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## Conviviality is not enough: a communication perspective to the city of difference

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**Journal: Communication, Culture and Critique****Abstract**

This article interrogates the ways in which urban communication enables or prevents politics of conviviality in the multicultural city. A multimethod, primarily qualitative, study in a London neighborhood exposed extensive communicative fragmentation along ethnic and class lines. Does such communicative separation lead to segregation? Is togetherness ever possible? Rather than a togetherness/separation binary, our study revealed a dialectic that rests upon diverging distribution of modes of communication in the city: media often separate urban dwellers and face-to-face communication brings them together in momentary but important association. This dialectic and its various incarnations give rise to a spectrum of politics of conviviality: civility through Othering; civility through negotiation of We-ness and Otherness; and politics of civic engagement and solidarity.

*Keywords:* urban communication; city; conviviality; cultural diversity; migration; Otherness; urban politics

## **Conviviality is Not Enough: A Communication Perspective to the City of Difference**

Calls to “togetherness” have intensified in the aftermath of extremist and racially motivated violence in cities of the global North. Many public, media, and political campaigns have embraced “togetherness,” as demonstrated in the “Je suis Charlie” campaign and the Facebook profile change option following the November 2015 Paris attacks. Campaigns promoting togetherness have often been represented and framed in mainstream and social media, as vividly demonstrated in the British tabloid’s *The Sun* front page “United against ISIS” (Pitt 2014) and Starbucks’ #Race Together. Alongside those, condemnations of extremism have pointed to urban divisions in European cities’ multicultural neighborhoods, powerfully captured in dramatic images of terrorists’ arrests in Paris and Brussels. In these cases, as in many others, cities of difference became the protagonists in debates on segregation and urban divides. The powerful and largely mediated discourse of togetherness has, yet again, brought forward the challenges of managing conviviality in culturally diverse urban societies. It has also raised many questions. Does togetherness tackle segregation? Does socio-cultural and communicative separation reflect segregation? Do calls to togetherness correspond, contradict, or merely ignore urban communication and its role in enhancing or limiting conviviality?

This article problematizes the popular and media-enhanced binary of togetherness/separation through the lens of urban communication. I argue that a complex dialectic, rather than a binary, rests upon diverging distribution of modes of communication in the city: media often separate urban dwellers while face-to-face communication brings them together in momentary but important association. Different modes of communication in the city, such as local press and hyperlocal media, represent key elements of urban infrastructures that support affective connections and disconnections. As shown below, the

ordinary, mundane, and affective configurations of urban mediated and face-to-face communication are critical to understanding meanings of separation, togetherness, and, consequently, politics of conviviality in cities of difference. In dialogue with Gilroy's (2004) conceptualization of conviviality and Amin's analysis of urban ecologies of possibility (2012), this article applies a communication perspective to the city of difference. Overlooked in urban sociology and cultural geography literatures, a communication perspective offers a necessary insight into everyday politics of conviviality and the ways in which this politics is shaped through (mediated) connections and disconnections. More particularly, such a perspective offers a nuanced understanding of the city as space of community, collaborations and divisions by studying its dwellers' communication practices. At the same time, and in engaging with theoretical and empirical urban approaches, this article aims to enrich communication studies with new ecological insights into individuals' use of communication technologies for social action and for managing urban life. Through this interdisciplinary intervention, the discussion reveals the need to understand the interdependence of communication and urban politics. As multicultural cities face racially-motivated and extremist violence, understanding how, on which platforms, and with what consequences we communicate with or against others is critical. This discussion, which aims to contribute to the interdisciplinary enquiry of urban publics, is empirically grounded in a year's study in multicultural London.<sup>1</sup>

The article is structured in three main sections. It starts by discussing the challenge of living together in difference, while critically engaging with theorizations of conviviality in sociology and cultural geography. It grounds the discussion in one of London's multicultural neighborhoods – Haringay, North London – and examines the close proximity of urban dwellers to a range of experiences which they often do not share. London, like many cosmopolitan cities, is largely composed of neighborhoods where people of different social

and cultural backgrounds co-occupy urban space without engaging in any apparent conflict. This relative harmony raises questions about the quality of urban co-existence but also its consequences. Do urban dwellers living next to each other manage proximity through communicative separation, inattention, and indifference (Bailey, 1996; Frosh, 2012)? What challenges do communicative separation and togetherness present to an urban politics of difference? The second part of the paper seeks answers to these questions in Haringay and in the analysis of data collected through ethnographic research, focus groups and a small scale survey. The final part takes the analysis further by discussing the ethical and political implications of urban dwellers' connections to and disconnections from each other.

### **Communicating and Miscommunicating Togetherness**

The project that informs this discussion<sup>ii</sup> was a year-long study of Londoners' engagement with the city's multifaceted communication infrastructures, especially as these relate to managing cultural difference. We selected a multicultural London neighborhood for this study, as communicating across/against difference becomes more critical when physical proximity to others is inescapable. Cities come with an inevitable reality: "throwntogetherness, the unavoidable challenge of negotiating a here-and-now" (Massey, 2005, p. 14), raises questions about how we manage temporal and spatial constellations, but also how we shape "an urban politics of living with difference" (Amin, 2012, p. 63). This section discusses how different literatures address these questions, especially in regards to urban encounters, the role of infrastructures in managing difference, and the challenges exposure to difference presents to urban dwellers.

