
Book Section:
Neal, S. orcid.org/0000-0002-2585-1245 (2022) Neighbours – More than just good friends? Rethinking neighbours in contexts of urban multiculture. In: Cheshire, L., (ed.) Neighbours Around the World: An International Look at the People Next Door. Emerald Publishing Limited, pp. 111-128. ISBN: 9781800433700.

https://doi.org/10.1108/978-1-83909-476-720221007

NEIGHBOURS – MORE THAN JUST GOOD FRIENDS? RETHINKING NEIGHBOURS IN CONTEXTS OF URBAN MULTICULTURE

SARAH NEAL

Sarah Neal, The University of Sheffield

s.neal@sheffield.ac.uk

Author/s Biography/ies:

Sarah Neal is Professor of Sociology in the Department of Sociological Studies at the University of Sheffield, UK. Sarah researches and writes in the fields of ethnicity, multiculture, rural and urban social life, community and place. Recent publications include Neal S., Gawlewicz, A., Heley J. and Jones R. D. (2021) Rural Brexit? The ambivalent politics of rural community, migration and dependency *Journal of Rural Studies* 82, pp. 176-183; *Friendship and Diversity, class, ethnicity and social relationships in the city* (Palgrave 2018 with C. Vincent and H. Iqbal) and '*The Lived Experience of Multiculture: the new spatial and social relations of diversity* (Routledge 2017 with K. Bennett, A. Cochrane and G. Mohan). She is co-editor (with Karim Murji) of *Current Sociology* and an editorial board member of *Journal of Intercultural Studies* and *Ethnic and Racial Studies.*

NEIGHBOURS – MORE THAN JUST GOOD FRIENDS?

ABSTRACT:

This chapter reviews the conceptual developments in neighbour studies, charting the shift and bringing together the older work 'distance-closeness' dynamic of neighbour relations with the newer 'equality of neighbours' approaches. It seeks to empirically extend the sociology of neighbours through an analysis of the experiential narratives of neighbours living in contexts of urban multiculture in the UK. Drawing on two previous studies of urban multicultural social life and a small street study of neighbours in London the chapter explores the everyday 'publicness' of the neighbour and examines the ways in which recent work on social infrastructure (Klinenberg 2018, Latham and Layton 2019) can be productively applied to the neighbour relations. The chapter concludes that where cultural and social difference is a very ordinary - although not necessarily easy – experience, neighbour relations offer the potential to work as radical sites of pragmatic multiculturalism.

KEYWORDS:

(Please supply up to 6 keywords for your Chapter)

1. Neighbours
2. Multiculture
3. Urban heterogeneity
4. Social infrastructure
5. Social relations
6. Publicness

NEIGHBOURS – MORE THAN JUST GOOD FRIENDS?

Introduction

Fragments from interviews often stay in the mind. They have a sort of empirical stickiness long after a research project has been completed. This happened to me with Kaleb's story about his neighbours. Kaleb was one of the parent participants in the friendship and urban diversity project I conducted with colleagues (Vincent et al 2018). Kaleb had arrived in the UK as refugee and settled in London 17 years ago. For 12 of those years Kaleb and his family had lived in the same flat on a social housing estate in the ethnically and socially diverse London Borough of Hackney. Kaleb's two daughters attended the primary school that was part of the research project. In my interview with Kaleb he reflected on his friendship networks and turned to his relationship with his neighbours explaining how, despite the rapid turnover of people arriving and leaving:

> I consciously try to make friends with my neighbour […] for example, I always send Christmas cards, upstairs, downstairs – our place is on the ground floor but there are people upstairs and in our block there are ten families. So every year on Christmas and New Year I go with my children and knock on their doors. My wife always says 'why are you worrying about this?' because there is no response from the other neighbours, you understand? [But] whatever they think, we have to do our part. That's my principle, trying to make friends.

Kaleb's story captures the ambiguities of neighbour relations and the impulses and the tensions that shape these. Its stickiness resonates with the shared experience of having/being a neighbour. As Bulmer (1986: 1) observes in the opening to his study of neighbours: 'everyone has neighbours'. Kaleb's efforts also resonate with everyday uncertainties and conflicts that characterize neighbour relations at the same time as the transnational 'social glow' that 'neighbours' elicit. But Kaleb's neighbours' story and his migrant experience also asks what it is to be a neighbour and how neighbouring is performed in urban environments characterised by social churn and demographic change. The idea of a 'good neighbour' remains socially, morally and culturally fixed and dominant even as social worlds and places are being rapidly recalibrated by human mobilities, globalisation and increases in urban social polarisations and ethnic diversity. How does the neighbour relationship adapt, transform, thrive, decline in these fluid, protean social contexts? These questions have been made more pressing by the current Covid-19 health crisis. This has brought neighbour practices and relations into new scrutiny as neighbours have been transformed into both points of care-giving and modes of surveillance in super-regulated 'locked down' everyday life.

This chapter focuses on the different pulls associated with the rapid shifts in residential social worlds and the conceptual continuity of the neighbour. It mobilises data from a small, street-based London pilot study (detailed below) and reuses empirical narratives like Kaleb's which have come from the qualitative data sets from two previous projects on urban multiculture: Living Multiculture: the New Geographies of Ethnic Diversity and the Changing Formations of Multiculture in England and the Children and Adult's Friendship Across Social and Ethnic Difference[i] (shortened here to Living Multiculture and Friendships and Diversity). The chapter considers the ways in which 'the neighbour' condenses a variety of everyday practices for managing social propinquity, social difference and urban multiculture close to (next door) home. Organised into five main sections, the chapter initially maps the slow development of a sociology of neighbours before it details the methods involved in the empirical data collection of urban practices of neighbouring. Emphasising the contradictions which define neighbouring, the findings sections explore the different 'present and absent' ways in which neighbour relations work and suggest that the spatialized and public aspects of neighbouring means that neighbours might be thought of as constituting a site of social infrastructure (Klinenberg 2018) as neighbours can potentially work as points of interaction, connection and collaboration making residency liveable through forms of unfocussed civic mutualism.

