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# Settling in a super-diverse context: recent migrants' experiences of conviviality

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**Abstract**

This article focuses on the experiences of settlement among recent migrants in a super-diverse London Borough. Drawing on theories of cosmopolitanism and the notion of civility, it illustrates how the demographic super-diversity of an area, and the fact that diversity has become commonplace among local residents, facilitates newcomers' settlement process. Not only do newcomers quickly develop a sense of belonging on the grounds of 'not sticking out' because of their visible or audible difference, but they also find it easier to meet people because so many people have come from elsewhere. The article develops the notion of 'microspaces of conviviality' where newcomers can form relations with other residents on the grounds of shared interests, educational backgrounds and sometimes shared languages. It describes these places as anchor points where more sustained and enduring relations can be formed, but also shows that only a limited number of newcomers and long-term residents actually use such spaces.

**Introduction**

Recent research on urban diversity has shown how people routinely interact and communicate across linguistic, cultural, ethnic and religious differences. These studies rooted in two streams of research: the first emerged against the background of criticism on multiculturalism and the resulting studies on social cohesion and interculturalism, with a focus on interactions between different ethnic 'groups' (e.g. Hudson et al 2007; Robinson & Reeve 2006; Sandercock 2004; Wood & Landry 2007). The other resulted from a long

standing anthropological and sociological interest in cosmopolitanism, and the call within this field to acknowledge that cosmopolitan attitudes and practices can not only be found among a world travelling elite, but also among less privileged individuals and groups such as labour migrants and working-class residents of both ethnic majority and minority backgrounds within urban neighbourhoods (Lamont & Aksartova 2002; Landau & Freemantle 2010; Noble 2009; Wise 2007). Since 2007, many of the studies concerned with the issue of how people of different backgrounds live together and share densely populated urban areas have used the notion of super-diversity, referring to the multi-categorical differences that have come together in specific urban places (Berg and Sigona 2013; Meissner & Vertovec 2015; Vertovec 2007; Vertovec ed. 2015). The notion of super-diversity has helped us to not only acknowledge unprecedented demographic complexity in cities across the world which are characterized by migration, but it has also helped social scientists to focus their research on what kinds of categorical differences make a difference in what kinds of situations. Although most studies in the realm of super-diversity continue to focus on ethnic, national and religious differences, some studies acknowledge that in certain situations or interactions, other differences such as class, education or sexual orientation can be more important (Hyra 2011; Wessendorf 2014).

This article focuses on the experiences of settlement among recent migrants in a super-diverse London Borough. Drawing on the notions of civility and conviviality, which is the subject of this special issue, it illustrates how the demographic super-diversity of an area, and the fact that diversity has become commonplace among local residents, facilitates newcomers' settlement process. How do newcomers experience commonplace diversity and convivial relations in the area? How do established patterns of conviviality impact on the settlement process of recent migrants? The paper addresses these questions by drawing on interviews with migrants who have arrived in Hackney within the last 10 years. It thereby

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attempts to expand the notion of conviviality to also include relations between people with different life-styles. Much literature on conviviality focuses on conviviality between people of different ethnic or national backgrounds (but see Morawska 2014 for an exception to this). However, when asked about their views of the diversity in the area and in London more generally, many of my research participants talked about the diversity of life-styles rather than ethnic diversity. Building on my research participants' own perceptions of diversity, I thus use the term 'diversity' to refer to various types of differences, ranging from linguistic to religious, but also differences in dress and style, which are sometimes related to ethnicity or religion, but not always.

The London Borough of Hackney is a good example of this emergence of conviviality. As shown elsewhere (Wessendorf 2014), it is the historical process of diversification and the normalization of diversity over time, which could also be described as 'commonplace diversity', which has lead to convivial relations between people of different backgrounds in Hackney.

