

CONVIVIAL CULTURES IN MULTICULTURAL MANCHESTER AND BARCELONA: EXPERIENCES OF POLISH WOMEN

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This article concentrates on a new understanding of multicultural societies which emerges from routine interaction between recent and established individuals in various urban spaces. The question of the actual interaction with multicultural population has been largely overlooked in research on Polish migration. Therefore, by exploring the notions of conviviality and convivial cultures, this paper demonstrates how post-2004 Polish presence increasingly affects everyday relations with the local population in both Manchester and Barcelona. The research findings, mainly from the narrative interviews with Polish migrant women, shed light on how convivial cultures emerge and how cultural identities are negotiated in everyday encounters in various spaces of the city, including organisational niches, neighbourhoods, family spaces, schools and colleges, and workplaces. Convivial experiences of Polish migrant women with multicultural population are characterised by constant transformation of multiple identities shaped by personal biographies, experiences of gender and other social categories, which are often shared with other groups and individuals.

Keywords: conviviality, convivial culture, encounter, multicultural, cities, Polish migration, migrant women

INTRODUCTION

This article concentrates on encounters between recent arrivals and established groups and individuals in various urban spaces. These new emerging patterns of interaction are a result of conviviality (Gilroy 2004). Despite a growing

academic interest in conviviality as a way of living together in urban spaces (Heil 2014; Karner and Parker 2011; Morawska 2014; Wise and Velayutham 2014), reflecting a deeper concern about “human modes of togetherness” (Nowicka and Vertovec 2014: 341), little is known about the actual convivial experiences of migrant women coming from a predominantly white society to multicultural cities. This paper draws on my doctoral research which empirically explored how convivial cultures emerge in encounters between Polish migrant women and the local population in both Manchester and Barcelona, including settled ethnic minorities and other migrants. While the study of gender and migration has been marginalised in the larger field of migration studies (Ryan and Webster 2008), this paper stresses the importance of migrant women’s experiences of conviviality in multiple fields of social interaction in two cities, including organisational niches, neighbourhoods, family spaces, schools and colleges, and workplaces – most of which are largely overlooked in research on migrant encounters.

After Poland joined the European Union (EU) in May 2004, many Poles have arrived in more prosperous European countries in search of work, career development and new experiences.¹ The extent of Polish presence in Britain has attracted the controversial attention of the media and politics. Polish migrants, often blamed for taking British jobs and benefits, have become a proxy when referring to the issues of immigration. Spain, on the contrary, did not open its labour market to Polish migrants until 2006. The extent of Polish migration has been substantially smaller in Spain than in Britain.² Furthermore, the discourse on Polish migration is absent in the Spanish media and politics, partly due to their alleged ‘invisibility’ and cultural closeness to the Spanish culture (Nalewajko 2012; González Yanci and Aguilera Arilla 1996). Their integral part in shaping convivial culture in multicultural cities of Britain and Spain has been largely overlooked.

While in Spain there is a significant gap in research regarding encounters between Polish migrants and multicultural population, especially after 2004; there has been a growing interest in academic research in Britain about Polish migrants’ response to cultural diversity (Cook et al. 2011; D’Angelo and Ryan 2011; Eade et al. 2006; Gawlewicz 2016; Ryan 2010). Some studies often offer simplistic ways of interpreting attitudes of Polish migrants to diverse ethnic difference. Nevertheless, researching encounters requires exploring not only attitudes but the complexity of actual experiences of conviviality which

¹ Between 2003 and 2010, the Polish-born population in Britain increased from 75,000 to 532,000 (ONS 2011).

² The January 2013 statistics recorded 78,952 Polish migrants living in Spain (Instituto Nacional de Estadística 2013).

are situated in a specific time and place, and positioned by personal biographies and often influenced by gender dynamics.

In this article, I firstly explore the concepts of conviviality and convivial cultures with attention to the intersection of locality, gender, ethnicity and other social categories often shared with different groups and individuals. Secondly, I provide a description of the research context, methods and analysis. Thirdly, I explore how convivial cultures emerge in different localities through strategies of contact and exchange between Polish migrant women and the multicultural population of both Manchester and Barcelona; and how ethno-cultural boundaries are negotiated through convivial encounters.

