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Commonplace Diversity and the 'Ethos of mixing': Perceptions of Difference in a

London Neighbourhood

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Abstract

The London Borough of Hackney is one of the most diverse places in Britain. It is characterised

by a multiplicity of ethnic minorities, different migration histories, religions, educational and

economic backgrounds both among long-term residents and newcomers. This paper describes

attitudes towards diversity in such a 'super-diverse' context. It develops the notion of

'commonplace diversity', referring to cultural diversity being experienced as a normal part of

social life. While many people mix across cultural differences in public and associational space,

this is rarely translated into private relations. However, this is not perceived as a problem, as long

as people adhere to a tacit 'ethos of mixing'. This comes to the fore in relation to groups who are

blamed to 'not want to mix' in public and associational space. The paper discusses the fine

balance between acceptable and unacceptable social divisions in relation to specific groups who

are seen to lead separate lives.

Introduction

The London Borough of Hackney is one of Britain's most diverse areas. Hackney's diversity is

characterised not only by a multiplicity of different migrant minorities, but also by differentiations in

terms of migration histories, educational backgrounds, legal statuses, length of residence and

economic backgrounds, both among ethnic minorities and migrants as well as the white British

population, many of whom have moved to Hackney from elsewhere. This is what Vertovec (2007b) defines as 'super-diversity'.

This paper describes attitudes towards diversity in such a super-diverse context. It develops the notion of 'commonplace diversity', referring to ethnic, religious and linguistic diversity being experienced as a normal part of social life and not as something particularly special. In this context of commonplace diversity, attitudes towards diversity are generally positive. However, positive attitudes towards diversity are accompanied by little understanding for groups who are perceived as 'not wanting to mix', a phrase repeatedly used by my informants. This paper develops the idea of an 'ethos of mixing' among Hackney's residents, in referring to the expectation that in public and associational spaces, people 'should mix' and interact with their fellow residents of other backgrounds. It describes the tensions that arise when groups of people do not adhere to this 'ethos of mixing'. Examples, which were mentioned most often during my research, are strictly Orthodox Jews and so-called 'Hipsters', young, mostly middle-class people who emphasise fashion and style and have only recently moved into the area. I contrast these two groups with Turkish-speakers and Vietnamese people, many of whom, especially among first-generation migrants, also do not have much contact with people from outside their group, but are not perceived to break the ethos of mixing. The paper shows how crucial participation in public, institutional and associational life is in the shaping of attitudes. Importantly, the belief that people should mix in these spaces is paralleled by the acceptance of more separate lives regarding private relations, as well as limited knowledge about other people's life worlds. Thus, the 'ethos of mixing' does not go beyond simple expectations of interaction, and is more limited than notions of cosmopolitanism which involve taking deeper interest in other people's life worlds (Hannerz 1992; Appiah 2010). The 'ethos of mixing' could also be described as an implicit grammar of living in a super-diverse area, shaped by a public and political discourse which emphasises the positive aspects of cultural diversity.

In this paper, I take an approach also criticised as 'groupist' (Brubaker 2004) by looking at specific groups. However, super-diversity in Hackney is also characterised by an increasingly 'mixed'

population (Meyhew 2011) and high degrees of cultural synthesis through, for example, intermarriage and cultural appropriation, an issue I discuss elsewhere (Wessendorf, forthcoming).

The paper draws on 18 months of ethnographic fieldwork in the London Borough of Hackney. The fieldwork included participant observation, for example in a weekly knitting group of elderly women, a youth club on an estate, a parents' group in a primary school, and an IT class for over 50s. All these groups were ethnically and socially mixed. Fieldwork also included participant observation in public spaces such as shops, parks and markets, as well as 28 in-depth interviews with local residents and key people such as councillors, teachers and social workers, and three focus groups. The people interviewed were of various ethnic and social backgrounds, including people of different age groups and legal statuses. At the time of the research, I had been living in Hackney for about four years already. As a local resident and mother, I was and continue to be participating in playgroups and other children-related activities, which has enabled me to deepen my understandings of informal social relations in public and associational space and to have numerous informal conversations with parents of various backgrounds.

