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Published version

PHILLIPS, Deborah and ROBINSON, David (2015). Reflections on migration, community, and place. *Population, Space and Place*, 21 (5), 409-420.

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Reflections on Migration, Community and Place

Editorial Introduction to Special Issue of Population, Society and Place

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Reflections on Migration, Community and Place

There is an extensive literature detailing the situations and experiences of migrants. This includes local and national studies exploring the material conditions and everyday experiences of migrant workers, refugees and asylum seekers, issues of migrant identity, acculturation and integration, inequalities, and the local impacts of migration on, for example, the labour market and service provision. Yet despite recognition that migration is experienced differently in different places, and is affecting different places in distinct ways, less is understood about the factors underlying the variable geography of experience and outcome associated with migration. Why do immigrants, for example, appear to assimilate more smoothly in some parts of the host country than others? What underpins different experiences in different places? How strongly do migrants connect and identify with new people and places in a transnational world? And what can we learn from this?

This special issue builds on discussions initiated at a Royal Geographical Society conference session that explored the contextualisation of migrants' experiences across a range of scales. This aimed to draw out the spatial variability, contradictions and ambiguities in migrant experiences, as well as exploring conceptual frameworks for understanding the connections between migration, community and place. The papers in this issue focus particularly on the local and more intimate places of social contact and encounter - the neighbourhood, parks and institutional spaces - but they also draw attention to the value of comparative research to tease out structural differences in opportunities, social context and policy that underpin commonalities and differences between localities.

In this introduction, we explore different conceptualizations of migration, community and place at a range of nested scales. Drawing on a rich vein of geographical and migration scholarship, we encounter diverse and contested understandings of the role, significance and meaning of integration and community development at a time of increasing international migration and growing ethnic diversity. Building on traditional understandings of community as constructed through close and weak ties, social interaction, place attachments, and feelings of identity and belonging, we see how migration, community and place have become closely entwined in both political discourse and policy spheres across the EU (European Foundation, 2010). In Britain, for example, New Labour's community cohesion agenda, which fostered integration through community building in areas of migrant settlement, proved a powerful policy driver in the face of ethnic tensions and divisions, and continues to inform policy thinking today. This community building agenda, rooted in social contact theory (Hewstone and Brown, 1986), was based on the premise that greater intercultural contact at the neighbourhood scale would bring social integration and help to foster a sense of common identity, citizenship and belonging. Widely criticised for its desegregationist ethos (Phillips, 2006), assimilationist tone (Lewis and Neal, 2005), the primacy of the local neighbourhood as a setting for interaction and community building (Robinson, 2005; McGhee, 2005), the de-racialisation of inequality (Worley, 2005; Harrison *et al.*, 2005) and the romanticising of community (Phillips *et al.*, 2008), evidence for the effectiveness of this policy approach to integration has proved somewhat inconclusive (Phillips *et al.*, 2014). Critics have further argued that not only has the policy effectively served to politicise the concept of community in an era of ethnic diversity, but that the de-racialised and de-contextualised language of 'community' has diverted attention from structural inequalities, such as poverty and inequality of access to jobs and housing, which impact differently on groups' life-chances and social relations in different places (McGhee, 2005; Phillips *et al.*, 2014).

Understandings of geographical context, as embodied in the concept of place, are similarly complex and contentious. We conventionally understand place as a location with both physical and symbolic attributes. Places are imbued with social and economic histories that affect community relations, offer different assemblages of social, economic and cultural opportunities and constraints, and have social and cultural meanings that can be read by newcomers as (sometimes simultaneously) welcoming and embracing or alienating and exclusionary. However, places, whether constructed as the city, neighbourhood, park, street or home, are also multi-layered, personal and imagined spaces. Drawing on critical, post-structuralist theorisations of space and place, we can appreciate place not simply as fixed and objective, but also as subjective and practiced – as created and re-created by its users and their interactions.