CONVIVIALITY AS A PRODUCT OF LIVING AND INTERACTING TOGETHER

While the question of living together in super-diverse cities (Vertovec 2007) has been often problematized in public, political and some scholarly debates, the emerging patterns of convivial culture in various spaces of multicultural cities have been overlooked and under-researched. The term ‘multicultural’ used throughout this paper is distinguished from the contested notion of multiculturalism. It describes societies or settings in which people of different ethnic, cultural and religious backgrounds coexist together and it does not arise from the governmental policy (Hall 2000). Conviviality is defined by Gilroy as (2006: 40) a “social pattern in which different metropolitan groups dwell in close proximity, but where their racial, linguistic and religious particularities do not (...) add up to discontinuities of experience or insuperable problems of communication”. Thus, these differences are considered as not exclusionary or obstructive to conviviality and do not disrupt convivial experiences and communication between people who interact and live together. Convivial culture is a culture of intermixture in urban areas based on ability to live together without becoming anxious and fearful about difference (Gilroy 2004). Culture is no longer understood as a homogenous body of traditions and customs but as a dynamic social process (Yuval-Davis 1997). Furthermore, conviviality allows exploring identity as a “‘production’, which is never complete, always in process” (Hall 1990: 222).

When researching experiences of Polish women in multicultural Manchester and Barcelona, I find Gilroy’s notions of conviviality and convivial culture very useful. However, he offers no methodological or theoretical underpinning of the concept. Furthermore, Gilroy focuses mainly on the postcolonial context.

Convivial encounters can no longer be solely explored in the context of diversity conventionally characterised by the presence of African-Caribbean and South Asian communities from Commonwealth countries or former colonies but through the lens of super-diversity as a result of an increase of migrants with diverse ethnic origins, migration histories, gender, age, religions, languages, education levels, legal statuses and economic backgrounds (Vertovec 2007). Furthermore, the impact of gender on conviviality remains underexplored, especially when it intersects with other axes of difference including race, ethnicity, class and age (Morawska 2014). In this light, there is a need to concentrate on the gender dynamics which are lacking in Gilroy's and other scholars writings' on conviviality.

Existing literature about the practices of living together in multicultural cities (Amin 2002, 2008; Valentine 2008; Cook et al. 2011) often interprets conviviality as limited to positive but superficial and casual encounters, such as banal mingling, holding doors for people or small talk in public spaces unlikely to generate meaningful encounters. For Valentine, "everyday convivial encounters often mark instead a culture of tolerance which leaves the issue of our multiple and intersecting identities ... unaddressed" (Valentine 2008: 334). Nevertheless, conviviality needs much more complex exploration which might allow understanding it with regard to various types and degrees of living together. Convivial (in Latin: *convīv(ere)*) means to live together (*con* 'with' + *vivere* 'live'). Hence, conviviality can be better understood in conjunction with the Spanish word *convivir* describing the action of living and interacting together. Therefore, I use the term 'convivial', as informed by the idea of *convivir*, to describe relations of living together in shared spaces which may involve various forms of living together.

Conviviality is explored in this paper as a process of interaction embedded in social practice which is not free from racism, tensions and conflicts (Gilroy 2004; Karner and Parker 2011; Wise and Velayutham 2014). The social dynamics between different groups and individuals are often influenced by the hierarchies of race, class and gender and other social categories. While this paper acknowledges that these hierarchies are often present in encounters with difference, it also shifts attention to exploring the ways in which differences are negotiated and the ways in which they create some elements of sameness.

Convivial encounters do not occur in a vacuum. Cities are specific places of encounter (Valentine 2008) and meeting "the stranger" (Simonsen 2008: 145). Nevertheless, this research recognises that cities are not homogenous entities and they differ in their opportunity structures, their ethnic composition of various localities and they may offer migrants different opportunities for convivial

interaction. Convivial encounters may occur in various spaces of multicultural cities such as neighbourhoods, workplaces, schools, adult colleges and family spaces. These “contact zones”, defined as the spaces where “people geographically and historically separated come into contact with each other and establish ongoing relations” (Louise Pratt 1992: 6), are intrinsic in exploration of everyday convivial experiences. Lamphere (1992: 2) points out that “interrelations are not just a matter of race, ethnicity, or immigrant status but can be influenced by the organisation of a workplace, apartment complex, or school”. Micropublics as the sites of banal transgression may serve as sites of inclusion and negotiation (Amin 2002: 970). This means that people may step out of their daily environments into other spaces which bring them together with those from different backgrounds. Despite claims that contact with Others does not automatically lead to respect for difference (Valentine 2008), it is “an important condition for allowing common cross-cutting identities to develop” (Muir and Wetherell 2010: 12) and it is important in reducing prejudice (Hewstone 2003). This paper acknowledges the necessity of empirical exploration of the complexities of emerging convivial cultures in order to enhance a broader understanding of the concept of conviviality.

