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“It’s a Two-Way Thing:” Symbolic boundaries and convivial practices in Changing Neighbourhoods in London and Tshwane

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Abstract

While there is a considerable body of literature on symbolic boundaries that engages with long-established/newcomer configurations, work on conviviality has only rarely taken this angle, despite its general focus on contexts of immigration-related diversity. This article connects these literatures by examining insider-outsider configurations between long-established residents and newcomers in two very different contexts of rapid demographic change, where the established population is already marginalised and feels further threatened by newcomers. Drawing on ethnographic research in Newham, United Kingdom, and Mshongo, South Africa, we advance debates on conviviality by revealing how perceptions of inequality, lack of civility, and lack of reciprocity shape symbolic boundaries against newcomers, which may in turn be softened by convivial practices. We also consider what the differences between the sites might reveal about the enabling conditions for conviviality in such neighbourhoods.

Keywords

migration; conviviality; exclusion; inequality; informal settlement; marginalisation; reciprocity; squatters; struggle discourse; symbolic boundaries

1. Introduction

There has been an abundance of social scientific work on conviviality since the early 2000s, emerging from a long-standing interest in the “capacity of people to live together” (Wise & Noble, 2016, p. 423). Gilroy (2004) was a central voice in current thinking around conviviality, applying the notion to the context of increasingly diverse 21st century postcolonial urban societies. In broad terms, the notion of conviviality “can be used as an analytical tool to ask and explore the ways, and under what conditions, people constructively create modes of togetherness” (Nowicka & Vertovec, 2014, p. 342). Building on Frankenberg’s work, Wise & Noble (2016)

highlight that the notion of conviviality is only useful if our empirical research specifically focuses on everyday *practices* of living together.

Much scholarship on conviviality is grounded in empirical examinations of such social practices (at the school gate, the butchers, amongst neighbours, at churches and savings clubs, etc.) (Chekero & Morreira, 2020; Noble, 2009; Radice, 2016; Wessendorf, 2014; Wise, 2016). By focussing on "situated social interactions" (Radice, 2016:433), the convivialities approach enables us to uncover the existence of everyday conflict, racism and exclusion, as well as successful coexistence (Nowicka & Vertovec, 2014; Vigneswaran, 2014; Wise & Noble, 2016).

Concerns with the question of how people live together with difference formed part of much earlier debates on solidarity in complex plural societies (Durkheim, 1964 [1933]; Illich, 1973; Overing & Passes, 2000). Such debates on solidarity are closely related to those around the construction of symbolic boundaries against those deemed as 'different' (Barth, 1969; Lamont& Molnár, 2002; Wimmer, 2013). Although rarely theorized in these terms, theories on symbolic boundaries are particularly applicable to many insider-outsider configurations, such as those between long-established and recent residents. While scholarship on conviviality pays particular attention to *practice*, scholarship on boundary making highlights *perceptions* about 'the other', and how these can play into or hinder convivial relations (Barth, 1969; Wimmer, 2013).

This article brings together these literatures by examining insider-outsider configurations between long-established residents and newcomers in the settlement of Mshongo in the City of Tshwane (South Africa), and the London Borough of Newham (UK). Juxtaposing these contexts is interesting. Despite vast differences in history, political and socio-economic conditions, and patterns of settlement and immigration over time, they both form part of a global geography of racial capitalism (Ali & Witham 2021; Phiri 2020). Both are deprived areas of concentrated inhabitation by those historically defined as racialized outsiders: from the shared experience of racism amongst generations of arrivals to London from the former British colonies and beyond, to the shared experience of squatters occupying land beyond the confines of apartheid's black labour reserves. In recent decades, both contexts have seen rapid changes related to immigration, and in both cases, the long-established population in one way or another has reacted negatively to this change. Importantly, in both sites, the long-established population is already socially and economically marginalised and feels further threatened by the arrival of newcomers perceived to have greater social or economic advantage due to their race (London) or economic position (Mshongo). Against the backdrop of these shared perceptions amongst the established residents that newcomers would worsen their marginalisation, we found evidence in the two sites of common dynamics shaping the capacity to live together.

In this paper, we identify three perceptions, common to our two vastly different contexts, that have led to the creation of symbolic boundaries against newcomers: perceived inequality, perceived lack of civility and perceived lack of reciprocity. While the article primarily focuses on perceptions about newcomers, in the second part of this piece, we link these to convivial practices and show how in both contexts, long-established residents either invested in convivial practices to cross symbolic boundaries, or expressed their appreciation when newcomers engaged in such practices. We thus show how convivial practices can have the effect of softening symbolic boundaries.