As I discuss in the following section of this paper, notions of conviviality have been criticised as too celebratory, ignoring persisting patterns of exclusion and racism (Ahmed 2008; Valentine 2008). Such patterns of racism also exist in Hackney, especially in relation to black youth, an issue I discuss elsewhere (Wessendorf 2014). Despite these continuing and ingrained patterns of exclusion in the area, the accounts of more recent migrants are generally positive. The dominant narratives of these recent migrants are of positive experiences with different others. Importantly, however, new forms of racism do form part of everyday social relations in the area, even if they are rare. These racisms are not characterized by simple dichotomies of black and white, but for example between long established residents (both ethnic minority and white British) and newcomers more generally, and against undocumented migrants or asylum seekers more specifically. It is important to point out that emerging

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super-diversity also leads to new forms of exclusion. Despite the importance of addressing such new forms of exclusion, the aim of this paper is to discuss how demographic super-diversity and the existence of commonplace diversity impacts on new migrants' settlement process and their sense of belonging. The paper shows how migrants feel a sense of belonging on the grounds of 'not sticking out' as different. In her theorization of 'belonging', Yuval-Davis (2006) has described the type of belonging expressed by my research participants as emotional attachment to a social group or location and 'feeling at home'. In this paper, I show how this is also related to feeling socially accepted.

This paper is based on an ethnographic study of social relations in the London Borough of Hackney during the period of 2008 - 2012, as well as an ongoing research project about recent immigration into the borough. Both projects consisted of participant observation in local associations, such as parents' groups, youth clubs and elderly people's clubs. In depth interviews were undertaken with long-term residents, recent migrants of various backgrounds, and key people who work in the migrant sector, such as English teachers, social workers, and people working in the voluntary sector. Furthermore, for the current project, four focus groups with recent migrants were undertaken. The current project involved a total of 98 respondents, in addition to informal conversations in associations and in public space.

Although this paper is based on research in Hackney and looked at places within Hackney, I do not assume that this is necessarily the only area in which people form social relations.[i] However, as I will show later in the paper, Hackney as a specific area within London does play a role in relation to recent migrants' perceptions of diversity and settlement, and many of them specifically wanted to stay in Hackney because of its multi-faceted diversity.

After discussing recent work on conviviality and its criticism, the paper looks at the emergence of commonplace diversity and convivial relations, and how these shape recent

migrants' sense of belonging to the area. Migrants' experiences of diversity during the initial phase of settlement mainly relate to visible and audible differences of life-styles, ethnicities, religions and languages in public space. The second part of the paper focuses on these spaces. They could also be described as sites of 'fleeting conviviality', where people interact with civility, but where relations do not go beyond superficial interactions. In the following section, the paper looks at sites where interactions across differences can be deeper and more sustained. Hunter (1985) and Lofland (1989) have conceptualized such sites as the 'parochial realm', referring to places like sports clubs, associations or relations between neighbours where more communal relations can be formed and where people meet on a more regular basis. The concluding section develops the notion of 'migrant convivialities', referring to the fact that participants in the study mostly formed friendships with other migrants. It also summarizes the paper's argument that increased linguistic and visual complexity in terms of life-styles facilitates a sense of belonging for those who might stick out as 'different' in less diverse places.

**Conviviality and its limits**

Much of the recent work on conviviality draws on earlier studies on social cohesion, interculturalism and cosmopolitanism mentioned above, looking at super-diverse areas in urban settings and patterns of 'everyday multiculturalism' (Wise 2009; Wise & Velayutham 2009). Scholars working on conviviality are interested in looking at how people who live in demographically diverse contexts 'live together successfully, how they create a modus co-vivendi and what strategies they create in order to practice it' (Nowicka & Vertovec 2014:342). Gilroy uses the notion of conviviality to describe how 'multiculture' has become 'an ordinary feature of urban life in Britain' (Gilroy 2004:xi), and to recognize the capacity of

ordinary people to overcome differences in their daily lives in the face of 'human sameness' (Gilroy 2006:6).

Morawska (2014) defines conviviality along six fundamental elements, ranging from the recognition of differences as legitimate feature of society, to sympathetic indifference or empathic interest in different others, to a certain stability of these features over time. Importantly, she points to a 'continuum of views and practices', ranging from 'side-by-side coexistence without much or with no mutual engagements to intense interactions bringing joy and reciprocal enrichment to the involved parties' (Morawska 2014:359). Morawska's contribution is important in relation to the material presented in this paper, because it not only points to the above mentioned continuum of convivial relations, but also the importance of both particular places as well as the historicity of the emergence of conviviality.