A developing sociology of neighbours

In her five-year study of neighbours in an Australian suburb, Lyn Richards argues that neighbour relations have not been given adequate social science attention because the neighbour is a 'residual' or 'default relationship for those – and only those – who cannot do better' (1990: 182 cited in Laurier et al 2002). And neighbours do appear to have a more limited presence in the social sciences and in sociology in particular, preoccupied as it is with a variety of other modes of social interdependency – personal lives, families, friendship relations, social networks and community. While there are exceptions (e.g. Crow et al, 2002; Felder 2020) even where the neighbour relation is considered within sociological studies of these social relationship, neighbours are one but not usually *the* key focus (see for example Savage et al 2005; Butler and Jackson 2014; Back 2015).

This seeming sociological reticence is especially surprising given the contradictions of the neighbour as a social relation. Neighbour relations can be dysfunctional and a focus of strain and sometimes extreme conflict (Hesse et al 1992; Cheshire et al 2019; Liu et al 2019) - in the UK one of the highest frequencies of hate crime occurs between neighbours (Demos 2018) - yet neighbours can also be a source of mutualism and support and 'ha[ve] the potential (not always realised) to draw us into close relationships with persons outside of our immediate networks of family and friends' (Painter, 2009: 527). Painter argues that neighbours are mostly neither the neighbour from hell nor the beloved neighbour but more fluidly occupy locations in between. The neighbour is a 'partial' (Morgan 2009) or 'liminal' (Painter 2012) figure in the social proximities of everyday life and one that requires constant pragmatic negotiation and on-going management. In Mann's early UK study of housing estate in the Wirral near the city of Liverpool in the UK in the 1950s (1954) he found that 'latent' or low key, non-intrusive, low contact neighbour relations were more successful and preferred to 'manifest' neighbour relations which involved high levels of engagement and contact.

In Baumgartner's (1988) well known study of the North American suburb of Hartley, she argues that indifference and avoidance of conflict led to a 'moral minimalism' characterising neighbour expectations and practices. In his extensive study of neighbours and informal social care, Bulmer (1986) argues that traditional, 'high care' forms of neighbourliness have increasingly given way to modern 'low care' forms of neighbourliness but that both forms are based on a cost-effort-reward exchange rather than more altruistic imaginings of being a good neighbour (Snaith 1988). Richards (1990: 215) similarly identifies the paradox of the 'good neighbour' being the 'distant neighbour' who emerges from a marginal social location only when needed and in their Isle of Wight study Crow et al (2002) found neighbour relations were mostly based on a strategy of 'friendly distance'. While the notion of 'distance' also emerges in Morgan's analysis of neighbours he emphasises a broader set of social and spatial geometries in which 'closeness' as well as 'distance' shape 'how we occupy space' and create an 'ethics of place' in which having identifiable neighbours – even if there is little interaction with them - becomes a basis for ontological security and comfort (2009: 34). An emerging theme in the existing studies of neighbours is the extent to which neighbours, who are ascribed and not selected and who have a 'unique power to affect us where we live, *at home*' (Rosenblum 2016: 2 original emphasis), involve forms of recognition and the 'invisible, ties' that bind neighbours as 'familiar strangers' (Felder 2020). This positioning reflects not so much the close-distance contradictions of the neighbour (Mann 1956, Richards 1990, Crow et al 2002; Morgan 2009) but the ways in which neighbours work as sites of 'urban cohesion' (Felder 2020), 'reciprocity' (Rosenblum 2016: 71) and are constitutive of the 'democracy of everyday life' (Rosenblum 2016: 5) and 'mutual vulnerability' (Rosenblum 2016: 245). This focussing on the relational interdependencies of neighbours moves neighbour relations beyond the closeness-distance paradox and into a different social space of co-existence where 'social and spatial proximity matters not

because it forces social interaction and ethical responsibility but because it provides an opportunity for these' (Painter 2012).

As areas of cities and suburbs become more ethnically and socially diverse, the neighbour relation increasingly becomes the site where encounters of cultural difference are experienced and routinely lived. For multicultural neighbours, what experiential forms does the 'rough equality' of the neighbour relationship take? There was evidence of this everyday democracy in the Living Multiculture project where neighbours were a point of reference for quotidian accounts of encounters across difference. For example, for Adam, a young White British London participant who grew up in the city of Bradford in Northern England, it was reflected in his childhood neighbour memories:

> … well, I remember when we were little kids we used to get babysat by our Pakistani next door neighbours, so we were used to it [difference]. And we used to just dance around to Madonna videos in the front room. It was great!

In suburban Leicestershire, Jodie, a White British participant in the Living Multiculture project, also identified neighbours as part of her living multiculture narrative:

> [f]or me, because I take my kids to school every day[...] and things like going to the supermarket [...] and just around the village and things and neighbours as well. We've got a lot of Asian neighbours, I think, it just becomes a very normal thing, just interacting with those other cultures.