METHODOLOGY

The fieldwork for this research was carried out in Manchester and Barcelona between June 2012 and March 2013. Both are multicultural cities with super-diverse and mixed neighbourhoods, making them significant settings for studying convivial encounters. Both are post-industrial with migration friendly narrative characterised by a wide organisational support of inter-cultural coexistence, although during the time of my fieldwork the funding streams of multicultural groups have been limited by the economic crisis. Under the banner of community cohesion in Manchester and interculturality in Barcelona, a number of policies and initiatives have been developed with regard to ethnic diversity and migration in both cities. Whilst the two cities share a number of similarities, there are nevertheless some differences. Barcelona is the capital of a Catalan nation without a state, characterised not only by bilingualism and complex national and regional identifications, but also a discourse of *convivencia* which is an integral part of a political strategy towards diversity and shaping social relations between the local residents and migrants – which makes it a particularly interesting context for studying convivial cultures.

The ethnography was initiated by participant observation with several multicultural groups involving Polish migrant women, which not only enabled a better understanding of convivial practices but also allowed me to establish trust with and provided access to research participants. I conducted narrative interviews with twenty Polish migrant women in Barcelona and twenty-one in Manchester. This approach allows developing extended accounts over the course of interviews (Riessman 2002). The sample was chosen to be as varied as possible and it included Polish migrant women who entered Britain and Spain just before or after Poland joined the EU. The interviewees were mainly contacted through the groups with which I conducted the participant observation and subsequently snowball sampling was applied. The third method employed in this research was a focus group conducted in each city made up of five to six women previously interviewed. The participants were asked to bring photographs reflecting everyday situations in multicultural Manchester and Barcelona. These photos were then used to stimulate group discussions. The interactive feature of this research approach allows discussion to explore the formation and negotiation of accounts within a group context and to cross-check data gathered through the above methods.

The narrative interviews were transcribed, summarised and coded manually to identify the main themes and subsequently analysed as narratives (Riessman 2002). The data from the narrative interviews was cross-checked with the data from the focus groups and the participant observation. All participants have been given pseudonyms.

CONVIVIAL CULTURES IN MANCHESTER

The findings in the two contexts demonstrate a vast heterogeneity of narratives, some tensions and contradictions. The reappearing themes include convivial experiences in local spaces of Manchester and Barcelona, for instance, in organisational niches, neighbourhoods, family spaces, at educational courses and in workplaces. This part of the paper focuses on encounters with difference in Manchester and Barcelona demonstrating multiple forms of contact within various spaces of the city.

Many participants felt that group activities in Manchester offered them a ground for a common understanding despite cultural and language differences. This passage demonstrates what it meant for Celina to be part of Europa, a group working with Central and Eastern European migrants and the local population in Manchester:

[I]n Manchester, at Europia, it has been great... I have been meeting up with these people and we have been organising events. I feel like I am contributing somehow and some kind of bond develops, because we do something together, we have the same goal ... it makes sense, a bit of a human sense of life.

During the first few months in Manchester, Celina lived in fear, as her flat was repeatedly targeted by local hooligans. Lack of contact with people and fear of the locals from her new neighbourhood made it difficult for any convivial culture to emerge. Celina became homeless after leaving the unsafe accommodation. This was a turning point in her story, as this was when she came across Europia and the Chinese Women Society. At first, the close relationship between the two groups was difficult to understand for Celina because she interpreted cultural identity in terms of one sort of collective, ‘one people’, “with stable, unchanging and continuous frames of reference” (Hall 1990: 223):

They said to me, ‘they will send you Petra from the Chinese Women Society’. I said ‘but I am not Chinese’, but I was told it didn’t matter. This was still my Polish narrow-minded thinking.

Celina’s example demonstrates common cross-cutting of identities which enabled her to look beyond ethno-cultural boundaries and establish bonds and friendships with members of the two groups. This convivial experience can be understood as sociability which “builds on a certain shared human competencies to relate to multiple other persons as well as a desire for human relationships ... In these interactions people gather in the same place ... around some point of shared interest” (Glick Schiller et al. 2011: 402). As Vertovec (2007) points out, shared ‘politics of place’ serves to forge multi-ethnic coalitions and alliances among the group members. The convivial culture emerging within the groups is premised on the formation of a bond and mutual trust between Celina and other members, the feeling of inclusion and “the same goal”, as she put it.