Imortantly, there have been critical voices in regards to ideas of conviviality. Gilroy (2006) pointed to the existence of conviviality despite of and in parallel with continuing structural inequalities and racism. Thus, different forms of social order can operate in the same context, and patterns of everyday conviviality can co-exist with 'everyday racism' (Noble 2011) and xenophobia (Lee 2002). This has been shown in a broad range of literature in recent years which discussed the co-existence of both positive and negative relations in specific locations (Clayton 2009; Wilson 2013). Especially in relation to convivial relations in the form of more fleeting encounters in public space, social scientists have questioned the extent to which these contribute to changes in attitudes (Ahmed 2008; Valentine 2008; Vertovec ed. 2015). Elsewhere, I have shown how convivial relations are sometimes accompanied by tensions, for example when it comes to perceptions of ownership over public space in the face of high numbers of newcomers. In the case of Hackney, these tensions have been manifest in relation to young, trendy people who form part of a process of

gentrification, the pace of which has been met with resentment among some of Hackney's residents (Butcher & Dickens [forthcoming] ; Wessendorf 2013).

Drawing on Overing and Passes's use of conviviality, which emphasised the affective side of the social (Overing & Passes 2000), Wise and Velayutham use the notion of 'convivial multiculture' to point out that conviviality goes beyond mere social interaction across difference, but that it is 'atmospheric' and 'captures something more embodied, habitual, sensuous and affective that carries over beyond the moment' (Wise & Velayutham 2014). This is related to the historicity of conviviality, which I discuss in the following section with the example of Hackney.

**The emergence conviviality in Hackney**

With its population of 257,379, Hackney figures among the 10% most deprived areas in the UK, but it is currently seeing the arrival of an increasing number of middle-class professionals of various nationalities.  It is also one of the most ethnically diverse Boroughs in Britain, with only 36.2% of the population being white British. Since the 1950s, sizeable groups of immigrants from West Africa, the Caribbean and South Asia have arrived, followed by Turkish, Kurdish and Turkish Cypriot people in the 1970s and 80s and Vietnamese refugees in the late 1970s. Among the biggest minority groups are Africans (11.4%), people of Caribbean background (7.8%), South Asians (6.4%), Turkish-speaking people (4.5%), Chinese (1.4%) and 'other Asian' (2.7% , many of whom come from Vietnam). 6.4% of the population identify as 'mixed'. 35.5 % of Hackney's total population are foreign-born, and they come from countries ranging from Zimbabwe, Cyprus, Somalia, Iraq, Albania to Denmark, Germany, etc.  Recently, there has been an increase in people from Eastern Europe, especially Poland (1.6%), and Spanish speakers from Latin America and Spain (1.5%).[ii] Other more recent countries of origin represented in the 2011 census include

Australia, the United States, France, Italy, Belgium, Switzerland, Japan and Brazil (London Borough of Hackney 2015).

Added to this national and linguistic diversity is religious diversity, both invisible and visible in public space, ranging from a sizable number of Orthodox Jewish people (7.4%), to south Asian, African and Turkish Muslims (14.1%)(London Borough of Hackney 2015), and Christians of various denominations. Pentecostal preachers can be found on busy high streets and markets, and various provisional and permanent churches are popping up across the borough, advertising their services in languages ranging from French to Portuguese, Spanish and English. Albeit not represented in local statistics, there is also a sizeable gay and lesbian population in Hackney, visible in both the Council's newspaper *Hackney Today*[iii] by way of advertising events, as well as a number of local bars and night clubs.

This development of diversification over time has led to perceptions of diversity as normal among the local population, and diversity in ethnicity, nationality, language, life-style and religion now forms part of local residents' everyday lived reality. Commonplace diversity does not mean that people are not aware of the diversity of the people around them, but they do not think that it is something unusual. Various kinds of differences are negotiated on a daily basis in myriad social encounters in public space (Wessendorf 2014).

When newcomers arrive in Hackney, they see this diversity of life-styles, and they also see that people act with civility across these differences. In her discussions on patterns of behaviour and social life in the public realm, Lofland (1989) defines 'civility towards diversity' as one of the main 'interactional principles'. This principle...