I first present current debates about the role of contact and interaction in diverse neighbourhoods, followed by the introduction of the Borough of Hackney and a description of how, in the context of immigration over several decades, diversity has become commonplace. I then describe how in the view of local people, the positive aspects of cultural diversity are being undermined when it comes to groups who are seen to lead separate lives, such as strictly Orthodox Jews and Hipsters. With the example of Turkish-speakers and Vietnamese people, I then discuss the importance of participation in local associations, the local economy and public institutions regarding perceptions and attitudes. The paper concludes by arguing that opportunities for contact are not only important in shaping people's attitudes towards each other more generally, but that they enable people to change their views over time and thus reduce entrenched views about others.

The role of encounters

The 2001 riots in Northern English towns triggered major criticism of multiculturalism policies which were blamed for enhancing separate 'communities' and hinder interaction between groups (Amin

2005, Vertovec and Wessendorf 2010). This criticism resulted in rising policy concerns about 'community cohesion' and 'parallel lives' (Cantle 2001), accompanied by calls for the need to encourage the development of sustained and positive interactions 'around shared activities and common issues' (CIC 2007, p.23). This policy shift led to specific interest in 'local communities', because it is neighbourhoods that positive inter-ethnic and inter-faith relations and public participation can be fostered. Since then, an increasing body of literature has discussed the role of contact in enhancing 'intergroup relations'. For example, social psychological quantitative studies have found that the presence of high numbers of 'out-group members' in a neighbourhood can be perceived as a threat, especially if opportunity for contact is not being taken up. But positive contact with outgroup members contributes to improved relations (Hewstone et al. 2007). The policy shift has also been reflected in qualitative research on neighbourhoods, with a number of studies specifically looking at multi-group contexts, showing the existence of both separate lives and social interaction (Blokland 2003, Ray *et al.* 2008, SHM 2007).[i]

While this paper is situated within this field of neighbourhood studies, focussing on relations between people of different backgrounds and patterns of 'everyday multiculturalism' (Noble 2009, Wise and Velayutham 2010), it mainly looks at *attitudes* and *perceptions*. It shows how attitudes towards diversity are shaped by a public discourse that positively celebrates diversity, but also by the way in which groups participate in public and associational space. I thereby define public space broadly in the classical sense of streets, parks, shops and restaurants, but also include places where people meet more regularly such as associations and clubs. Academics and policy makers have paid increasing attention to the role of such places within neighbourhoods where people of different backgrounds meet, like markets, parks, sports clubs, schools, community festivals, trade unions or business associations, and the role of the quality and regularity in which people interact across difference (Amin 2002, Dines *et al.* 2006, Hudson *et al.* 2007). For example, Amin stresses the need for more regular and sustained encounters, emphasising that 'habitual contact' in itself does not necessarily lead to cultural exchange, but that it can 'entrench group animosities and identities, through repetitions of gender, class, race, and ethnic practices' (Amin 2002, p.969). Similarly,

Sandercock (2003, p.89), shows how peaceful co-existence requires 'something like daily habits of perhaps quite banal intercultural interaction in order to establish a basis for dialogue'. Others claim that even fleeting encounters in public space shape attitudes towards others (Boyd 2006, Vertovec 2007a).

Valentine cautions against generalisations about the positive effects of regular encounters on intercultural understandings and 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). She criticises 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. Others similarly show how stereotypes and racism towards difference can co-exist with daily interactions in multicultural neighbourhoods (Wise 2005, Watson 2006, Noble 2011, Wilson 2013 (forthcoming)).

The material presented here shows that encounters in public and associational space do not necessarily enhance deeper intercultural understanding, but that the *absence* of such encounters can enhance prejudice. Especially regular encounters in social spaces such as community organisations, but also corner shops or even just the school gates play an important role in the process of familiarisation with people who are different and in getting accustomed to communicating across difference. For example, the elderly members of a knitting group where I undertook fieldwork were very much at ease with communicating across language barriers, exemplified by their playful and inclusionary way in which they welcomed a Spanish-speaking woman who knew very little English. A weekly parents group at a primary school presents an example of the reduction of prejudice. The teacher who leads the group organised a cooking class for Turkish speakers and women of Caribbean background in order to break down prejudice which some of the Turkish mothers held against Caribbean people because of gang violence in their area dominated by black male youngsters. The Turkish-speaking women had a much more differentiated view of the Caribbean mothers after the class than before.

