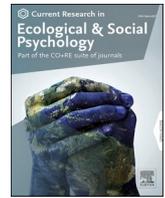


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“Just say hi”: Forced migrants’ constructions of local neighbourhoods as spaces of inclusion and exclusion in South Wales

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ABSTRACT

Integration is often assumed to be a public good and both UK and devolved governments have developed refugee integration strategies to address this aspiration. Within these strategies the development of social bridges with members of the host society is seen as a key indicator of integration, however the local neighbourhood is often neglected in research. This paper reports the findings of a discursive psychological analysis of interviews with 19 refugees and asylum seekers about their integration in Wales, UK. It focuses on the ways in which participants discursively constructed accounts of their neighbourhood relationships. The analysis highlights the importance of looking at the ways in which place is characterised by refugees and asylum seekers and the implications that this has for the kind of person who does, or does not, belong in that place. We demonstrate that most participants constructed their accounts using a discourse of ‘just saying hi’ and suggest that in using such a repertoire participants went to rhetorical lengths to construct themselves as respecting the normative principles of interaction amongst neighbours. Participants lives were largely circumscribed within the home and neighbourhoods were positioned as banal spaces in which stability take precedence over closer relationships with neighbours. The findings suggest that asylum dispersal policy of accommodation on a ‘no-choice’ basis and the use of housing in ‘difficult to let’ areas may be actively impeding other policies aimed at refugee integration.

1. Introduction

The so-called ‘refugee crisis’ in Europe, which saw over a million refugees enter Europe via the Mediterranean Sea in 2015 alone (Eurostat, 2016), prompted an increased interest from academic researchers in the area of forced migration. Whilst the number of refugees crossing the Mediterranean has reduced in recent years, new and continuing conflicts and different migratory routes have meant that at the end of 2021 there were an estimated 89.3 million forcibly displaced people worldwide (UNHCR, 2022).

Much of the academic research has focussed on the drivers of migration (e.g. Crawley et al., 2018) from a sociological or human geography perspective but as the articles in this Special Issue demonstrate, forced migration is also of particular interest to Psychologists, particularly in the areas of acculturation, inclusion and wellbeing (e.g. Colic-Peisker and Walker, 2003; Berry, 2005; Thompson et al., 2018). Discursive psychologists have analysed media representations of the ‘crisis’ (Goodman, Siireyeh and McMahon, 2017; (Parker et al., 2018)) and the political response to the ‘crisis’ (Kirkwood 2017; Durrheim,

et al., 2018). However, far less research, particularly from a discursive psychological perspective, has investigated the talk of asylum seekers and refugees themselves who have successfully travelled to European countries and attempted to rebuild their lives there (cf. Kirkwood, McKinlay & McVittie, 2013; Clare et al., 2014; Goodman et al. 2015). This research seeks to add to this growing body of literature through an analysis of the talk of refugees and asylum seekers, living in Wales, about their neighbourhood relations. Indeed, despite being identified as a key site of refugee integration (Ager & Strang, 2004), local neighbourhoods as sites of inclusion or exclusion and for the development of place-based identity have received little attention, which this article seeks to address. In order to understand the psychological and social factors that impede or promote inclusion and the wellbeing of refugees and asylum seekers, it is crucial to explore refugees’ own constructions of their neighbourhood spaces and the place-identities they draw on when talking about their neighbourhoods. In doing so we recognise that refugee migration is characterized by high levels of forcedness and that associated with this are risks, harm and trauma that come from pre-migratory experiences in the home country and experiences whilst

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in flight (Echterhoff et al., 2020). These experiences, risks and harms, as well as those experienced in the host country, play a key role in refugee integration generally and more specifically in the new neighbourhoods in which refugees find themselves living.

In this paper the term ‘refugee’ is used for those who have been recognised by a national government as meeting the requirements of the 1951 United Nations Convention relating to the Status of Refugees and the term asylum seeker is used to describe those who have ‘crossed an international border in search of protection, but whose claim for refugee status has not yet been decided’ (Castles, De Haas, & Miller, 2014, p. 222). The paper begins by outlining the context of the present study before discussing previous discursive research that has investigated place-identity and neighbourhood relations. Following a discussion of the methods employed in this study a Discursive Psychological analysis (Wiggins, 2017) of interviews with refugees and asylum seekers is presented in order to answer the following research question: *how do refugees and asylum seekers in Wales discursively construct their neighbourhood relationships?*