While there has been significant work done – my own included - on public and semi-public spaces such as parks, markets, cafes, transport, schools, communal gardens, work – there has been much less examination of encounters and negotiation of social difference in the intimacies of private homespaces. This was a point brought home to me by Lucy, a mixed heritage, Singaporean migrant participant in the Living Multiculture project when she reflected,

> [T]here's a difference between, like, public spaces and the private, maybe as well. You can access public space […] you have right to go there [...] but I was just thinking about neighbours. Like I can go to any Turkish place and, erm, a Jamiacan bar, but would I be invited back to a neighbour's house? *And that might be the difference between cohesion and living side by side* (emphasis added).

Lucy presents a pressing challenge to social researchers here about the public/private nature of social divisions questioning where the lines of interaction across ethnic and cultural difference are drawn. While there is some growing attention being given to difference and home space (Neal et al 2016; Tyler 2020) this is still emergent. In the Friendships and Diversity project we focused on the ways in which primary school relations extended out of school and into homespaces through sleepovers, birthday parties, play dates and so forth and we identified the ways in which parents engaged in a series of strategies which negotiated, agonised over and/or avoided social and ethic difference in their children's and their own relationships in homespaces (Neal et al 2016, Vincent et al 2018). Heil (2014) and Tyler (2015, 2020) have also both explored the neighbour in contexts of cultural difference. Heil studied neighbouring in two locations in Senegal and Catalonia which have experienced significant refugee migrant settlement. For Heil the focus of attention is on the ways in which in contexts of cultural difference in both places neighbours show a disposition to adapt and negotiate with their neighbours. Neighbours were a site of resource and solidarities, often conceptualised in terms of family, while they occasionally worked as an obstacle. in most cases longer and shorter-term residents interacted around principles of support and exchange. In the

different geography of South East England, Tyler's (2015) work also picks on the emergent commonalities between two working class neighbours on a social housing estate in Woking, a small town outside of London. Tyler examines- though an intergenerational focus- the ways in which a white working class family engage with their Muslim working class neighbours. She found that while racism was part of the response- the relationship also moved beyond racialisations and gave way to increasing senses of commonality and shared ground in the process of doing neighbouring. In an echo of Rosenblum's emphasis on the rough equality and mutual vulnerability of neighbours, Heil argues that 'the categories of 'neighbour' or 'resident' span sociocultural, socioeconomic and even legal differentiations in ways that few other categorisations can, [i]n the absence of other more meaningful reference systems for social interaction in urban settings, providing notions with local reference such as neighbour or resident establishes a potential basis for sufficient equality and respect' (Heil 2014: 466).

Bringing together the older distance-closeness geometries with the newer 'equality of neighbours' debates, this chapter adds to the work begun by Heil and Tyler, developing the sociology of neighbours through an analysis of the experiential narratives of neighbours living in contexts of urban multiculture.

A note on research methods and design

Alongside the reuse of data generated from earlier research projects, the chapter draws on a small number of interviews from a recently conducted pilot study of neighbours in one street - Bradwell Street (a pseudonym) - in the multicultural, socioeconomically deprived but also gentrifying locality of Tottenham in North London. Tottenham is an area that makes up the multi-ethnic London Borough of Haringey. Haringey is a socially polarized borough with an affluent middle class population in the north of its boundary and a much poorer, deprived working class population to its south. Haringey, and Tottenham in particular, are superdiverse (Meissner and Vertovec 2015), characterized by both older (1960s) and newer (post 2000s) migrant settlement. The largest ethnic group is White British (34.7%) but minority ethnic groups (Black African, Black Caribbean and 'Other White') make up the majority of the boroughs' overall populations. It has experienced more recent migrant settlement since 2004 from EU accession, West African and South American countries.

Tottenham has a 'reputational geography' (Karner and Parker 2010). It was the focus of violent serious disorders in 1985 and in 2011. The urban riots that spread across the UK in August 2011 began in Tottenham when the police shot and killed a young African Caribbean man, Mark Duggan. While Tottenham has begun to be affected by gentrification this is not the wealthy super-gentrification of other London boroughs liked Islington (or even neighbouring Hackney) but more an early stage and more partial gentrification driven by poorer (and mostly younger) middle class populations and it is a gentrification which involves higher levels of cheek-by-jowl social and ethnic difference.

Architecturally, the housing in Tottenham tends towards being a mix of smaller Edwardian brick terraces and social housing estates and has fewer areas of the type of large Victorian and Georgian housing which has lent itself more easily to gentrification (Lees et al 2008). These smaller terraced properties, are mostly still only large enough for single family use and this has meant that Tottenham has retained a significant population of white working class residents and established New Commonwealth migrants who settled in the area in the 1960s.

Over four decades both of these groups have aged and there has been a generational shift as the houses of these older residents are either rented out or bought by younger people and families as

they remain one of the 'just affordable' inner London neighbourhoods for those on middle class salaries. This creates a dynamic social mixity in Bradwell Street. The local geography is one with which I am, through social networks and previous research and my own residential geographies, reasonably familiar. Bradwell Street was selected on the basis of social networks and for encapsulating a changing demography. There is a particular density generated by the small terrace architecture of the street that means neighbours *have* to live close together. While the houses all have their own front doors and front gardens, the gardens are small and designed with a shared front path and porch and the houses all share party-walls and garden fences' as well as water and drainage systems. Built around the 1900s, the terraced housing was more often single brick party walls so sound and noise between the houses are very audible and the small fenced gardens at the back of each house mean that the garden spaces are usually quite open and public to near neighbours. The small scale of the terraced houses and the shared and easily overheard and overlooked aspects of their design mean that Bradwell Street neighbours share a micro intimacy in terms of awareness of the routines of other's lives and also have a higher level of visibility to each other given the likelihood of encounter via arriving or leaving home or being in the garden.

