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'Tales from other people's houses': home and dis/connection in an East London neighbourhood

Olivia Sheringham[a], Casper Laing Ebbensgaard [b] and Alison Blunt[c]

[a]Geography, Birkbeck University Of London, London, United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland; [b]Environmental Sciences, University Of East Anglia, Norwich, United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland; [c]Geography, Queen Mary University Of London, London, United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland

ABSTRACT

This paper explores what it means to live together in the city through a focus on home and urban public space in East London. It develops a conceptual framework for understanding home as a site of dis/connection – both connected to and disconnected from – the wider estate, street, neighbourhood and city. Drawing on a series of home-city biographies with residents living on different housing estates, we explore what makes a city 'liveable' for its diverse residents within and across domestic and public spaces; how home-city dis/connections shape ideas and experiences of living together; and the importance of sensory, material and social contexts of home in shaping residents' dis/connections with neighbours and the wider neighbourhood. By taking seriously the practices, experiences and imaginings of home as a site of urban dis/connection, we argue that urban scholars can gain a fuller picture of what it means to live together in the city, and understand and challenge inequalities, exclusions and prejudices that shape urban lives.

'Historias de casas ajenas': desconexión doméstica y urbana en un barrio del este de Londres

RESUMEN

Este artículo explora lo que significa vivir juntos en la ciudad a través de un enfoque en el hogar y el espacio público urbano en el este de Londres. Desarrolla un marco conceptual para entender el hogar como un sitio de des/conexión, tanto conectado como desconectado de unidades habitacionales, la calle, el vecindario y la ciudad más amplios. Basándonos en una serie de biografías de ciudades-viviendas con residentes que viven en diferentes unidades habitacionales, exploramos lo que hace que una ciudad sea 'habitable' para sus diversos residentes dentro y fuera de los espacios domésticos y públicos; cómo las desconexiones de la ciudad de origen dan forma a las ideas y experiencias de convivencia; y la importancia de los contextos sensoriales, materiales y sociales del

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CONTACT Casper Laing Ebbensgaard ✉ c.ebbensgaard@uea.ac.uk ▢ Environmental Sciences, University Of East Anglia, Norwich NR4 7TJ, United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland

hogar en la configuración de las des/conexiones de los residentes con los vecinos y el vecindario en general. Al tomar en serio las prácticas, experiencias e imaginaciones del hogar como un lugar de desconexión urbana, argumentamos que los académicos urbanos pueden obtener una imagen más completa de lo que significa vivir juntos en la ciudad y comprender y desafiar las desigualdades, las exclusiones y los prejuicios que dan forma a la vida urbana.

« Récits de chez les autres »: le foyer et les dé/connexions urbaines dans un quartier de l'est de Londres

RÉSUMÉ

Cet article explore ce que signifie la vie en commun en grande ville, en se concentrant sur les foyers et les espaces publics urbains de l'est de Londres. Il développe un cadre conceptuel pour comprendre le foyer en tant que lieu de dé/connexion (à la fois connecté et déconnecté) des domaines plus larges, de la rue, du quartier et de la ville. En nous appuyant sur une série de biographies de foyers citadins avec les résidents de plusieurs lotissements, nous étudions ce qui rend une ville « vivable » pour ses divers habitants au sein des espaces domestiques et publics et à travers eux ; comment les dé/connexions du foyer et de la ville façonnent les idées et les expériences de la vie en commun et l'importance des contextes sensoriels, matériels et sociaux du foyer dans la formation des dé/connexions des résidents avec leurs voisins et la communauté plus étendue. En prenant au sérieux les pratique les expériences et les imaginaires des foyers en tant que lieux de dé/connexion urbaine, nous soutenons que les chercheurs sur l'urbanisme peuvent obtenir une image plus complète de ce que la vie en commun dans une grande ville signifie et ils peuvent aussi comprendre et remettre en question les inégalités, les exclusions et les préjudices qui modèlent les vies en milieu urbain.

Introduction

The quotation in our title is from an interview with Emily, an American who lives on the third floor of a low-rise building in East London with her partner and daughter. In contrast to what she describes as the 'suburban fantasy' of escaping other people, Emily enjoys the 'sociality' of the city: 'having connections to other people's lives … hearing tales from other people's houses.' Living alongside other people, and hearing their interactions within and beyond her block of flats, reminds Emily that she is 'part of something larger': part of an urban neighbourhood that lies beyond, but is also present within the walls of her own dwelling and shapes her understanding of home on both domestic and urban scales (see Figure 1; Blunt and Sheringham, 2018).

This paper explores what it means to live together in the city through a focus on home and urban public space. It develops a conceptual framework for understanding home as a site of dis/connection – both connected to and disconnected – from the wider estate, street, neighbourhood and city. The research for this paper was completed, and most of the paper was written, before the COVID-19 pandemic. Whilst we explore the ways in

Figure 1. Emily's kitchen. Photo by Casper Laing Ebbensgaard.

which people experienced home as a site of dis/connection prior to lockdown, our argument is directly relevant to understanding how we might live together in a post-pandemic society.