1.1. Refugees and asylum seekers in Wales

This paper focusses on asylum seekers and refugees who live in South Wales, UK. Whilst Wales has a long history of migration (Evans, 2015), it is not until relatively recently, when in 2001 Wales became an asylum dispersal location, that significant numbers of refugees and asylum seekers have been present in Wales. In response to pressures on housing in London and the South East, the introduction of the 1999 Immigration and Asylum Act saw the creation of the National Asylum Support Service (NASS), a separate support system for asylum seekers, whereby those who required subsistence and housing support had to agree to compulsory ‘no-choice’ dispersal away from London. Netto (2011) discusses the impacts of ‘no-choice’ asylum dispersal policy criticising the rationale that asylum dispersal spreads the ‘burden’ and arguing that it is part of a large suite of measures aimed at deterring asylum seekers from coming to the UK. She particularly highlights the problematic use of housing in ‘difficult to let’ and deprived areas, arguing that the lack of infrastructure and support services for supporting asylum seekers may leave them ‘isolated, marginalised and exposed to racial hostility’ (Netto, 2011, p.289). From 2001 onwards, four towns and cities in Wales (Cardiff, Swansea, Newport and Wrexham) became home to those awaiting a decision on their asylum claim. At the end of 2021 there were 2,603 asylum seekers living in Wales in Home Office provided accommodation awaiting a decision on their asylum application (Home Office, 2022). Thus, for asylum seekers arriving in Wales there is a double sense of ‘forcedness’: forced to leave their home country to seek sanctuary, and a second lack of choice about where they will live whilst their asylum claim is determined. Such forcedness raises questions about the ability of these dispersal locations to manage the associated perils of forcedness discussed earlier, if they have little or no previous experience of this.

If a successful grant of refugee status is awarded, refugees no longer continue to face restrictions on where in the UK they live and are able to move away from Wales if they choose. However, it should be noted that, upon a successful grant of refugee status, refugees are given only 28 days to leave their asylum accommodation, which research has shown to be an insufficient amount of time to find new accommodation, resulting in homelessness for a large number of new refugees (Crawley, 2013; Doyle, 2014). Whilst new refugees can apply to local authorities for housing support, applying in an area outside where they have been housed as an asylum seeker can be refused by the Local Authority, restricting the ability of new refugees to move to an area of their own choice. As such, reporting an accurate number of refugees in Wales becomes problematic, especially because this information is not recorded on surveys such as the decennial census. Whilst Robinson (1999)

estimated that there were approximately 3,600 refugees living in Wales in the 1990s, more recently Crawley (2013) suggested that this figure had risen to over 10,000. As such, little is currently known about the integration experiences of refugees and asylum seekers in Wales (cf. Crawley and Crimes, 2009; (Parker, 2018, 2020)) which this paper seeks to contribute towards.

Although immigration and asylum remain matters reserved to the Westminster Government, many of the policy areas concerning refugee and asylum seeker integration are devolved to the Welsh Government, such as health, housing and social services. Indeed, the Welsh Government recently launched its plan to make Wales a ‘Welsh Government, 2019 and in its previous strategies has diverged in policy approach from the Westminster government. Since devolution, one key area of divergence has been each government’s view of when integration should begin with the Westminster government suggesting that it is a process that can only begin on the day refugee status is awarded and the Welsh Government viewing it as a process that begins on day one of arrival in Wales. This paper adopts the perspective of the Welsh Government and takes a discursive approach to the analysis of interviews with refugees and asylum seekers in Wales.

1.2. Neighbourhoods: spaces of inclusion and exclusion

The paper focusses specifically on the ways in which participants in this study talked about relationships with those in their local neighbourhoods. Ager and Strang (2004), in their *Indicators of Integration Framework*, suggest that the local neighbourhood is a key integration space. Their framework, which has influenced both UK and devolved government approaches to refugee integration, consists of 10 domains organised into four headings that they suggest make up integration: the *means and markers* of housing, health, education and employment; *social connections* including social bridges, bonds and links; *facilitators* such as language and cultural knowledge and safety and stability; and rights and citizenship as the *foundation* for integration. Ager and Strang (2004) draw on Putnam’s (2002) theory of Social Capital and argue that the local neighbourhood is a place where social bonds (e.g. connections within a community defined by ethnic, national or religious identity) and bridges (e.g. connections with members of other communities) can be formed, but that it also has the potential to be a place of exclusion if the right conditions for integration are not put in place. Spicer (2008) similarly argues that neighbourhood places are closely linked to refugees’ and asylum seekers’ experiences of social inclusion or exclusion. He suggests that the lives of asylum seekers may be highly circumscribed within localised places such as the home and the neighbourhood and that the social bonds asylum seekers form with neighbours may define these boundaries (Spicer, 2008, p.507).

The question of whether to conceptualise ‘the neighbourhood’ as a ‘public’ or ‘private’ space has also preoccupied sociologists. Lofland (1998) suggests a model in which the social territories in which individuals interact with one another are considered within three different realms. In this model the private realm is ‘the world of the household and friend and kin network’, the public is ‘the world of strangers and the “street”’ and the parochial realm is the ‘world of the neighbourhood, workplace, or acquaintance network’ (Lofland, 1998, p.10). Wessendorf (2013) argues that distinguishing between these three realms is useful for understanding the ways in which interactions between people of different backgrounds may be meaningful and thus the focus of this paper is on the “parochial realm”. Stokoe and Wallwork (2003) note that relationships amongst neighbours have often been neglected by social psychologists despite being an important and routine aspect of social life. They suggest that the neighbourhood should be treated ‘not as a place that contains people and activities but rather as a form of social organization, that may be intimately tied to articulation of the ‘other’

(Stokoe and Wallwork, 2003, p.562).