Despite identifying similar underlying dynamics of symbolic boundary making and convivial practices in both contexts, we also acknowledge important differences between Mshongo and Newham. Greater socio-economic inequality in Mshongo – exemplified amongst other things by the much more pronounced precarity of existence and the virtual absence of basic infrastructure – makes 'two-way' solidarity practices much more crucial to collective survival. Nevertheless, in light of the violence that has erupted across symbolic boundaries in South Africa, we also acknowledge that the degree of reciprocity implicit in convivial practices may differ across the two cases.

In the following section, we review work on symbolic boundaries and established/newcomer relationships, identifying connections with literature on conviviality and the common relevance of principles of inequality, civility and reciprocity. We then delve into the two research sites and their methodologies, before turning to the empirical part of the paper that looks at perceptions that erode the capacity to live together, and convivial practices that might contribute to the softening of symbolic boundaries. We conclude by identifying contextual features that enable living together with difference, through discussion of the main differences between the two sites.

2. Symbolic Boundary Making and Conviviality: Three Common Principles

There exists a long-standing body of research that has looked at societal insider-outsider configurations and processes of inclusion and exclusion amid change (Chekero & Morreira, 2020; Elias & Scotson, 1994; Lamont & Molnár, 2002; Matsinhe, 2016; Nieftagodien, 2012; Nyamnjoh, 2006; Wallman, 1978; Wimmer, 2013). Much of this work draws on the notion of "symbolic boundaries", defined as "conceptual distinctions made by social actors to categorize objects, people, practices, and even time", creating feelings of similarity and group membership (Lamont & Molnár, 2002, p. 168). Of particular relevance to this article is literature focusing on social relations and processes of inclusion and exclusion between long-established residents and newcomers, which can be one of the most relevant types of symbolic boundaries created by residents (Elias and Scotson's 1994). Regarding our two contexts, of particular interest is work that looks at social contexts where the long-established population already feels marginalized and often threatened in their precarious position by

newcomers (Hardy, 2017; Hewitt, 2005; Kerr, Durrheim, & Dixon, 2019; Valentine, 2008). This work has shown how the coming together of existing deprivation among the long-settled, and the arrival of new groups can "antagonise the relations between long-term settled residents, both minority and majority ethnic, and new arrivals" (Hickman, Crowley, & Mai, 2008, p. 99). As we show in the empirical section, social marginalisation also comes into play regarding long-term processes of racialisation, with ethnic minorities in Newham feeling threatened by white newcomers who are perceived to wield more power within established hierarchies of racialisation. In Mshongo, where black South African residents are living the legacy of apartheid policies of spatial marginalisation, there is privilege associated with African newcomers from countries without such recent histories of racial marginalisation, whose citizens are perceived to have greater skills, buying power or social capital. Inequality and marginalisation are thus important factors underpinning the creation of symbolic boundaries in light of the arrival of newcomers.

Studies of multi-ethnic neighbourhoods have shown that symbolic boundaries do not necessarily coincide with categorical differentiations along ethnic, racial or class lines, but 'otherness' is often defined by newcomer status and adherence to local rules of order and decency, for example community rules around trash disposal or decent behaviour in shared public spaces such as parks and street corners (Blokland, 2003; Hickman, Mai, & Crowley, 2012; Wallman, 1978; Wessendorf, 2020; Wimmer, 2013). In our data, such expectations of civility and order strongly shaped long-established residents' perceptions of newcomers and the creation of symbolic boundaries against those who were seen to not adhere to these rules.

An additional factor which played into the creation of symbolic boundaries related to the notion of reciprocity, here understood as resource exchange regarding involvement in local life, causes and concerns. In the context of a London neighbourhood, Wallmann and colleagues found that insiders were defined 'in terms of their local involvement, for example in associations, rather than by their ethnic or national origins' (Wallman, 1982, p. 119; see also Hickman et al., 2012). In their study of Tower Hamlets (London), Dench et al. (2006) showed that perceived lack of contribution to the welfare state, coupled with socio-economic marginalisation, contributed to negative views of both Bangladeshi newcomers, who were seen as exploiting the welfare state, and white middle-class newcomers who were perceived to control resources while avoiding local engagement. Similarly, in KwaZulu-Natal, migrants' non-participation in strikes and trade unions was seen as undermining the struggle for improved working conditions (Ndinda and Ndhlovu, 2016). These examples demonstrate that forms of reciprocity (by way of recognizing and participating in local concerns) can be closely intertwined with existing social inequalities, historical processes of marginalisation, and local discourses of struggle (Kerr et al., 2019).