To develop our argument about home as a site of urban dis/connection, we examine the influence of home and domestic life on residents' sensory, material and social connections with, and disconnections from, their neighbours and local neighbourhoods. More specifically, we explore home as a site of dis/connection for residents across three generations who live in flats and maisonettes on a range of housing estates in Hackney, East London. Some residents have long family roots in the neighbourhood, sometimes on the same estate. Others, like Emily, have moved to the neighbourhood more recently, either from elsewhere in the UK or from overseas. All live in an area shaped by diversity in relation to the ethnicity and migration histories of its residents, alongside processes of urban change from bomb damage, slum clearance and the construction of post-war social housing to more recent regeneration and gentrification. Drawing on a series of home-city biographies (Blunt et al., 2020), we explore the ways in which residents' dis/connections with their neighbours and the wider neighbourhood shape their sense of place and affective displacement in the context of urban change. Whilst home has been a site and/or spatial imaginary (Blunt & Dowling, 2006) through which to explore forms of urban displacement in urban public space (Butcher & Dickens, 2016) or on a domestic scale (Burrell, 2014), this paper adopts a home-city approach to understand both within the same conceptual frame (Blunt and Sheringham, 2018). It does so by addressing three key

questions: what makes a city 'liveable' for its diverse residents within and across both domestic and public spaces? How are dis/connections with neighbours and the wider neighbourhood shaped by the sensory, material and social contexts of home? How do home-city dis/connections shape ideas and experiences of living together? We investigate the ways in which residents living on housing estates near Kingsland Road experience, practice and imagine home as a site of urban dis/connection first through neighbourly relationships and interactions, and then through material and sensory connections with estates, neighbourhoods and the wider city. First, we situate our argument in relation to broader debates about living together in the city.

Living together in the city

From Jane Jacobs' classic account (Jacobs, 1993 [1961]) of the 'city ballet' on the sidewalks of 'animated' urban American neighbourhoods, to more recent research on conviviality (including Gilroy, 2004; Hemer et al., 2020) and diversification (Vertovec, 2015), living together in the city is understood largely in relation to lives lived in urban public space. For Jacobs, for example, the 'eyes on the street' that watch over small-scale, everyday interactions between residents and those at work build up the 'trust of a city street.' Such public interactions underpin what she terms 'city privacy': a privacy that implies no private commitments: 'Nobody can keep open house in a great city. Nobody wants to. And yet if interesting, useful and significant contacts among the people of cities are confined to acquaintanceships suitable for private life, the city becomes stultified' (pp. 55–6). Like Emily (cited above), Jacobs describes suburban homes as 'isolated from other parts of life,' and characterized by an 'extended private life' that lacks the differing degrees of contact that animate neighbourhoods (p. 56). Writing from within her own home on Hudson Street, New York City, Jacobs explains:

> I know the deep night ballet and its seasons best from waking long after midnight to tend a baby and, sitting in the dark, seeing the shadows and hearing the sounds of the sidewalk. Mostly it is a sound like infinitely pattering snatches of party conversation and, about three in the morning, singing, very good singing. Sometimes there is sharpness and anger or sad, sad weeping, or a flurry of search for a string of beads broken. One night a young man came roaring along, bellowing terrible language at two girls whom he had apparently picked up and who were disappointing him. Doors opened, a wary semicircle formed around him, not too close, until the police came. (p. 53)

Whilst Jacobs conveys the nature of the 'deep night ballet' of the neighbourhood beyond her home, this paper focuses on the material and sensory dis/connections *between* home, neighbours and the wider neighbourhood. We argue that both a sense of the city as experienced from the home and a sense of home as experienced from the city are fundamental to understanding urban lives.

A significant body of more recent work has examined what it means to live together in the city in the context of 'super-diversity' (Vertovec, 2007) and the limits of multiculturalism and cosmopolitanism (Amin, 2012; Back & Sinha, 2016, 2018; Jazeel, 2011). An important part of this work has explored 'conviviality,' which, following Heil (2014, p. 319), 'delineates a process which describes aspects of the everyday life in neighbourhoods where local residents engage in practices and discourses of living together, engaging with, confronting and embracing differences.' Ideas about conviviality are often

closely connected to situated and embodied encounters – sometimes fleeting, sometimes more sustained – in urban locations such as neighbourhoods, streets, markets and cafes (Laurier & Philo, 2006; Sheringham et al., 2019; Watson, 2009; Wilson, 2017). In Hackney, for example, Susanne Wessendorf distinguishes between conviviality in 'public' and 'parochial' space, with the latter including interactions between neighbours as well as with schools and associations, and sees both as separate from 'private' space. If, as Wise and Noble (2016, p. 423) write, conviviality is about 'the capacity to live together,' this capacity is portrayed within prevailing accounts as located predominantly in urban public space. Whilst the distinction between urban 'public' and 'private' space has been critiqued in terms of their historical, social and spatial specificity (see, for example, Hayden, 1996; Hooks, 1999; Marcus, 1999), this distinction is often assumed and/or reinforced rather than interrogated. As Gidley observes, 'public interculturalism is often accompanied by private segregation,' with the latter representing 'the paradoxical shadow of public conviviality' (Gidley, 2013, p. 370; also see Valentine, 2008; Vertovec, 2007; Wessendorf, 2014). In this paper we seek to move beyond this public/private distinction and examine how urban encounters are experienced on domestic scales and, conversely, how domestic lives shape urban encounters.