While my research has shown that mixing in public and associational space is often paralleled by more separate lives when it comes to private relations, many residents think that mixing across cultural differences in public and associational spaces is an integral part of living in Hackney (Wessendorf 2010, Wessendorf, forthcoming).

Hackney's history of diversification and the emergence of commonplace diversity

If there is a general characteristic to describe Hackney, it is the continuity of population change over the past half century. With its population of 247,182, Hackney figures among the 10% most deprived areas in the UK, but it is currently seeing the arrival of an increasing number of middle-class professionals.[ii] It is also one of the most ethnically diverse boroughs in Britain, with only 36.2% of the population being white British. Jewish people have been settling in Hackney since the second half of the 17th century, and since the 1950s, sizeable groups of immigrants from West Africa, the Caribbean and South Asia have arrived. Turkish, Kurdish and Turkish Cypriot people started arriving in the area in the 1970s, both as labour migrants and political refugees (Arakelian 2007). Vietnamese refugees arrived in the late 1970s (Sims 2007). Among the biggest minority groups are Africans (11.4%), people of Caribbean background (7.8%), South Asians (6.4%), Turkish-speaking people (5.5%), Chinese (1.4%) and 'other Asian' (2.7% , many of whom come from Vietnam). 35.5 % of Hackney's total population are foreign-born, and they come from 58 different countries, ranging from Zimbabwe, Cyprus, Somalia, Iraq, Albania to Denmark, Germany, etc. Recently, there has been an increase in people from Eastern Europe, especially Poland (City and Hackney 2008).

Hackney's history of population change has resulted in what appears to be a great acceptance of diversity. The Hackney Place Survey 2008/2009 shows that almost four out of five residents in Hackney think that people from different backgrounds get on well together (78%). The positive attitudes towards diversity are not only reflected in a general acceptance of diversity, but also in diversity not being seen as something particularly unusual. For example, during my fieldwork in local associations, I noticed that newcomers are not usually asked about their origins, even if they look different or speak with an accent. When I asked whether I could do part of my fieldwork at a computer club for elderly people, the teacher of the club welcomed me there, but also told me that

despite his students' various backgrounds, diversity was not an issue in any of their conversations. They show little interest in each other's origins because everybody comes from elsewhere and it is therefore not a particularly special topic to talk about. In other words, diversity is so normal among the students that it has become somewhat banal. This normalcy of diversity is what I conceptualise as 'commonplace diversity'. It confirms Mica Nava's argument that the familiarity between groups, resulting from residential mixing, has 'shifted the axis of belonging in much of contemporary London' (Nava 2007, p.14). In his research in North London (including Hackney), Devadason (2010) has similarly shown that skin-colour no longer marks insider or outsider status. In Hackney, this also applies to dress code and language. However, notions of commonplace diversity do not mean that people's origins are unnoticed. Differences of origin, language, religion, etc. are acknowledged, for example by way of describing others according to their perceived ethnicity or national background, but they are rarely talked about.

Importantly, and as mentioned in the previous section, commonplace diversity can be paralleled by racism and tensions. Noble cautions that conviviality in diverse localities, produced through shared practices, does not preclude the existence of racism and conflict. He emphasizes that 'people are capable of acting in both cosmopolitan and racist ways at different moments, in different contexts'(Noble 2011:158). This has also been exemplified by Wise among Anglo-Celtic residents and Chinese newcomers in an Australian suburb, where resentment against increasing numbers of Chinese shops was paralleled by friendly neighbourly relations with the newcomers, which Wise describes as 'hopeful intercultural encounters' (Wise 2005:172). Thus, everyday multiculturalism can also be accompanied by everyday racism (Noble 2009). In the case of Hackney, commonplace diversity is put into question when differences come to the fore in regard to groups whose members are seen to not participate in the wider society.