Massey (2005) argues that urban *throwntogetherness* directly challenges fixity of identities and the strangeness of the national Other – ethnic minorities, asylum seekers and refugees. Especially in cities like London where the national majority constitutes a local

minority, the national narratives of who belongs and who is the stranger are always under erasure (Hall, 1996), though never fully erased. The physicality of co-presence constitutes sensory and bodily mechanisms for making sense of difference and negotiating the city's intersecting relational geographies (Massey, 2005). As Amin argues, the urban encounter feeds into an "affective disposition" (Amin, 2012, p.60), a distinct ability to sense, communicate, connect and disconnect through the "entanglement of bodies and things" (ibid., p. 60).

Urban encounters are situated in place but they are also, and increasingly, connected to global realities (King, 2007) – those associated with diasporic connections, digital connectivity (van Dijck, 2013), national cultural diversity policies, and media representations of the urban. A communication perspective is the missing link in understanding urban encounters in their full complexity. Learning from the Chicago School of Sociology's influential tradition (Park, Burgess, and McKenzie, 2000), I argue for a communication perspective which is ecological and sensitive to the nuances of urban life, not least the encounters and interactions that make the city a lived, social and political space. The Chicago School scholars identified a range of important interactions in the city: between individuals; between individuals and technologies; between individuals and the environment. As these interactions are increasingly managed through different modes of communication – from face-to-face to digital – their quality and consequences cannot be fully understood without a closer look at the patterns and meanings of communication. At the same time, communication in the city is uneven and asymmetrical. Encounters are experientially and affectively managed through proximity, but they are also symbolically managed – mediated – on digital platforms and through the circulation of different cultural and regulatory discourses (Lane, 2015). Discourses and disciplinary orders associated with We-ness and Otherness and with desirable and undesirable modes of difference circulate in asymmetrical flows of

communication: in digital hyperlocal and global affective relationships (Leurs, 2014); in migrants' transnational networks of crossborder moral and affective exchanges (Smith, 2001); in policy campaigns that promote controlled proximity to difference (Amin, 2012); in advertising and corporate strategies that commodify cultural diversity (Zukin, 2010). "[T]he street is not the point at which immersion detaches the body from the matrices of political economy" (Keith, 2005, p. 105), neither are local association with and dissociation from others detached from wider representational, technological, and regulatory systems (Massey, 2005).

At the juncture of the local and the global, of the physical and the digital, and of the material and the symbolic, the city of difference presents urban dwellers with an ecology of possibilities (Amin, 2012). Conviviality is one of those possibilities. With Gilroy (2004) as a starting point, I refer to conviviality as the close urban co-presence of difference that feeds into individual and collective identities' constitution, sometimes in dialogue and sometimes in opposition to other identities. Conviviality suggests shared awareness and acknowledgement of others' proximate presence. According to Gilroy (2004), conviviality depends on demographic and educational overlaps, rather than upon a moral commitment or guarantee of collaboration with others. In many ways, conviviality represents the strategies and tactics (de Certeau, 1984) that urban dwellers employ in managing difference in the unequal city (King, 2007; Massey, 2005). If conviviality does not overcome urban inequalities, in what ways, if at all, does it challenge them? Gilroy (2004) points to the possibility, even if not the guarantee, of collaboration and recognition, especially for those groups who suffer from marginality and misrecognition. Amin (2012) argues that conviviality and its politics depend on access and use of urban infrastructures. He calls for urban infrastructures that care for those in need, infrastructures that support the voices of those not heard.

Urban communication infrastructures partly manage physical and mediated contact across and against difference. This is a critical process in urban life as the inevitability of constant encounters with difference brings with it perpetual exposure to the unknown, the uncertain, the risky. Such confrontations with difference are unavoidable and so is the experience of the “pleasures as well as the pains they inevitably produce” (Watson, 2006, p.6). Exposure to urban difference and its associated divides, uncertainties and risks is not unlike the exposure to the range and scale of risks that Giddens (1990) recognizes as a consequence of globalization. As Giddens argues, awareness of the range and scale of risks individuals now face enhances a sense of ontological insecurity – a sense of insecurity that is deeply linked to humans’ primordial fears of being exposed to the unknown. In response, Silverstone (1984) emphasized the role of the media in supporting a sense of ontological security – in reproducing the familiar and in regularly exposing audiences to risks, they regulate everyday life and contain those risk; consequently the media help manage audiences’ anxieties (1994). If Silverstone’s argument held true at times when television dominated the mediascapes of western metropolises, its relevance is yet more eminent at times of intensified mediation in all elements of urban life. As connections across the city and beyond are increasingly organized in digital networks, as interpersonal communication, policing, and the representational landscape of the city are regularly mediated (Georgiou, 2013; McQuire, 2008), communication infrastructures’ ability to organize and to feed into urban dwellers’ desires and fears expands further. How do urban dwellers manage ontological insecurities when the unfamiliar and the unpredictable are regularly present, frequently seen on the street or the screen? Amin (2012) argues that urban infrastructure and close proximity to difference allow for multiple connections, ties and affinities of different intensity and endurance, not necessarily for strong, sustained and secure community ties. Does this structure of differentiated modes of connection support or challenge ontological



security? Arguably, people and things' consistent presence (Giddens, 1990, p. 92), even when they are not intimate and familiar, helps sustain order, certainty, and systems of trust.

