An everyday public?

Placing public libraries in London and Berlin

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Declaration

I certify that the thesis I have presented for examination for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy from the London School of Economics and Political Science is solely my own work. References to other people's work have been indicated throughout.

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Abstract

This thesis is a study of three public libraries, two in the Berlin district of Wedding, and one in Thornton Heath, south London. In these neighbourhoods with high levels of ethnic diversity, poverty and transience, the libraries offer a 'window' onto their localities, spaces in which local concerns, ideas and practices of contemporary multi-cultural urban life are played out.

Through ethnographic fieldwork in two European cities, this thesis reflects on the particularity of the library as a local institution, and the ways in which larger political concerns emerge in these institutions. In interviews with library staff and in participatory work with library users, I trace how forms of social need and competency, questions of social difference and social justice, and pervasive concerns with demonstrations of value are spoken and unspoken in each site. In considering institutional narratives from library staff alongside the voices of library users, multiple interests and needs are made audible, and the library emerges as a space where expectations and priorities must be negotiated on a daily basis.

The thesis explores the library as offering forms of public life and visibility to groups for whom 'publicness' is not a given: young children, older women, and teenagers. It argues for the library as an important interstitial space, a place 'between' the public life of the street and other forms of public participation, and as a site of social mediation. At the same time, it demonstrates the contingency of public space, the tensions around its use, and points where the library comes up against the limits of its institutional capacity. This thesis contributes to the sociology of public life, public space and public goods, exploring these issues through a highly visible yet under-researched institution, 'placing' this discussion within a nuanced account of the city neighbourhoods in which the research is located.

Acknowledgements

I'm in the British Library, showing my card to get into a reading room. The security guard on the desk takes my card out of my hand and studies it closely.

Looking up he says, jokingly, 'You've only got, what, 10 days left on this – what are you going to do with yourself after that?' He answers his own question, 'You'll have to get a life, that's what!'

'I'll have to stop hanging around in libraries,' I say.

My deepest thanks to all the librarians and members of staff at the fieldwork libraries in London and Berlin, and not only to those whose voices and libraries feature in the final thesis. I am grateful to all the library users with whom I spoke and listened and with whom I shared in activities inside and outside the libraries. I thank everyone for their time, and their openness to telling and showing me about the daily life of their libraries.

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I have greatly enjoyed and learned much from being part of the NYLON network. I thank Berlin and New York colleagues for collaboration and the faculty for their time and commitment to the NYLON project. I am grateful to all NYLONers for their comments on work over the years. Most of all, I thank Ruth Sheldon for her exemplary collaboration, great ideas and friendship.

I have benefitted from being part of the LSE Cities group – sharing work in progress in seminars and sharing an office with a host of helpful and supportive colleagues over the

This thesis is dedicated to the memory of my grandmother, Sheila Monica Sutton, whose commitment to the infinite value and meaning of people's lives continues to inspire and sustain.

Introduction: why listen to the public library?

> It's late on a July evening; I'm on the train, heading back to central London, and talking about my PhD research with a friend of Matt's, who I've just met.

> 'Public libraries? Really?' he gives a short laugh. 'So, are you doing a post-mortem?'

This was the most recent example of a typical kind of response to my research among the people I meet in my everyday social life, for whom the public library is not a feature of *their* everyday, and for whom libraries, placed in a situation of acute threat in the current climate of severe municipal austerity measures, have perhaps already ceased to exist. Prompted by the then looming threats to the public library service, Bella Bathurst writes a series of similar questions in *The Observer* in May 2011:

> What's the point of buildings filled with print? Isn't all our wisdom electronic now? Shouldn't libraries die at their appointed time, like workhouses and temperance halls?[1]

The dramatic subtitle to her article: 'With the axe about to fall, Bella Bathurst reveals just what we're about to lose' conveys a sense of the inevitability of the closures, which is also evoked in the idea of the post-mortem, or, in another question I was invariably asked, 'are you researching them before they all shut down, then?'