The ethos of mixing

Sometimes, the ethos of mixing is being undermined when specific groups are seen to lead separate lives. Examples which were mentioned most often during my research are strictly Orthodox Jews and so-called 'Hipsters'. Strictly Orthodox Jews and Hipsters could not be more different in their

characteristics. The former are a long established group in Hackney, the group's members have been born into the group, and it is defined by strict religious rules that accompany its members throughout their lives. The latter are a new phenomenon in the area. It is a social milieu to which individuals choose to belong at a certain point in their life, and as a phenomenon of a certain age group, it is inherently transient. While strictly Orthodox Jews are characterised by continuity and tradition, Hipsters are part of a trendy, transient and fashionable life-style phenomenon. This paper is not about the actual characteristics of these groups, but about how they are *perceived* by local residents. With 'local residents', I refer to people of various ethnic, religious and class backgrounds who live in the area and who have participated in my research.

Perceptions about Strictly Orthodox Jews

The strictly Orthodox Jewish community is estimated to make up 7.4% of Hackney's population, numbering about 17,500 (Mayhew *et al.* 2011). They mostly live in the northern part of Hackney in Stamford Hill, but use public services and shops in other areas of the borough, too.[iii] Strictly Orthodox Jews are visibly different, wearing traditional clothes of black suits, black hats, beards and twisted side locks for men, and modest long-sleeved and long-hemmed garments for women, some of whom also cover their hair with a hat, bandana or wig. Strictly Orthodox Jews have their own schools, shops and housing estates and they have strict rules of not mixing with people of other backgrounds (Dein 2001). There are thus very few opportunities of communication across difference. The following example from my fieldwork exemplifies how two residents experience the questioning of the 'ethos of mixing':

> I'm at an indoor playground called Pirate Castle in Stamford Hill with my 2-year old daughter. It is Sunday and very busy. Most families are of Orthodox Jewish background, but there are also one or two East Asian families, a few people of Caribbean or African background and a few white British people. I am sitting at a table on the side. The place is very confined and people literally rub shoulders. A black British couple sit at the table next to mine and offer a Jewish girl some crisps. The girl's mother interferes and says 'no, it's not kosher'. The woman (A) asks her what 'kosher' means, and the Jewish mother explains that 'it's a special way of preparing food, the Jewish way, we only eat kosher

food'. She goes back to play with her daughter and A starts chatting with a white British woman (B) who sits next to her. They have a conversation about kosher food and what it means. Although I cannot hear every word they say, they seem to have an engaging but non-judgemental conversation about it. At the next table sits an Orthodox Jewish man in traditional clothes. A, the white British woman, asks him 'excuse me, what do your side locks mean?' The man does not respond, but holds up his hand, palm facing towards her, indicating that he either does not understand or does not want to talk, shaking his head. She asks him again, but he shakes his head and wards her off with his hand. B says to A: 'forget it, he won't talk to you, he won't explain it'. Her companion gets annoyed: 'why, I am just asking out of curiosity, I just want to know about his religious tradition, why can't he answer me, is it a secret society or what?'. They both shake their heads and go 'tsts' (Fieldwork diary, 9. April 2012).

This instance interestingly exemplifies the 'ethos of mixing'. While the two women's attitudes are positive and open while having a conversation with the Jewish woman, they turn negative when communication breaks down with the Jewish man. Although this communication breakdown could be down to issues relating to gender and him not wanting to talk to unknown women (Dein 2001), the two women interpret it as refusal to interact across religious differences. They seem to be accepting of difference while communicating about it with the Jewish woman, but become unaccepting when communication is refused and the 'ethos of mixing' is being undermined.

This was also reflected in my interviews and other informal conversations. For example, my Italian hairdresser, who has worked in the area for about 20 years, says that he gets along with everybody and mentions the local market where he always has a nice chat with the (non-Orthodox) Jewish, African, Caribbean and Pakistani stall holders. He tells me that 'some people don't want to integrate, they stick to themselves, like up in Stamford Hill', referring to the strictly Orthodox Jews. He continues that 'if you are an open person you'll get along with everybody'.[iv]

The 'ethos of mixing' is questioned particularly when it comes to disputes about space. An example is the fight over a pub in Stamford Hill which was bought by 'the Orthodox Jewish community' (*Hackney Gazette*, 19 July 2009), with plans to turn it into a synagogue. This triggered a

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campaign among the pub's clientele. When interviewed by a local journalist, one of the campaigners described his frustration as follows:

> We need to establish that what we had was a genuine community facility that was used by hundreds of people (...). It is to be replaced by something that is going to be used by only a small minority of people (Hackney Gazette 2009, p.7).