> ... specifies that in face-to-face exchanges, confronted with what may be personally
> offensive visible variations in physical abilities, beauty, skin colour and hair texture,
> dress style, demeanour, income, sexual preferences, and so forth, the urbanite will

act in a civil manner, that is, will act 'decently' vis-à-vis diversity (ibid., 1989: 464-5).

Importantly, Lofland states that civility towards diversity does not necessarily imply a specific appreciation of diversity, but it means treating people universally the same, and it can emerge from indifference to diversity rather than appreciation of it. This is similar to Morawska's (2014) emphasis that conviviality can be seen in terms of degrees, or on a continuum of different views and practices. However, civility should not be confused with conviviality, as the former relates more specifically to social interaction, whereas the later relates to a combination of interactions, dispositions and worldviews. But civility could be seen as a requirement or predisposition to conviviality. Buonfino and Mulgan (2009:17) describe civility as a 'learned grammar of sociability'. They compare these grammars of sociability with language. Although we are born with the disposition to speak a language, we still have to learn how to speak, read and write. Similarly, civility is based on existing dispositions, but it also has to be learned and cultivated. In a super-diverse context, civility towards people who look, speak or behave differently is learned through everyday contact and interaction in a multiplicity of day-to-day social situations.

For newcomers, it is not just the existence of commonplace diversity and patterns of conviviality which shape the way in which they experience the area in which they settle, but it is these concrete ways in which people interact and, especially, in which other people relate to them, which facilitates their settlement and sense of belonging.

**Conviviality in public space: diversity and a sense of belonging**
Whenever asked whether they liked the diversity they encountered in Hackney, the migrants who participated in my research responded positively. These positive responses were related

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to various factors which relate to the existence of conviviality in the area. The following extract of an interview with Aika, a woman from Kyrgyzstan who has been living in Hackney for almost ten years, captures these various factors. When asked whether she liked the fact that Hackney is so mixed, she said the following:

Aika: I love the fact that it's so mixed. And partly I moved from W *(an area in West London)* away and was like, I like Hackney so much because that first week when I arrived they invited me for dinner to Clapton *(an area in Hackney)*, and when I came here it was so fresh and so vibrant in comparison with W, W was cold, it didn't have the vibrancy to it, and Hackney was just like, yes this is me, that's something I really liked, I loved it .... And I don't feel like, I think I stayed here because I never felt like I'm a foreigner here. I don't feel that.  I don't feel like I don't belong here, I feel like I can be part of it or not part of it, no one bothers, you just, I feel comfortable, I feel good.

S: Because there are so many people, it doesn't matter the way you look?

A: [Laughs]. Yes no, how you dress, how you look, there are not many norms. Whereas at home even leaving the house was, not brushing your hair seems to be a crime. It's hard work, it's hard work. Living up to that image with women, well kept women, educated, you have to live up to that perfect ideal.

S: So you felt freer here?

A: Yes, I could dress down a bit! I don't need to wear high heels all the time! I don't need to put make up on! Because although you're free in your family, when you go out and go to a party and everyone is dressed up, you have to be dressed up, you just, you look like a wreck otherwise. And here I don't mind that because quite a few people look like a wreck, so what, at home it doesn't work.

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Aika's statement captures the experiences of other migrants regarding several factors. First, the visible diversity of life-styles enables her to feel freer regarding her own looks. Being able to 'dress down a bit' is a statement other female research participants expressed, too. A woman from Latvia, for example, told me how she had never worn flat shoes in public space before moving to London. Visible diversity not only enables people to dress the way they want in terms of taste and style, but also in regards to religious believes. For example, my Latvian research participant is originally of Chechen background and was brought up in a religious Muslim family. Whereas in Latvia she did not dare to wear a headscarf in public space because of discrimination, moving to London finally enabled her to do so.

Visible diversity also facilitates a sense of belonging for those of visible ethnic minority background, both newcomers as well as long-term residents. For example, a Malawian migrant preferred Hackney to a less diverse area in West London because he had experienced racism there, and similarly, a young black man of Nigerian background who was born in Hackney is hesitant to move away because the only experiences of racism he had took place outside of London.

Feeling a sense of belonging because of the diversity of life-styles, religions and ethnic backgrounds extends beyond the visible and also includes linguistic differences. One of my research participants from Chile expressed her relief when she realized that in Hackney, 'everybody is like a tourist'.