Much of the work on symbolic boundaries focuses on representations and discourses about 'the other', which is also reflected in this article, in which we primarily focus on long-established residents' perceptions and how they talk about newcomers. In contrast, work on conviviality specifically focuses on everyday practices of living

together. It primarily focuses on how symbolic boundaries are crossed and negotiated and how people sometimes make a conscious effort to communicate, interact and live with people of different backgrounds (Noble, 2009; Wise, 2009). As we show later, investment in convivial practices (such as gift exchange and engagement in local issues) can soften symbolic boundaries, while lack of investment in convivial practices can exacerbate them.

This article contributes to debates on conviviality by showing the huge impact of symbolic boundaries on convivial relations, and how the dynamics of inequality, civility and reciprocity that underlie symbolic boundaries play into these processes. Furthermore, it advances debates on conviviality by identifying what might be the conditions for conviviality in contexts of rapid demographic change in which substantial proportions of the established populace already occupy a marginalised position.

3. The research

The research for this article was undertaken in two distinct localities where established residents are marginalised and occupy a position of relative deprivation compared to the wider population.

The informal settlement of Mshongo comprises a series of informal shack settlements bordering the township of Atteridgeville in Tshwane, South Africa. Here, only 17% of households have piped water into their dwelling, as compared to 67% of the wider population in the township. Over 20% have no income, compared to 12% in wider Atteridgeville (StatsSA 2011a & 2011b).

Mshongo was established only around thirty years ago through land invasions by black South African residents who were seeking relief from overcrowding in the township due to housing controls intended to limit the black urban population. With the fall of apartheid-era controls on black citizens' freedom of movement, new squatters arrived from a variety of ethnicity-based reserves that had previously confined black citizens in various provinces. Migrants from other African states began joining South African squatters after the first democratic elections in 1994, and arrival levels rose in the early 2000s as South Africa "rapidly evolved into one of the largest recipients of asylum seekers in the world" (UNHCR, 2009, p. 43). These numbers quadrupled between 2007 and 2008, making South Africa the main destination for new asylum seekers worldwide in that year (ibid). In particular, "survival migration" into South Africa following political and economic crisis in Zimbabwe between 2000 and 2012 was described as "the largest mass influx anywhere in the world since the start of the twenty-first century" (Betts, 2013, p. 55). Shack settlements, where black South Africans already lived in concentrated poverty (Van Averbeke, 2007, p. 337), were one destination for new arrivals, and informal sites, including Mshongo, became a common site of collective xenophobic violence (Fauvelle-Aymar & Kabwe-Segatti, 2012).

Distinctive from the London case, many residents of Mshongo helped establish the settlement and participated in collective efforts to secure services or respond to crime. Residents live on the threshold of state care; the municipality provides water at specified points, but many residents dig their own pit latrines and make illegal connections to the formal power supply. There are no schools or hospitals within the settlement, and police and emergency services often cannot or will not access the unmapped streets. Public space is everywhere and nowhere: there are no parks, squares or benches, but at the same time private space is often barely distinguishable from the street; streets, pathways and spaces between dwellings are places people walk, women sit, and children play. Often, pit latrines and water points are shared, becoming places of encounter. Here and there, taverns, stalls and shops, operating on public land, become extensions of the street.

In contrast, Newham in East London has existed since the late 1800s and has functioning, state provided infrastructures such as water, electricity and roads, including social infrastructures like schools, libraries, community centres, and tended public spaces like parks and squares. Nevertheless, Newham is also one of the most deprived areas in the UK (New Policy Institute, 2015). Levels of child poverty, homelessness and premature mortality are all worse than the London average (Trust for London, c2022), while processes of 'regeneration' are making housing in the area "wholly unaffordable for the majority of its inhabitants" (James 2016). Newham has long been a classical migrant reception area, where new arrivals find their feet, especially since WW2. In 2018, only 13.4% of the population identified as white British, and only 45.4% were born in England (Datastore, 2018). Those identifying as ethnic minorities mainly originate from South Asia, Africa, East Asia and the Caribbean, with a high number of people originating in Eastern Europe, Latin America and Africa arriving since the 2000s (Aston-Mansfield, 2017). Importantly, when asking long-established residents about changes in Newham's population, they refer to Eastern Europeans. This is partly due to their visibility in public spaces such as squares and parks, and an increasing number of Eastern European enterprises, but also reflects a substantial increase in Eastern European migrants since EU accession in 2004, rising to 11.3% of the population (Office for National Statistics 2023).

