers as reasons why black youth rioted. While the riots represented an extreme form of threat to public order, they only reconfirmed the already existing social tensions in Hackney: fear of crime and the perception that it was mainly black youngsters who committed such crime.

Already before the riots, gang crime and the use of weapons such as knives and guns overshadowed other possible tensions and conflicts in the borough, and many people in Hackney defined gang violence as the borough's main problem. People involved in these crimes are predominantly from disadvantaged backgrounds, they are young, male and mostly black, although there have been incidents between Turkish gangs, too. This, of course, leads to much stereotyping of black youngsters being up to no good, an issue which is not unique to Hackney but also exists in other London boroughs (Keith 1993; Hewitt 2005). However, when asking people about their social relations and life in Hackney, these issues seemed to be much more important than the fact that Hackney is super-diverse. While diversity is generally interpreted as something positive, one fragment of this picture of good diversity does not fit in, namely black youngsters.

In his article on 'intercultural citizenship', van Leeuwen develops the notion of 'side-by-side citizenship' which encompasses a 'mild indifference towards' diversity, where 'cultural otherness ... simply gets integrated into daily routines and a shared background understanding' (van Leeuwen 2010: 648). According to van Leeuwen, such an 'ethos of relaxed indifference is only possible if one

actually lives in the midst of a visible diversity of lifestyles and ethnocultural variety' (*ibid*.). He identifies three requirements which enable side-by-side citizenship: anonymity, diversity and safety:

> Diversity on the city streets can only be enjoyed, or taken for granted in a casual kind of way, if it is accompanied by the sense that the streets are safe. How could anybody be relaxed about difference, while perceiving it as a direct threat? (van Leeuwen 2010: 648)

In Hackney, the acceptance (and sometimes appreciation) of diversity is somewhat fractured by the presence of a group which is perceived to threaten the public order: black youngsters, especially those who wear hoodies and track suits. Other studies have shown the long history of the discursive, perceptual but also actual exclusion of this group (Keith 1993; Hall 1999; Hewitt 2005). In the case of Hackney, not only the social disadvantage and exclusion of many black youngsters, but also the perceived threat they pose to public safety, oddly coincide with the positive public discourse surrounding diversity (Wessendorf 2014a [forthcoming]). It also represents the co-existence of positive attitudes towards diversity more generally, and stereotypes against specific groups, as well as the existence of separate life-worlds where the lives of black youngsters and their social milieus do not overlap with those of the rest of the population.

The scale of the problem of gang violence, gun and knife crime also somewhat dwarfs issues surrounding cultural diversity. In other words, commonplace diversity also exists in relation to the real problem of crime and disadvantage in the area, and the exclusion of black youth as 'the other'. In her study on 'Visceral cosmopolitanism' in London, Nava describes the parallel existence of 'hospitable engagement with people from elsewhere', and xenophobia and anti-immigrant feeling (Nava 2007: 13). In Hackney, it is not the chasm between locals and immigrants which is the main issue, but the continuity of divisions between black youngsters and the rest.

Bloch and Dreher give an interesting example of this parallel existence of everyday multiculturalism and everyday prejudices. In an area in southern Sydney, they found that local residents saw cultural diversity 'as an asset, and most people consulted described positive experiences of multiculturalism' (Bloch and Dreher 2009: 197). At the same time, Arab and Muslim Australians were seen as an exception to this positive picture of diversity, and they were perceived to threaten harmonious relations. Especially elderly Anglo-Celtic residents expressed anxiety about this group taking over certain public spaces (Bloch and Dreher 2009). In Hackney, black youth are similarly stigmatised and perceived to threaten positive relations in public space, but these feelings are expressed by people of various backgrounds, including the parental generation of these youngsters. Furthermore, while Bloch and Dreher found that anti-Muslim feelings were based on resentment, on the basis that they were seen to 'receive more attention from the state, at the expense of the Anglo "silent majority"' (Bloch and Dreher 2009: 199), prejudice against black youth is primarily based on generalised ideas that they are involved in crime and threaten public safety. Both examples show, however, that difference becomes relevant when it is related to perceived threats in public space.

The examples of both Sydney and Hackney confirm Hall's notion of the 'multicultural drift', where cultural diversity is increasingly accepted as a normal part of today's urban societies, while racism continues to exist in relation to specific minority groups (Hall 1999).

The issue of black youngsters brings to the fore that independent of the degree of cultural diversity and positive relations between individuals of different backgrounds, continuities of inequality and

disadvantage, coupled with racism, continue to be at the centre stage of local tensions. While narratives of conviviality and positive relations between people of different cultural backgrounds are important in countering a public and political discourse which assumes tensions on the grounds of cultural difference, it is equally important not to lose sight of these deeply rooted issues surrounding power relations and inequality.