Diverse communication infrastructures can be seen as themselves representing an order of things in cities of difference. Urban communication infrastructures involve technologies, media produced locally and transnationally and consumed locally, but also systems of face-to-face communication (Ball-Rokeach and Kim, 2006). Little studied, face-to-face communication has a distinct significance for urban societies. Dependent on close physical proximity, on awareness and shared concerns about local issues (ibid.), face-to-face communication does more than just reproduce familiarity, existing networks and community connections. It enables affective links across the dispersed histories and diverging connections of urban dwellers (Leurs and Georgiou, in press). Face-to-face communication in the city always co-exists with the rich and fragmented universe of mediated communication. Increasingly, alongside national and transnational mass media, hyperlocal media, social media, and ethnic media call for the attention of urban dwellers. These range of media, in their convergence and divergence, become platforms for multiple and contradictory claims to community, togetherness and separation. In positive or negative ways, different modes of communication constantly expose the urban dweller to difference and its diverting claims to belonging. Thus difference becomes banal, either because in its physical and symbolic expressions it is regularly encountered in the street, or because it appears in mediated communication as fleeting and unremarkable ephemera (Frosh, 2007).

City dwellers immersed in the routines of city life are often inattentive and indifferent to the range of urban sounds, languages and media surrounding them. A sense of proximity produces a civility of indifference, the ability to co-exist with others without resenting them (Bailey, 1996), a conviviality without engagement. For Frosh (2012) civility of indifference is a morally enabling moment, but for Bauman (1990) it is disabling of empathy and

solidarity. Urban communication – as we studied it in its multifaceted modes and orientations – exposed the complex empirical incarnations of these contested claims and, not least, revealed their cultural and political implications for the city of difference.

### **Communicating Togetherness and Separation**

Our study was located in Harringay/Green Lanes, a lively multicultural neighborhood of approximately 27,000 residents, with a vibrant high street and parks where encounters among locals are constant and inevitable. The area is organized in a grid of domestic streets that expand on either side of a long high street – Green Lanes. Harringay/Green Lanes is located in the heart of the London Borough of Haringey, the fourth most deprived borough in London and one of the most diverse areas of the UK, with 65.3 % of its population being non-British White (Haringey Council, 2014). It is an area which has been undergoing a gradual process of regeneration and gentrification, with middle class families moving in, house prices rising fast, and businesses targeting a middle class clientele making a visible advance. This is also a neighborhood with no obvious interethnic conflict. There is relative harmony in coexistence, even among groups which share national histories of conflict, such as Turks and Kurds or Turkish Cypriots and Greek Cypriots. While moments of tension are not unheard of – with the London riots of 2011 being the most recent – the neighborhood does not suffer from persistent interethnic tensions. While largely convivial, the neighborhood is socially unequal, with levels of poverty among minorities being disproportionately high (Haringey Council, 2014) and with rising housing costs pushing less affluent residents out of the area. In addition, ethnic minorities are underrepresented in decision-making bodies and, during fieldwork, we observed the closing down of numerous ethnic community centers due to spending cuts. Harringay is also a neighborhood of rich and diverse communication infrastructures: a hyperlocal, successful online social forum; two local newspapers; more than half a dozen ethnic newspapers; at least three ethnic radio

stations; neighborhood and resident associations' mailing lists; very strong interpersonal networks; and, not least, active community organizations and churches that mediate communication, information and services for many residents.

A multimethod study in this locale conducted between September 2013 and September 2014 informs this discussion. It included a 9-month ethnographic participant observation, a small-scale survey with 138 participants of Black Caribbean/Black Caribbean mixed heritage; British White/British White mixed heritage; and Turkish/Turkish mixed heritage backgrounds (from now on referred to as British White, Turkish, and Black Caribbean for brevity) randomly selected on the high street; five ethnically-specific focus groups each constituted from 5 to 11 female and male parents of the same cultural backgrounds, aged between 25 and 50, recruited through snowballing; and a public engagement event conducted during a local school's summer fair. Approximately 45 locals voluntarily participated in this event; participants identified their most important communication infrastructures. Asset mapping methods were used in the public engagement event and as supplementary methods during the focus groups. At the core of our research was an inquiry on urban communication's role in managing everyday life in the city of difference. The proposed analysis emerged inductively and in response to some of the most prominent themes that the data generated. While the particular analytical categories emerged inductively, they are situated in wider systems of knowledge (Haraway, 1988), as much as in our own ethical-political commitment: to understand "what, where, when, how, and for whom differences matter" (Ringrose and Renold, 2014, p.772). The discussion that follows draws from data collected through the different stages of the project; statistical data is associated with the survey and direct quotations with the focus group discussions. The discussion focusses on locals' communication practices, the ways these are enacted and discussed, as well as on the ways in which they enhance or restrict a politics of mutuality, respect, and collaboration.