In Mshongo, we draw on transcriptions of 21 semi-structured interviews with key informants and residents in 2008 and 39 narrative interviews with longstanding residents in 2012, as well as notes from seven walks and two focus groups. Interviews included key informants, established residents, and migrants impacted by collective anti-foreigner attacks in the settlement. In the Newham case, we draw on 15 months of ethnographic fieldwork starting in February 2018. The project engaged with both long-established residents and newcomers through participant observation in weekly community groups, observations in public and semi-public spaces, informal conversations, in-depth interviews with 22 residents, expert interviews with 10 key people, and eight focus group interviews with residents of different backgrounds and generations such as

teenagers, parents and grandparents. In both cases, interviews varied in length and were recorded where participants consented. NVivo was used for thematic analysis in both projects, although the thematic structure differed.

Whilst both research projects involved established and newcomer groups, most of the material cited draws on the views and experiences of longstanding residents, who were largely from a range of black South African ethnicities in Mshongo, and of minority ethnic background in Newham. Material from Newham comprises mainly excerpts from group conversations, which are by nature lengthy but more illuminating when cited in full. Excerpts from Mshongo, which are drawn from a larger number of interviews, are shorter and presented in a more synthetic manner.

4. Perceptions that Shape the Capacity to Live Together: Inequality, Civility and Order, Reciprocity

This section discusses how perceptions of inequality, notions around civility and order, and expectations of reciprocity shape social relations on the ground. We begin with perceptions of inequality, which, in the two contexts, underpin all other aspects of who is perceived as insider or outsider.

4.1. Perceptions of Social Inequality

Against a backdrop of experiences of racism and/or socio-economic precarity, the arrival of newcomers who appear to have distinct advantages over or to compound disadvantage for established residents can lead to fears of reduced life chances and can be perceived as a powerful threat to progress toward greater social inclusion. This was manifest in somewhat different ways in the two sites presented here. In London, long-established ethnic minorities expressed frustration about Eastern European migrants' perceived advantages in securing jobs based on their white privilege. This frustration was expressed against the backdrop of experiences of racialisation over several decades, where the now adult children and grandchildren of the first migrants continued to worry about their job prospects due to institutionalised racism.

In a focus group discussion with a group of elderly South Asian women who had been living in Newham for up to three decades, they expressed their concerns about their grandchildren's career prospects, contrasting these with the perceived better prospects of Eastern European migrants' children. While they agreed that Eastern Europeans faced difficult challenges when first arriving, especially in the context of Brexit, they still expressed resentment. When asked whether they thought it was easier for Eastern Europeans to settle than it had been for them, they acknowledged the challenges these newcomers faced, while at the same time

emphasising that 'Muslim, Asian and African people are targets and find it difficult' even though they had been there for a long time. They emphasised that even for their grandchildren, it continued to be difficult to find jobs because of the colour of their skin, while they believed that Eastern Europeans' children would find jobs more quickly.

This focus group was just one of many conversations with individuals of ethnic minority background who expressed their frustration with continuities of racism and islamophobia which disadvantaged them in comparison with other (white) residents who had arrived recently but were seen to experience less social exclusion (see also Wessendorf, 2020). Perceptions of inequality were exacerbated by views that newcomers were competing with long-established residents over underfunded resources such as health services and council housing.

Anxieties about newcomers stretching the capacity of the local area were also a theme in Mshongo. Both locally born participants and international migrants with a long history in the area saw the ever-growing population as sharpening their suffering and marginalisation vis-à-vis mainstream South African society. For instance, the settlement was established through land occupation and lies on dolomite, which is vulnerable to the development of sinkholes. One participant pointed out that the larger the population becomes, the more pit latrines are built, increasing the area's vulnerability to sinkholes. Another had been injured in just such a case, when a sinkhole opened under a latrine where she was relieving herself. She indicated the scars she bears from acid burns from her fall into the sewage, which was mixed with cleaning acid.