Similarly to Celina, Judyta had previously lived in multicultural societies and subsequently moved to London where she shared accommodation with Nigerian people and had a child with her partner of Nigerian origin. She then moved to Manchester. Participating in Europia activities enabled her to step outside her daily environment, get to know others and engage in common ventures: “*What I really like is that there are people from different parts of the world and they want to do something together and they find a common language and most of all they accept each other*”. At the same time, when the Chinese Women Society

asked members of Europa to prepare a short performance for the celebration of the Chinese New Year, Judyta expressed her objections to change a Polish legend to suit the occasion:

If this is Polish culture, a Polish legend, this is not out of nowhere. This is not some kind of a fairy-tale, but a legend that is linked with a historical place so there is a seed of truth, but it shouldn't be changed, because it is linked with a given region, place and people ... Fine, Chinese New Year, but we are supposed to show something Central and Eastern European, so why should I care that in their culture this colour symbolises this or the other and that they might not like it ... My culture is like this and I will not change it for the needs of other cultures.

Judyta gave importance to unchanging and continuous frames of reference and meaning of cultural symbols. In this context, she saw her culture as an essentialist and homogenous body of traditions and fixed cultural symbols that should not be changed. There is a tension between her openness to difference and fixed notions of ethno-national identity. Judyta's narrative, as well as several other accounts, demonstrates the "simultaneity of openness and boundary maintenance" (Glick Schiller et al. 2011: 410). Nevertheless, Judyta's objection to changing the legend did not stop her from taking part in a re-invented performance. This served not as a betrayal of individual identities, but rather a celebration of collective convivial culture transformed from a static and homogenous phenomenon into a dynamic process allowing negotiation of cultural identity, which in the case of Judyta also happened in other spheres of her life. She felt uncomfortable about the boundaries of 'Polishness' she encountered during a Polish event for children:

I spoke to the organiser of the Children's Day in Oldham, who made it totally Polish. We talked about racism. I told him, listen, it was a nice event, you could eat a grilled Polish sausage, have a pint of Polish beer, but for me it was 'Polakowo', Poland for Polish people ... When I arrived with my partner, he felt uncomfortable. I didn't feel good and I will never go to this kind of event. So he told me, 'you know, 85 per cent of Polish people are racist'. So I said to him, we are the ones who should change it, it is our duty.

Judyta's narrative is full of contradictions and tensions as she tries to make sense of living in a multicultural society and in a mixed relationship. Her narrative illustrates that individuals each belong to multiple group identities at different levels. On the one hand, she affirms her mixed-race child's distinctiveness from

'blackness', partly as a result of pressure from the 'Polish collective' expecting her to fit to a role of the cultural reproducer of the nation (Yuval-Davis 1997). On the other, she becomes a member of cross-cutting social formations (Baumann 1996) understood here as convivial cultures in which the intersection of personal experiences, locality, ethnicity and gender plays an important part. This is evident in her narrative about meeting other mothers in child-care facilities:

All these women from different countries, who came here like me, they need it, because they don't have families here, they don't have many friends, and we all need to meet people, establish friendship, so they are more open [than English women]. And maybe this is what brings us closer, because for example, there is a mother who came from Zimbabwe ... She misses home too and she is able to understand that someone may feel homesick, so this is what brings us closer. We meet up together with our kids, or we visit each other for a cup of tea and coffee.

According to Glick Schiller et al. (2011: 404), "the process of engagement with others is always going to be with particular individuals with whom one may want to identify or share moments or spaces of 'conviviality'". As a mother who lives away from her family in Poland, Judyta identified with other migrant women who came from different countries and share similar experiences of motherhood and migration, allowing her to look beyond ethno-cultural boundaries. In this context, conviviality enabled Judyta to focus on those commonalities that intercut the dimensions of fixed identity and difference. This example shows the connection between the locality of the child-care facilities enabling contact between mothers, commonality of experiences and the emerging convivial culture, all constituting important characteristics of motherly conviviality.

It is also possible that Judyta wanted to spend more time with the mother from Zimbabwe because of her fear of racism in the context of her mixed-race son's interaction with white Polish children. As Byrne (2006) suggests, mothering practices are not only gendered but also raced. Judyta and her child's socialisation with a black mother and her children possibly relieved the pressure from the Polish collective expecting her to fit to a role of the cultural reproducer of the nation (Yuval-Davis 1997) and it offered a sense of security away from the Polish dominant gaze and stereotypes.