These questions always prompted me to pause, and to think about what is at stake in the public library, and consequently, in this research. Was I really conducting a post-mortem into an institution that was thought to have died out? The public library service was founded as a space for all, but these repeated assertions that it was no longer necessary, or relevant, or had in fact already ceased to exist, worked as a provocation. What was I doing in the library? Why should we listen to what is happening in public libraries? My research shows that the public library is a vital and important part of everyday life for very many people, even while it is systematically under-valued. If the

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[1] She continues: 'There are 4,500 public libraries in Britain […] As local authority budgets are reduced by the government's cuts, up to 500 libraries around the country will have to close.' http://www.theguardian.com/books/2011/may/01/the-secret-life-of-libraries (last accessed 14 September 2014)

necessity of the public library is simultaneously invisible to some people, and so vital to others, what does that tell us about contemporary understandings of public goods and public life?

My research considers the public library to be an institution for which it is inherently difficult to account and to make sense of in terms of economic values, making it vulnerable to financialised forms of accounting. In this research, I 'listen' to the public library, paying attention to the everyday expressions of value through the negotiated forms of public sociality which take place in daily practices in the library space. I suggest that in this form of attentiveness to the everyday work of the library lies in an alternative practice of accounting for the value of the library.

In this introductory chapter I situate the research, locate the research questions and provide a brief consideration of the methodological approach, discussing how ethnography can help ask these questions about how to listen to and how to tell, to provide an account of what value and values emerge through the public library. Through introducing the fieldsite libraries, I discuss the particularities and peculiarities of the library as a research site, and I close with an outline of the chapters which follow.

The public library as a window

My research locates questions about everyday living together in two ethnically diverse and semi-peripheral neighbourhoods in London and Berlin. It focusses specifically on three public libraries, one in Thornton Heath, in Croydon, south London, and two in Wedding, part of Mitte, a *Bezirk* (district) in Berlin. The public library becomes an ethnographic lens for looking at daily life in places that are both ordinary and over-looked but at the same time offer the potential to be inflated into 'problem places'. The key thematic concerns of the research are twofold: how ideas about diverse urban places can be considered through spatial and discursive understandings of peripherality; and how the potentials and problematics of diverse urban places are 'worked out' in the spaces and daily life of the public library.

The library offers a very particular institutional location in itself, and looking at the library can tell us important things about everyday and institutional life in the city, making it a barometer of place. As Aditi Mehta observes: 'the public library is a diagnostic window into society; the building, its operations, and the services it provides reflect the social, economic and political contexts of time and space' (2010: 16). I use this idea of the 'diagnostic window' to open out what is seen as an interior space and to argue that the everyday activities of the urban library may be read as a barometer of place, and a measure of social concerns and debates. The library emerges not only through its location within a very particular urban context, but also within a strong institutional context of purpose and intent, responding to state priorities as well as local need. The presentation and codification of areas in cities is intensely political, and the library is a place deeply imbricated in a political project. Considering a city neighbourhood through its public library therefore provides a usefully bounded frame while simultaneously opening out to ideas of broader connectivity and different forms of participation and belonging.

In this research, the library serves as a window onto two city neighbourhoods. The library becomes a lens through which to focus on received and shifting meanings of place which emerge in the everyday life in and around it. While the libraries are located in places which are spatially and historically very different, both are in areas where contemporary debates around ethnic and cultural difference and public participation, as well as problematic discourses of place, circulate. This, I argue, pushes them to the conceptual and perceptual periphery. In moving between such 'edge' sites in the UK and Germany I discuss how these shared thematic and discursive concerns generate aspects of connectivity and overlay, as well as divergence – and show how a close up, small scale method can be a way of talking about large social issues.

Part of the work of this thesis is to demonstrate the continued relevance of the library, and to bring to the fore the constituent parts that make it a unique public space. One of the foundational characteristics of the public library is that of its scope and ubiquity as a

membership organisation. Anne Goulding highlights that 56% of the UK population are registered with a local library (2006: 109). This is an incredible membership, the highest percentage of library members in Europe. The figure she gives for Germany is 10% (Ibid.). The German newspaper *Die Tageszeitung,* however*,* animated this figure to convey a sense of the relative use of the library compared to other leisure activities. Using figures from the *Deutsche Bibliotheksverband,* the German library association, Sarah Wildeisen gives a figure of 200 million annual visits to the library, compared to 146.3 million visits to the cinema and 17.6 million attendances at the two main German football leagues.[2]

In the chapters which follow, I convey the deep and important social meanings and expressions of public life both at work inside the library and which reach beyond it. In evoking the forms of public life at work in the public library, I also reflect on the concomitant social wounds incurred by its potential loss. The public library in this current moment is a fragile institution, caught between ideas of municipal provision and voluntarism. The inherent circulatory value at the heart of the municipal library project is no longer demonstration enough of the library's worth. Here, 'value' emerges as a field of contestation, which expresses the tensions between the civic role of the public library and the contemporary situation of lack of money and of political priority, and as an pragmatic instrument employed by public libraries to attempt to convey their continuing worth.