This paper draws on the work of Dixon and Durrheim (2000) who use the term ‘place-identity’ to recognise that “questions of ‘who we are’ are often intimately related to questions of ‘where we are’” (Dixon and Durrheim, 2000, p.27). A growing body of discursive research (Stokoe and Wallwork, 2003; McKinlay and McVittie, 2007; Wallwork and Dixon, 2004) has focused upon the relationship between self and place and rejects the view that place-identity is purely a mental structure that is formed through individual’s interactions with their environments. Instead, place-identity is seen as a “collective construction, produced and modified through human dialogue that allows people to make sense of their locatedness” (Dixon and Durrheim, 2000, p.40). In this view, place is neither regarded as fixed nor a static background to which social action takes place but rather as one which is both socially constituted and constitutive of the social world. Dixon and Durrheim (2000) suggest that social actions, such as justifying, blaming and excluding, are performed as constructions of place are oriented to, thus the present study adopts this approach in a discursive analysis of the talk of refugees and asylum seekers about the neighbourhoods in which they live.

2. Methodology

The data analysed in this paper comes from a wider study into the integration experiences of refugees and asylum seekers in Wales. 19 individual semi-structured interviews were conducted with refugees and asylum seekers who were living in Wales at the time of the interview. All participants were recruited with the help of refugee and asylum seeker support organisations in Cardiff and Swansea. 11 participants were male and 8 were female and ranged in age from 19 to 58, with an average age of 34. The participants came from 13 different countries of origin and had been living in the UK for between 1 month and 12 years at the time of interview, with an average time in the UK of 40 months. In keeping with the Welsh Government’s vision of integration beginning on day one of arrival in Wales both refugees and asylum seekers were included in this study. As such, participants had a range of immigration statuses at the time of interview: four were asylum seekers who had made an initial application for protection to the UK Government, seven were asylum seekers whose case had been refused by the UK Government and who were appealing the decision at the time of interview and receiving Section 4 asylum support, seven had been recognised as refugees and granted five years leave to remain in the UK and one had been granted British Citizenship. In the context of the present paper, each of the participants had been initially sent to Wales on a no-choice basis by the UK Home Office in order to claim Section 95 support under the 1999 Immigration and Asylum act. As such, those participants who were asylum seekers were housed on a ‘no-choice’ basis. In contrast, those with refugee status had chosen to remain in Wales following their grant of status and had a greater degree of autonomy regarding where they chose to live.

The interview schedule was designed using the ten domains of Ager and Strang’s (2004) *Indicators of Integration Framework* as a guide. All interviews were conducted in English except for one which was conducted partly with the aid of a translator. Participants were informed that the interviews would be conducted in English prior to consenting to participate, however project information sheets and consent forms were available in the participant’s first language if required, in order to ensure that fully informed consent was given. Ethical approval for the study was granted by the School of Social Sciences Ethics Committee at Cardiff University (Ref: SREC/1450). Interviews lasted between 18 and 62 minutes, with an average length of 32 minutes. Each interview was audio-recorded and transcribed using a simplified version of the conventions outlined by Jefferson (2004) (see Appendix for transcription notation).

Following transcription, each interview was initially coded using the software package NVivo. As a form of Computer-assisted qualitative data analysis software (CAQDAS), NVivo can be used as a tool for

organising and managing a qualitative dataset, coding and identifying relationships within the data. This initial analysis was carried out by the first author in a deductive manner using the ten domains of Ager and Strang’s (2004) framework. The aim of this initial coding was purely to organise the data prior to a more in-depth discursive analysis, which we describe below. In the context of the current paper sections in which social bonds and social bridges (Ager and Strang, 2004) were spoken about by either the participants or the researcher were identified. Housing and their local area was, in most cases, the first topic discussed in the interviews, as it was felt that this topic was one that all participants would be able to discuss, regardless of their immigration status. However, due to the use of a semi-structured interview schedule, discussions of neighbourhood relationships were not limited to the initial interview questions. Of the 19 participants, only one, who had been living in the UK for 12 years, reported having regular meaningful contact with their neighbours. The remaining participants described their neighbourhood relations as perfunctory and limited, with one participant reporting having no contact with their neighbours at all. As such, further analysis was undertaken of these sections of the interview using Discursive Psychology (Wiggins, 2017) to identify how the participants constructed their neighbourhood relationships during the interviews.

Discursive Psychology treats language as a form of social action. Dixon and Durrheim (2000) argue in favour of a discursive re-framing of place-identity in the same way as discursive psychologists have sought to challenge cognitivism in other areas of social psychology (Wiggins, 2017). Therefore, the focus of analysis was on what is accomplished in the interaction by what is said, as opposed to what this might tell us about the speakers’ internal cognitions. Both researchers reviewed each of the sections identified as being about neighbourhood relationships from the initial coding of each interview. This second stage of analysis was carried out by hand and did not use NVivo. As part of this process each researcher identified the discursive devices (Wiggins, 2017) used by participants in constructing their accounts of neighbourhood relationships. These were discussed and agreed upon by the researchers to ensure rigour, and throughout the analysis and write up of the findings we followed the guidance of Yardley (2015) to ensure the quality of our research. These guidelines highlight the importance of sensitivity, commitment and rigour, and transparency as key markers of quality in qualitative research (Yardley, 2015), and ensure that qualitative research can be measured for quality on its own basis, rather than attempting to apply the theoretical assumptions of quantitative paradigms. Given the topic of this research, sensitivity to the stories of our participants was a key consideration which we addressed not only through ethical research practices but also through presenting the full accounts of participants that are embedded in the context in which they were described. Our remaining faithful to participants stories is also a key measure of the commitment and rigour of our research (Yardley, 2015), as is the methodological competence and engagement with the topic that we both have as researchers who have published widely using discursive psychological methods on topics broadly relating to marginalised communities. The data that is presented in the following sections are extracts that best represent the ways in which neighbourhood relationships were constructed in the data; the full extracts and our analysis of these are provided to provide full transparency to our analysis and to allow the reader to determine the transferability of the findings to other contexts.