Thus, we can conceptualise place as constructed and experienced through the lens of gender, ethnicity, age, migrant status etc., and in so doing glimpse the likely complexity of place-based identities, engagements, experiences, community attachments and belonging. The work of Robina Mohammad (2013) for example, draws attention to British Muslim feminine spatialities and geographies of the veiled body to reveal the gendered experience of moving through masculinised public places in the city, and its implications for spaces of encounter, community and integration for this group. Hopkins (2010) and Phillips (2014) explore how masculine geographies are constructed and negotiated on a day to day basis by marginalised young British Muslim men whose bodies seem out of place in certain part of the racialised city. Several scholars have sought to highlight how construction and experiences of place are entangled with age and stage in the life-course, with an increasing interest in youthful imaginations and practices. Skelton and Gough (2013), for example, explore how young people might be conceptualised as key place-making agents, not only living in and experiencing the city differently from older generations but also helping to create dynamic local spaces. The work of Valentine *et al.* (2009), Spicer (2008) and Ní Laoire *et al.* (2010), for example, has particularly focused on place and community as narrated, experienced and constructed by migrant children. In each case, subjective understandings of fear, risk, trust, safety and belonging become embedded in multi-layered constructions of place and community, the boundaries of which may be drawn and re-drawn on a daily basis according to personal experience, social networks and wider politicised discourses that shape an individual's sense of place in their immediate locality and/or nation.

The dynamism and fluidity of place are captured in the growing recognition of its multi-scalar nature. Although much of the classical migration literature fails to fully engage with such conceptualisations (see Silvey (2004) for review), more recent re-thinking of place as relational - the product of intersecting historical and contemporary processes at a range of nested scales - highlights the multiple influences on migrants' everyday lives. Taking inspiration from the seminal work of Doreen Massey (1994; 2005), who enjoins us to embrace 'the culturally multiple, dynamic and connective aspects of place in a globalising world' (Massey, 1994: 149), geographers in particular have increasingly acknowledged place as hybrid, interconnected and transnational (Blunt, 2007; Brickell and Datta, 2011). Similarly, migration theorists, such as Glick Schiller and Caglar (2009), have called for a disruption of hierarchies of scale in favour of an appreciation of the intersection between local and global processes that impact on migrants' experiences of social and spatial incorporation. Linked to this is a growing awareness of the embodied politics of international mobility (and immobility) and the inequalities that it produces. Recent work on transnationality and diaspora, for example,

highlights the power of both places of origin and places of settlement to shape migrants' identities, practices and communities of belonging.

Our understanding of migrants' experiences, social interactions, putting down roots, and community formation has thus shifted significantly with the recognition of an increasingly interconnected, transnational world (Vertovec and Cohen, 1999). The transnational paradigm is widely acknowledged to have destabilised traditional conceptualisations of community and place as fixed, localised, territorialised and bounded. Early transnational theorists were criticised for their over-emphasis on the unbounded nature of identity, de-territorialisation of community, and disembedded approach to transnational lives (Mitchell, 1997), but recent years have witnessed a re-spatialising of the transnational perspective. This acknowledges the importance of overlapping social fields, multiple associations, allegiances and place attachments, hybrid identities, and diverse ways of being in a mobile world (Levitt and Glick Schiller, 2004; Brickell and Datta, 2011; Mendoza and Morén-Alegret, 2013). So, for example, drawing inspiration from Smith's (2001) concept of transnational urbanism, we see increasing attention to the idea of translocality for its ability to capture the essence of mobility without losing sight of the importance of place and place-based associations (Oakes and Schein, 2006; Greiner and Sakdapolrak, 2013).

Not only does the literature on migration and transnationalism disrupt traditional notions of place and community, it also unsettles conventional ideas of family and household. If, like Wright and Ellis (2006), we understand the household as both a physical unit and a set of social and economic practices, then we need to explore further the diversity of living arrangements that arise with international migration and their implications for integration and settlement in particular contexts. In this vein, migration scholars have enjoined us to look in more detail at transnational household strategies and attachments (Waite and Cook, 2011), the implications of ethnic diversities within households for integration (Wright and Ellis, 2006), the effect of power relations within households on social, economic and cultural engagement in particular places (Silvey, 2004), and the implications of household composition for understanding diverse patterns of consumption, work and social reproduction (Smith and Winders, 2008). As we look further inside the household, feminist scholarship offers a critical analytical perspective on the gendered (and racialized) politics of migration, family dynamics and household migration strategies that not only shape migration flows to particular places, but also underpin social and economic integration and settlement experiences for men, women and children (Silvey, 2004; McDowell, 2013).