Some participants felt that educational courses offered them an opportunity to come together with people from various backgrounds. This is reflected in the narrative of Paulina who articulated her encounters with people of Middle Eastern and South Asian origin in different ways in two different contexts. The intersection of locality, gender and class are significant in shaping

Paulina's experiences and perceptions of these people. The two excerpts below demonstrate how different her experiences are on the street of an ethnically diverse and relatively deprived neighbourhood of Manchester and during an adult education course:

I felt stressed when walking through that neighbourhood. People would accost me on the street and look at me in a strange way. I had blond hair then and 'ciapaci' would make some inappropriate comments so I felt uncomfortable. They tried to make contact, because I think that they know that many Polish women are keen to meet them ... Their comments weren't nice. I felt really scared and uncomfortable.

I like the course a lot, so many people from different countries, a lot from Arabic countries, from Pakistan, but they are nice people, I have even better contact with them than with Polish people.

On the one hand, this example illustrates that the casual contact with the Other on the street can generate avoidance and intolerance, especially if the space is marked by uneven power dynamics (Amin 2008), in this case between a Polish woman and Asian men making sexual remarks. Several informants in both cities reported street harassment, rarely discussed in literature on migrant encounters as a result of which they felt emotionally distressed, uncomfortable or unsafe. These negative encounters were often discussed mostly with reference to men described as South Asian, Arab and Muslim. By using a derogatory term '*ciapaci*'³, Paulina perceived these men as a homogenous group based on skin colour rather than knowledge of their background. Her narrative illustrates how the experience of street harassment influenced her view of a whole group as dangerous and oppressive to women.

On the other hand, habitual contact as a result of regular attendance at the course and the opportunity to get to know her colleagues enabled Paulina to redefine some terms. Habitual contact and the locality of the course facility promote the establishment of social relations in a relatively safe manner, free of fear and anxiety experienced on the street. This allowed Paulina to look beyond the ethno-cultural boundaries giving space to conviviality.

³ A term ascribed by some Polish migrants to those of South Asian and Middle-Eastern origin, often in conjunction with a lower class status. The interviewees who used it said they heard it from other Poles and adopted it (*ciapaty* – singular, *ciapaci* – plural).

CONVIVIAL CULTURES IN BARCELONA

As in the context of Manchester, the interviewees arriving in Barcelona have encountered a very diverse population from Spain and other parts of the world. As in Manchester, organisational activities in Barcelona may facilitate the emergence of convivial culture where encounter and interaction with the locals may produce a sense of belonging amongst some participants. While initially lack of knowledge of Spanish and Catalan constituted a significant barrier for Natalia in establishing meaningful contact, a workshop organised by the Casa Eslava, an organisation working with migrants from Slavic countries and the local population, allowed her to transcend this linguistic difficulty. She found a common language and understanding with other participants through non-verbal means and participation in activities:

I remember that it really helped me a lot... It was all in Spanish, but it wasn't a problem for me because of this huge interest and willingness to participate expressed by all the women, regardless if they were veiled, older or younger ... I think it was useful for many of us, who found support thanks to some discussions about problematic topics. Despite the language barrier, we found a common language ... Even when I wasn't able to communicate in Spanish, we used body language. I remember when leaving I was happy because I felt part of the group, even though in everyday life I feel rejected to some extent because I don't speak their language.

I also took part in the event discussed by Natalia as part of my participant observation. During the workshop, a form of connection between the participants was established. Having in common experiences of gender and migration brought them closer and allowed meaningful interaction. This example also demonstrates openness across difference rather than through the celebration of difference (Glick Schiller et al. 2011). This is set in contrast to feeling rejected in everyday life because of language barrier.

Unlike Natalia, Zofia speaks Spanish and Catalan fluently and this enabled her to become a part of a Catalan association which aims to promote Catalan culture outside of Spain:

[It] means a lot to me I was invited to become a part of it and I became an executive member. This was an honour for me because I am the only foreigner there ... I feel appreciated and important ... Sometimes when we are away at an event, for example, the Italians ask what we are doing and where we are from.

I then feel like part of the group and I say, our culture is like this and like that. I also feel like this is my culture, my language and my family.

While Zofia identified with culturally diverse Barcelona, it was her participation with the Catalan group that also offered her a sense of belonging and inclusion. Being Polish did not exclude her from becoming a part of the group. Zofia's involvement with the association allowed her to cross the ethno-national boundaries of the group and to form friendships with other members. This example contradicts the notion of 'closed Catalans' reinforced in some narratives and it offers a more inclusive notion of '*Catalanness*', manifesting itself through a kind of conviviality where the ethno-national boundaries in social relations between Zofia and the group become less important.