In addition to these very concrete experiences arising from inadequate infrastructures for an increasing population, resentment toward newcomers was exacerbated by the perception that they enjoyed socio-economic advantages. This was experienced in various ways, including through mundane encounters in public space. Speaking of young South African men in Mshongo, one participant said "it becomes painful when they see boys from Zimbabwe drinking beer every weekend and eating meat on a daily basis," appearing to live lives of plenty while the unemployed South African youths must "always ask from others" to obtain these relative luxuries.

In Mshongo, black South African residents were living the legacy of apartheid policies of spatial and economic marginalisation (Monson, 2015), and this was often a palpable context for conversations about newcomers. There was privilege associated with African newcomers who were perceived to have economic advantages such as holding capital, being able to make low wages stretch further for their families at home due to a favourable exchange rate, or having livelihood advantages from superior education or training because "their governments are not like our government" as one South African put it.

Direct economic competition within the settlement was also seen as a by-product of demographic change. South African entrepreneurs complained that cheaper shops by non-South Africans were reducing their customers. The prominence of large Somali-run shops was a visible marker of economic inequality between citizens of South Africa and of other African countries. These stores have an advantage in that they can often sell at lower prices due in part to their access to sufficient funds to buy in bulk and secure related discounts (Gastrow & Amit, 2013). Somalis seeking refuge in South Africa are not necessarily in a weak economic position on arrival, as one Somali participant reflected:

> You see, when we leave our country, it is not because of the lack of resources or hunger but it is because of the war. Maybe Zimbabweans come here to look for money, but we are not here to look for money. Our country is rich; we are here to look for peace.

At the same time, their well-resourced businesses had out-competed some longstanding residents. One shopkeeper reflected from his own experience:

> You suffer to sell your stuff, put everything… like mielie meal. I can't sell mielie meal. They sell mielie meal there very very very cheap. I sell here… that mielie meal I must eat with my child. [chuckles] I can't sell.

For another South African man, the apparent inequality brought echoes of township shops under apartheid where residents had felt exploited by more privileged shopkeepers of Indian heritage, who suffered less severe discrimination. He feared that Somalis would "establish themselves here, and then they will look at us as 2nd class citizens."

In both Mshongo and London, then, perceptions of social inequality, rooted in long-standing processes of socio-economic and/or racial marginalisation, contribute to tensions with newcomers who are seen to have better chances of socio-economic upward mobility and whose presence is perceived as a threat to services or livelihoods for the established population.

4.2. Perceptions of civility and order

Notions around civility and order can be powerful symbolic markers delimiting who belongs and who does not. Perceptions about "others" and what is perceived as unacceptable behaviour often arise from what people experience in public spaces such as street corners, parks and playgrounds. In Newham, when asking long-established residents about changes to the area, the feeling that newcomers were eroding civility and

order often came up. Littering in the park, drinking in public space and begging was seen to symbolise a lack of care about the local environment.

The following quote from a focus group with long-established residents of mainly South Asian and Caribbean heritage who had lived in the area for most of their lives exemplifies how they acknowledge some newcomers' efforts to make a living, while resenting how others behave in public spaces:

> Susanne: How about changes in terms of the population, have you noticed anything?
>
> Sharon: Eastern Europeans. And I do find that a lot of them, they are hard-working, they are very clean, but there are a lot of people that are not working and they are drinkers and, they are in the parks and…
>
> Meera: Yes, and she's got a dog and she goes there and sometimes they are quite abusive…
>
> Sharon: And you know they urinate on the trees. They don't really care I mean, come on!
>
> Elizabeth: And they'd be sitting on a bench, next to a rubbish bin, but they drop it in front of them, and it's little things like that. Why not keep it tidy? (…) I've lived in Newham all my life, 80 years. I've seen lots of changes. I mean I've got Chinese and Eastern European [neighbours], and we sort of mix in.
>
> Sharon: Yeah, we've got a mixture, like I've got Italian and English and there's Chinese and there's Africans and Nigerians and Irish, you know, but people are polite.
>
> Elizabeth: We get on, you've got to get on.

As in other conversations with long-established residents, Eastern Europeans were mentioned as soon as asked about changes, especially in regards to drinking alcohol in public space and begging, often ascribed to migrants originating from Romania (Wessendorf, 2020). Elizabeth contrasts these newcomers with other residents who, earlier on, were newcomers as well, but who she perceives as part of the larger "we" because they adhere to rules of order and civility.