3. Results

In the analysis that follows, we examine participants’ constructions of ‘neighbourhood’ and ‘home’ and the boundaries between them in their talk about their experiences living as refugees or asylum seekers in Wales. The section begins by focusing on the majority of participants who drew on a discourse of rigid separation between their homes and neighbourhoods. This boundary between ‘home’ and ‘neighbourhood’ was reflected in and maintained through limited interactions with their

neighbours, which ranged from silence to banal greeting. However one participant in particular constructed a very different account of their neighbourhood relationships which we go on to discuss in the second part of these findings.

3.1. "Our house is not Welsh": constructing boundaries between 'their neighbourhood' and 'our home'

Extract 1, below, is taken from an interview with Emanuel¹, who at the time of interview had been living in Wales for approximately 6 months and was appealing a recent refusal of his initial asylum claim. He was living in a house with other asylum seekers in what he described as a predominantly "local" area and in this extract constructs an account of "difference" to explain why he does not have any relationship with his neighbours. Here we see the construction of a binary between "our" house (which is for asylum seekers) and "their" neighbourhood, which is for British people and not asylum seekers.

Extract 1 Emanuel

- | | | |
|----|----------|--|
| 1 | Sam: | yeah ok .hhh errm (1.0) and where you live do you |
| 2 | | know your neighbours the other people who live on |
| 3 | | the street? |
| 4 | Emanuel: | no no we don't know we don't er (0.5) we don't have |
| 5 | | good relations with our neighbours |
| 6 | Sam: | ok |
| 7 | Emanuel: | err (1.0) mm (1.0) we are different you know we are |
| 8 | | the only one who is from another place and most of |
| 9 | | them are (.) er (1.0) local people so (.) we are different |
| 10 | | in terms of colour in terms of identity even so it's |
| 11 | | difficult for us to have relations with our neighbours |
| 12 | Sam: | yeah |
| 13 | Emanuel: | plus (.) our way of life it's- our house is not Welsh it's |
| 14 | | kind of like our way (0.5) prepared will connect with |
| 15 | | our neighbours |
| 16 | Sam: | ok |
| 17 | Emanuel: | so they know that simply by looking or my hou- you |
| 18 | | can see our house in (.) we are asylum seekers or |
| 19 | | refugees (.) so we don't have good relation (0.5) but |
| 20 | | it's good for our life |
| 21 | Sam: | yeah do you- do you ever speak to them? |
| 22 | Emanuel: | no heh heh |

This extract comes from a section of the interview discussing housing and his local area and begins with Sam asking Emanuel whether he

knows his neighbours (lines 1 to 3). In Emanuel's first turn (lines 4 and 5) he rejects Sam's proposition of knowing his neighbours and, after a brief pause, uses an Extreme Case Formulation (ECF) (Pomerantz, 1986) to imply that rather than bad relations, it is an absence of relations with his neighbours that he experiences in his area. Here Emanuel's use of the plural pronoun "we" suggests that he is using "we" as the group of asylum seekers living in this specific house in the neighbourhood under discussion, rather than a claim that he is talking on behalf of all asylum seekers. The use of "we" throughout this extract positions Emanuel and his housemates as a community that are both "different" and separate from their neighbours and is used to justify such a separation. It also constructs a moral order in which it is okay for "them" (asylum seekers) to be there as long as they do not cause any trouble.

In lines 7 to 10 Emanuel uses a three-part list (Jefferson, 1990) to detail three ways in which "they" are different from their neighbours in terms of where they are from, their "colour" and "identity". This works to construct an account of feeling different in this place and of not belonging here. In this turn, there are a number of pauses and hesitations, implying that it is difficult for Emanuel to account for his earlier talk. Although Emanuel (l. 8) begins by using an ECF to suggest that they are the "only" household that are not "local people" this is quickly repaired (lines 8 and 9) by suggesting, "most of them are local people". Emanuel constructs further difference in lines 13 and 14 and here uses the first person plural possessive pronoun "our" to justify having no relationship with his neighbours due to cultural differences. However, in lines 17 to 20 he repairs "my" house to "our" house and talks of how the physical space ("our house") signifies difference and further justifies "them" not belonging with local people. Since asylum seekers are dispersed to towns and cities across the UK on a "no-choice basis", it is perhaps slightly concerning that the house is constructed as a spatial signifier of difference within the neighbourhood. Indeed, this was highlighted in controversies in 2016 when asylum seekers' doors in Middlesbrough were all found to have been painted red and had led to asylum seekers becoming the victim of hate crimes as a result (Bates, 2017). Separation is further justified in lines 19 and 20 in Emanuel's claim that "we don't have good relation but it's good for our life". Here, Emanuel is avoiding making criticism and constructing an account in which separation is okay and that the absence of problems and hostility is more important in the neighbourhood than "good" relationships.