Whilst home and domestic life often remain unexamined in accounts of urban conviviality, other attempts to understand what it means to live together in the context of diversification stretch an understanding of home from the domestic to the urban, resonating with wider work on the contested domestication of urban public space (Degen, 2017; Koch & Latham, 2013; Mandich & Cuzzocrea, 2016). Drawing on research in New York, Singapore and Johannesburg, for example, Vertovec describes what he terms urban 'rooms without walls' over different scales and sites – 'from the setting of a park, to a street, to a public bus and to food court table' – which are 'often temporary and transient formations, arising in some instances once a year, several times a week or at prescribed times of day' (Vertovec, 2015, p. 193; also see Burrell, 2016, on temporality and transience in an urban neighbourhood). Marking out a 'separate togetherness,' and shaped by cartographies of inclusion, exclusion, accommodation and cohabitation, 'the permeable boundaries of "rooms" allow for affinities to form and be displayed within a heterogeneous public arena' (193; also see Law, 2001).

Alongside work on the domestication of urban space, other research explores 'neighbouring' and 'neighbourliness' and challenges theories of neighbourhood 'disassociation' due to increased privatization and mobility (Boyce, 2006; Buonfino & Hilder, 2006; see also Laurier et al., 2002 in relation to suburban neighbouring). This research focuses on the negotiation of privacy and sociability (Crow et al., 2002), the relative strengths and weaknesses of ties that underpin a sense of community, belonging and/or disaster resilience (Blokland & Nast, 2014; Cheshire, 2015; Felder, 2020; Redshaw & Ingham, 2018), and the importance of understanding the sensory dimensions of neighbourly relations (Lewis, 2020). Alongside research on the impact of 'unneighbourliness' on the 'unmaking of home' (Baxter & Brickell, 2014; Cheshire et al., 2019), other work explores neighbourly connections at home, including on housing estates (Baxter, 2017; Melhuish, 2005) and in domestic high-rises (Baxter & Lees, 2009; Fernández Arrigoitia, 2014). In her research with recent Bangladeshi migrants living in high-rise housing in inner-city Toronto, for example, Ghosh contrasts the 'imagined sterility and order of high-rises' and the 'nature of everyday social life of their occupants' (Ghosh, 2014, p. 2008). Ghosh

explains how Bangladeshi residents have turned these high-rises into *para* (Bengali for 'neighbourhood'; also see Bonnerjee, 2012), transforming them from 'regimented func-tional spaces into their own social, sacred and economic spaces' (Ghosh, 2014, p. 2015). As Blunt and Sheringham (2019, p. 821) write, '[t]he city itself represents foreignness and unfamiliarity while the high-rise *para* allows for a kind of bypassing of the city to create connections with other residents as well as with people and homes in Bangladesh.' In contrast, other scholars have argued that luxury high-rise developments enable wealthy urban residents to cocoon their lives in vertical gated communities that limit their exposure to more diverse neighbours and neighbourhoods beyond (Atkinson, 2016; Ayoub, 2009; Graham & Hewitt, 2013). We argue that attention to the material, social and sensory connections with, and disconnections from, the wider city shape people's sense of home and belonging and their ideas and experiences of living together in the city.

Wider perceptions and media representations of certain types of housing as unhomely and alienating run counter to the experiences of neighbourliness and belonging in many residents' lives (Baxter, 2017; Ghosh, 2014; Miller, 2001). Writing about the working class neighbourhood of St Ann's in Nottingham, for example, Lisa McKenzie (2015) explains that '[b]eing connected, and finding connections, … are important when you live on a council estate' (53). She traces 'the interwoven experiences of the many different lives that have passed through it, creating a neighbourhood that is disadvantaged in many respects, but that also has advantages of a long history of migration, the sharing of cultures, and some of the most interesting and kind-spirited people you could ever meet' (45). In contrast, in his discussion of the 'multiplicity of life' on the Pepys Estate in South East London, Gidley writes that '[r]esidents pass each other in [its] public spaces, but remain strangers' (Gidley, 2013, p. 365; also see Felder, 2020 on 'familiar strangers'). Residents are 'at best tenuously connected to each other,' and, whilst some have strong connections beyond the estate, others remain 'pinned down' within it (365–6). Whilst revealing different degrees of connectedness, both examples foreground the life stories of residents, challenging the tendency to stigmatize and dehumanize inner-city estate living (also see Baxter, 2017; Roberts, 2014; Hanley 2012).