> F: … and all the people speak bad English, for me it was perfect [laughs], because my uncle that lives in the countryside [in Cambridgeshire] like [speaks] super English, said to me 'ahh if you speak bad English, people are not going to talk to you or you have to have a very good British accent blablabla', but I came here, all

the people speak bad English, so I feel very comfortable, so that's nice because all the people have an accent and a lot of people don't speak English so I feel like phew, it's not strange to speak bad English

S: and you don't feel like an outsider…

F: No. That's the best thing of London, or of Hackney, that everyone is like a tourist, everyone speak bad English, everyone has an accent, that's nice.

Thus, it is the visible and audible diversity in life-style, religion, race and language which enables people to develop a sense of belonging and feel that they don't stick out.

Drawing on Simmel's (1995 [1903]) classical work on the metropolis, Tonkiss (2003) develops the notion of an 'ethics of indifference', referring to differences becoming normal and unremarkable, and involving 'a certain freedom in the city, the lonely liberty of knowing that no one is looking, nobody is listening' (Tonkiss 2003:300). Unlike the thesis developed by urban theorists like Wirth (1938), Simmel (1995 [1903]) and Park et al. (1968) which underlines alienation in light of complexity, Tonkiss highlights how indifference as a result of social complexity gives certain freedoms to particular groups, also described as 'the freedom to be left alone' (Sennett 2010:268). As reflected in the accounts of my research participants, the 'ability to go unnoticed in the streets of the city has particular resonance for women and for others whose bodies are marked in terms of difference' (Tonkiss 2003:301).[iv] Rather than leading to alienation, this freedom enabled my research participants to develop a sense of belonging and of feeling socially accepted.

The experience of feeling socially accepted also relates to the second factor which shapes migrants' experiences of conviviality during their settlement,  namely their experiences of diversity in the places where they had lived prior to their move to London,

either in their home country or in another country of immigration. Again, my Chilean informant, who came to London via Italy, refers to the metaphor of 'the tourist':

> London is super multicultural but Hackney is like *more*, so it's easier, like you feel that you are, since you have arrived you feel like you are a tourist but all the people are like tourists, that's nice, and also it's different than Italy, when we were in Italy we only had Italian friends...

A woman from Argentina who came to London via Spain similarly feels that settlement in Hackney is easier because of its long-standing diversity, but she takes the analysis of why it is easier to connect with people here a step further, expanding it to not just diversity, but also temporality:

> M: Actually it was easier for me to make friends here than in A or V [Spanish cities where she previously lived]
> S: Do you think it was easier because everybody comes from elsewhere?
> M: I think so, yes, it is the heterogeneity, but I think it was also, there's something about the temporariness of everything, it's not just that there are people from many different places, but that you have people coming and going very much, and so people are more used to the fact that someone new is coming, and might leave, and that doesn't mean that you're not going to engage or connect, or maybe *that* person is going to leave at some point, so there's an issue of heterogeneity, definitely, but also of transience.

Although the fact that an area has a high population turnover and is characterized by transience could be interpreted as a negative factor in terms of the building of social relations, Montse's statement above points to something different. In her view, it is the very transiency of the population which creates a certain openness towards newcomers, at least among those who might have been newcomers to the area at an earlier point in time. It is important to take this aspect of temporality into account when thinking about conviviality, especially because more conventional analysis of positive social relations somewhat assumes a need for stability and long-term commitment. Montse found the existence of long established circles of friends in Spain difficult to access, and she describes how she found that in places where 'people know each other for a looooong time (sic), ... they are not that open when it comes to have some intimacy of some kind, to become more proximate'. Montse's statement reflects Wallman's (2003) notion of 'open' and 'closed' local systems in specific neighbourhoods, sometimes within the same city. These systems are defined by factors such as industrial structure, employment opportunities, travel to work patterns, and types of social networks (local or beyond the locality), but also by the heterogeneity of the local population. These factors result in different ways of defining 'outsiders' and different degrees in which newcomers are incorporated (Wallman 2003)[v]. Hackney represents an example of an open social system because of its heterogeneous population's wide reaching social networks, but also because of the diversity of employment opportunities and other structural factors listed by Wallman (2003). Perceptions of Hackney as a place where it is easy to meet new people are also reflected in my Chilean research participant, Francisca's, statement:

> ... because in Hackney there are a lot of people that are not from Hackney and that are alone here like me, it's easy to meet, it's like 'hello where are you from?'. I

know that they don't have parents here, and they are here for some reason so you have a lot of things in common, so it's easy to meet people.