Four participants made up the pilot street study: Matt, Chloe, Divya and Ebba (pseudonyms). The participants were accessed through convenience and snowball sampling and, despite the opportunistic nature of this sampling approach, the demographic differences between the participants broadly reflect the demographic differences of the residents living in the street. On Bradwell Street there are participants who have lived on the street since the 1960s and one participant, Divya, has been a resident since 1982. Other residents have moved into the street more recently and Matt, Chloe and Ebba have only lived in Bradwell street for the last 4-6 years. The street has a mix of family status with young adult, older teenagers and young children and babies. Divya's two children were young adults but still living at home and Ebba's children were both under five. Matt and Chloe had recently had their baby. All the participants live in mixed gender households in the street and are all home owners and described themselves as being middle class (Ebba, Chloe)) and working class (Divya, Matt). The participants variously describe their ethnicity as White British (Matt, Chloe), Indian (Divya) and Swedish (Ebba). The sample included one couple interviews (Matt and Chloe) and two individual interviews (Ebba, Divya).

The interviews were in-depth and unstructured, based on only a few small prompts. This was an approach embedded in sociable and dialogic methods (Bondi, 2009; Sinha and Back 2013) which was more suited to open and generative explorations of neighbouring experiences and perspectives. Doing the fieldwork, I was struck by the ways in which the methods imitated and were in themselves a particular kind of neighbouring practice. They had a meandering and chatter-based quality to them which was further enhanced by the home settings in which most of the interviews took place. The interviews usually involved lots of reciprocity and trust-building small talk, with interviews often being interrupted by the making and drinking of cups of tea and other family members wandering in. These were very much conversational interviews, with data generated through occasional questions and prompts around neighbour experiences and perspectives on neighbours, and with vignettes and memories being regularly narrated and explained. The interviews were each transcribed and then thematically coded. The interviews differ from the indirect ways in which neighbours came up in the previous projects, most obviously because the pilot interviews focused very explicitly on experiential neighbouring practices and perspectives. However, there is a striking amount of shared ground in themes, patterns and reoccurring socialities, anxieties, practices, encounters of difference, capacities and tensions to manage difference in intimate space that resonated with Kaleb's, Adam's, Jodie's and Lucy's reflections on neighbours in the Mixed Friendship and Living Multiculture projects (see endnotes for project details).

Neighbours: a social infrastructure

The sociology literature has emphasised the ways in which neighbours work through their 'roughly equal', close but distant, first and last point of social resource and as a barometer of wider social change, tension and cohesion. But it says less about the publicness of neighbours. Despite being located in personal life and the materialities of home space, neighbour relations are nevertheless sutured into public social life. This publicness is most obviously present in encounters between neighbours as they move through and around the homespace and the quotidian social and embodied proximities involved in doing this – 'hi, hello' interactions, putting the bins out, being in the garden, leaving or returning home, bumping into people on shared footpaths, pavement, lifts etc. But this is also expressed in the shared expectations and reciprocal practices of neighbouring. The publicness of neighbour relations was apparent in Jodie's and Lucy's reflections that multicultural neighbour interactions were indicative of 'real' multicultural interaction. For Jodie, it was her Asian neighbours that made cultural difference a 'very normal thing' and for Lucy it was the act of neighbourly invitations into homespaces that might best capture what she called 'living side by side' multiculture. Publicness is at the heart of Kaleb's (not always successful) neighbour practices ('I always try and make friends with my neighbours', taking cards at Christmas). Kaleb's emotional labour generated social encounters and the merging of public-private boundaries between his neighbours.

In this context the neighbour relationship can be understood to be part of the social infrastructure of places. In *Palaces for the People* Klinenberg (2018: 10) defines social infrastructure as the 'physical places and organisations that shape the way people interact', those public institutions, facilities and spaces – schools, libraries, parks, cafes, playgrounds - that allow places to thrive as people are connectively brought together. In their development of Klinenberg's (2018) argument about the importance of social infrastructure for 'nurturing public life' Latham and Layton (2019: 2) examine the ways in which public space is critical for supporting the 'good city', i.e. the inclusive social life of cities. Latham and Layton argue that publicness is multidimensional and that there are 'a whole range of spaces—many not conventionally thought of as public space—where these different ideas of publicness can be found and practiced' (Latham and Layton 2019: 4). While neighbours are not conventionally conceived as 'public', and while Klinenberg is clear that social infrastructure is physical, the neighbour is a distinctly spatialized social relation and it works as a site in which public-private boundaries intersect and overlap.

This idea of neighbours as a form of social infrastructure - or mini-machines of publicness - took shape in a number of the accounts of neighbouring in the Bradwell Street interviews. In one example of this Ebba explained**,**

> Everyone says Tottenham! [pulls a horror face] when I say where we live but they are such brilliant neighbours here. It's like in Sweden where neighbours are part of the culture. I feel I know so many people in the street. That's why we don't move even when we think we have outgrown the house. Jean [a white working class woman] is next door. She's been here since the 1960s. We tell her she's like MI6, she knows so much about everyone and what is happening! [laughs] Miles [Ebba's husband who lived in in the street before he met Ebba] knows all the older neighbours who have been here such a long time and I know all the newer ones.

In Ebba's description of the street it is her emphasis on the neighbours' publicness and their participatory collective social life that dominates the account - not least in the figure of Jean who Ebba humorously allocates a secret service level of knowledge about her neighbours and the residents in the street. In Ebba's account, this participatory publicness creates what Amin (2012) has called the 'surplus' or affordances that flow from interaction and affirm the value of public life (cited in Latham and Layton 2019: 4). For Ebba this experience translates into a strong affection for her neighbour relations to the extent that she does not want to leave the street even though she now has two children and not enough home space.