Complaints relating to behavioural norms also came up in the context of Mshongo, with reference to newcomers from rural areas of South Africa and those from other parts of Africa. Practices such as walking around drinking from a bottle and making noise at night were seen to mark newcomers as "very rude", an elderly South African asserted. In the context of limited sanitation infrastructure, certain practices in public space were seen to undermine the cleanliness and health of the settlement, particularly newcomers emptying urine from their buckets in the street (rather than in a pit latrine) or discarding faeces in bags outdoors.

In an informal settlement where dwellings are often close together and amenities shared, residents' private lives are more visible to neighbours, both because they can be more easily seen and heard, but also because information travels quickly by word of mouth. One participant had a negative view of outsiders after witnessing a baby's body being discovered in a pit latrine and hearing that the police had traced the mother to the province of Limpopo. Another told how a *muti* charm – a jar containing a child's hand and money – was found in the remains of a migrant's dwelling and seen as the reason why a man who tried to take over the property later "went mad". Such discoveries – bound up with perceived incivility and transgression of norms – are easily witnessed, overheard or idly discussed in the streets, and can generate negative associations with newcomers.

In both London and Mshongo, newcomers who are seen to break local rules of civility and order stand out as different in the eyes of the long-established population. While in both places, public space was the primary arena in which such behaviour was observed, in Mshongo, where the private realm often spills into the public, a wider array of transgressions of civility and order were visible and occurred in spaces closer to home.

4.3. Expectations of Reciprocity

In Mshongo and Newham, much of the resentment against newcomers was founded in perceptions that they did not adequately contribute to practices that reproduce the ethos or valued functions of place or failed to show commitment to valued norms or aspirations of members of the longer settled population. In Newham, this was expressed in relation to the perceived lack of efforts among newcomers to speak English and supposed reluctance to interact with long-established residents. For example, a group of mothers expressed their frustration that Eastern Europeans did not make the effort to communicate with others at the school gate and did not speak English in public space or at the workplace (see also Wessendorf, 2020). They were also blamed for creating separate public spaces in the form of cafes where they only spoke their languages.

The following conversation with a white British resident in a community centre shows how, independent of people's origins, engaging in convivial practices is seen as a conscious choice and an important way of signalling one's belonging to a place.

> Felicity: even people moving in who look like me, they don't say 'hello'. They don't speak English and don't want to mix
>
> Susanne: But I can see quite a bit of mixing here at this coffee morning.
>
> Felicity: Yes but they CHOOSE to come here, these are the people who make a choice to mix, but the newcomers don't.

Later on in the conversation, a friend of Felicity also contrasted her Caribbean and Russian neighbours with newcomers who would not talk to her. This "ethos of mixing" and the expectation that all residents should engage in everyday convivial practices such as saying 'hi' at the school gate, is also present in other parts of London which have seen rapid population changes (see Wessendorf, 2014).

In Mshongo, expectations of local engagement went further and were more politicised. This was linked to the political meaning and purpose for which the squatter settlements were created. They were established through collective mobilisation to provide a foothold in "white" cities toward the end of Apartheid. The founding residents viewed them as a route to formal housing and a fuller experience of citizenship. Instead, many have languished on the housing lists, sometimes for decades, in an increasingly more dense and less habitable settlement. This led to an increasing number of collective marches and protests in the settlement, during which attacks against African migrants and their businesses sometimes ensued (Monson, 2015). Explaining the underlying tensions, established residents complained that newcomers were indifferent to the history of the settlement and the ambitions of its longstanding residents, wanting only to "have space" as one pensioner put it. Shopkeepers were easily marked as outsiders by their failure to close their stores, in line with a tradition of struggle, during protests about service delivery. Established residents will get angry, one informal leader said, when they sacrifice their time to march and fight for the rights of squatters, while migrant entrepreneurs "are keeping; they're benefiting themselves in shops". Similar sentiments were expressed over and over by different longstanding residents of Mshongo, who perceived newcomers as freeriding on their efforts or simply 'not caring' about their struggle. For example, a female community worker complained of both domestic and international migrants, saying:

> … Zimbabweans don't care. If we are fighting for something, they don't care because they are not here to stay, they are just here to make money. Other nations don't care. They don't care. Some people from Pietersburg [a city in South Africa's Limpopo province] stay here just to work; they've got houses at home.

Similarly, an unemployed man singled out those "foreigners" who "would ignore the call for the meetings and continue with their business […] And when things are fixed, they would be first felt by those same people, yet

we are the ones who attend meetings." This echoes other discussions on migrant avoidance of, and South Africans' demands for, commitment in these contexts (Kerr et al., 2019; Landau, 2014).