Whilst population geographers have sought to shed light on the complex connections between demographic processes, household social and economic arrangements, and neighbourhood changes associated with migration and settlement (Buzar et al., 2005; King, 2012), social and cultural geographers have been especially drawn to questions about the family and household as sites of identity formation, differential power relations and belonging, and to the interrogation of place as 'home' (Blunt, 2005, 2007; Brown, 2011). Walton Roberts and Pratt (2005), for example, using an ethnographic approach, have documented the complex, multiple and gendered understandings of migration, and varied imaginative spaces of home, that can exist across the generations of a single household. Waite and Cook (2011) assert the importance of an intergenerational lens in understanding emotional attachments to multiple spaces of home and the implications of this for feelings of social integration and belonging. Meanwhile, Ehrkamp and Leitner (2006), in exploring material and metaphorical spaces of belonging, argue that multiple, polyvalent identities do not

necessarily weaken migrants' attachments to local places nor undermine their desire for engagement in local communities.

Understanding of mobility, settlement and place at this fine scale have brought fresh insights into the reconfiguring of home, the re-working of identities, and how everyday lives and household domestic arrangements are entangled with individual subjectivities, the micro-politics of particular places, and wider global processes. The city and neighbourhood nevertheless remain key sites of arrival, settlement, encounter and attachment, and it is to these that we now turn.

City contexts

Amin and Thrift's (2002; 297) commentary on urban spatialities encapsulates the differences in multicultural dispositions exhibited in different cities, and their possible consequences for migrants' ability to move through cities, find their place in cities, build associations, claim their rights, and achieve political recognition.

Different cities have different ethnic styles and therefore different demands for rights to the city. As a result, some cities or parts of cities seem to be generating something like a cosmopolitan sensibility while others seem to be stuck in polarised games of move and countermove that endlessly repeat the same old dislikes.

Cities present diverse contexts for the incorporation of migrants, the playing out of migrants' lives and, as Goodwin-White (2012) investigates, the lives of migrant children. Migrants in turn, through their presence, visibility/invisibility, social practices and institutions help to recast the cities in which they settle in an ongoing process of transformation (Portes, 2000). Different histories of migration, policies and politics of inclusion/exclusion, opportunity structures, group tensions and support systems etc. all articulate with varied expressions of cosmopolitanism and perceived 'difference' to shape newcomers' life chances, experiences of everyday civilities and sense of citizenship and belonging. Layered on top of this is often a racial/ethnic encoding of space, rooted in racialised urban imaginaries, that associates some cities (or parts of cities) with cosmopolitanism, with whiteness, or with racialised tensions and difference – crude associations that do not necessarily play out on the ground (Amin and Thrift, 2002; Amin, 2012).

There is a rich literature to suggest that place at the city scale matters for the experience of migrant settlement, integration and community. Studies of migrant identities (Back, 2006; Ehrkamp, 2005), place-making (Binnie *et al.*, 2006; Gill, 2010), the development of urban enclaves (Graham and Marvin, 2001), and citizenship and belonging (Phillips, 2014), for example, reveal the urban contextuality of migrants' lives and situatedness of their community building and belonging. Notably, in Britain, the uneven geography of urban disturbances involving British Asian minorities and whites in 2001 pointed to the salience of social and economic differences between cities, localised racist discourses, media interventions, and the local politics of migrant incorporation in shaping ethnic relations (McGhee, 2005). Detailed comparative studies, however, which tease out the essential differences between cities as places for migrant settlement, or allow us to better understand the variable impact of migration, are lacking (but see Platts-Fowler and Robinson (2015) in this volume). Cadge *et al.* (2012) and Hatziprokopiou and Montagna (2012) have argued that this, in part, reflects

disciplinary boundaries in scholarship and the focus of different scales of analysis. While quantitative, macro-scale investigations of migrant incorporation in some migration scholarship tends to suffer from lack of data (see Bean *et al.*, 2012), and underplay the salience of place, cultural identity and community, detailed ethnographic studies of the everyday lives of migrants often lack a broader comparative perspective.

There are nevertheless important insights that we can glean from existing comparative scholarship. Working at the city scale, Glick Schiller and Caglar (2009) argue that migrant incorporation is influenced by the positioning of the city along a continuum of power and influence. At one extreme are 'top-scale' cities (such as London), which are identified as offering the broadest range of possibilities for migrant incorporation and transnational connection. At the other are 'down-scale' cities, which have not succeeded in restructuring in the face of economic change, where migrants' skills and cultural heritages are not highly valued, and opportunities for integration are more restricted. Bean *et al.* (2012) build on this theme by using quantitative analysis to compare second generation migrant incorporation into a range of American and European cities. They highlight significant differences in outcome between 'inclusionary' and 'less inclusionary' cities, as defined in terms of citizenship and integration regimes, and welcome and support for migrants. They conclude that inclusionary cities open up many more pathways for migrant advancement than less inclusionary cities, but that important contextual variation between cities impacts on the potential for social, cultural, economic and spatial integration in each.