### Separation Vs conviviality?

Locals' engagement with their neighborhood was somewhat paradoxical. The survey, focus groups and online and offline ethnographic observations revealed high levels of local engagement and strong identification with the multicultural locale. On the high street, dominated by Turkish and Kurdish restaurants and grocery shops and a smaller but rising number of other catering businesses, contact with ethnic diversity is constant. People of all ages and cultural backgrounds occupy the street, rub shoulders, and exchange greetings in shops, restaurants, and at the nearby school gates – the neutral ground (Anderson, 2011) of the multicultural city. Most participants expressed their pride for their neighborhood's diversity and confirmed that shopping and eating is the high street's magnet for locals and visitors. Yet, qualitative and survey data pointed very clearly at socio-cultural and communicative separation: most participants' noted that their friendships, sustained attachments, and media use diverged from physical proximity. A focus group participant referred to that separation as evidence that, behind diversity, social life in Harringay is deeply divided. Others took for granted or hesitantly admitted this kind of separation from proximate but less familiar others, partly attributing it to linguistic and cultural differences – which however were never clearly defined. Observations also showed that different groups often diverged in certain community centers, cafés and barbers, churches and mosques.

Persistent separation across ethnic lines, which often merge with class, emerged as a key finding. This separation is most revealing in the media, which partly reproduce socio-cultural divides but which, to an extent, enhance them. According to our survey, British White participants predominately use the vibrant local social forum, *Harringay Online* [HoL] (54.1%) as their main resource for information and communication. 45.9% of British White subscribe to HoL's newsletter but only 7.5% of Turkish participants. Black Caribbean respondents reported that they predominantly use the *Haringey Independent*, combined with

the *Tottenham & Wood Green Journal* (37.5%) as their main information sources, showing extensive dependence on local press. Turkish respondents use as their main online information resources the free local newspaper *Haringey Independent* combined with the London Turkish language newspaper *Olay* (20.7%). In addition, only 17.1% of Turkish respondents use online UK media as their main resource of information. This contrasts with the 57.2% of British White respondents and 46% of Black Caribbean respondents. The divides between participants of different backgrounds were also reflected in the use of non-British media. The majority of Turkish respondents (66%) use transnational media on a daily basis to get information. This sharply contrasts with 50% of British White respondents and 67.2% of Black Caribbean respondents who never use transnational media.

To an extent, communicative separation is not surprising: it reflects longstanding cultural connections, for example transnational connections among diasporas. In part, such divides also reveal linguistic barriers. However, linguistic barriers do not fully explain limited engagement with the local, especially digital, media among the numerically significant Turkish minority. While 41.5% of Turkish survey respondents said they do not speak English, 92.5% of them said they do not engage with *Haringay Online*. The very successful digital social forum *Haringay Online* is a vibrant communication space, with high levels of local engagement and influence in local politics, but which remains a medium primarily used by British White middle-class locals.

What our data revealed is that the diverse media and communication landscape, which expands across the urban and digital streets of Harringay/Green Lanes, participate in communicative separation. Separation points towards the persistence of networks of kin and community ties but it also reveals certain elements which are distinctly urban but also communicative. The vast majority of Turkish survey respondents were unemployed or on benefits and without internet access at home. For many, internet access is available on mobile

phones and on pay-as-you-go deals which make access expensive. Many of the female Turkish focus group participants described how they needed to make a choice between investing their limited funds on television or on the internet. For many of these participants, digital infrastructures which provide free Wi-Fi access in cafés and restaurants are still inaccessible as these are places many cannot afford or places they feel they do not belong. Thus, and while communicative separation is the result of a range of factors, it was interesting to observe how many participants repeatedly attributed such separation to ethnicity and cultural difference. Participants' concerns, as shown below, often echoed hegemonic political discourses equating separation to "multicultural pathologies" (Lentin and Titley, 2011). A British White participant spoke of his concern with regard to what he sees as local divides that spread across physical and digital domains:

You tend to find Turkish and Middle Eastern underrepresented in schools, at PSAs or PTAs, on boards of governors, HoL [*Harringay Online*]. Almost everywhere. Only the tech-savvy on internet and who speak English confidently engage, but they are very few...The Turkish question is an interesting one, but it is a real challenge for the neighborhood. There is a linguistic barrier first, but also a cultural barrier. Perhaps it would be good to have a HoL...for the Turkish community? It's not clear how to breach the divide with them and get them involved locally.