Another campaigner, quoted in the *Evening Standard,* emphasised that 'everyone is welcome and among the regular clients are members of all the different communities – white, black, straight, gay, born Londoners and new arrivals' (Clout 2008, p.1). In the view of these pub-goers, the 'ethos of mixing' is being questioned when a previously mixed space is claimed by a group for its own specific purpose. Blokland (2003) describes a similar process in a Rotterdam neighbourhood where long-term Dutch residents felt threatened in their ownership of a public square where Moroccan boys played football. Their 'norms of public practice had been violated and their symbolic ownership of the space challenged'. Similarly, the customers of The Swan in Stamford Hill felt threatened in the ownership of their pub which provided them with a sense of belonging, albeit to a more mixed group than that of the Rotterdam square. In fact, the very mixedness of the group forms part of their identity as 'typical pub customers'. This incident could also be interpreted as a combination of everyday multiculturalism and everyday racism, with negative views being held against Orthodox Jews while celebrating the mixing of people of different backgrounds.

My informants mentioned very similar issues surrounding the dispute over specific places and 'not wanting to mix' in relation to Hipsters.

Perceptions about Hipsters

Hipsters are young, fashionably dressed, mostly middle-class people in their twenties. Many of them are students or work in the design and fashion industries and in media. They have moved into the area during the last five years or so. Because of their style, they form a clearly recognisable group concentrated in certain areas of the borough where pubs have been taken over by new owners who refurbished them, and more and more European-style cafes are opening. The immigration of Hipsters

forms part of a larger movement of gentrification.[v] Hipsters are not unique to Hackney but can be traced back to late 1990s American urban culture (Rayner 2010, p.3).[vi]

Hipsters have become such a visible subculture in some areas of Hackney that a resident has started a blog called *Hackneyhipsterhate* which criticises these youngsters for being inconsiderate, holding loud parties in quiet neighbourhood streets, and not caring about their fellow residents.[vii] The critics, both on the blog and among my informants, accuse Hipsters of committing very little to the local area, not taking much care of their immediate surroundings and leaving litter in the local park which, in the summer, turns into a site that resembles a festival, with hundreds of young 'trendies' hanging out and partying. Especially my informants who have lived in the area for ten or more years describe the pace at which this area has seen an influx of young people who seem to live in their own world as a threat to the social order of the area. The high concentration of them in places like a park, a market and pubs is often experienced as alienating to long-term residents. For example, an elderly white middle-class couple who have lived in the area for over 20 years feel as if they cannot go to the local pub anymore because it has become too young and trendy. Another informant who is in his 40s, of Caribbean origin and who grew up on a local housing estate similarly feels that his local pub has been taken over by 'young, pretty people', emphasising that the pub would not change if it was on social housing estate. He thereby refers to the fact that the new people using the pub are part of gentrification, and he expresses his resentment against this demographic change.

The example of strictly Orthodox Jews and Hipsters shows that in a super-diverse context, difference can be contested when groups are perceived as disengaged from the society around them. In the following sections, I show that it is not just social segregation which is seen as a problem, but the coming together of various factors: use of public space, competition over such space and social segregation.

Live and let live: Turkish-speakers and Vietnamese

Turkish speakers and Vietnamese people are among the more established ethnic minorities in Hackney in terms of their length of residence. I have chosen these two groups to exemplify the

attitudes of 'live and let live', referring to the acceptance of groups who primarily socialise with members of their own group. They form a good example because they are both visibly recognisable and many of the first-generation migrants do not speak much English. Nevertheless, the local residents' attitudes towards them are characterised by acceptance.

