

## Ethnic minorities' reactions to newcomers in East London: symbolic boundaries and convivial labour

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[http://eprints.lse.ac.uk/101879/1/Wessendorf\\_ethnic\\_minorities\\_reactios\\_wp35.pdf](http://eprints.lse.ac.uk/101879/1/Wessendorf_ethnic_minorities_reactios_wp35.pdf)

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In much public discourse on immigrants in Western Europe, perceptions towards newcomers are discussed in relation to what white national majorities think. However, today, new migrants often move into places which are already settled by previous migrants. Surprisingly little is known about the local experiences, perceptions and attitudes towards newcomers among long-established ethnic minorities in areas which they have made their home, and where they predominate not just in numbers but also by way of shops, religious sites, school population, etc. Based on ethnographic fieldwork in East London (UK), this paper looks at long-established ethnic minority residents' attitudes towards newcomers from Eastern Europe, and how these are shaped by their own histories of exclusion. More concretely, it looks at how long-term experiences of racism and Islamophobia impact on their perceptions of recent, white migrants from Eastern Europe who are sometimes 'othered' themselves, but whose children are more likely to become accepted as part of the national majority. It asks how long-established residents' attitudes towards newcomers are shaped by a combination of their own histories of racism and exclusion, as well as convivial social practices in everyday life.

The paper identifies three themes which repeatedly came up in white British residents exclusionary discourses about ethnic minorities and migrants: one relates to notions of 'the other' (e.g. Muslims) taking over the area, the second theme relates to language, and the third to the idea that ethnic minorities and newcomers do not want to mix. The paper shows how ethnic minorities construct similar such 'symbolic boundaries' towards newcomers, namely along notions of territorial 'take over', newcomers not speaking enough English and not wanting to mix. These sentiments are underlined by fear that the newcomers' 'whiteness' facilitates their access to jobs, jeopardizing their own or their children's opportunities. At the same time, however, ethnic minority research participants' discourses about newcomers were highly nuanced and research participants situated these within their own histories of immigration and exclusion. While Eastern European migrants' alleged white privileges were portrayed as undoubtable advantage, there was also attentiveness to the challenges faced by these newcomers in the context of Brexit, and new forms of solidarity were expressed in

light of newcomers' struggles to settle in the context of a hostile, post-Brexit-vote environment.

The paper draws on 15 months of ethnographic fieldwork in the London Borough of Newham. The project included both long-established residents and newcomers. The fieldwork entailed attending weekly community groups such as a knitting group and coffee mornings at community centres. At the time of writing this paper, a total of 120 respondents had participated in the research, consisting of 22 in-depth interviews with residents of ethnic minority background and migrants, ten expert interviews with key people such as policemen and women, social workers, teachers, and religious leaders, and eight focus group interviews with residents of different generations such as teenagers, parents and grandparents. Research participants represented a cross section of first-generation migrants, their children and grandchildren as well as newcomers from a wide range of backgrounds. The longer-term residents originate in South Asia (including south Asians from East Africa), the Caribbean and Africa. While most research participants of South Asian origin are Muslim, some research participants are of Hindu or Sikh backgrounds. The sample was thus diverse in terms of ethnicity, religion, generation and ethnicity. The research participants represented in this paper share their long-term residence in Newham (either all their lives or 20+ years) and relative deprivation, with the majority being on lower incomes or on benefits, and only three respondents having a university degree.

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