But where do recent migrants form such closer social relations? Where are the spaces of conviviality where people's relations go beyond fleeting interactions? In the following section, I look at microspaces of conviviality for both long-term residents as well as newcomers.

**Microspaces of conviviality**

> M: Once I was in a coach going to a day trip with a children's centre and I sat there and thought 'this is democracy'. This is it!
> S: Because there are people from everywhere?
> M: Yes, this is it! I was in that coach and everybody was from all over, and it was a strange and funny trip, because it was everybody, the food, you needed to bring a packed lunch, so people from Ethiopia with types of food and Indian types of food, and how you relate to your children and how you care about them and raise them and talk to them. All these differences were there in a coach. And I was like, I'm with the world inside here, that's amazing!

Mariapaula is from Colombia and has been living in London for ten years. Her experience on the coach captures several issues which I discuss in this section. One is the experience of close proximity and interaction with people who are different in the context of what I describe as 'microspaces of conviviality', referring to places where people interact beyond the fleeting, but engage in conversations and activities which have the potential to lead to

friendships. These are similar to the 'micropublics' described by Amin (2002). Such 'parochial realm spaces' (Hunter 1985; Lofland 1989) are characterized by communal relations among, for example, neighbours, with colleagues in the workplace, or acquaintances through associations or schools. Social relations in the parochial realm are thus less personal than in the private realm, but more communal than in the public realm. In this section, I use the example of two types of such spaces where conviviality is not just a characteristic of the acceptance of diversity, but where it is characterized by repeated and sometimes more sustained social interactions across various types of difference: children's centres and football.

Children's centres are publicly funded places across the UK which offer various services, ranging from pre- and post-partum health checks, to breastfeeding advice, music classes, and drop-in sessions for parents and their pre-school children. According to a health professional who has been working with migrants in Hackney for many years, children's centres are the one place which, sooner or later, migrants with children will access. Among the mothers I interviewed, children's centres represented important places for socializing.

What happens during these drop-in sessions? Usually, the children are invited to participate in various activities around, for example, arts and crafts tables, but also outside with sand and water play. Often, a snack is provided towards the end of the session, and everybody sits together and sings nursery rhymes. I have observed various types of social interactions in these centres, ranging from simple smiles and gestures, to long chats and the seeming emergence of friendships. The intensity or depth of these interactions strongly depended on both language as well as other commonalities.

One of the children's centres I regularly attended was particularly diverse in terms of the languages spoken and the general mix of people (mainly mothers). Of the 16 parents attending a session, there were sometimes only two or three of the same linguistic, ethnic or

religious background. Among the attendees, there were Turkish women with hardly any English, second-generation south Asian women who only took off their full veils once they entered the space, an Algerian and a Bolivian woman with broken English, a British south Asian man who was looking after his friend's son, a Somali grandmother, etc. Some of the Turkish and British south Asian Muslim mothers came together as friends, the rest of the mothers were on their own. I was amazed by the many languages the parents spoke with their children. Some of the adults chatted with those who spoke the same language, and, to a limited extent, to those who spoke different languages. Interactions among those parents who didn't know each other were limited, and after the sessions, people went home separately.

This was reflected in some of the accounts of my interviewees. They enjoyed attending the sessions at the children's centres, but did not form friendships across difference which went beyond that space. For example, a Romanian mother told me how much she enjoyed going to a children's centre with her son, 'socializing with the mothers there, telling our experiences, and they were not Romanian'. However, she only made friends with two Romanian mothers, one of whom also happened to be her neighbour.