Perceptions about Turkish-speakers

Turkish-speakers in Hackney come from Cyprus, mainland Turkey and Kurdistan. Turkish Cypriots were the first to arrive in Britain and settled here from 1945 onwards. They were followed by mainland Turks since the late 1960s and Kurdish people since the late 1970s (Enneli *et al.* 2005). [viii] They make up about 5.5% of Hackney's population (London Borough of Hackney 2004) and are visibly present in Hackney with numerous shops, restaurants, barbers and cafes mainly along two high streets. According to Enneli *et al.* (2005, p.2) 'the Turkish-speaking community is probably one of the most self-sufficient communities in London'. They have established half a dozen community-based newspapers, various organisations which provide services such as mortgages or a quit-smoking helpline, taxi companies and driving schools (Enneli *et al.* 2005). Turkish-speakers are not only present in areas where their ethnic businesses prevail, but also in more mainstream corner-shops across Hackney.

Because the Turkish-speaking community is so self-sufficient, many migrants of the first generation have very limited English skills. According to one of my Turkish informants who came to the UK in 1977, many of them do not feel the need to learn much English because they get around well enough without it. However, their children who go to mainstream state schools speak English. A Kurd in his late 20s who came to the UK at the age of 11 told me that it is not only language difficulties which prevent Turkish-speakers from mixing with others, but members of the first generation also 'don't want to lose their culture'. Several of my informants told me that there is a great deal of pressure on the second generation to socialise with Turkish-speakers only, and especially when it comes to marriage, inter-ethnic relations are very rarely accepted by the parents (Arakelian 2007). [ix] To summarise, Turkish-speakers fulfil several of the criteria for living in a separate world and 'not wanting to mix': limited language skills, a self-sufficient support network and, especially among

the first generation, few social relations with people of other groups. This was also noticed by many of my non-Turkish-speaking informants who told me that Turkish speakers seemed to 'keep themselves to themselves'. At the same time, however, none of my informants presented this in the kind of negative way as 'non-mixing' was portrayed in relation to Orthodox Jews and Hipsters. Why, then, are Turkish-speakers not perceived as breaking the 'ethos of mixing'? Before attempting to answer this question, I will turn to another group in Hackney that has similarly created its own social networks.

Perceptions about Vietnamese

The first Vietnamese migrants came to the UK as refugees between 1975 and 1981, with more migrants arriving during the 1980s as a result of family reunification. More recently, Vietnamese migrants arrived in the UK as asylums seekers, students, and undocumented workers (Sims 2007). According to the Hackney Household Survey, 0.6% of people in Hackney speak Vietnamese (London Borough of Hackney 2004).

Vietnamese people are visible in specific areas of Hackney, especially along two of the major High streets where they run grocery shops and restaurants, which serve both a Vietnamese and non-Vietnamese clientele. They also run nail parlours across the borough (Benedictus 2005, Sims 2007). Like Turkish-speakers, many Vietnamese migrants of the first generation have limited English language skills (Sims 2007).

Interestingly, I repeatedly heard the term 'invisible' when people spoke about Vietnamese. A primary school teacher told me that 'you don't really see them, you have maybe one or two in a school class but they are somewhat hidden'. According to her, they achieve in school so they are not seen as a problem and therefore do not draw much attention. Another informant told me that they are somehow invisible. 'You read about them in the local papers and you see their restaurants, but that's about it.' This was also confirmed during my fieldwork in local associations, none of which was attended by Vietnamese people. Although this might have been coincidence, it does reflect my informants' impression of this group as leading somewhat separate lives. One of my informants told me that they 'keep themselves to themselves, put their heads down and get on with it'. Just getting on

with it is a comment some of my informants also made about Turkish-speakers. It refers to the sense of them not sticking out and, despite being a distinct group, somehow melting into the larger picture of diverse Hackney. This is closely related to the use of local institutions and space.