Conclusion

Do people 'hunker down' (Putnam 2007: 149) in the face of super-diversity? Do they lead segregated lives, as claimed in much public and political debate ever since the riots in northern English mill towns in 2001, the terrorist attacks of 9/11 and the bombings in London in July 2005? Do any of these public discourses of separation, segregation and parallel lives reflect the realities of super-diverse contexts? The British cohesion and integration discourse tends to see ethnic and religious diversity as a challenge and portrays the enhancement of positive relationships between people of different backgrounds as one of the solutions (Cantle 2001; Commission on Integration and Cohesion (CIC) 2007; Communities and Local Government (CLG) 2012). This approach has been criticised for its tendency to place the responsibility for mixing and interaction primarily on migrants and ethnic minorities (Phillips 2006; Hickman *et al*. 2012; Bloch *et al*. 2013). Parallel to this dominant public and policy discourse has been an emerging literature which has described how in many local contexts, people already successfully negotiate ethnic and religious diversity. These new approaches have also been described as 'everyday multiculture approaches' (Neal *et al.* 2013: 315). They show that, although processes of migration and ethnicity are complex, they are also 'more ordinary and liveable than anything one might infer from the high octane, headline representations of the political and media arena' (Rampton 2013: 9). These studies show the everyday competencies people develop in dealing with diversity, and that many people are fairly capable in navigating a superdiverse context, 'bringing intelligible order to their circumstances' (Rampton 2013: 9). Important in all of these studies on urban encounters is that they point to a phenomenon I have described as 'commonplace diversity', the fact that on the ground and in the context of everyday lived diversity, multiple differentiations regarding cultural, religious or linguistic differences are not perceived as something particularly unusual. Wise (2013: 39) describes a process where, 'living daily with diverse others, people often acquire quite subconsciously a kind of intercultural habitus'. She describes how 'in some circumstances rather than obvious modes of intercultural competence and outward forms of cross-cultural recognition taking place, what evolves is something more like difference blending into a kind of taken for granted wallpaper' (*ibid*.). In other words, people get used to multiple kinds of differences. Tonkiss (2003: 300) talks about how 'differences go unremarked because unremarkable', and 'otherness is ordinary'. She states that in this sense, indifference is one way 'in which differences are lived in everyday social spaces'.

Drawing on Tonkiss's (2003) notion of 'minimal ethics', van Leeuwen (2010: 641–642) describes how this ethics 'involves a relaxed attitude with respect to social diversity or eccentricity', contributing to 'a widening of the range, of the bandwidth, of acceptable social, cultural and ethnic difference'. This relaxed attitude regarding social diversity has also been shown in quantitative social psychological studies. For example, Hewstone *et al*. (2007: 108) state that 'it is a well-established fact that the potential for intergroup conflict may be reduced in societies that are more complex and differentiated along multiple dimensions that are not perfectly correlated, rather than being split

along one central, typically ethnic or religious, fault line'. In other words, conditions of super-diversity can reduce 'the potential for polarising loyalties along any single group distinction', thereby increasing 'tolerance for outgroups in general' (*ibid*.).

It is important, however, to acknowledge that the dominance of positive encounters across difference do not preclude negative attitudes towards specific groups, including racism and xenophobia. A broad range of literature has shown how everyday racism and positive relations can coexist (Wise 2005; Valentine 2008; Noble 2011). I have exemplified the continuing role which racism plays in relation to black youngsters who continue to be among the most disadvantaged in the area and who are subject to much stereotyping and harassment by the police. At the same time, however, racism is also expressed in more complex ways in the context of super-diversity, where, for example, a Turkish newcomer can be treated in a xenophobic way by a long-established resident of Caribbean background. However, the accounts of my informants of many different backgrounds, as well as many years of participant observation in the area, have revealed that racism and xenophobia have little bearing on everyday social relations in Hackney.

Research into diversity and, more recently, super-diversity has proliferated in recent years. This resulted not only from increased interest in the issue across the social sciences, but also from new and unprecedented demographic developments with an increasing number of urban (and rural) areas characterised by super-diversity. In this paper, I have reviewed the burgeoning literature looking at social relations in such contexts. As social scientists, we are still groping for expressions to capture the phenomena emerging from diversification, and we are looking for better ways to understand new negotiations of difference in everyday practices in such contexts. Terms such as 'multiculture', 'super-diversity' and 'commonplace diversity' exemplify this. The lively academic debates on these issues presented in this paper show that there is still much research to be done in this area. Questions about the reasons why diversity works in some areas, for example places like Hackney with a long history of diversification, as opposed to others which might have experienced more sudden diversification, are still unclear. Also, there is a need to explore whether places which experience diversification first experience tensions, before diversity gets incorporated and becomes commonplace. In other words, how long does it take for diversity to become commonplace? These are just some of the questions which need to be addressed by further research across the social sciences and in specific neighbourhoods (Robinson and Walshaw 2012). The body of literature presented in this paper and the questions raised by this burgeoning field show that interest in diversity is certainly not going to disappear and that urban places are likely to become more complex rather than less. Super-diversity is thus here to stay, and it is an exciting and important task to observe and describe evolving patterns of social life in such contexts.

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