What becomes apparent in these words is an ambivalent and contradictory explanation of communicative separation. These words partly reflect concern and respect for the proximate other and partly reaffirm a group's Otherness in the eyes of the speaker. For this participant, as for many others, digital connectivity itself becomes evidence of togetherness and the lack thereof becomes equally powerful evidence for minorities' perceived (self-)segregation. This popular interpretative framework points to two ways in which communication is mobilized to justify and articulate a politics of conviviality. On the one

hand, it points to the equation of digital connectivity to public engagement (van Dijck, 2013). On the other hand, it points to a selective interpretation of patterns of communication for justifying a certain form of cosmopolitan politics. Anderson (2011) refers to Goffman's category of "gloss" to explain the limits of urban cosmopolitanism and the niceties which can disguise but not always hide racial sentiments. Concerns, even anxieties, expressed by this participant, among many, reveal a cosmopolitan ethos but also an inability to understand unfamiliar others' position. Separation becomes "the problem" in this participant's explanatory framework, which does not tackle but rather – even if unintentionally – reproduces communicative and socio-cultural hierarchies. This participant's class habitus makes it almost impossible to identify with the experiences of Turkish locals, even if he is worried about their marginality in public life. In addition, his limited contact and little affective engagement with the groups he speaks of makes it even more difficult to understand Turkish locals as anything but Others. Yet, our ethnographic observations recorded again and again many Turkish informants' participation in dense local networks and their vivid engagement with local issues. This was the case for a number of men using a Turkish community center, who regularly held conversations about local issues, such as safety, transport and politics. These communication practices remain largely unaccounted for in some of the dominant local imaginaries of public engagement, which instead overemphasize difference (including an exaggeration of linguistic difference). These communication practices are certainly undermined in the above participant's words. The space between the speaker and the minorities he talks about is one of "uncommitted observation and impersonal witnessing" (Frosh, 2007, p.281), associated with established hierarchies and divides. Relative indifference is most visible in another participant's words:

...I don't lose sleep over it, but it's quite easy to sort of feel that...although I live in a very very diverse area to be in a bit of a ghetto. (British White, Male)

There is a fine balance between civility and detachment expressed here. Urban throwntogetherness and the inevitable proximity to others come with the requirement for certain level of convivial civility (Bailey, 1996), even if this civility often does not necessarily come with empathy. These participants find it difficult to articulate initial concerns about separation, as they see no affective connections with local others; largely, understanding them comes through engagement with media representations. A certain level of disengagement from the proximate other also affirms pre-existing barriers – defined along linguistic, technological, and perceived or real cultural difference. The ambivalence expressed here opens up to a discourse of conviviality through inattention – a space where uncommitted relations with others neutralize hostility and fear (Frosh, 2007) and enhance civility. Urban separation along ethnic and social lines becomes ordinary, as the words of a British White female participant also attest:

The people running around in the shops and the restaurants, that's where I really have it [exposure to difference] in my life, rather than the people that I am actually really good friends with. (British White, Female)

However, inattentive civility falls short of deconstructing categories of Otherness. Importantly, stereotypes are circulated among all groups, including members of ethnic minorities. Constructions of Otherness, familiar through national media representations and discourses of the “idle” urban Black youth, were drawn by a Black Caribbean participant, when describing his anxiety about local separation along ethnic lines:

Young Black boys...don't want to go out and work, and there is work out there, they prefer to be on the streets stealing, yeah?...It's like nothing to do with the police “stop and search”. They've decided to do this because they don't want to go out and work. (Black Caribbean, Male).



Persistent perceptions of minorities as Others are entangled in the global city's inequalities and its divided mediascapes and technoscapes. For some participants, policy decisions in regards to access and control of information confirm such divides. In the Turkish male focus group, a number of participants expressed their anxiety about further marginalization and exclusion from local affairs as a result of communication policies. In the words of one of them:

We used to get the [local government's information] facilities, we don't get it anymore...Haringey Council used to provide us with all the information in Haringey with newspaper. It used to be a free newspaper.

When asked why he wouldn't get this information online, he responded:

But I don't have computer, I don't have computer facilities, I am not going to punch on my phone "what's going on in Haringey?" You understand?

In comparing the different kinds of responses to communicative separation, it becomes apparent that urban dwellers interpret experience at the juncture of socio-cultural order (Bourdieu, 1980) on the one hand, and their affective associations and dissociations with others and with their (mediated) environment, on the other.

Contradictory discourses of ethnic and social demarcation and affective attachments in the locale enhance urban dwellers' anxieties and their efforts to manage them. The participants above express different kinds of anxieties in regard to socio-cultural and communicative separation – some relating to public engagement, others to crime and urban anomie. Many struggle to find a balance between the benefits associated with the city's openness and the uncertainties and risks it entails. Regular encounters with difference, which come with exposure to overwhelming inequalities, enhance these anxieties. Inevitably perhaps, sentiments of trust become primarily grounded in longstanding relations of family,

community and familiar communication systems. These sentiments separate those who urban dwellers want to be with and those they are happy to co-occupy the urban neighborhood.

They also reveal affective association of different kinds, intensity and duration.

There's a lot of harmony amongst the diversity, but actually when I talk about community and stuff going on...it doesn't reflect the whole community...I always say there's a strong middle-class community here...if there are events going on, then it tends to be quite mono-cultural. (British White, Male)

These words set a hierarchy of relations and collaborative possibilities, which clearly recognize co-occupancy as different from community. Identification with a "strong middle-class community" affirms boundaries of sustained association, but also wider power structures. Such narratives surpass the locale but still regulate it, not least through their wide circulation in hyperlocal media. While spoken from a position of privilege, these words also reveal anxieties about local separation that cross ethnic and class lines.