The ways in which neighbours work as a site where the private and the public converge was also evident in the Matt's and Chloe's reflections on being and having neighbours. The materialities of proximate space and overhearing the day to day sounds and routines of others' lives - climbing the stairs, the sounds of radios, televisions, voices, arguments, visitors, pets, children – can mean that the everyday lives of others become nearly as familiar as our own. For example, Chloe explained how her day has become shaped by her neighbour's return home in the morning from his night shift work and how he always shouts 'hello' incredibly loudly to his wife which is now a signal for Chloe to get up. But beyond these overheard and now incorporated minutiae practices of everyday life, Matt and Chloe reflected on the ways in which the neighbour has a wider publicness:

Chloe: A neighbour is just who's next door, really, yes it just who's living nearby/
Matt: No, it's more than that. It's about caring and looking out for each other. Helping out and being sociable/
Chloe: Ha ha [teasing] when have you been sociable?
Matt: [Laughing] I have! I try, I chat to people – being a neighbour is definitely more than someone just living nearby […]
Chloe: Yeah, maybe, ok, I suppose! [...] like even with next door who we don't really know at all [apart from the familiarity of their routines] and who haven't been that friendly to us, in an emergency I know I would be fine to ask them to look after Lily [Matt and Chloe's baby] and would expect them to help.

What is most obviously striking here is the distiction between Chloe's definition of the neighbour as 'just who's living nearby' and Matt's definition of the neighbour's public and civic status. But what is perhaps more striking is the way in which the interdependency that Matt suggests exists in the neighbour relation ('it's about caring and looking out for each other') is then extended by Chloe in her hypothetical willingness to call on the neighbours in a moment of crisis and her demonstrating a remarkable amount of social trust in the neighbour in that she would leave Lily with them in an emergency. This (untried) willingness is a particular form of social trust based on the idea of the neighbour with its associations of someone you can turn to in a time of need. What is noteable too is that the level of trust that Chloe shows is not based on thick bonds, long term residency, cultural sameness (Matt and Chloe describe their neighbours as Columbian) and/or friendship relations. Chloe has already explained that not only do they not really know their neighbours, nor have their neighbours been 'that friendly'. Her trust is situated within the expectation of the neighbour as a public figure.

There is a echo of this understanding of the neighbour as social resource and public 'front line' in my interview with Divya who moved from India to the UK as a young woman and has lived on Bradwell Street since the 1980s:

> Oh yes neighbours are so important. Because if you don't know anybody then you can be dead inside your house for months! Neighbours are important […and] I would go to my neighbours for help. One day in the house [there was] just me there and [there] was water gushing

> through the kitchen and I ran straight to Greg [who lives a few doors down] and he came to help us.

In Divya's account neighbours operate at the extremes and emergencies of publicness – neighbours are there for checking the most basic wellbeing (that you are not dead), as well as a source of pragmatic help in the face of domestic emergencies. While neighbours are identified as being needed for different homespace-related situations, what Divya, like Chloe, highlights is the level of social support and expectation afforded by the neighbour relation. Within these residential narratives are accounts of a form of social infrastructure which is facilitated by a public facing set of encounters, interactions, practices and sensibilities of neighbours which, in this multicultural street, appear to reflect largely successful neighbouring experiences. However, the different pulls, contestations and tensions that can characterize the public sites that make up social infrastructure were also identifiable and it is these that are considered next.

Microsolidarities, ambivalence and difference between neighbours

To think of neighbours as a site of social infrastructure is to recognize the iterative solidarities that are generated from mutually supportive social relationships (Crowe 2010). As Morgan (2009: 25) notes, contemporary forms of neighbouring are not based on the 'compulsory solidarities' (Crowe 2002) found in the classic community studies work such as Alwyn Rees' (1955) study of the Welsh village of Llanfihangel or Michael Young and Peter Wilmott's (1962) study of London's East End. Instead microsolidarities are made through the everyday practices of residency and small acts of informal care or kindness (Brownlie and Anderson 2017) - taking in deliveries, watering plants, feeding pets, cutting a hedge – that emerge through the particular neighbour mix of propinquity, public attentiveness and pragmatism.

In Bradwell Street, particular individual neighbours were regularly named as being 'good neighbours'. Jean, Greg, Tansy (pseudonyms) were all neighbours who were known for knowing lots of the people on the street, for being ready to help out or have a chat or provide informal care, and Jean's, Greg's and Tansy's names came up a lot across the participant interviews. Wise's (2009) concept of 'transversal enablers' describes the ways in which certain individuals had high levels of sociality and networking and capacities to do effectively bridging in the street. The three individuals identified had quite distinctive backgrounds, even as they apparently shared these roles and skills as 'connectors'. Greg was a middle-aged white man born in Cornwall; Jean an older white woman born in London; and Tansy an older black woman born in Guyana, but they were all regularly mentioned in the interviews in relation to the support they gave to other neighbours and their contribution to the social life of the street. New neighbours were drawn into old neighbour practices, with Ebba describing how Tansy would come round on Friday nights to ask if Ebba and Miles could help with her order of fish and chips and both Ebba and Divya drew on family metaphors to define the closeness that neighbours can share.