Other studies have used qualitative research to flesh out these contextual factors further and extend the concept of integration to include personal experiences of ethnic difference, as well as emotional aspects of belonging in different national and urban contexts. Hatziprokopiou and Montagna (2012), for example, examine the interplay of political, economic and global forces in the incorporation of Chinese migrants into London and Milan in the context of contests over the use of city spaces, while the research of Valentine *et al.* (2009) with Somali refugee children in Sheffield (UK) and Aarhus (Denmark) highlights the importance of place for both attachment and security. Both studies highlight the situatedness of identity and belonging, and the importance of national citizenship regimes for feelings of integration. For example, Valentine *et al.* (2009: 247) argue that refugees' experience of being Somali and Muslim in Sheffield and Aarhus reflected not only conventional indicators of integration (labour market participation, language etc.) but also 'complex webs of emotion and identification' with particular places. These spanned city, national and transnational scales, and had clear implications for refugee experiences and feelings of integration and belonging. Meanwhile, O'Neill and Hubbard (2010) undertook an innovative project to explore the experiences of asylum seekers, refugees and undocumented migrants across a diverse range of East Midlands localities, focussing specifically on what it 'felt like' to live in particular places and in different contexts. The use of mobile ethnographies and walking interviews enabled an exploration of the textures of place and the idea of 'being-in-place' that is associated with belonging amongst the most vulnerable groups of migrants.

Local spaces and neighbourhood places

While the city context is important, everyday lives are lived and community relations are negotiated through the local and more intimate spaces of the city – the home, the neighbourhood, the market,

the park, a range of institutional spaces – and through embodied experiences of difference. At their best, local (in particular, ethnographic) studies can provide rich, agent-centred accounts of individual experiences, behaviours and trajectories, and provide insights into the complex interactions between the agency of migrants and the structures and power relations which shape individual outcomes (cf. Massey, 2005). However, despite a plethora of descriptive work on the arrival and settlement experiences of migrant workers, asylum seekers and refugees, many studies shy away from exploring the complex intertwining of people and places, rendering unclear the role that different dimensions that place might play in shaping outcomes for particular individuals or groups (Robinson and Reeve, 2006; Spicer, 2008). Meanwhile, policy oriented literature on the impacts of migration has tended to focus either on the national context at the expense of local geographies of change (Stenning and Dawley, 2009), or has been aspatial in nature and has failed to consider how consequences might be manifest and managed in different ways in different contexts (Thorp, 2008).

A small number of studies have, however, directly confronted the question of how migration, community and place intersect at the local scale (e.g. Cheong *et al.*, 2007; Hickman *et al.*, 2012; Kesten *et al.*, 2011; Netto, 2011; Phillips *et al.*, 2010; Robinson *et al.*, 2007; White, 2011). These studies tend to be dynamic in nature, charting migrant experiences through time, or adopt a comparative approach to reveal variability, contradiction and ambiguity in the effects and consequences of new migration. Two key themes emerge that highlight the salience of both contextual and compositional factors in particular locales.

The first concerns the relationship between the local social, political, historical and material context of arrival, settlement and community formation. Significantly, research points to the positive effects of circumstances where an appreciation of the openness of place by residents meshes with their understanding of migration as part of an ongoing process of social and spatial transformation. Hickman *et al.* (2012) (and Hickman and Mai (2015) in this volume), drawing on comparative research, for example, observe how different readings of local histories of place underpin residents' responses to the settlement of newcomers. Broad local acceptance of dominant narratives of change appears to moderate anxieties over new migration, ease negotiations over difference and belonging, and facilitate social cohesion (cf. also Robinson and Reeve, 2006). Scholarly analysis of media reporting on immigration and asylum issues points to the power of the media to intervene in the framing of such narratives through particular representations of social, economic and political contexts for migration (Robinson and Reeve, 2006; King and Wood, 2001; Gedalof, 2007) and the creation, and disruption, of imagined neighbourhood communities and local place identities (Aldridge, 2003; Finney and Robinson, 2008). While there are notable examples of positive media campaigns that have helped to counter racialized imaginations, contest hegemonic anti-immigration discourses and undermine commonplace myths that destabilise good community relations (see Finney and Robinson, 2008), scaremongering and negative representations of 'otherness' and cultural difference are commonplace. These readily infuse local opinion and can fuel tensions, especially in places already facing challenges through urban disinvestment, welfare reform and economic restructuring (Hudson *et al.*, 2007; Spencer *et al.*, 2006).