In contrast to the emphasis on encounters in work on urban conviviality, and on the importance and limitations of neighbourliness and connections within often stigmatized forms of housing, the home can also be a site of loneliness. In their work on the importance of social engagement, networks and support, and the significance of virtual as well as face-to-face interaction, Victor et al. note that the 'preoccupation with non-domestic external social activities' in the wider literature on older people and loneliness 'fails adequately to capture the social world of older people, which may be more locally and domestically focused than other groups within the population' (Victor et al. 2009, pp. 20–21; also see Perren et al., 2004; La Pierre & Keating, 2013). Whilst the literature on urban conviviality focuses on living together in urban public space, much of the literature on loneliness focuses on people living alone and emphasizes *household* rather than *home*, obscuring, we argue, a broader understanding of the multiple material and social factors that contribute to the experience of feeling at home or not at home.

As part of a broader attempt to rethink the connections between the domestic and the urban (Blunt and Sheringham, 2018), this paper considers the 'home-city geographies' of dis/connection, bringing together an understanding of urban domesticities (home-

making in the city) and domestic urbanism (the city as home) through a focus on neighbours, housing estates and neighbourhoods. By extending understandings of conviviality in relation to domestic as well as urban spaces, this paper investigates the ways in which people may be both connected to, and disconnected from, their neighbours at home and in the wider city. The paper reframes debates about living together in the city to include the home as well as urban public space and the dis/connections between them and demonstrates the ways in which the processes and experiences of neighbourly connectedness and urban isolation are closely intertwined.

Home-city-street

This paper is part of a wider research project called 'Home-city-street,' which is based at the Centre for Studies of Home, a partnership between Queen Mary University of London and the Museum of the Home, and has engaged residents living on and along the Kingsland Road in the production of four short films and an app-based audio-walk called 'Home-city stories.' This paper draws on sixteen home-city biographies with residents from three generations and different ethnicities who live on a variety of housing estates with different housing types and tenures. The home-city biographies represent 'the life stories of urban residents' (Blunt and Sheringham, 2018, p. 13; also see Blunt et al., 2020) and explore the mutually constitutive nature of home and city lives. In what follows, we draw on these home-city biographies to analyse home as a site of sensory, material and social dis/connection with the wider city through experiences and encounters with neighbours and the neighbourhood.

Neighbourly relationships and interactions

Nancy Rosenblum writes that, 'Neighbors are not just people living nearby, friendly or unfriendly, trustworthy or treacherous, intrusive, withdrawn, or maddeningly oblivious. They are our environment. They are the background to our private lives at home. If they give a sufficiently strong dose of themselves, they forcibly appear in our foreground . . . The unique power neighbors hold over our lives is explained in one word: they affect us where we live, *at home'* (Rosenblum, 2016, p. 2). Just as the politics of home extend over scales far beyond, whilst still being bound up with, the domestic – notably in relation to contested ideas about nations as homelands (Kaplan, 2003; Sandercock, 2003) – Rosenblum explores what she terms 'Good neighbor nation' and its implications for individual and collective identities in the USA. Rather than think about neighbours and 'neighbouring' in relation to the wider nation, we address the ways in which they signal an urban neighbourhood that lies beyond, but is also present within, the domestic dwelling. In this section, we explore some of the ways in which relationships and interactions with neighbours – and experiences and practices of neighbouring – shape experiences of home on domestic and urban scales.

Rather than being fixed, our home-city-biographies reveal how a sense of dis/connection with neighbours and place may ebb and flow across time, closely related to family and migration histories, and over generations and the life course (see Blunt et al., 2020). Having children was a key factor in people's experiences with neighbours, creating, for many, a sense of local belonging and 'community' with other parents. Emily, who is in her

40s, talks about how, 'once you have a kid ... you make lots of friends, you develop connection with your community when everyday in the morning or afternoon you are at the school gates with the other parents who bring their kids ... You develop relationships, and just knowing that there [are] people, you know, if my daughter forgets her keys and we are not here, she knows that there [are] four places she can go.' Different articulations of the notion of 'just knowing that there are people' provided a sense of comfort and connection for other participants, often with regard to extending their own caring parental gaze. This sense of 'just knowing' was also about neighbourliness and having a shared history, which could transcend other markers of difference, including political views. Recalling the Brexit referendum, Emily explains:

> I would rather live with my Nigel Farage voting neighbours that are familiar to me, and that I share a history with because our kids went to the same school or whatever, than live somewhere even where there are a lot of people who are thinking and doing the same thing as me, but that I didn't have a history with ... that were total strangers. ... That was an important moment for me in thinking about community.

Here, a sense of familiarity and shared history becomes a strong basis of connection that can move beyond political differences, revealing how neighbouring and belonging in relation to others – or being in one's 'comfort zone', to use Blokland and Nast (2014) term – does not necessarily imply having the same views as one's neighbours.

In contrast to Emily, who moved to London as an adult, Kathy and Sandy have lived in this neighbourhood all their lives, first with their parents and then with their respective husbands and children. Since she divorced and her children left home, Kathy has lived alone. In contrast to the connectedness to other people's lives described by Emily – and the importance of sound in creating such connections – Kathy and Sandy reflect on the changes to their neighbours and neighbourhoods, and how their interactions and communication with neighbours have changed over time. Their reflections also reveal a sense of difference and disconnection, particularly in terms of age and ethnicity.