The separation between 'neighbourhood' and 'home' was evident in the talk of a number of other participants. Whilst for Emanuel, above, this separation was underpinned by an absence of all forms of neighbourly interaction, the majority of participants constructed their interactions with their neighbours as polite but ultimately shallow and limited, and like Emmanuel, still restricted to outside of the home space. With all participants in this section, their lives were circumscribed within the home (Spicer, 2008). Extract 2, below, for example, from an interview with Hayat, who had been living in the UK for 6 months at the time of interview and had recently been granted refugee status, exemplifies the way in which many of the participants talked about their relationships with neighbours.

Extract 2 Hayat

- | | | |
|---|--------|---|
| 1 | Sam: | yeah heh heh and is it- is it mostly British people living there? |
| 2 | | [Or is it Arabic speakers?] |
| 3 | Hayat: | [the neighbours are British] yeah |
| 4 | Sam: | yeah (.) and have you spoken to them? |
| 5 | Hayat: | "hello" (.) nothing more heh heh |

¹ All names used in this paper are pseudonyms in order to protect the identity of participants

Whilst waiting for a decision on her asylum claim, Hayat had lived amongst a mostly Arabic speaking community and had only recently moved to a new area upon receiving refugee status. Extract 2 follows on from a prior discussion of her housing and begins with Sam asking Hayat about her new neighbours (L.1-2). Here, he attempts to give Hayat two options as to whether the people who live in her new area are British or Arabic, however, she confirms that they are British immediately. Interestingly, despite Sam using the terms “people who live there” in his initial question, Hayat responds using the term “neighbours” which constructs a relationship with others more so than “people who live there”. Hayat’s response to Sam’s question about the level of contact she has with her new neighbours (l. 5) is short and to the point, using the extreme case formulation “hello nothing more”. [Kusenbach \(2006, p.289\)](#) suggests that ‘saying hi’, or ‘friendly recognition’ as she terms it, is a common urban neighbourhood phenomenon and is the equivalent of what [Goffman \(1963\)](#) describes as ‘civil inattention’ in the public realm: a recognition that strangers are close by that does not impose on one another. She goes on to conclude that such ‘friendly recognition’ is ‘the normative, minimum principle of interaction among people who consider each other neighbours, and the foundation for the development of deeper neighbourly relationships’ (2006, p.291).

Awet, in Extract 3 below, constructs his neighbourhood relationships in a similarly banal way to Hayat. Awet, who had been living in Wales for approximately three years at the time of interview and was appealing the refusal of his asylum claim, had been discussing the different houses he had lived in whilst in Cardiff.

Extract 3 Awet

1	Sam:	and when you lived there:: did you (.) get to know other
2		people who lived in that area the neighbours on that
3		street?
4	Awet:	oh the neighbours not really
5	Sam:	no
6	Awet:	not really yeah just (0.5) erm the friends in the house just
7		comes to see erm ((interruption)) just er:: friends (.) my
8		housemates they come by and jus:t know each others
9	Sam:	ok
10	Awet:	and then other than that the neighbours:: not that much
11		maybe we’ll when we see like “hi” or something
12	Sam:	ok
13	Awet:	yeah

In Extract 3, Sam’s initial question (l.1-3) is repaired from “people who live in that area” to “the neighbours” (l.2) which implies that his question is focused upon relationships in Awet’s street. In line 4, Awet begins his turn with an “oh” receipt ([Heritage, 1998](#)) suggesting that this may have been an unexpected question and he uses the hedged phrase

(“not really”), which he repeats again at the beginning of line 6. Following a number of pauses and hesitations, in lines 6 to 9, Awet focuses instead upon those who he did have relationships with (in his house). He uses the discourse marker “just” on four occasions in this turn, which may function to imply that what he is saying is a reflection of the facts ([Weltman, 2003](#)), supporting the view that this may have been an unexpected question and difficult topic for him. It also functions to move the talk onto a more positive topic. Indeed, it is not until line 11 that he confirms that he had limited interaction with his neighbours and that this consisted of the banal, every day, only saying “hi” to them. By engaging in such small talk with their neighbours, Hayat and Awet are showing that they respect the moral order and recognise that to have “good” relationships with neighbours requires them to, as a minimum, engage in small talk with their neighbours. Positioning themselves in this way works to ensure that they cannot be questioned or criticised for this as they are portraying themselves as individuals who are willing to integrate in their local communities. In these examples, “just saying hi” is both banal and ordinary, making “them” everyday and normal just like “us” and may therefore imply that a sense of belonging – albeit limited – could be being constructed here.

The themes raised in the extracts from Hayat and Awet can also be seen in Extract 4 below. Aminata, like Hayat, had recently been granted refugee status prior to the interview and had been in Wales for 9 months at the time of the interview.