New migrants typically settle in disadvantaged and deprived neighbourhoods, often characterised by poor housing, high levels of unemployment, limited and over-stretched service provision, and poor local amenities (Robinson, 2010). These places can represent an unfavourable context for immigrant reception and induce what has been referred to as 'acculturative stress'; adverse effects, including

anxiety, depression and other forms of emotional distress and physical ill-health associated with adapting to a new cultural context, although experiences can differ significantly according to the age, gender, education or legal status of the migrant (Spicer, 2008; Schwartz *et al.*, 2008). Living in close proximity to people from the same country of origin or from a shared ethnic or religious background can help limit integration challenges. Benefits are most apparent in situations where the migrant community is well established and has a good knowledge of local bureaucratic systems, resource availability and has established its own community based services and facilities (Crawley *et al.*, 2011; White, 2011; Kesten *et al.*, 2011; Spicer, 2008). 'Place-making' by migrant populations has long been seen as an essential strategic response to the alienation, isolation and difference experienced by newcomers, helping to cement new identities, and sustain and empower marginalised communities. Ehrkamp (2005), for example, reveals how Turkish migrants in Germany create new places of identity and belonging at the neighbourhood scale through an ongoing negotiation between transnational ties and local lives. These new places, she contends, engender feelings of comfort and security that facilitate social engagement with the receiving society on their own terms. Gill (2010), however, drawing on a case-study of the Polish community in Birmingham, warns of the potentially negative implications of heightening ethnic difference through place-making in certain contexts (also see McGhee *et al.* (2015) in this volume).

The second theme concerns the relationship between the composition of the long-standing population and community relations. Local studies suggest that socially and culturally diverse places are more likely to adapt well to new migration, to be more inclusive and to foster a positive integration experience for migrants (Hickman *et al.*, 2012; IPPR, 2007; Jayaweera and Choudhury, 2008; Netto, 2011; Robinson *et al.*, 2007). Such neighbourhoods can provide access to inclusive local resources, such as schools, enabling new arrivals to develop social bonds and access practical and emotional support (Clayton, 2009; Hickman *et al.*, 2012; Robinson *et al.*, 2007; Spicer, 2008). These findings are consistent with analysis pointing to the positive impact on interethnic relations of living in a more diverse environment (Laurence, 2011). They also appear to provide some support for the aforementioned inter-group contact hypothesis, which asserts that under the right conditions intercultural encounters can facilitate greater appreciation and understanding of diversity and difference and promote positive social interactions. These encounters might only be mundane and fleeting in form but can be an important positive precursor to more open and inclusive cultures. However, one must be careful not to overstate the importance of such encounters. Studies indicate that intercultural contact does not always translate into progressive and long-term social relations and can in certain circumstances reinforce prejudices and exacerbate tensions (Valentine, 2008; Vertovec, 2007; Phillips *et al.*, 2014). The process of negotiation associated with everyday encounters within spaces of new migration is uncertain and the outcomes can sometimes be problematic; evidence of practical conviviality can exist alongside evidence of limitations, difficulties and tensions (Kesten *et al.*, 2011; Phillips *et al.*, 2014). A key reason for this variability of experience is reported to be material context. Struggles over resources need not inevitably result in hostility from existing residents towards new groups perceived to be culturally different, but such feelings appear likely to be exacerbated by a relative lack of interaction between new communities and others (Hickman *et al.*, 2012; Hudson *et al.*, 2007). **Constant churn associated high rates of internal migration for new migrant households can also bring significant neighbourhood change in diverse transitional areas in terms of both household composition and area decline (Finney and Catney,**

2012). This undermines the potential for establishing lasting personal and community associations and can damage feelings of safety, social cohesion and trust (Robinson 2010).