Seeking social and ethnic familiarity works as a tactic for managing ontological insecurity in the city of difference across all groups, as revealed in the survey results highlighted above. The strong attachment of Turkish participants to Turkish transnational television is not merely linguistic but also ontological (Silverstone, 1994): transnational Turkish television to an extent reproduces the familiar and the intimate, not unlike what *Haringay Online* does for its own users, perhaps. Minorities might seek more proactively familiarity and security as urban uncertainties are often more intense for them, precisely because of their limited economic and cultural capital. As noted already, ethnic minorities (Haringey Council, 2014) are more likely to suffer higher levels of poverty, have lower educational achievements and lower presence in interactive participatory media. Thus for them, ethnic familiarity becomes even more important in sustaining ontological, social and economic security. This was most apparent among a number of Turkish female participants

who live in social housing and who have little English. As most explained, their networks of support are exclusively Turkish, and their media use almost wholly in Turkish, with limited use of English language local press and the internet. English language media were usually used for gaining access to important information, e.g. schooling and welfare. Familiar media offer many the confidence in the continuity of their identity and of their surrounding social and material environment (Giddens, 1990; Silverstone, 1994).

Local throwntogetherness is always mediated by wider politics and histories of race and ethnicity. Physical proximity is challenged through affective distance from others occupying different positions in the social or cultural local order and mediated through systems of representation that surpass the locale. While national political and media discourses of “entitlement” and “Muslim segregation” were mobilized by local participants for racial and social demarcations, these discourses are locally, experientially and emotionally appropriated:

You need to have a lot of local activities, not causing people to divert in groups.

Because there's a lot of groups within the area. We all say it's multicultural and it's diverse, but there are a lot of individual groups that do their own thing...they don't open themselves out to other groups (Black Caribbean, Male).

This participant expresses a certain ambivalence, which partly reaffirms Otherness and partly recognizes collective responsibility for the neighborhood as a whole. The civility discussed earlier turns into a sense of civic responsibility in these words, even if it remains constrained within hegemonic narratives of (minority) groups' perceived pathologies. While dominant majoritarian narratives (Appadurai, 2006) are reproduced in negative references to certain groups, a sense of locally grounded We-ness ameliorates this narrative. This was a commonly adopted position among many participants, especially women and minorities. Being more likely to have regular, even if unintended encounters with neighbors of different

backgrounds at the school gates, the high street and in parks, many women were more open to negotiating who belongs and who does not belong in “the community”. For one of them, the best thing about the neighborhood they live in is the fact that “There is not a normalized way of being”. These words point towards the lack of a set understanding of the boundaries of a “We”. Another White British female focus group participant said she was “scared” of moving away from local “diversity and cosmopolitanism”, in reference to her planned move to the countryside. While there is no evidence of empathetic engagements with others in her words, there is strong attachment to the world of multicultural conviviality she occupies. Is it possible for this civility to turn into civic engagement and solidarity?

### **Conditional togetherness**

While communicative and cultural separation across ethnic and class lines remains dominant in the multicultural neighborhood, separation is neither sealed nor permanently bounded. What Giddens’ analysis of ontological security fails to acknowledge is the significance of close encounters and of face-to-face communication in building relations of trust and support. Declared lost and replaced by impersonal systems of trust, face-to-face communication is anything but absent in the city. While mediated communication primarily enhances attachment to the familiar, face-to-face communication is the embodiment of the intimate and inevitable encounter with difference. Ontological security depends on affective reaffirmation of a familiar and safe space against urban uncertainties, as noted above. But ontological security in the city cannot be sustained without the encounter with difference, precisely because living with difference is an inherent condition of urban life. Lack of such encounters intensifies insecurities and thus suspicion, fear and conflict. Overdependence on familiar networks, for example on the basis of class and ethnicity, can intensify anxieties, as it increases the awareness of disconnection from the surrounding urban world. This is most visible in urban societies where segregation across ethnic and social lines is intense –

insecurities are anything but absent and phenomena of interethnic violence are more likely to occur. If separation is not enough to sustain a sense of security in the city, how do residents build their confidence and trust among others they do not necessarily share deep affiliations with?

The ordinariness of the encounter is the most promising moment in thinking of togetherness alongside individual and collective confidence. As an asset mapping exercise during the focus groups and the public engagement event revealed, the parks and the high street are the two spaces where people of different backgrounds have the most frequent encounters. Participants in the focus groups also spoke of “crossing paths”, especially as intimate relations mediate contact with the unfamiliar:

Through kids, either at the park and starting to see the same face or having seen someone you’ve seen in another group [of kids activities], you know, you cross paths.  
(British White, Female)

The other day, you know, I dropped my bags and I was chatting to a woman we were watching the kids play and we had a chat. (Black Caribbean, Female)

The brief and uncommitted communication in the urban street is a moment where urban dwellers build their confidence in the continuity of their environment; the people they encounter and greet, as in the above case, are reliable references to the continuity of identities, which is necessary, as Giddens (1990) argues, for ontological security. Face-to-face communication also destabilizes the discursive media order of Otherness, as representational narratives of the Other are tested in the street. A way to address urban anxieties through contact but also through interaction, the encounter is enabling, even if limited, when it comes to politics of conviviality. As discussed above, unintentional and inattentive encounters feed into a civility and acknowledgement of others’ right to the city.