Extract 4 Aminata

1	Sam:	where you live now do you know: w many of your neighbours?
2		
3	Aminata:	no I err (0.5) actually I don’t err er go with the’rr
4		my neighbour (.) only from outside “hi” only °that’s
5		it°
6	Sam:	ok would you like to know your neighbours better?
7	Aminata:	outside o- ok but in my house now anybody errr I
8		don’t like it with the hhh err go and come in with
9		the neighbour I’m little separate
10	[.....]	
10	Sam:	you don’t want to say morning hello?
11	Aminata:	only “hello” outside heh heh heh
12	Sam:	but that’s ok?
13	Aminata:	that’s ok yeah heh heh heh
14	Sam:	uhm are the neighbours:: are they British people or
15		other asylum seekers?
16	Aminata:	yeah I have err British people I have from Syria with
17		my’rr friend my friend very very friendly (.) hhh err
18		because she have one boy 15 months
19	Sam:	ok
20	Aminata:	yeah a baby it’s a very cute it’s- she’s coming only
21		in my house°

The extract begins with Sam asking Aminata about her neighbours (1.1-2). In line 3 Aminata makes an immediate denial of knowing her neighbours before hesitantly going on to construct a similar account to Hayat and Awet, of saying “hi only”. However, in line 4, much like Emanuel in extract 1, Aminata makes a specific reference to place (“outside”) suggesting a distinction between public and private spaces and that only outside the home is a place for speaking to neighbours. Again, she does not break the moral order as she positions herself as engaging with her neighbours outside of her home, but she also discursively creates a space in which the home is a place for her family only. Sam’s follow-up question (1.6), reflects Aminata’s normative response, and is constructed as an extreme-case formulation (Pomerantz, 1986). Aminata’s response begins in line 7 with a reaffirming of her previous utterance in which only relationships with neighbours “outside” the house would be acceptable for her. This is justified in line 9 with the hedged construction (“I’m little separate”), which functions to show that she acknowledges the norms of neighbourhood behaviour but that her own house is not a place in which she wishes to have relationships with her neighbours.

Sam’s question in line 10 suggests that he has interpreted Aminata’s earlier turns as dispreferring interaction with her neighbours. In Aminata’s next turn (1. 11), there is evidence of this being difficult, or “troubles talk” (Jefferson, 1988), for her. Both of Aminata’s turns (at line 11 and 13) are completed with laughter, suggesting that responding to Sam’s questions and accounting for herself may be problematic. Indeed, using “only” may function here as a face-threat mitigator, showing that she respects the moral order in the neighbourhood and ensuring that she avoids any criticism.

In the final turns of this extract, Aminata provides a more concrete example of who would be welcome in her home (her Syrian friend). This talk works to position the home as a place for “us” and the neighbourhood as for “them”. This construction is aided by the repeated use of the words “friend” and “friendly” in line 17 that works to distinguish friends, who are welcome in her house, from neighbours, who are British, and would not be, but who she still recognises the moral order requires her to have some form of engagement with.

In each of the extracts presented in this section, good neighbour relations have been constructed as just “saying hi” and, by consequence, as the absence of silence and conflict. In this way, it can be argued that neighbourhoods are positioned as banal and everyday spaces in which safety and security take precedence over closer relationships with neighbours.

3.2. “When I go to their house I don’t feel it is a strange”: constructing inclusive neighbourhood spaces

Analysis of the interview data revealed only one participant, who had been living in Wales for 12 years, constructed what could be described as an example of ‘inclusion’ in her neighbourhood, in which the boundaries between ‘home’ and ‘neighbourhood’ spaces were permeable. In Extracts 5 and 6, below, from an interview with Amna, we see the only evidence in the data of a participant who described their neighbourhood relations as more than “just saying hi”.

Extract 5 Amna

- | | | |
|----|-------|--|
| 1 | Amna: | no it’s- well my flat it is they are very friendly with |
| 2 | | me and I am and before er just my in front of me a |
| 3 | | flat is (1.0) before they live now for a few years but |
| 4 | | before them a lady old lady she lived there err she |
| 5 | | passed away and but- I was very (1.4) uhm close to |
| 6 | | her. She was very lonely and I usually cook (0.5) |
| 7 | | something every day and I took it for her and err she |
| 8 | | was pleased she was very old lady and she was very |
| 9 | | friend to me and I was and err so she gave me her |
| 10 | | sister’s number just in case if >something< and I |
| 11 | | always pleased that I had it because hh (.) one day I |
| 12 | | saw she was in everyday I check on her to make sure |
| 13 | | she is ok and one day I saw she is not ok something |
| 14 | | wrong with hh so I (.) straight away I rang her hhh |
| 15 | | err sister and they came her sister and her nephew |
| 16 | | they came and they took her to hospital and they |
| 17 | | find that it was stroke (.) so they were very pleased |
| 18 | | I’m there and I went to her funeral after that I |
| 19 | | always go to the bed at hospital to er (.) just visit her |
| 20 | | and then .hhh (.) one day she passed away and I went |
| 21 | | to her funeral and hh I went to her (.) eldest sister to |
| 22 | | say how sorry I am and for her loss and I told her and |
| 23 | | hhh she said ↑who are you? and I said “I’m neighbour” |
| 24 | | of your sister and she said “↑oh I know <u>you</u> because |
| 25 | | I’ve heard a lot about you you’re a good cook” |
| 26 | Sam: | heh heh heh |
| 27 | Amna: | “because my sister always er (.) told me you give her |
| 28 | | some cook- and some food and it’s very nice” yes yes |
| 29 | | that’s why how |
| 30 | Sam: | mmm nice |
| 31 | Amna: | yes very close |