These studies have pointed to some of the ways in which particular aspects of the social, political and material context and compositional nature of place can inform the experiences and effects of new migration. Efforts to conceptualise these place-specific experiences and outcomes have tended to focus on the generation of neighbourhood archetypes (Hickman *et al.*, 2012; Robinson *et al.*, 2007; Spicer, 2008). At one extreme are locations which possess a recent history of different cultures meeting, colliding and negotiating a social settlement, where there is an increased likelihood of new migrants receiving a more positive reception. At the other extreme are neighbourhoods, (or perhaps small towns (see Leitner, 2012) with strong place identities and a more limited recent history of accommodating ethnic diversity, where there is a heightened likelihood of negative reactions to new migration. Although even in more hostile settings, Amin (2002) and Leitner (2012) suggest, micro-spaces of opportunity (schools, social settings, parks) may exist for positive encounter.

These conceptualisations represent useful organising devices. They point to some of the ways in which the nature of the neighbourhood and city into which migrants arrive might inform experiences of incorporation and influence the impact of their arrival. However, they are descriptive, rather than analytical tools, which speak in generalities and say little about causal pathways between the nature of place and the process of migrant incorporation. They provide little guidance about how to engage with the complexity of context and explore how place and people interact. They point to different dimensions of place important in shaping experiences of migration but say little about their relative importance or interconnectivity. These limitations become all too evident when faced with the challenge of understanding and explaining experiences and outcomes in places (neighbourhoods or cities) that fall between the archetypes outlined by these typologies. It is also important to remember that rarely, in practice, is it possible to make a straightforward distinction between places that 'work' in terms of inter-ethnic relations and those that do not; intercultural tensions and accommodations can exist side by side (Clayton, 2009; Phillips *et al.* 2014). Furthermore, Mendoza and Morén-Alegret (2013) highlight the challenges posed by a lack of appropriate methods for capturing the complex relationship between place and migration in world where migrants increasingly lead transnational lives. Thus studies rarely convey the dynamism and multiplicity of everyday experiences and associations across a range of different localities.

This issue

The papers in this special issue focus on contextualising migrant experiences within intimate, local places of contact and encounter. Drawing out the salience of intersections between compositional and contextual factors in light of increasing international migration and growing diversity, they venture beyond description of the variable geography of migration to explore the factors shaping the contours of difference evident within experiences and outcomes of migration. Many of the papers rise to this challenge through comparative analysis. Commonalities and contradictions in processes of social, cultural and spatial incorporation and variations in material well-being are explored through analysis of the experiences of migrants from different countries of origin with distinct migration histories, assigned to a variety of legal categories and settling in places with

different histories of accommodating diversity and difference. All the papers focus specifically on the neighbourhood as a space of social contact and encounter and seek to advance understanding of how material situations, social connections and feelings of community and belonging are formed and reworked in different lived spaces and meaningful places.

Hickman and Mai (2015) look beyond quantitative understandings of what produces positive interactions to qualitatively explore the role of place in shaping the quality and quantity of social interactions in residential spaces of migration. They argue that in order to understand relations that are understood as cohesive by local residents it is necessary to analyse dominant narratives framing the way complexity is experienced in different places. To this end, they question what underpins 'positive' and 'negative' outcomes of encounters between long-term residents and new immigrants through a comparative analysis of two relatively deprived areas of London; Kilburn and Downham. Drawing on in-depth life narrative interviews, they provide insights into how localised cultures and identities can offer safety, security and a sense of belonging, but can also serve to isolate and exclude. Specific histories and memories of immigration, rather than the numbers of contacts, interactions or mixing between groups, are revealed to help explain observed differences. The case study of Kilburn is revealed to be a place where immigration is understood as integral to the area. Narratives of belonging are based on the acceptance of diversity and the idea that newcomers can contribute economically. In contrast, the Downham case study is more typical of areas of 'settled backlash'. Here, residents represent themselves as homogenous, denying the existence of social and cultural diversity. The arrival of new groups is thus seen as an exception, rather than the norm. Challenging the perception of the relationship between social cohesion and migration as inevitably problematic, Hickman and Mai argue conclude that diversity resulting from social and geographical mobilities is accommodated in different ways in different places, depending upon prevailing notions of belonging, obligation and identity.

McGhee *et al.* (2015) also adopt a qualitative focus approach in their exploration of the impact of neighbourhood context on the shifting identity practices of post-accession Polish migrants in Southampton. Similarities are noted between the findings to emerge and other studies in the UK and beyond, for example, in relation to suspicion of co-ethnics, a preference for close-knit associational ties and the avoidance of community institutions. Where McGhee and colleagues venture beyond other similar studies is by recognising the potential of different places to provide access to different packages of resources and opportunities, and in their analysis of the combined impact of local social and environmental conditions and constraints on the ways migrants construct their social identities. Concluding that context matters, they argue for research to look beyond reified group dispositions, to focus on the places in which migrants find themselves and to explore the conditions and constraints perceived, experienced and negotiated in their daily lives.