The workplace is a space where many migrants spend much time together with people from different backgrounds. These places may generate multiple and diverse types of interaction often allowing migrants to get to know others. The importance of habitual contact at work with people from different backgrounds was stressed particularly in the context of Barcelona where many participants noticed segmentation of the labour market based on ethnic stratification. This could be a result of the dominant ideological forms defining certain groups of migrants as 'outsiders' far from the White-Christian-Western model, who tend to occupy marginal spaces of the labour market or work in the black economy as they face difficulties in obtaining a residence permit (Colectivo IOE 1998). Some participants emphasised that these divisions made meaningful interactions almost impossible with many non-European migrants, for example, with Africans who often sell sun-glasses or t-shirts on the streets; with South Asian migrants often described as 'cerveza-beer' men, as some of them are known for selling canned beer on the streets of Barcelona; or with South Americans who are mostly visible in catering and hospitality jobs. This was highlighted by Irena, a product engineer and a PhD student, who stressed that there are limited possibilities to get to know people from different cultures, since many of them work in specific sectors:

But when today you see that people from South America mostly work in bars... in grocery shops you usually see Pakistani or Chinese people... then they are not seen as equals ... There is a lack of possibility to work with them and to get to know them. The first step is for the employer to treat everyone equally, and then you have a chance to get to know others.

Irena pointed out that habitual contact at work allowed her to look beyond ethno-religious differences and see her co-workers as equals:

When you see that I work shoulder to shoulder with a Muslim man or woman, and she does exactly what I do, and she is treated exactly the way I am, I start treating her the same way too ... You see, she wears burka, or however you call it, but she works with me, she is a scientist, she is a normal human being like you and me... this is a chance to get to know her and her culture. We spend most of our time at work, so if you have a chance to get to know other people and to see that they do the same job as you do, that they don't just clean, it would make a difference. I have learnt this myself.

This narrative is a powerful example of how boundaries along ethno-religious lines become blurred through everyday interaction at work where people work together as equals and do similar tasks. Through the workplace interaction, Irena found that she shares a common humanity with her co-worker who initially was perceived solely through ethno-religious lens. Irena's strong statement confirms Hewstone's (2003) suggestion that equal status and opportunities to get to know each other allow meaningful contact. As Irena noticed, they both are scientists and they perform similar work. She stressed that even though her co-workers have different values and lifestyles, she learnt to respect these differences. Irena's narrative illustrates the possibility of meaningful conviviality at work with a potential to change prejudiced views leading to respect for others.

CONCLUSION

This article aimed to broaden understanding of conviviality as manifested in everyday experiences of encounters through boundary crossings in different spheres of Polish women's lives in which routine practices can generate experiences of a more inclusive belonging. The article highlighted the evidence of emerging convivial cultures and the diversity of encounters between Polish migrant women and the established population in Manchester and Barcelona. Everyday experiences of convivial encounters are influenced not only by the wider social, political and economic context in the two cities but also by intersection of locality, personal histories, gender, class and other categories of difference. The above examples demonstrate that conviviality allows both, contradictory but coexisting tendencies (Gilroy 2006) through convivial encounters which become key factors for cultural negotiation. Conviviality as a product of interactive coexistence and intersecting trajectories allows cultural identities to be transformed. This helps to challenge the idea of undifferentiated, racially and ethnically segregated groups. Even if migrants want to maintain their traditions,

they maintain them alongside their daily interactions, transforming the landscape of multicultural cities (Hall 2000).

Although the quality of everyday interaction and the extent to which it promotes meaningful contact which translates to positive respect (Valentine 2008) is currently questioned, the research this paper focused on shows that participation in shared tasks and ventures, whether during organisational activities, mother and toddler meetings or educational courses, are likely to form social connections and bonds of trust. This often allows boundary crossing and looking beyond ethnic, racial or religious difference; and (re)shaping own identities in relations to others. Social location raises important questions which need further exploration in terms of opportunities for encounter or the lack of such opportunities. Paulina's example in this article has highlighted the need for the recognition of power relations among different groups and individuals which influence interactions in urban spaces and to address the underlying power dynamics in research of encounters with difference not only in terms of race and ethnicity but also class and gender. Finally, this article calls for recognising the complexity of encounters between migrants and the established population involving various forms of conviviality and tensions in a range of sites of interaction in the cities.

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