Sandy is a Jewish woman whose family migrated to East London in the early twentieth century. She remembers growing up on the estate where she still lives when 'Everybody kind of knew each other. ... I'm not going to say it was neighbourly, but people knew each other and were friendly. ... It was – it's my home.' She describes the estate now as more transient, with younger residents who don't have families: 'It's different. ... We've had some really nice evenings outside with some of the young people, and they'll say "Come over," we'll have a drink and we've got a fire pit, and we go and join them and we'll chat. ... They're lovely but they're not going to be here for long. ... People aren't laying down their roots here anymore. ... This was a place that had roots and it doesn't have roots anymore.'

Kathy, who is in her 80s and of Irish descent, remembers the transience of growing up in a tenement house in Hoxton in the 1930s. She has lived in her two-bedroom flat on the fourth floor of a high rise block on the Kingsland Estate since 1982 and the first thing she does when she wakes up is to open her curtains so that her son, who lives in a maisonette on the same estate, can see that all is well (see Figure 2). Later she waves to her daughter as she walks to work. Whilst her family ties remain strong in the neighbourhood, and she likes living alone, Kathy can feel lonely at times. Rather than feel connected through the

sounds of her neighbours' lives, as Emily describes above, Kathy feels disconnected because she finds it harder to communicate with some of them. She describes a family on her estate who she thinks is Polish:

> he's done a lovely job on his front garden and as I passed by, she might be standing – and I say to her "Love . . . .The garden looks lovely," and she'll smile and nod and "Thank you, thank you," but that's it. She won't come to the front, you know, towards the gate . . . and I think if she comes towards me we could try to have a conversation. . . . I could say to her, "Do you like living on the estate?" . . . but they smile and nod and that's it.

Figure 2. Kathy's bedroom. Photo by Casper Laing Ebbensgaard.

She continues, 'you get to know the sort of people that you can look at and smile and say hello and you'll get a response, but some people you know you're not going to get a response from them, so you don't bother.' Ali – who moved to London from Cyprus as a child in the 1950s, and who owns a kebab shop on Kingsland Road – also highlighted the importance of communication in facilitating a sense of belonging and home: 'you have to live somewhere, you live there, you get on with your neighbours, you get on with the public, so we are not strange to one another, we talk to each other. It's the communication that makes you home. If you don't have communication with the public, you feel a stranger.'

Like Sandy and Kathy, Debby also grew up near Kingsland Road with her parents and grandparents. She is now in her 50s, and lives on the Victorian De Beauvoir Estate in a rented maisonette alongside multi-million-pound houses. Debby sees the main difference between neighbours in terms of income and tenure:

there were certain groups of people that sort of knew each other and spoke to each other, and there were other groups of people that seemed to have nothing in common with each other even though we all lived in the same neighbourhood, and I saw that where I came from it was very much a class kind of thing. So I always felt that people who owned their homes didn't feel the need to talk to people who were tenants because we had nothing in common.

Debby also distinguishes between people with and without children. She also explains how her perspective has changed since she joined the local Women's Institute, demonstrating how these neighbourly dis/connections can change over time, but also how they have their limits. As the only white working-class committee member, she describes how:

we'll go to people's houses for meetings but they don't come here because I won't have them here. Because they've got these huge houses with … glass extensions and these huge kitchens. … . I'm not going to do it. That's fine, I don't mind. … . It's been really good for me to break down some of the barriers really of my perceptions … . all of these women are really nice women. If we hadn't met through the Women's Institute we probably wouldn't be having conversations with each other. … . It's made me feel very differently about where I live.

In a similar way to Emily who feels connected to her 'Farage-voting neighbours' because of familiarity and a sense of shared history, Debby's feelings of connection with other members of the Women's Institute transcend her perception of class difference. And yet there are limits to this connectedness. Whilst Debby goes to meetings in the 'huge houses' of other WI members, she does not host meetings in her own, smaller home.

The above examples demonstrate how connections and/or disconnections with neighbours are central to how people feel – or do not feel – '*at home*' (Rosenblum, 2016, p. 2). Moving beyond existing work on neighbouring that tends to focus on domestic *or* neighbourhood scales, our home-city biographies unsettle these conceptual boundaries and demonstrate how relationships and interactions with neighbours are fundamental to people developing a sense of home – or not home – at both domestic and urban scales. Yet connections and disconnections with neighbours and neighbourhoods are not limited to social encounters but encompass a range of material and sensory dis/connections with the spaces and built environment of the neighbourhood', to which we now turn.

Spaces of dis/connection

In this section, we turn to the *spaces* beyond the home, particularly the communal play areas on housing estates, and the different ways in which the materialities of home affect a sense of connection or disconnection with neighbours and the wider neighbourhood. These materialities of home are, in turn, understood and experienced in sensory ways, as shown by Emily's description of her recent awareness of,

the feeling of more connection to the things going on elsewhere. … it's not like I am eavesdropping or spying or anything like that with my neighbours, but … it's nice sometimes to hear life going on in the flats around me. … It is about connecting to something outside your own dwelling. … There is something really nice about being able to … connect to other people's worlds that are really different from your own.