As the physical encounters exist in wider communicative contexts, language circulated in the media is often mobilized to interpret them. Repeatedly, focus group participants mentioned “diversity”, “multiculturalism”, “cosmopolitanism” as the best qualities of their neighborhood and raised concerns about the possibility of some groups losing their right to the city as a result of rising house prices and gentrification:

The thing I worry most about it, as if Haringay does become gentrified, there would be less community. (British White, Male)

Even if this participant admits having only superficial encounters with others with whom he shares no ethnic or social background, symbolically, their co-occupancy presents him with a sense of reassurance that community exists. When the encounters become less indifferent and develop into communication and sharing on common concerns, relations of trust and engagement are more likely to be enhanced, as another participant describes:

I do share [things I read online] with my neighbors...They just don't use the Internet, or they don't use *Haringay Online* anyway. So we would talk to them about things that we think would be of interest to them, and their teenage daughter. (British White, Female)

At moments when co-occupancy becomes more than a random encounter, possibilities for civility to turn into civic responsibility and solidarity emerge. As we observed in public spaces and at local meetings and events, there are momentary and temporal alliances, which are liberated from the moral fears and the divides that are persistent in the city of difference. This is the case for example with the campaign to save the local hospital grounds – a campaign organized in both the physical and the digital street. Such moments of convergence of difference give rise to communicative togetherness. A focus group participant describes unplanned moments of togetherness in the park:

Finsbury Park is the only park within the area I know that you can actually engage with other people, because there's actually a Black Jamaican, he does this on a Friday on a summer. He was doing this last year and it was brilliant. He brings a sound system and his little barbeque kit and, seriously, he would play music and it was mixed. Turks, Polish, the Black, they've all come to listen to his music and he would also bring chicken, which you wouldn't pay for, so he would barbeque chicken and hand it out. Every Friday, people would come with their cans of beer, sit back and listen to this beautiful music. (Black Caribbean, Male)

Such practices of togetherness sometimes spill into the media, especially social media. Social media, partly because of their dependence on experience and on longstanding or ephemeral affective connections (Papacharissi, 2014), contribute to ordinary local engagement. During fieldwork, long threads on *Harringay Online* discussed the new Polish burger bar or the refurbishment of a Turkish restaurant, and residents' mailing lists mediated street parties, playstreet scheme and local school summer fairs. Congregations across difference, mostly initiated in face-to-face communication, are sustained and sometimes, at critical moments, turn into organized action, revealing the collective imaginings of a community.

Online debates on the school teachers' strike in July 2014 became an interesting case during our fieldwork. On *Harringay Online*, where fiery disagreements are far from rare, consensus predominated in supporting the striking teachers. This discussion was also one of the few cases when female participants predominated.

Solidarity with all those striking tomorrow (Female contributor)

Yesterday my son's local school was closed. I support the reasons for the strike and just took the day off and enjoyed some time with my children. I appreciate not

everyone can do that, but people found solutions of various kinds - many parents helped each other out (Female contributor)

I'm quite happy to put up with since I am sure my son's education will be damaged a lot less than by unhappy teachers leaving the profession in droves (Female contributor)

In this case, digital media served a dual role in enhancing collective public participation: on the one hand, allowing the vocalization of shared values of solidarity and humanism; on the other hand, functioning as a system of trust by enabling the development of a shared understanding of risks and uncertainties (Giddens, 1990). This is a powerful example where digital communication emerges as an informational portal for managing local risks collectively and for sharing expressions of solidarity. Coming together in support of a common cause – better education – is ephemeral and as many other debates on the same online forum show, individuals who embraced this shared cause then continued on their divergent paths. But it is the moment of crisis, or of realization of a crisis, that brings shared values of respect and solidarity to the fore. At least momentarily.

### **Urban Communication and the Plurality of Politics of Difference**

As recorded in the multicultural neighborhood of our study, the multiple and diverging modes of communication present the necessary conditions for urban conviviality. Yet, conviviality is not the endpoint of a politics of living with difference but a spectrum of possibilities: a politics of civility through Othering; a politics of civility through negotiation of We-ness and Otherness; and a politics of civic engagement and solidarity. The ways in which different modes of communication enable local separation or togetherness reflect these politics' plurality. Separation and togetherness are constitutive, co-existing and co-dependent elements of conviviality: in the city people converge and diverge, they come together and



separate in managing living with difference. In part, the co-dependence of communicative separation and togetherness reflects the pragmatics of communication: people seek different information and diverse kinds of communicative connection through different associations and a range of media. The communicative separation/togetherness dialectic, though, also serves core elements of ontological security in the city of difference. On the one hand, through communicative separation, urban dwellers reaffirm bonds and relations of trust associated with culturally, socially and linguistically familiar media and longstanding community attachments. On the other, face-to-face communication in the street, which occasionally spills into digital streets, supports momentary and selective togetherness and reassures urban dwellers that unfamiliar others are not threatening and do not necessarily present new risks. As the unfamiliar is always around in the city of difference, ontological security and conviviality depend on the ability to both withdraw *and* to engage with it. While this dialectic crosses gender, class and ethnic particularities, its expressions and politics divert. Depending on urban dwellers' position in local, national and transnational systems of power, conviviality comes with different politics.