However, sometimes women developed friendships within the centres which formed important anchor points for them, even if not going beyond the centre. In a centre run by a Muslim Community Centre, there was a mix of white women of primarily British backgrounds, and Muslim women of various national and linguistic backgrounds. I joined a conversation between a woman from Somalia and a Turkish woman who both spoke good English, although it was not their mother tongue. They were exchanging recipes, and the Somali woman was raving about how much she liked Turkish food. She told the Turkish woman that her husband really enjoyed it when she cooked the recipes which 'my Turkish friend from the children's centre gave me'. Although these women only see each other once a week at the children's centre, they have formed a friendship not only via the shared

experience of having children of the same age, but also on the basis of their interest in cooking. The fact that they both spoke enough English to talk about food and children, as well as the sharing of the weekly routine of coming to the children's centre, enabled them to form this close bond. Although they also shared the same religion (both were wearing headscarves), I cannot judge whether this factor played a role in their friendship.

Another example is that of Olga, a Georgian woman who came to London via Italy. She made a Russian speaking friend from Ukraine in a children's centre and, after several years, is still friends with her. Not only did she form a new friendship which went beyond the children's centre, but this friend also introduced her to a Facebook group of Russian-speaking mothers of various nationalities who also meet outside of cyberspace and organise picnics in the park with their children. Apart from their shared language, they also share similar educational backgrounds. Thus, language and shared interests were the most important elements which shaped the formation of more sustained and deeper relations. Such relations sometimes also go beyond language differences, especially in light of similar educational backgrounds and shared interests. Francisca from Chile and Aika from Kyrgyzstan, whom I both quoted earlier in this paper, met at a yoga class at a children's centre, which, according to Francisca, 'was nothing of yoga, but it's to meet new people'. There, they made friends with other women of various national backgrounds, for example Iran and Japan, who were interested in yoga, and they formed their own exercise group through which they have sustained their friendship until today, several years later. Although they do not share a language or national background, it is their shared educational background, their interest in yoga and a similar life-stage which brought them together.

These patterns of sustained conviviality leading to friendship as a result of routine (often weekly) encounters are also reflected in other contexts. Alisher, a migrant from Uzbekistan who is a big fan of football gained an insight into the many different social

worlds present in Hackney and beyond. He has played football in various groups and parks, approaching football players randomly and joining in for games. He started off with an Algerian group, but, despite his own Muslim background, could not relate to them over the course of time because of their strong religiosity. He then moved on to a different group consisting of people of different nationalities which he…

> … had never heard of, like Eritreans, all these countries I had never heard, so it was like, ohh, it's not just football, I'm learning something you know, meeting people, asking about their culture, what they do, what they like, it was like yeah it's quite good.

Again, it was the ability to speak English, the repeated and sustained encounters with these fellow players, and the shared interests, which led to long-term friendships:

> … and I just talked to them and they said they played every week, and can I come along, and slowly slowly, and just made simply friends, we had something in common, we went for drinks ...

The examples of the children's centres and Alisher's football clubs demonstrate how these open micro-spaces of conviviality facilitate experiences of close proximity with people who differ along various categorical differences. Importantly, only few research participants participated in other groups, civil society or religious organisations where people of different backgrounds meet.[vi] An exception to this are asylum seekers, who access services like advice centres, day centres for asylum seekers and refugees, and shelters or food banks where they meet people of different backgrounds, including long-term residents who work as volunteers.

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In relation to migrants with a secure legal status, however, it appears to be the openness of state funded children's centres, freely accessible to everybody who is a parent, as well as the open format of more casual football groups in parks, which open up the possibility to encounter with different 'others'.

Importantly, however, many long-term residents as well as recent migrants do not participate in these spaces. They are busy working, some feel that their English is too limited, or they have formed their social networks independently through initial contacts, relations from work, or University. Thus, apart from the work place and University, children's centres and football clubs seem to be among the few places where both long term residents and people with limited English engage in more sustained encounters with people who are different. Micro-spaces of conviviality where routine encounters can take place over extended periods of time can thus not be taken for granted, but they need to be sustained and, in the case of children's centres, publicly funded.

**Conclusion**

This paper started off with the question of how existing patterns of conviviality between visibly and audibly different people (not just in terms of ethnicity, but also life-style) impact on migrants' settlement and sense of belonging. The story told in this paper is a positive one. Recent migrants experience commonplace diversity and the positive interactions observed in public and parochial space as key to their sense of belonging. Even if encountering difficulties in terms of legal status, access to work or housing, these migrants feel socially included because difference is accepted in public and parochial space. As mentioned in the introduction, this does not preclude the co-existence of racism, sexism or other forms of discrimination. None of the recent migrants I interviewed had had personal experiences of racism in public or parochial space, but some had observed instances where others were

affected by racism. These instances mainly related to newcomer status, rather than visible difference. None of my research participants generalized such negative experiences to the whole population of the area, but saw them as incidents within a context where their visible and sometimes linguistic difference did not form a barrier to a sense of inclusion.