Crowe (2010) argues that social solidarities are made through a range of processes and it was possible to see these reflected in the interviews. Some were lifecourse solidarities built around length of residency, generation and family status – young children in particular generated neighbour interaction - and there were also what Crowe (2010) calls 'problem solidarities' built through the efforts to collectively care for the repair and maintenance of the street. For example, the street was involved in the Love Haringey Hate Litter campaign; Greg's lobbying of the Haringey Council to plant trees along the street has resulted in the greening of the street and residents planting flowers around these; Matt had lobbied neighbours to get collective support for speed bumps being put in the street and residents-only parking. While these are all small and momentary solidarities they punch well above their weight in terms of their social and material affordances.

But there were doubts and tensions within these accounts of the neighbouring and small solidarities often co-existed with ambivalence of the closeness of neighbours being valued while at the same time a need to maintain distance being important. Chloe's willingness to define neighbours as just someone next door is one example of the 'thinness' of the social infrastructure and Ebba, who spoke so affectionately about the street, also admitted that she had 'hidden in the kitchen and pretended not to be in' to avoid having to see one of her neighbours who had become 'just a little bit too dependent on us' and 'too regular' in dropping by. As much of the neighbour research has shown, there is constant tension in the close/remote practices of neighbouring. This can be seen in Ebba feeling overwhelmed by too much contact but also, conversely, Divya's feelings of too much distance. Despite her association of neighbours with family and the reassurance that it is neighbours who would ensure she was still alive, Divya also spoke of social isolation and anxiety,

> [I don't] have a friend here on the street really. That's the saddest thing I will tell you Sarah. This street is really peaceful and people say hello but I worry and don't feel I know people that well. It doesn't feel safe around us, at the back and down there over the [main] road especially [where there are large social housing estates]. I would never go to anyone there [on the estates]. And I've always worried if the children are safe when they are coming back home.

In Divya's account of Bradwell Street, it is simultaneously a place of recognition and safety but it is also experienced as lonely and is bordered by the potential threat of other 'non-neighbours' who live just beyond the street. These closeness-distant tensions and anxieties resonate with the liminality of the neighbour relationship and its imprecise identification as a site of social infrastructure. Unlike schools, parks, hospitals and libraries, neighbours were less reliable, less governable and more uncertain forms of social infrastructure. This meant that there might be too much and/or too little neighbouring and that the range of neighbouring was limited – for Divya there were worlds just beyond the street that were constantly threatening and from which neighbours could not offer protection. But these uncertainties were articulated in a context in which social and ethnic diversity was a given, an assumed part of the demographics and residential life of the streetscape in which cheek-by-jowl cultural and social difference of households and neighbours in the street was understood as being very ordinary.

Nevertheless, the ethnic and social differences of Bradwell Street was a point of comment and reflection and there were hints of social strain about living multiculture. For example, Divya, who has lived on the street for over 30 years, explained how:

> … w*hen we came in it wasn't that mixed on this street, everyone was mostly English but then more people came in then, when we arrived, and bought houses here. It was always had a mix of people here since I've lived on the street. Londoners and then people who have come to London so yes [there are] lots of different backgrounds on the street. I wouldn't be confident talking with everyone.*

While she is a newer and a younger resident, Chloe also expressed an somewhat coded unease about the multiculturalism of Bradwell Street when she said that she felt that, *us all being different does stop people getting together more.* For other participants, some of the gentrification and urban churn delivered by the superdiversity of new migrant flows from Central and Eastern Europe and South America as well as younger, white urban middle-class residents meant that there were other ambivalences about wider social forces driving residential change. As another younger and more recent resident on the street, Ebba spoke affirmatively about the multiculturalism of the street and worried that generational and gentrification shifts would mean less difference:

> I'd hate us all to be the same, that'd be so boring! I don't want any more people from Stoke Newington [a hyper gentrified area of Hackney, Tottenham's neighbouring borough] though.

In these recognitions of the social and ethnic difference of the street, there is a 'taking difference for granted' sensibility of the multicultural drift of the street made by migration settlements in the 1960s and the newer migration settlements and gentrification of the 21st Century. While there are some uncertainties about the extent of socialities and interaction across difference (Divya and Chloe) it is gentrification that is most openly worried about (Ebba). While work on gentrification (Lees et al 2008; Butler and Hamnett 2012) has tended to argue that gentrification creates parallel lives or 'social techtonics' (Butler and Hamnett 2012; see also Jackson and Butler 2015) with little interaction across social and ethnic difference, a focus on the neighbour relation presents more possibilities of encounter and negotiation. In contrast to some of the social segregations and cultural avoidances that characterized the ways in which parents negotiated the social worlds generated in diverse primary schools (Vincent, Neal and Iqbal 2018), the material and social proximities of homespace appeared to offer micro, cumulative and multiple opportunities for negotiation as residents engaged in a range of neighbour socialities and small pragmatic exchanges, from having a spare front door key just in case of forgetting the front keys, taking in deliveries and keeping an eye on the house when neighbours were away, to engagements about house repair and maintenance and improving the street and the quality of residential life. Unlike the temporary encounters of difference in shared public space such as parks (Amin 2012, Neal et al 2016) or the extended encounters of difference through the shared use of social infrastructure institutions such as primary schools (Vincent et al 2018), residential home space presents a more explicit and direct mutualism in the most intimate, environments of everyday life. This may enable the practices of routine interaction and mutualism to minimize difference and create other forms of connection and shared identification (Heil 2014, Jackson and Butler 2015, Tyler 2015, 2020). As Rosenblum (2016: 2) argues, 'we have no exit [from our neighbours]' Consequently 'the stakes, the depth and intensity of the interests in quotidian private life' are much higher. In this context neighbour relations are distinct from the micropublics (Amin 2002) of other social infrastructure sites with which much of the conviviality literature has been preoccupied. Ethnically diverse neighbours *have* to interact across difference and even if neighbours are mostly unknown, avoided and ignored, they are nevertheless *there* and bound into an informal mutualism in which there is the ongoing possibility of encounter as well as a pragmatic reliance and support.