*Civility through Othering* represents a politics that balances between indifference, privilege and recognition of difference. This is the most basic form of conviviality but its politics lack empathy or commitment to others and there is no engagement beyond accidental meetings in public space. As the words of some British White male, middle-class participants, have shown, there is some recognition of others' presence and some concern about separation, but these are followed by inability or indifference in engaging with the challenges of separation. On the contrary, separation is seen as the problematic outcome of minorities' pathologies. These hegemonic discourses of Otherness are very powerful and effective. Even minority participants adopt them sometimes, as shown in a Black Caribbean's

words about “entitled” Black youth. As civility supports co-occupancy without animosity, it accepts the presence of others. But it comes with a negation of others’ equal right to the city.

*Civility through negotiation of We-ness and Otherness* recognizes others’ right to the city. It comes to life when urban dwellers’ everyday practice involves systematic encounters with others and desire for such encounters, as noted in the cases of some British White women and the middle-class Black Caribbean participant who called for institutional support of conviviality. Negotiation of boundaries of We-ness and Otherness occurs when communication is more than merely accidental and when participants from different backgrounds engage in some sustained crossings, for example in schools, in local organizations and in social media. Such crossings support reflexive encounters and enable affective contact with the unfamiliar but ordinary – it is possible to see and experience others as members of one’s own school or local community. This negotiation challenges rigid boundaries but it does not guarantee solidarity and mutual care.

Mutual care requires more than the encounter; it requires a commitment to a *politics of civic engagement and solidarity*. Amin (2012) argues that co-occupancy is not the same as cooperation but it is necessary for cooperation. Sennett (2013) emphasizes that cooperation, not solidarity, advances our capacity to live together. I argue for cooperation through solidarity. Solidarity represents an ethical point of recognizing mutuality in co-occupancy, a moment of a convivial ethics of commitment to each other. Londoners’ close encounters are a prerequisite for such a politics, especially in enabling sustained interpersonal communication in multicultural neighborhoods’ urban and digital streets. Sustained contact across difference and the affective dimension of urban sociality it supports, open up avenues to see and talk about inequalities and uneven public participation. From the example of the barbeque in the park, to the case of digital solidarity to striking teachers, we can observe the

emergence of affective publics (Papacharissi, 2014), publics that occasionally push the limits of the unequal and divided city.

### **To Conclude: Convivial Separation**

Frames of ethnic absolutism (Gilroy, 2004) reproduce assumptions about the pathology of socio-cultural and communicative separation. Similarly, frames which focus on cosmopolitan politics as an alternative to ethno-centric politics (Anderson, 2011) assume that convivial openness is in itself enabling of a politics committed to equality and justice. The problem with these kinds of binaries is the emphasis on togetherness and communication across difference as being the endpoint – the proof of willingness to leave particularities aside. However, communication can serve different needs and desires, these being social, cultural and ontological. In the process, communication supports – and sometimes critically obstructs – a range of politics for living together in difference. Thus, the frame of analysis proposed here is not one of togetherness but one of convivial separation. Urban dwellers manage ontological insecurities in the city by sustaining deep attachment to the familiar and by maintaining ephemeral engagement with the unfamiliar. Convivial separation, which at times involves withdrawal and at times inattention to others, is more compatible with Derrida's hospitality (2002). It does not require from the unfamiliar to become familiar and to integrate into preexisting communities and values. Thus it opens up the door to values of mutual care and equalitarian engagement with each other. Convivial separation might be more inclusive, democratic, and potentially effective in managing urban uncertainties, compared to forced togetherness that inevitably suppresses difference. At the same time, ephemeral and strategic togetherness creates conditions for differential affective connections and generates the necessary conditions for collaboration and collective action.

A communication perspective reveals the nuanced and complex ways in which the city of difference is lived and communicated – the increasingly diverse modes of communication and the different ways in which urban dwellers engage with them show that the ecology of possibility that Amin (2012) talks about is a possibility to have separation without segregation. Separation without segregation is also contextual and subject to certain communicative conditions: first, the regular and unforced communication in public space – especially the high street, the park, the school, but also sometimes and importantly social media; secondly, the sustained and dynamic mediated communication infrastructure that allows locals to get access to information of different kinds, to seek ontological security by engaging with familiar and recognizable communication networks, such as those developing around ethnic media for some or hyperlocal media for others. The result is a range of possibilities, though not a lack of restrictions. Affective exposure to the city and its lived difference is a key element of conviviality. Sustained communication about and across difference is critical for an urban ethos that recognizes various occupants’ converging, and sometimes diverging, right to the city. And engaged communication with one’s neighbors is the moment when others’ right to the city becomes a shared commitment, the rare but promising moment of mutuality and care across difference.

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**Endnotes**

<sup>1</sup> The author led the project *Communication infrastructure in multicultural London* (Co-investigator: S. Livingstone; Researcher: W. Motta-Guarneros).

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