For Emily, home is a space of connection with neighbours and the wider neighbourhood, shaped more by the sounds of other lives being lived than by face-to-face encounters and

interactions (also see Lewis, 2020). The sounds that Emily describes provide a low-level, background 'awareness of life going on,' with little direct emotional attachment to her neighbours. Many participants, including Emily, talked about how having children made them far more connected with neighbours and the wider neighbourhood. Yet many of our participants described this in terms of sensory connections that relate to the materialities of their dwellings and immediate surroundings, including, in particular the design of housing estates. Thus, for example, participants of different generations talked about children playing out in estates, and the importance of collective visibility – like Jacobs' 'eyes on the street' – that keeps them safe. Lisa, for example, who is in her early 30s and lives with her husband and two children on the Lockner Estate, made friends with other mothers on the estate when she was on maternity leave, and now feels that her children are safe to play out because 'there's at least four, six, eight pairs of eyes out on the children in addition to mine. . . . I frequently come downstairs in the summer and if the doors are all open, to find six or eight kids in here all playing.' Lisa knows that if there was an emergency in the middle of the night that she could knock on 'at least 10 doors to say, can you come? I am leaving the children in bed and can you come to my house? And that is amazing. I don't think that is usual and *that* is what I value about here the most.' Lisa lives in a maisonette and distinguishes between the connection of each floor to the wider estate: 'When I am downstairs, I can see [the estate], I am on a level with it, it almost feels like my living room is part of it. When I am upstairs, I don't feel I am part of it anymore. I feel like I am in my personal space much more.' Whilst downstairs is open for children to come and go, Lisa does not allow them to play upstairs, maintaining a clear boundary between her 'personal space' and the wider estate.

Similarly, Carol and Fred, a couple in their 60s who have lived on the Lockner Estate for 37 years and regularly look after their young grandson in their home, talk about the importance of children playing on the estate:

> one of the main things about this estate is that the children play out, whether there in this green which is normally where they are, but if they go up to the next green or up to the football pitch, you know that there's people up there that know your child and if that child hurts themselves they'll bring them back. And the kids that play, all know that wherever they are whatever they're doing, there's somebody there watching them.

Yet this sense of children being safe and protected – with several trust-worthy pairs of eyes watching them – was something they saw as unique to the estate, and which stood in contrast to their sense of the wider neighbourhood. Their daughter Sammy describes not realising how 'protected' they were until she moved away: 'living on here, everybody kind of comes together and you don't really have [racism], but I think that is kind of rare.' These examples demonstrate the importance of communal spaces such as play areas on the estate for residents when establishing relations to neighbours – or as McKenzie puts it 'finding connections' (McKenzie, 2015, p. 45) and engaging in the 'sharing of cultures' (McKenzie, 2015, p. 53) across council estates – and which can develop into supportive social networks that sustain a sense of belonging and safety on the estate (also see Baxter, 2017, on residents' memories of growing up on the Aylesbury Estate).

For Mark, aged 18, who was born in Jamaica and moved to London before his second birthday and who lives with his mother and younger brother in a two-bedroom flat on the Geffrye Estate, this sense of safety or protection in the communal play areas of his estate

Figure 3. The view of communal areas of the Geffrye Estate seen from Mark's kitchen window. Photo by Casper Laing Ebbensgaard.

was at risk due to a range of factors (see Figure 3). He recalls how when he was younger and 'crime rates were really high' people would group regularly in 'the car park . . . stealing wheels', 'like 2 o'clock in the morning . . . just come and take like . . . two wheels and then just leave bricks on [the axle].' Mark was not allowed to go out and play after dark and explains that he is still extremely cautious about going out in the evenings. He recalls how 'since I moved to Hoxton in 2003, every night I hear police sirens . . . Just imagine that . . . every single day of those 15 years [I have lived here] I hear police sirens'. Mark is not alarmed by the sirens and has grown so accustomed to them that he says he 'needs them to sleep at night'. However, the regularity of sirens and the associated sense of emergency in everyday life is inscribed in wider narratives of crime and violence on the estate and in Hoxton, which was expressed across a number of the home-city biographies.