Investment in local social relations, be it by way of mixing with people of different backgrounds, or by way of engaging with local struggles, form part of perceptions of the broader "we" of local residents in both Mshongo and Newham. Lack of this investment, coupled with perceptions of social inequality and views that newcomers break local rules of civility, can lead to negative perceptions about newcomers more generally. However, these views are sometimes contradicted by everyday convivial practices, as we discuss in the following section.

5. "It's a Two Way Thing": The Prospects and Limits of Conviviality

We have shown how resentment towards newcomers emerged in the context of long-standing experiences of marginalisation resulting from racism, islamophobia and socio-economic marginalisation, coupled with frustrations about newcomers' supposed lack of adherence to local rules of order, and their perceived unwillingness to engage with the local population or locally important political causes.

Of course, positive views coexisted with the negative. Not only did long-term residents sometimes express empathy about newcomers' struggles to settle, but boundaries often softened where there was evidence of convivial practices. For instance, efforts to communicate across differences, offer care, friendship or forms of recognition were seen as evidence that newcomers "are not all bad". For example, in the conversation with a group of women quoted above, the following discussion took place. Sharon was sharing her difficulty finding a Chinese New Year card for a neighbour who always gives gifts at Chinese New Year and Christmas, when Meera interjected:

> Meera: Yes, you know, it's a two-way thing, sometimes you can be forward but sometimes people are stand offish and they don't want to know and don't want to mix so you just …you know…
>
> Sharon: When I lost my husband, he came (neighbour) and said you can call on me for anything, and he came to visit, they were so lovely, I've got some nice neighbours. […]
>
> Meera: It's just individuals isn't it, they are not all bad, they are not all, yeah.

Elizabeth: There's quite a few people when I take the dog for a walk, they are drinkers but they pat the dog and say “hello” and I wouldn't sort of shun them, you have to keep the respect.

Susanne: So generally, you think people get along in the area?

Sue: I think so yeah. Most people do, don't they Mariam? Do you think where you live people get along as well?

Mariam: Yeah, neighbours and you know, quite friendly.

Sue: If you make an effort with people they generally are…

Mariam: And there's reciprocation as well you know in terms of support, just generally like, chit chat, or you know, small talk.

Sue: I used to have Eastern European (neighbours), […] they used to have BBQs and they'd say “we're going to have a BBQ, do you want to take your washing in?” They'd call me and they'd give me a big plate. But you know things like that…

Here, seemingly small gestures, everyday interactions and small talk, taken together, build a picture of mutual respect and reciprocity. Convivial practices thus counteract the symbolic boundaries between the long-established residents and more newly arrived residents.

In a similar way, but a very different context, a Mozambican woman observed how the everyday practice of “living well with your neighbours” created relations of trust that kept some newcomers safe during collective attacks on foreigners in Mshongo:

> It’s all about how you live with your neighbours, if you are not in good books with your neighbours or they hate you they would call the attackers and tell them that there is a foreigner here. But if you live well with your neighbours, they would alert you when the attackers come and defend you from them.

Mozambican shopkeepers were positively labelled as “humble” when they agreed to employ South Africans in their businesses and register with the South African Revenue Service in order to pay tax. Similarly, some newcomers had gained acceptance and even positions of leadership in Mshongo through a process of “learning to live with” the established residents. One local leader, originally from a neighbouring country, said that many people treat him as Zulu. This is partly due to his long stay in the area, but also because on arrival

he “interacted and learnt to live with the elderly members of the community.” He concluded that, as a result, nobody came near his home during the attacks of 2008.

Therefore, both research sites produced evidence that convivial practices are a common process by which newcomers and long-established residents might cross symbolic boundaries. However, we must take care not to overstate the power of such investments and their reach across complex societies. While in both Mshongo and Newham, long-established residents and newcomers engaged in convivial practices, these continued to be paralleled by mistrust, tensions, and prejudice.

Of course, the notion of convivial practices as a ‘two-way process’ is itself a perception, which cannot be taken at face value. There appears to be scope for genuine bi-directionality in the Newham examples, where established residents seem to feel more reciprocally bound by the ethos of mixing to “keep the respect” as Elizabeth put it, even where a newcomer’s behaviour does not align with norms of civility. Yet the terms of reciprocity are clearly set by the preferences and interests of the established, potentially limiting the capacity of convivial practice to change symbolic boundaries, since “boundary change is logically unattainable without change on the side of insiders” too (Klarenbeek 2019: 908). The prospects for genuine reciprocity are slimmer in Mshongo, where there appears to be far more at stake if newcomers fail to engage in convivial practices. If the alternative to meeting the expectations of long-established residents may be violent expulsion from the community, the ‘two-way process’ appears more coerced than freely reciprocated (see also Vigneswaran 2014: 477).