'Bridges'

When I visit a summer party on an estate, I am amazed at the great mix of people. Although the residents are most likely to share a similarly low income level, they are mixed in terms of ethnicity, religion and nationality, some British-born but of parents from abroad, others who arrived recently, and yet others whose families have lived in the area for several generations. There is a great deal of friendly interaction, and the adults are having fun watching their children play games, getting their faces painted and performing hip hop dances. While visible difference does not seem to play a role in terms of who is chatting to whom, a group of Turkish women stands out. They sit together and do not interact much with the others. However, they have come to the party and are happy to see their children participate in the various activities. Turkish women can also be seen at the school gates of the state schools in the borough. In one of the schools where I spent time during my fieldwork, Turkish-speaking mothers have become well-known for their cooking skills, contributing to school fetes with traditional Turkish food. One of these mothers regularly comes to a parents' coffee morning and has helped with the school garden.

Turkish-speakers do not only interact in mainstream society in the context of residential mixing and institutions such as schools, but also in business and trade. They run many restaurants as well as corner-shops. Similarly, Vietnamese people are present both in institutions such as nurseries and state schools, but also in the restaurants and nail parlours mentioned above. These nail parlours are particularly appreciated by women of African and Caribbean backgrounds who are among the most regular customers. Vietnamese children enter mainstream society via the schools and activities during their spare time.

Thus, although Vietnamese people and Turkish-speakers are known as 'keeping themselves to themselves', there are various points of contact where informal interaction happens. Such contact usually takes place in public and associational space. Furthermore, the specifically marked 'ethnic'

places such as restaurants or grocery shops form 'bridges' between these groups and the residents of other origins. Turkish-speakers also run many mainstream corner shops, which makes it almost impossible for residents not to get in contact with a Turkish-speaker in everyday life.

All these points of contact exist to a much lesser degree, if at all, in relation to strictly Orthodox Jews and Hipsters. Both groups stand out because they are concentrated in specific areas, their members are visibly different in dress and style, and they are rarely seen in mixed spaces. Strictly Orthodox Jews do not send their children to state schools or nurseries and they do not run restaurants or shops which cater to the rest of the population. Similarly, Hipsters mainly cater to themselves in that they run and use pubs, cafes and bars that are specifically aimed at them. Since most of them do not have children yet, they do not have contact with family-oriented places like nurseries and schools. Hipsters and strictly Orthodox Jews also compete over public space with other residents. The Hipsters have 'taken over' one of the local parks on weekends and some of the pubs, while the strictly Orthodox Jews dominate a specific area of the borough where they have opened their own schools, shops, community facilities, and places of worship, sometimes in competition with long-standing mixed places such as a pub. 'Not mixing' is thus seen as a problem when it is interpreted as 'not *wanting* to mix'. This is the case among strictly Orthodox Jews who fear to stray from religious law if building relations to non-Orthodox Jews (Dein 2001). In contrast, Hipsters less consciously lead separate lives and they do not intently distance themselves from the rest of society. However, local residents see them as being absorbed with their own social milieu.

In relation to Turkish-speakers and Vietnamese people, I have heard on several occasions that they 'just get on with it'. This is the case for many other groups in Hackney who might primarily socialise with members of their own group when it comes to private relations, such as Nigerians, white British middle-class people, Pakistanis, Polish, Brazilians, Europeans of various national origins, etc. Stereotypes and prejudice between these groups might exist, but they are not seen to undermine the 'ethos of mixing'. Thus, participation in local life in the area, be it the local economy by way of restaurants and shops, or mixed institutions such as schools, libraries or sports clubs, plays an important role in shaping people's perceptions about each other.

The examples of Hipsters, strictly Orthodox Jews, Turkish-speakers and Vietnamese show that in a place where diversity is generally valued as a positive feature and promoted by both the local media and the Council, social segregation is seen to harm the social fabric of community.

Conclusion

People in Hackney have a very down-to-earth approach towards diversity and many would not want to live in a place that is less diverse. However, parallel to this positive attitude towards diversity, people who are perceived to reify their differences are sometimes seen in a less positive light. 'Some people want to live separate lives' or 'they don't want to mix' are sentences I have heard repeatedly in both interviews and informal conversations when referring to groups like Hipsters and strictly Orthodox Jews. Their perceived unwillingness to interact is interpreted as inadequate in a place as culturally mixed as Hackney. This resonates with Savage et al.'s findings that in many neighbourhoods today, belonging is not defined by length of residence but by the ways in which residents participate locally (Savage, *et al.* 2005, p. 29).