Mark is acutely aware of the negative image that is shaped through public media representations of his neighbourhood, emphasising drug-related offences and 'postcode turf wars' over other kinds of stories. Yet, he also explained that during the height of the most recent gang wars, he felt alarmed and always looked over his shoulder when leaving his home and came to a point in his life where he actively chose to stay 'on a good path'. The presence of local gangs in Hackney is shown to put immense pressure on local youths, particularly from Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic (BAME) backgrounds (Butcher & Dickens, 2016), and Mark's experience confirms the unease at being targeted by the police, or recruited by gang members. Yet, the path that Mark chose found support through his social network of friends on the estate and at school, and their shared interest in playing football on the estate parking lots, the enclosed 'cage' on the estate (see

Figure 3), or the full-size pitches in local parks. From his kitchen window, often left ajar, the sound of his friends kicking a ball about on the parking lot below, or the view of them play in 'the cage' from his living room and bedroom windows, would often entice Mark to run down for a game of 'rounders' or 'touch'. Using these communal spaces for ball games would sometimes elicit complaints from neighbours, forcing them to relocate to one of the other spaces to play, yet in ways that were never seen as restrictive. In contrast, he describes the increased restrictions of playing on spaces beyond the estate, including the full-size pitches in Shoreditch Park or Haggerston Park which, since being upgraded to astroturf, now require pre-booking and payment:

> people that work in the offices or work in a bank . . . they get their mates and are like 'yeah, let's book a pitch and let's go and play football'. And when they book their pitches we ain't got nowhere else to play. And I am thinking . . . how are we young black men, young black boys get off this road and play football if we can't even play football for half an hour?

Mark has become intensely aware of how his access to and use of communal spaces on estates and the wider neighbourhood is related to, if not completely shaped by how he is perceived, racially, in communal spaces and the public sphere. While the spatial disloca-tion mainly takes place in a public setting, the expressed forms of 'affective displacement' (Butcher & Dickens, 2016) cut across communal and private spaces, inscribing the home into wider narratives that reify racial and classed stereotyping of the neighbourhood.

For other residents living on estates in the area – albeit in privately owned flats – their experiences of dis/connection to their neighbourhood and wider city were expressed through the views their homes afforded of their urban surroundings. Just as Mark's views of the communal areas connect him to his friends through play, other residents describe the significance of domestic views *of* the city. Daniel, who lives with his partner and young children on an upper floor in an 18 storey tower block on the De Beauvoir Estate, explains that on sunny days he can stick his arm out from his balcony and see his shadow waving on the ground below. These vertiginous experiences of being physically detached, yet visually connected, to the ground below are crucial to what Daniel describes as the 'disconnectedness, connectedness' of living in a tower block. As he continues, 'you're sitting in the flat now you can hear so many things going on in the street: kids in the playgrounds, the guys doing the paving stones, you can hear motorbikes or the police cars and stuff, but in a way you are kind of backed off from it and it also just gives you a perspective. . . . Being here . . . it's sort of like you're there but without being there.' As well as reflecting on the sounds of the neighbourhood from the streets below, Daniel describes his view of the wider city as 'another way of connecting things, tying everything together, instead of everything just being like a whole load of random dots just sort of scattered across a page. . . . Drawing lines between things kind of connects them and makes them feel in your realm', almost as if he is creating his own map of the city which is central to his sense of belonging within it. As he explains, 'just being able to look out the balcony and see things that I've known about, seen, been to, could go to, might never go to, don't want to go to or, you know, really want to go to, all those things it's something about, yeah, reassuring my sense of myself or where I am.' Unlike the face-to-face encounters that underpin an understanding of urban conviviality, – from his home on an upper floor Daniel feels simultaneously connected and disconnected to the streets and neighbourhood that he can hear and see below. The physical distanciation and material

dis/connection that Daniel experiences, differs from the social or communal forms of dis/connection that Emily and Kathy express with regard to their neighbours and sense of 'community'. Even when physically separated from the wider city, Daniel forms multiple and overlapping sensory connections to his neighbourhood in ways that are crucial for his wider sense of urban belonging.

Emily articulates a similar sense of 'disconnected, connectedness' in relation to her family's previous home on the top floor of a tower block next to their current flat, with a view of the tall building cluster comprising the financial district in the City of London. Reflecting on the experience of living so high up, and the spectacular backdrop the skyline provided for their day-to-day domestic lives, she says:

> it adds something if you can see the city, or detracts, I don't know. Because the city is so impersonal, I mean . . . you saw everything of the city, and that felt special. It was like . . . 'My God, here I am, in London, I have arrived' because I have got this view. But, it also felt like that world, the world of the city and finance and all that, that that world, although it is right on my doorstep is so foreign . . . something quite maybe alien, but still beautiful.

The sense of 'arrival' that Emily expresses emphasises the personal achievement of making it to and in London, of making sense of a situation that is otherwise strange: living in an 'impersonal' city, in a world that is completely 'alien' to her. Her sense of arrival is not dissimilar to Daniel's 'reassuring' experience of looking out on the city and spaces that are familiar yet also unknown to gain a 'sense of myself' and 'where I am'. This tangible yet distanciated connection to the city reflects a visual, aesthetic domestication of the urban which departs slightly from the sense of 'para' (Ghosh, 2014) and belonging to a neighbourhood discussed earlier, with less emphasis on the collective efforts that imbue home-making practices. Rather than indicating how high-rise residents bypass the alienating effects of living in a city by forming communal ties with their neighbourhoods, the sense of 'disconnectedness, connectedness' suggest forms of making relations in the domestic setting to people, buildings and life forms that are complete strangers but come to play an important role nonetheless for developing a sense of belonging and home in the wider city. The sensory city as experienced from *within* the home thus becomes integral to a sense of home in the wider city (see also Ebbensgaard, 2020).