Here, Amna begins by describing her neighbours as “very friendly with me” (l.1-2) and interestingly then says “and I am”, implying it to be a reciprocal ‘two-way’ friendship amongst neighbours. In this extract Amna’s own agency is demonstrated throughout as it is her who is cooking (l.6), checking (l.12), ringing (l.14) and visiting (l.19) which constructs an account of an everyday friendship with her neighbour. Throughout extract 5, Amna positions herself as a caring friend and neighbour which is achieved through the repair from “lady” to “old lady” in line 4 that positions her neighbour as someone in need of support. This positive construction, of herself and her relationship with her neighbour, is further reinforced in lines 22 to 24 with the use of reported speech from her neighbour’s sister. Such reported speech functions to show this as a reciprocal friendship and supports Amna’s claim in line 5 that she was “very close to her”, a claim which she repeats in her final turn of this extract (l.31). Indeed, Amna constructs a positive place-identity here using such a reciprocal friendship as the basis for her belonging in her neighbourhood. In this extract Amna is also able to construct several of the normative principles of neighbouring identified by [Kusenbach \(2006\)](#), in particular parochial helpfulness (“I usually cook something every day and I took it for her” (l.6-7)) and proactive intervention (“I check on her every day to make sure she is ok” (l.12-13)).

Although Amna describes a close and reciprocal relationship with the “old lady” next door, in extract 6 below, she initially characterises her relationship with other neighbours in a similar way to the participants in the previous section, namely “we just say hi” (l.8).

Extract 6 Amna

- | | | |
|----|-------|--|
| 1 | Amna: | Yes lots of British some all my I live in a flat in my floor I |
| 2 | | live in eighth floor and three of them there is four flats in one |
| 3 | | floor and four of them they are British- three of them- sorry |
| 4 | | three of them they are British only me but hhh |
| 5 | Sam: | Do you speak to them? |
| 6 | Amna: | Yes |
| 7 | Sam: | Mmm |
| 8 | Amna: | Just we say hi because everybody is busy but (l.5) er say hi |
| 9 | | and always I give them and they give me uhm .hh Christmas cards New year cards and (.) yes we are very friendly |
| 11 | Amna: | when I go to their house I don’t feel it is a strange |
| 12 | Sam: | Yeah |
| 13 | Amna: | I don’t feel er strange I don’t feel they are strangers or (.) they don’t feel I am a stranger = |
| 14 | Sam: | Yeah |
| 16 | Amna: | It’s like a brother or a sister |
| 17 | Sam: | A relaxed relationship |
| 18 | Amna: | Very good friends very good relationships we have .hhh I go there just a straight go to their kitchen without thinking |
| 20 | | [laughter] |
| 21 | Amna: | oh it is- it’s not our culture to do that= |
| 22 | Sam: | Yeah |
| 23 | Amna: | When you go to places just a straight go to kitchen but I do here not everywhere but their house because I feel I’m part of (0.5) the family |

However, Amna’s immediate use of the qualifying phrase “because everybody is busy” (l.8), constructs this level of interaction as a result of the practical realities and distractions of daily life, rather than a lack of deeper connection with her neighbours. Furthermore, with her use of the extreme case formulation ([Pomerantz, 1986](#)) “everybody”, she diffuses individual blame for this limited level of interaction. Amna immediately repairs this admission with a description of reciprocal acts of friendship (“always I give them and they give me uhm .hh Christmas cards New year cards” (l.9-10)) which arguably go beyond the minimum of normative neighbourly attentiveness. Indeed, throughout the rest of the extract, Amna veers between positioning these relationships as either friendly but ordinary (“I don’t feel they are strangers” (l.13)) or as a closer, familial connection (“it’s like a brother or a sister” (l.16) and “I feel I’m part of the family” (l.24-25)). This suggests that these relationships may have begun in a similar way to those described by the participants in the previous section, and deepened with time. Amna’s construction of her closeness with her neighbours is further emphasised in this extract by the ways in which she speaks on their behalf, with her assurance that “they” (l.14) also do not see her as a stranger and her use of the collective personal pronoun “we” in the phrase “very good relationships we have” (l.18).

Unlike with the other participants whose limited interactions with their neighbours were underpinned by a clear boundary around the ‘home’ space, Amna constructs her neighbours’ homes as open and accessible. Her reference to their kitchen (l. 19), rather than more formal spaces such as the sitting room, implies a relaxed familiarity with their home. Amna’s sense of belonging within her neighbours’ homes, contrasts greatly with the experiences of the other participants such as Aminata in extract 4 above in which neighbourly interactions are restricted to “outside”. Amna’s account demonstrates that superficial neighbourhood interactions may develop into meaningful inclusion within the neighbourhood space, with adequate stability and time.