6. Conclusion

This article has examined the creation of symbolic boundaries against newcomers and how convivial practices can contribute to the softening of these in two vastly different contexts, the South African settlement of Mshongo and the London Borough of Newham. Their histories of settlement and immigration and their socio-political and economic conditions differ. However, their long-term residents share the experience of social marginalisation, coupled with rapid demographic changes resulting from the arrival of newcomers seen to be at an advantage either because of perceptions around their white privilege (in Newham) or economic advantage (in Mshongo). Against a backdrop of racism and economic disadvantage, perceptions that newcomers might reduce the prospects for housing, amenities, space and jobs, can exacerbate already existing feelings of marginalisation and exclusion. Notions around civility and order in public space can contribute further to negative feelings about newcomers. In both places, differences that attract attention or comment are produced through everyday observations and experiences of practices that threaten locally valued norms or historical struggles.

We have examined how these marginalised long-established populations perceived more recent populations moving into the area by building on studies of symbolic boundaries that have shown that established/newcomer distinctions can be the most salient differences among local residents. By analysing established-newcomer configurations in such different places, we have identified how perceptions that erode the capacity to live together relate to three principles emerging from our data and literature on symbolic boundaries: inequality, expectations of civility and order, and expectations of reciprocity. While these three principles are based on perceptions about newcomers, we have also shown how residents value newcomers' efforts to engage in convivial gestures such as greetings, the sharing of food and neighbourly support. These convivial practices can help soften symbolic boundaries.

While we have identified common principles in these two vastly different places, we also acknowledge that these issues were experienced differently in Mshongo, which differs from Newham in terms of the depth of poverty, the virtual absence of state services, the enmeshing of public and private space, and the intense politics of struggle against the legacies of institutionalised white racism. Expectations of reciprocity, for example, differed across the two sites. In East London, where practices of mixing are valued by established residents in a context of longstanding "commonplace diversity" (Wessendorf, 2014), resentments can be around the preservation of pre-existing orders of convivial relations, such as the ethos of mixing that has developed between prior arrivals. While situational instances of resentment surface at times, they stand in stark contrast to Mshongo, where violent displacement has occurred at the boundary between "us" and "them". In this context, we can find a much more politicised and strongly felt ethos of solidarity and struggle that has persisted among different ethno-linguistic groups who were divided and separated into reserves under apartheid, but came together to claim space and rights on the margins of the city. Residents explicitly linked both inequality and reciprocity to the struggle to overcome an existing history of marginalisation, and resentments were particularly apparent when newcomers were seen to prioritise their personal interests over participation in the collective struggle for a better life.

While our empirical material revealed how perceptions of inequality, lack of civility and lack of reciprocity can erode convivial social relations in the two contexts, it also suggests that peaceful social relations across perceived differences are easier in better-resourced and formally governed environments, where the risk differences pose to one's political rights, economic survival and way of life is arguably lower. It also appears that a more intense form of solidarity is required to sustain a settlement like Mshongo where residents must continually struggle for access to basic amenities and mobilise collectively for an equal place in the city. Differences of commitment will be particularly salient where the stakes are so high, and a greater investment in convivial practices is likely to be required.

Whilst convivial relations involve both cohesion and conflict, collective violence against outsiders in Mshongo certainly appears as a rupture. The high incidence of xenophobic discrimination and related violence in South Africa; the role of mobilising actors and repertoires in such violence; and particularities of Mshongo's informality and history of contentious politics (Misago, 2019; Monson, 2015), are key parts of an explanation that would take us beyond the scope of this paper. However, one direction for future research would be to consider how differences of ethos across different localities – here manifested as an ethos of mixing in Newham, and an ethos of struggle in Mshongo – might shape the context for such ruptures. Kerr and colleagues have argued that the linking of insider/outsider grievances to a discourse of struggle can constitute migrants as a threat to citizens' hopes of liberation from historical marginalisation (Kerr et al 2019: 1008). Further work along these lines might help account for contexts where the everyday flow of social relations is disrupted by violent instantiation of symbolic boundaries.

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