In looking at public libraries in city neighbourhoods in London and Berlin which are highly socially and ethnically diverse, I am also situating the library into an on-going academic and political debate about the contested nature of contemporary multicultural life. Disquieting debates on national identity which are taking place across Europe and are consistently grounded in rhetoric about immigration and integration, making claims to a failed multiculturalism, resonate around the public libraries I researched. How does an institution deal with claims around diversity (Ahmed 2012),

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[2] 'Lesesäle der Republik', 3 November 2010 http://taz.de/Lesesaele-der-Republik/!60699/ (last accessed 14 September 2014)

'representation', 'access' and 'outreach' in a context of febrile denunciations of the multicultural project?

At the same time, the public library is embedded within the *realexistierende* multiculturalism of everyday life in London and Berlin neighbourhoods. The declaration in political arenas, that multiculturalism has 'failed' therefore ignores the everyday 'work' of dealing with and encountering difference that 'carries on regardless'.[3] This observation marks a paradox of multiculturalism – that it operates as both 'fact' and rhetoric. As Michael Keith observes: '[m]ulticulturalism is both incontestable and normatively contingent' (2005: 177). Moreover, it works as both of these simultaneously; disconnecting the lived experience from the impact of its discursive operations fails how to observe how they work on each other.

In a context where multiculturalism is declared by politicians to have 'failed', and has been criticised as conceptually limited (Hall 1991: 58-9; Werbner and Modood 1997: 23; Amin 2002: 967; Sen 2006: 156), and for implying that some people are more culturally 'marked' than others (see Puwar 2004), there is a need to take a critical view about what this term can do. While I acknowledge the importance of the implications of multiculturalism debates on public institutions and on discursive understandings of ethnic difference, I include the term as one of many forms of social difference at work in the city public.

These layers of difference are at work in everyday urban life, where people encounter and deal with difference in routine engagements and avoidances. Sophie Watson explores these forms of daily negotiation in public space as 'how people rub along, or don't in the public spaces of the city' (2006: 2). This is less a form of encounter than a strategy of recognising the 'rub', the knocks and tensions of daily life, people scuffing up against each other. This mode reckons with the daily give and take, the successes and

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[3] Louise Osborne, 'Germany's failed multiculturalism carries on regardless', *The Guardian*, 19 September, 2012 (http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2012/sep/19/germany-multiculturalism-immigration). Last accessed 14 September 2014.

the antagonisms of everyday dealings with social difference, and how this relates to people's understandings of themselves.

Ash Amin examines the potential for 'unsteady social spaces', everyday occasions to meet and mix which, with acknowledgement to Les Back, he also calls 'micropublics' (2002: 969). While micropublics - 'the workplace, schools, colleges, youth centres, sports clubs and other spaces of association' are considered the site of 'prosaic negotiations' (Ibid.), this is not to say that such occur spontaneously in these places. Amin goes on to emphasise the highly intentional work required to encourage interaction and encounter across perameters of difference: 'the transformational element of interaction needs to be made explicit and worked at in efforts to make them intercultural spaces' (2002: 970).

Watson develops the spatial implications of Robert Putnam's work on the bridging and bonding capital at work in associational life by discussing forms of political association through a deeper engagement with their spatial expressions (2004: 207). Considering 'different or less obvious spatial forms' makes visible a wider range of association and engagment, particularly those which are informal. She considers these in terms of 'a spatial reordering of community and social capital [...], which at times may not be obvious, which may be shifting or momentary, and which may even be invisible to all but those involved' (2004: 209). Attending to the spatial forms of everyday associational life has resonance for this research, in which the spatial organsiation of the library itself offers a rich field of inquiry into daily forms of institutional practice and user engagement with the space.