Conclusions

For Jonathan, who is in his early 30s and lives in a flat-share on the Lockner Estate, 'home isn't just inside the four walls of whatever it is you rent or buy or . . . squat. It's something about everything around it, how it connects.' For Jonathan, understanding home through a sense of connectedness beyond 'the four walls' helps him to 'find some sort of circumstances that enables . . . a liveable life,' despite the social inequalities and injustice of the city. In this paper we have explored the entangled geographies of urban and domestic lives through a focus on the lived experiences of people living on and around the Kingsland Road in East London, an area characterised by widespread mobility and change both historically and in the present day. The 'home-city biographies' that we engage with here – which include photographs of homes and neighbourhoods as well as discussions of domestic and urban materialities – reveal that a sense of connection or

disconnection with neighbours and the wider neighbourhood cannot be seen in isolation from people's lived experience of the city, and that people's lived experience of the city (and dis/connections with people and places within it) cannot be seen in isolation from people's domestic lives. Rather than taking either the home or the city as a starting point for our analysis, we take a 'home-city geography' (Blunt and Sheringham 2018) approach in which domestic and urban spaces are seen as having overlapping and mutually constituting geographies.

The paper contributes to and advances a well-established and still burgeoning body of work on urban encounters – which engages with questions of living together in the city (Back & Sinha, 2018; Keith, 2005; Wessendorf, 2014) – through drawing out how urban conviviality and encounter (as well as segregation, inequality and exclusion) shape and are shaped by experiences of home. By home, we mean not just a metaphorical notion of the domestication of urban spaces (Koch and Latham, 2013; Zukin, 2010), but also people's domestic lives that are practised, experienced within and extend beyond the walls of their (urban) dwellings. Yet as well as drawing attention to the importance of people's domestic lives in their sense of belonging (or not belonging) to the neighbourhood and wider city, this paper highlights the role of urban encounters – with immediate neighbours and in the wider neighbourhood – in people's experiences of home, which may involve a feeling of *isolation from*, or of being *part of*, something larger. Thus, we argue, a sense of connection or dis-connection from one's neighbours or neighbourhood needs to be explored across a range of geographical scales which span the domestic and the urban and move beyond both. Such scales, as Gidley (Gidley, 2013, p. 369) suggests (following Hall 2012), are 'not nested hierarchically [. . .], but rather, [. . .] arranged as a palimpsest, each scale inscribed on the others.'

Within such a 'palimpsest' of urban dis/connectedness, this paper foregrounds the overlapping material, sensory and social contexts of urban dwelling. We argue that these contexts of urban dwelling are dynamic and relational; they change over time, adapting to and shaped by people's personal trajectories and life course as well as processes of urban change (see Blunt et al., 2020). Thus, for several participants, their sense of belonging in the city and/or connectedness with neighbours was shaped by their experience of having young children which brought them into contact with people whom they otherwise would not have known. For others, a sense of connectedness or disconnectedness was conditioned by wider structural factors shaping their sense of security or precarity within their home and wider milieu. In both cases, these conditions change over time – as children grow up or housing estates become threatened by the forces of regeneration and wider structural changes. The experiences and narratives of home *in* the city, and the city *as* home, ebb and flow over time, shaped by and shaping urban dis/connections with people, places and the built environment as well as structural factors that condition these.

As many residents, including ourselves, have felt the social, material and sensory dis/connection in their domestic and urban lives intensify since the COVID-19 pandemic, people have come to make sense of new realities, which inspire hope for inhabiting a post-pandemic world. By emphasizing the importance of urban dis/connectedness, this paper foregrounds the shifting sensory, material, and social contexts for urban dwelling and demonstrate how a sense of belonging is dynamic and constantly adapting through people's personal life course. As ways of living together in the dense city are being

restricted, reimagined and remediated we are reminded of the importance of sensory, material and social forms of urban and domestic dis/connection to establishing and sustaining a sense of belonging in the city.

Several scholars have critiqued a tendency to celebrate the 'inclusive sociality' (Hiebert et al., 2015) of urban public life, arguing that such work can 'reproduce a potentially naïve assumption that contact with "others" necessarily translates into respect for difference' (Valentine, 2008, 321). Whilst such work has drawn attention to the wider material, racial, ethnic, gendered and other factors which shape people's experience of public and semi-public spaces, we argue that people's home spaces and domestic lives have been largely absent from such analyses. This paper thus puts forward a framework for exploring domestic *and* urban dis/connectedness and the multiscalar material, structural and social contexts which shape these connections. It is only by taking seriously the practices, experiences and imaginings of home as a site of connection and/or disconnection with neighbours, neighbourhoods, and the wider city that, we argue, urban scholars can gain a full picture of what it means to live together in the city, and to understand and challenge some of the inequalities, exclusions and prejudices that shape urban lives.

ORCID

Casper Laing Ebbensgaard http://orcid.org/0000-0002-3926-0702

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