Kohlbacher *et al.* (2015) rise to the challenge laid down by McGhee *et al.* (2015) through comparative analysis of the role of social encounters and contacts in shaping the neighbourhood attachments of migrants and natives living in three different areas of Vienna - one affluent and two more deprived. Drawing on quantitative and qualitative data from a large scale international survey of interethnic tolerance and neighbourhood integration, the authors investigate the role of weak and strong social ties in forming both place attachments and a sense of belonging. Migrants are revealed to report higher levels of place attachment than native residents in all neighbourhoods, a finding consistent with other studies. Exploring this relationship, social contacts within the

neighbourhood are revealed to be key in explaining attachment for both migrants and natives. However, weak social ties and everyday convivialities within the neighbourhood with natives and migrants are revealed to significantly increase attachment for migrants (but not for native residents) in all three neighbourhoods. They conclude that these weak ties are important to the formation of social networks and the accumulation of social capital and are therefore particularly important in the early stages of settlement. However, an important caveat is attached to these findings. The degree of place attachment between the case study neighbourhoods was found to vary, even after taking into account compositional characteristics of the neighbourhoods. In short, residents in deprived neighbourhoods were found to report lower levels of attachment. In conclusion, Kohlbacher *et al.* (2015) echo the call of other papers in the special issue for greater attention to different aspects of place in an effort to explain these outstanding neighbourhood differences. In particular, they argue for more attention to be given to the physical attributes of place.

Neal *et al.* (2015) pick up the gauntlet thrown down by Kohlbacher *et al.* (2015) in a distinctive contribution that moves us away from the residential environment to focus on public parks as key social and material spaces for multicultural encounter. Their paper seeks to move beyond the focus on public spaces as a *context for* social relations towards the idea of the public space (in this case the park) as *co-constitutive of* them. In an argument informed by non-representational theory, they suggest that parks can become important sites of multicultural encounter, attachment and community because of the way in which they 'bring together' diverse populations through their materialities, promote an emotional sharing of these public spaces across groups of users, and by the animation of place through everyday practices of 'being' in the park. Neal *et al.*'s paper makes an important contribution by also challenging us to think critically about how we research the interconnections between diverse peoples and places. Notably, following Askins and Pain (2011), this paper reflects on the research process itself as a place of encounter and engagement with diversity and difference. The authors recount the challenges that they have faced in trying to be sensitive and attentive to difference in their research practice. Significantly, in a warning consistent with McGhee *et al.*'s (2015) call to look beyond reified group dispositions, they alert us, as researchers, to the dangers of engaging in 'difference work', which assigns and fixes difference through the conventional ethnic categories all too often inherent in the ethnographic gaze.

The final paper in the special issue considers the broader issue of integration, which is understood as a two-way process involving change of new arrivals and settled populations. Platts-Fowler and Robinson (2015) argue that despite recognition that integration can proceed at different velocities and along different trajectories in different locations, there have been few attempts to chart and explain the variable geography of integration. In response, they integrate an appreciation of place into an operational model of the integration process to guide the longitudinal exploration of variations in the integration process within a cohort of refugees arriving into the UK from the same country of origin, at the same time, granted the same legal status and afforded a similar package of support and assistance but settled in two different cities in England. The findings to emerge from this comparative analysis spotlight the benefits associated with settlement in more cosmopolitan neighbourhoods, where there is greater acceptance of diversity and difference, and underline the importance of recognising how refugee integration is grounded and embodied in space and place.

The papers in this special issue share a commitment to venture beyond the apparent consensus that the experiences and outcomes of migration might emerge under the same general operative

processes but can evolve in different ways in different places. Rather than merely describing this geography, they seek to explain it. In doing so, they avoid the tendency of previous studies to consider the importance of particular aspects of place in isolation, and set out to explore the interplay between various scales and different dimensions of place. It is from this vantage point that the intersection of factors within the residential neighbourhood influencing situated experiences of migration are analysed, the question of why migrants in particular locations might be leading more restrictive and restricted lives is considered, and the influence of migration on local dynamics of cohesion and opportunities for forging more positive outcomes are addressed.

Acknowledgments

We are grateful for the helpful comments of an anonymous referee on an earlier version of this introduction.

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