4. Discussion

[Durrheim and Dixon \(2005, p.185\)](#) suggest that displaced people may ‘struggle to construct a sense of ‘home’ elsewhere, living with a perpetual sense of being ‘out-of-place’ or excluded’. [Spicer \(2008\)](#) similarly suggested that local neighbourhood places were linked to refugees’ and asylum seekers’ feelings of social inclusion or exclusion. In this paper, we have suggested that participants’ constructed accounts of relationships in their neighbourhoods, and of belonging there, ranged from ‘silence’ to ‘inclusion’. For those who had few, or very limited, encounters with their neighbours the absence of conflict and feeling safe in their accommodation were used to justify such positions. For participants, such as Emanuel in Extract 1, who uses a three-part list to position himself as “different” from his neighbours, such ‘silence’ may be indicative of not belonging there. However, in presenting himself as separate from his neighbours it can also be argued that he is at the same time constructing himself as a ‘good’ neighbour and somebody who does not make spatial transgressions that could see him being seen as a ‘bad’ neighbour ([Stokoe and Wallwork, 2003](#)). Similarly, whilst those who constructed their accounts as “just saying hi” could perhaps also be seen as evidence of not belonging, they may in fact be indicative of normative urban neighbouring ([Kusenbach, 2006](#)) or may indicate that participants viewed their current neighbourhoods as only temporary spaces which has been one of the aims of the UK Government’s asylum seeker dispersal system. Here again, participants constructed accounts in which security appeared to take precedence over feelings of belonging or deeper relationships with their neighbours. These constructions work to present the participants as uncritical of their neighbours and their local area and to position themselves as ‘good neighbours’ who respect normative behaviours in the neighbourhood ([Stokoe and Wallwork, 2003](#)).

The examples presented in this paper demonstrate the importance of analysing the ways in which place is characterised by refugees and

asylum seekers and the implications which this has for the kind of person who does, or does not, belong in that place. The interesting point to note here is what “just saying hi” achieves in terms of participants’ belonging and the importance that place plays in this. Wodak (2008) has shown that, for migrants, “us” and “them” discourses can lead to places of “inclusion” and also “exclusion”. However, in these examples “just saying hi” is both banal and ordinary, making “them” everyday and normal, just like “us”. This may therefore suggest a certain sense of belonging is being constructed here as these participants were not met by silence or ignored by their neighbours. Indeed, Wessendorf (2013, p.400) suggests that such informal relations may ultimately “contribute to a sense of being part of a community and being able to communicate with people who are different”.

In the introduction to this paper, we discussed the rationale of asylum dispersal and suggested that disrupting the ability of asylum seekers to develop a sense of ‘home’ in a place of their choice was a planned outcome of public policy (Hynes, 2011). It is of interest to note that only one participant in this study, who had been in Wales for 12 years, constructed a clear account of inclusion within her local neighbourhood. Whilst we have suggested that “just saying hi” may construct a sense of inclusion, this appears to be limited and may therefore have implications for the success of any refugee integration policy introduced by the UK or Welsh Government. In particular, the asylum dispersal policy of accommodation on a ‘no-choice’ basis and the use of housing in ‘difficult to let’ or deprived areas may be actively inhibiting other policies aimed at refugee integration. Future research may also wish to investigate further the ways in which local residents talk about the integration of forced migrants within their local communities and the degree to which notions of forcedness and its associated risks and harms are constructed within such discourses.

The integration of refugees and asylum seekers into receiving societies, is in part predicated on the sense of belonging that people are able to construct within their neighbourhood spaces and the development of a place-identity that extends beyond the boundaries of their home. While this is certainly possible – as we see in the case of Amna – who has developed meaningful bonds with her neighbours and a sense of ownership over her neighbourhood space, in many instances people’s lives remain circumscribed to their homes. As can be seen in the talk of

many of the participants in this study, living and being within a neighbourhood does not guarantee meaningful inclusion within that space. Given the predominance of public discourses that stigmatise and demonise refugees in the UK, as well as policies such as the ‘no-choice’ asylum dispersal policy which constrain people’s decision-making about their own lives, it is understandable that refugees and asylum seekers would retreat within the boundaries of the one space within their control – the home. It is crucial that the burden of integration and inclusion is not placed on migrants and refugees. Meaningful inclusion requires policies that allow refugees and migrants greater stability and agency in where they are housed and the challenging of deeply othering and racist discourses around immigration that frequently dominates public debate within the UK.

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Ethics and Informed Consent Statement

This research was approved by the School of Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee at Cardiff University (Reference: SREC/1450). All participants gave their fully informed consent before taking part in this research.

Declaration of Competing Interest

The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

Data availability

The data from this study is not currently publicly available but interview transcripts can be made available upon reasonable request by emailing the authors.

Appendix

Note on transcription conventions (Potter et al. 2011)

(.)	Short untimed pauses
(1.0)	A timed pause (in seconds)
heh heh	Voiced laughter
.hhh	in-breath
hhh	out-breath
=	Indicates the break and subsequent continuation of a single interrupted utterance.
> <	Speech noticeable quicker than preceding talk
—	Stressed or emphasized speech
° °	Audibly quieter speech

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