Importantly, expectations of mixing in public and associational space are rarely accompanied by a criticism of non-mixing in the private realm where it is seen as normal that similar people who share similar life-styles, cultural values and attitudes attract each other. Such social connectedness does not necessarily go along ethnic lines (although it often does), but other categorical boundaries such as class and education can be important, too. These separate worlds are accepted as normal, as long as fellow residents participate in one way or another in associational spaces or in the public realm. This confirms Wise's findings in Sydney where 'inhabitants do not need to know their neighbours intimately or even wish to become friends, but (…) gestures of care and recognition (…) can create a feeling of connection to the diverse people who share the place (Wise 2005, p. 182). She describes how 'moments of intercultural exchange' translate the 'abstract other' into a 'concrete other' (2005, p.183). This differentiation between the 'abstract' and 'concrete other' could also be applied to Orthodox Jews and Hipsters versus Turkish speakers and Vietnamese people, the latter transforming into 'concrete others' via simple daily interactions in shops, at school gates or in the nail parlour. Even if stereotypes and prejudice persist despite such contact, the possibility to interact can

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lead to a more differentiated picture about the 'other'. Importantly, this picture can change over time and in the course of repeated encounters. In relation to encounters among parents in a multicultural primary school, Wilson similarly stresses the importance of 'change in sensibility' *over time* (Wilson, forthcoming, p. 10). My research has shown that thanks to repeated encounters, even if fleeting, images about others are not entrenched in people's minds, but there is scope for change. Thus, despite the limitations of fleeting encounters regarding the enhancement of deeper intercultural understanding, the *lack* of such encounters can lead to entrenched negative attitudes against people who are perceived to stay away from participation in local life.

To summarise, Hackney's residents do not experience separate life-worlds in regard to private relations as a problem. Social relations are thus characterised by the co-existence of both separation and mixing. But non-participation in local life, ranging from economic activities to participation in civil society or institutions such as schools, is encountered with limited understanding. However, only when this disengagement is coupled with contestations over space does it turn into tension. This is when notions of 'living and letting live' are being questioned. While during my fieldwork, such contestations applied to space, others have shown that issues surrounding competition over resources such as housing can fuel group animosities and tensions (Dench *et al.* 2006, Ray et al. 2008, Valentine 2008).

The material discussed in this article illustrates the fine balance between what residents in a super-diverse area experience as acceptable and unacceptable social divisions, and the ways in which people interpret their social surroundings in terms of the participation of their fellow residents in local life.

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[i] For earlier studies see Baumann (1996), Bott (1957) and Wallman (1982).
[ii] The number of the total population is taken from the ONS 2011 Mid Year Estimates. The number of Turkish speakers is taken from the 2004 Hackney Household Survey. The remaining numbers are taken from the 2011 census.
[iii] The strictly Orthodox Jewish community in Stamford Hill is dominated by Hasidic Jews. On the history of Orthodox Jewish settlement in Stamford Hill see Baker (1995).
[iv] My hairdresser's views on Orthodox Jews and the fact that he gets along well with the Jewish traders at the local market also exemplify that negative views about Orthodox Jews among Hackney residents are not related to anti-Semitism.
[v] Gentrification in Hackney already started in the 1980s (Butler 1996), but has accelerated since the 2000s. There has also been a long-established artist community in Hackney already before the arrival of Hipsters.

[vi] Greif (2010, p. 3), traces the term 'Hipster' back to 1940s black subcultural figures in the US, which a decade later became a white subcultural figure and was defined 'by the desire of a white avant-garde to disaffiliate itself from whiteness (…) and achieve the "cool" knowledge and exoticized energy, lust and violence of black Americans'.

[vii] See http://hackneyhipsterhate.tumblr.com/, and the video 'Being a Dickhead's Cool' http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Xzocvh60xBU.

[viii] Despite the political and cultural differences between these groups, including long-standing tensions especially between Turks and Kurds, I will here use the term 'Turkish-speakers' to refer to all groups. This paper looks at *perceptions* of difference, and the differentiation between the three groups is rarely relevant for those people who do not form part of these groups.

[ix] On inter-generational tensions among Turkish speakers in Hackney see Arakelian (2007).