Concluding reflections

Neighbours matter. As the Covid-19 pandemic has shown, neighbours can become a first and last line of social care and support for everyday mundane needs as well as in extreme crisis. In the 2017 Grenfell fire disaster it was Muslim residents, awake late and observing Ramadan who alerted and tried to help their neighbours. In the 2005 experience of Hurricane Katrina, too, Roseblum (2016) notes how neighbours relied on each other for rescue. This is not to over sentimentalise neighbours (or neighbouring) – the Covid -19 experence has been one of surveillance and reporting of neighbours[ii] as well as supporting them and neighbour relations can breakdown in terrifying ways as the 1990s Balkan war and Rwandan war showed. Neighbours are a widely experienced, informal and non-institutionalised social relationship which intersect personal and public life.

Bulmer (1986) cautions against a rose tinted analysis of neighbours and neighbouring, arguing that the reciprocity and social care impulse of the neighbour is more calculated interaction, driven by the self-interest and the ways that being a good neighbour has the benefits of feeling good and that pure 'goodness of heart' is rarely the motive for help and support between neighbours. There may be something of the doing good to feel good impulse in the narratives presented by Adam, Jodie,

Lucy, Kaleb and Bradwell Street residents but these also went beyond straightforward self-interest. While there were ambivalences, avoidances and disappointments, a recurring pattern in the interviews examined here is the ways in which the neighbour is invested in and valued as a form of mutual social support. Even Kaleb, who, disappointed by his neighbours unresponsiveness, and, with his wife advising him to stop trying, is nevertheless committed to keep on visiting, delivering cards and encouraging interaction and what he calls 'playing his part'.

Kaleb's emphasis on 'playing his part' and his sense of responsibility for his neighbours reflects a commitment to public life and sociality that can be seen in a number of the narratives discussed in the chapter. In this context, the chapter suggests that it might make sense to think about neighbours as a form of social infrastructure. Obviously neighbours are not spaces like the libraries, schools and parks that Klinenberg (2018) defines as social infrastructure, but we can think of them as exchange sites which are able to generate similar outcomes and affordances associated with social infrastructure relating to interaction, mutual support, social wellbeing and collective liveability. As Latham and Layton (2019) argue, we need to think more openly about other spaces of social infrastructure as there may be 'a range of often underappreciated and overlooked spaces not often thought of as public but which nonetheless have distinct public dimensions. Studying these spaces as social infrastructure—as spaces that facilitate social connection—directs attention to the breadth, depth, and texture of social life that can be facilitated in the urban environment' (Latham and Layton 2019: 9).

While neighbours have remained stubbornly marginal and unfashionable in sociology, it might be possible to rethink them as a more *radical* social relationship and particularly in contexts of increasing social difference and ethnic diversity. This radicalism is reflected in Rosenblum's (2016) 'rough equality' and Heil's (2014) equality of 'resident' categories as well as being present in the co-productive nature of neighbouring - and *what we do for others for free*.

As a social relation, the neighbour subverts and disrupts the public and the private, the social and the spatial boundaries. The disruptive qualities of neighbour relations are particularly significant in contexts where large scale, diverse migrant settlements are reflected in localised urban multiculture. For the Bradwell Street particpants, neighbour relations and interactions by and large worked across ethnic and social difference rather than being segregated by these. In their narratives too, Jody, Adam, Lucy and Kaleb all tended to identify neighbours as a focus of connective potential and shared lives rather than a point of racialised separation or conflict. In revisiting the 'social techtonics' argument (that gentrification embeds 'fault lines' between a white urban middle class and social and ethinc 'others') Jackson and Butler (2015) suggest that while it is 'still useful' social techtonics needs to allow for more 'nuance' as it does not always adequately capture the senses and practices of belonging and local engagement within an multi-ethnic neighbourhood, '[t]he concept of social tectonics fails to explain the full complexity of social relations' (Jackson and Butler 2015: 2361). Neighbours and neighbouring practices can powerfully evidence some of this 'complexity'. Shaped by cultural and ethical expectation, propinquity and pragmatism demands on-going strategies around the social geometries of distance, division, care and closeness as the boundaries are managed through forms of unfocused mutualism. Urban heterogeniety and social churn is experienced in homespaces and not only in parochial public space so that, as Tyler (2015: 1177) notes, 'neighbourliness, care and kindness can transcend ethnic and racial identities'. Where cultural difference is a very ordinary - although not necessarily easy – experience, neighbour relations offer the potential to work as sites of pragmatic multiculturalism.

References

Amin, A. (2012). *Land of strangers*, Cambridge, Polity Press.

Back, L. and Puwar, N. (Eds.) (2013). *Live methods.* Oxford, Wiley Blackwell.

Back, L. (2015). Why everyday life matters: Class, community and making life liveable. *Sociology*, *49*(5), 820-836.

Baumgartner M (1988). *The moral order of a suburb*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Brownlie, J. & Anderson, S. (2017). Thinking sociologically about kindness: Puncturing the blasé in the ordinary city. *Sociology, 51*(6), 1222 –1238

Bulmer, M. (1986). *Neighbours: the work of Philip Abrams*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Bondi, L. (2014). Understanding feelings: Engaging with unconscious communication and embodied knowledge. *Emotion, Space and Society,* 10(1), 44-54.

Butler, T. & Hamnett, C. (2011). *Ethnicity, class and aspiration: Understanding London's new East End*. Bristol: Policy Press.