Not only are experiences of settlement shaped by the long-standing diversity in the area, but also by previous experiences of the places where migrants might have lived prior to moving to Hackney.

While all migrants in one way or another experience conviviality and interaction across difference in public space, the more intensified interactions in the parochial realm do not form part of all migrants' day-to-day life. It is in places like children's centres where relations can sometimes go beyond the fleeting, primarily when a language is shared and when there are common interests and similar educational backgrounds. Interestingly though, my research participants mostly formed such relationships with other migrants, and not with white or ethnic minority British people, even if they had a good knowledge of English. They found it hard to explain these 'migrant convivialities', which were sometimes with co-ethnics, other times panethnic with speakers of the same language, and other times with people from completely different areas of the world. It could be related to what one of the research participants, quoted earlier, described as 'temporariness', relating to shared experiences of being a migrant and possibly not settling forever, which creates a certain openness towards others of the same fate. Some of my research participants also expressed a sense of exclusion from the social milieus of long-term British residents, describing it as 'impossible' to make British friends. This, however, did not impede on their sense of belonging and affiliation to the area.

The point important in relation to conviviality is that there is something about a place being super-diverse not just in terms of ethnicity, but also in regards to languages, religions

and life-styles, which makes it easier to settle. In this context, social boundaries become so manifold and complex that, at least in public space, they lose relevance. In other words, there are so many different 'groups' and individuals present in the area that there is no established group which newcomers need to fit into (Elias & Scotson 1994). Wise and Velayutham also describe how difference gets 'back grounded' as a result of the 'sheer scale of diversity', but, as I have also shown in the introduction, it can become relevant in situations of tensions and conflict (Wise & Velayutham 2014:424). Especially when writing about conviviality, a notion which has been criticized for its connotation of 'happy multiculturalism' (Ahmed 2008), it is important to not lose sight of contentious issues around sexism, homophobia, xenophobia and racism which exist in parallel to convivial relations. In Hackney, these contentious issues relate to for example institutionalized racism against black youth (Wessendorf 2014), and barriers to accessing skilled work for highly educated recent migrants (Wessendorf 2016 [forthcoming]).

Migrants do not always expect the scale of diversity prior to their arrival in Hackney, but are surprised about the diversity. However, they very quickly adapt to it and learn to appreciate it. This relates to Overing and Passes' (2000) point that conviviality is something people strive for. Even if many people do not form friendships or more sustained relations with people of other backgrounds or life-styles, or do not participate in mixed spaces like children's centres, people who live in super-diverse contexts (have to) make an effort to live peacefully in public and parochial space, at school gates, play grounds, markets, etc., across language barriers and other kinds of differences which are sometimes difficult to understand. I would like to end this paper with a statement from Aika, my Kirgiz informant, which beautifully captures the process of learning conviviality, and the effort to live together peacefully. When comparing the diversity of her home town with Hackney, Aika said the following:

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So although Kyrgyzstan was mixed it was still not as mixed as here. It's just neighbouring countries, it wasn't somebody from completely far away coming here. And then you realize all of us are the same, all of us want the same thing. We would like to be happy, we would like to have a roof over our head, we would like to have decent food on our table, we are just human beings … differences aren't a big deal.

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[i] See Glick Schiller and Çağlar (2015) for a criticism of neighbourhood studies.

[ii] The number of the total population is taken from the ONS 2013 Mid Year Estimates. The remaining numbers are taken from the 2011 census.

[iii] *Hackney Today* is a fortnightly newspaper published by Hackney Council and circulated to 108,000 households in Hackney.

[iv] See also Van Leeuwen's (2010) notion of side-by-side citizenship.

[v] See also Elias and Scotson (1994).

[vi] An exception to this are ESOL Classes (English for Speakers of Other Languages), where migrants of various backgrounds meet.