Cheshire, L., Easthope, H. & ten Have, C. (2019). Unneighbourliness and the unmaking of home. *Housing, Theory and Society.* 1-19. DOI:10.1080/14036096.2019.1705384.

Crow, G. Allan, G and Summers, M (2002) Neither busybodies nor nobodies: managing proximity and distance in neighbourly relations, *Sociology* 36,1: 127-145

Crow, G. (2002). *Social Solidarities: Theories, identities and social change*. Buckingham, UK: Open University Press.

Crow, G. (2010). Social Solidarities. *Sociology Compass.* 4(1), 52-60.

Felder, M. (2020) Strong, weak and invisible ties: a relational perspective on co-existence, *Sociology* 54, 4: 675-692

Heil, T. (2014). Fragile convivialities: Everyday living together in two stateless but diverse regions, Catalonia and Casamance. *European Journal of Cultural Studies. 17*(4), 452-470.

Jackson, E. & Butler, T. (2014). Revisiting 'social techtonics': the middle classes and social mix in gentrifying neighbourhoods. *Urban Studies. 52*(13), 2349–2365.

Karner, C. & Parker, D. (2010). Reputational geographies and urban social cohesion. *Ethnic and Racial Studies. 33*(8), 451-1470.

Klinenberg, E. (2018). *Palaces for the people: how to build a more equal and united society*. London: Bodley Head.

Latham, A. & Layton, J. (2019). Social infrastructure and the public life of cities. *Geography Compass. 13*(7), 1-15.

Laurier, E., Whyte, A., & Buckner, K. (2002). Neighbouring as an occasioned activity: "finding a lost cat". *Space and Culture. 5*(4), 346-367.

Liu, Y., Cheshire, L., Wang, S. & Xuanming, F. (2019). A socio-spatial analysis of neighbour complaints using large-scale administrative data: the case in Brisbane, Australia. *Cities 90,* 168-180.

Lees, L. (2008). Gentrification and social mixing: Towards an inclusive urban renaissance? *Urban Studies. 45*(12), 2449-2470.

Mann, P. (1954). The concept of neighbourliness. *American Journal of Sociology.* 60(2), 163-168.

Meissner, F. & Vertovec, S. (2015). Comparing super-diversity. *Ethnic and Racial Studies. 38*(4), 541-555.

Morgan, D. (2009). *Acquaintances: the space between strangers and friends*. Maidenhead, Berkshire: Open University Press and McGraw Hill.

Neal, S., Vincent, C. & Iqbal, H. (2016). Extended encounters in primary school worlds. *Journal of Intercultural Studies. 37*(5), 464-480.

Neal, S., Bennett, K., Cochrane, A., & Mohan, G. (2017). *Lived experiences of multiculture.* London: Routledge.

Painter, J. (2012). The politics of the neighbour. *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space. 30*(3), 515-533.

Rees, A. D. (1950). *Life in a Welsh countryside: a social study of Llanfihangel Yng Ngwynfa*. Cardiff: University of Wales Press.

Richards, L. (1990). *Nobody's home: dreams and realities in a new suburb.* Melbourne: Oxford University Press.

Rosenblum, N. (2016). *Good neighbours, the democracy of everyday life in America*. Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press.

Savage, M., Bagnall, G. & Longhurst, B. (2005). *Globalisation and belonging,* London, Sage.

Snaith, R. (1986). *Neighbours: the work of Philip Abrams* by Martin Bulmer. *British Journal of Social Work. 16*(5), 595-598

Tyler, K. (2015). Attachment and connections: a 'white working class' English family's relationships with their BrAsian 'Pakistani' neighbours. *Ethnic and Racial Studies. 38*(7), 1169-1184.

Tyler, K. (2020). Suburban ethnicities: home as the site of interethnic conviviality and racism. *British Journal of Sociology. 71*(2), 221-35.

Vincent, C., Neal, S. & Iqbal, H. (2018). *Friendship and diversity: class, ethnicity and social relations in the city*. London: Palgrave Macmillan

Wise, A. (2009). 'Everyday multiculturalism: transversal crossings and working class cosmopolitans'. in A. Wise & S. Velayutham (Eds.) *Everyday multiculturalism* (pp.21-45). Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.

Young, M. & Wilmott, P. (1957). *Family and kinship in East London.* London: Routledge and Kegan Paul

Notes:

[i] These were both two-year, qualitatively designed projects with fieldwork based on interviews and participant observation and were funded by one of the UK's key social research funding organisation, the Economic and Social Research Council. The first project was *Children's and adults' friendships across social and ethnic difference* (ES/K002384/1). This project explored intergenerational school-based friendship relations across social and ethnic difference between young children (8-9 years old) and their parents in three primary schools in a superdiverse area of North London (see Vincent et al 2018). We conducted 78 interviews with children, parents and teaching staff. This chapter uses material from our interview with Kaleb who was a parent participant.

The second project was *Living multiculture: the new geographies of ethnic diversity and the changing formations of multiculture in England* (ES/J007676/1). This project explored urban social life in three different geographies of multiculture in England and involved 127 group, mobile and one to one interviews and participant observation with multi-ethnic young adults (16-18), social interaction and practices in local public spaces such as parks and café spaces and participation in local social leisure organisations in multicultural places. (see Neal et al 2017). This chapter uses material from interviews with Adam, Jodie and Lucy who were members of social leisure organisations.

[ii] Priti Patel the UK government's Home Secretary stated that she supported reporting neighbours to the police if they were seen breaking Covid-19 rules.
https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2020/sep/15/rule-of-six-priti-patels-neighbours-unimpressed-about-her-shopping-lawbreakers