These different perspectives on considering everyday encounters with and negotiations of difference in urban life are useful for thinking about the public library as a space which offers a distinctive mode of recognising and accommodating forms of social difference. As this research shows, the public library is a space which has the capacity to encourage both fleeting and non-committal forms of participation as well as sustained and regular commitment to its activities. The public library is a place in which the lived

experiences of ethnic and cultural diversity, what might be understood as 'commonplace diversity' (Wessendorf 2013) come alongside programmatic targets and institutional strategies for inclusion.

Research questions

This research considers the public library as a site in which institutional and 'everyday' relationships towards and perspectives on forms of difference are mediated through the work of the librarians, and through participation by users. This daily work is set against a discursive backdrop of the politics of 'managing' difference within tropes of national belonging and panics around immigration and 'integration'. The research questions encompass three thematic directions; considering the public library's relationship to place and its locality, the nature of the library as a public space, and the ways in which the library navigates or mediates between daily practices of difference and 'official' policies on multiculturalism and social inclusion.

> **How is the public library situated in relationship to ideas and practices of contemporary urban multiculture through its location in the city neighbourhood?**
>
> **In what ways can the library be seen as a 'micropublic', a place 'open to the negotiation of ethnic difference', and what other understandings of 'public' emerge in this context?**
>
> **How are both the 'lived' expressions of multiculturalism and the political and policy dimensions of multiculturalism and difference encountered and managed in the public library?**

I begin by considering the library's location and investment in its neighbourhood. In working in sites on the urban periphery and places that have experienced an image problem, but not overt 'crisis', I highlight places that, by their 'ordinariness', and their geographically and socially peripheral status, have escaped the sights of the urban critical theorist. I ask what role the public library can have in these places and look at the relationships and connections which are made through and around the library into

its locality. I consider how a close-up analysis of everyday life in these city neighbourhoods through the lens of the public library unfolds some of the multiple spatial and social implications of these places and embarks on a conceptual re-orientation.

As I will go on to discuss, the public library is understood as a bridge to participation in democratic public life. In the second of my research questions, I focus on the everyday manifestations of public particpation in the library, considering the value and meaning of 'prosaic negotiations' around difference. I argue that in critically observing (and participating in) pragmatic forms of social interaction in and around the public library, it becomes possible to reflect on and draw out what is distinctive about this form of public space, and what its potential might be in offering a particular form of negotiated living or being together.

The institutional location of the public library is itself important in this research. I consider the public library as occupying an interstitial and even awkward site within local bureaucracy. A place with an educative role, it is not part of the local authority's education budget; it is a statutory service, but it tends to fall under the parameter of leisure and culture. This interstitial site makes the library institutionally fragile and, as I will go on to discuss, difficult to successfully 'account' for, as the current threats to its funding show. Furthermore, in its 'front-facing' role as 'representative' of the local bureaucracy, it is a site in which municipal and national concerns and policies are negotiated alongside the lived experiences and unpredicatability of public life. The third research question therefore considers the implications of the library's occupation of this peculiar space, seeing the library as located between demands for ever-improved outcomes and successfully met targets and its responsibility to the needs and experiences of its users who themselves face economic and social pressures. In this way, this research may be seen as 'attentive to the ways in which geopolitical issues and neo-liberal economic interests play into local situations' (Back and Sinha 2010: 74).

Through exploring understandings of everyday life within the setting of the library, I start to draw out its complex relationship with its locality and provoke a wider consideration of public participation, who constitutes the public, and how forms of social difference are recognised and negotiated in this public space. Moreover, I am concerned to develop a careful portrayal of the everyday, the small scale interactions and interventions that happen in 'ordinary' local contexts, both because these are constitutive of locality, and because in a situation of inflammatory debate and headlines, this research takes a more contextual, reflexive and everyday view on identity, difference and participation.

Complex multiculturalisms

In late 2010 and early 2011, European political leaders, including Germany's Angela Merkel and Britain's David Cameron made a series of statements about the need for greater integration around 'common values' and national identity. Both political leaders made claims that the multiculturalism project had failed; Merkel stating this bluntly, while Cameron, also speaking in Germany, wove a narrative in which 'state multiculturalism' had weakened a collective identity and could be thus obliquely linked to the 'home grown' terrorist threat. Here are the 'headlines' from their respective speeches:

> And of course, the tendency was to say: let's be '*multi-kulti*' and live next to each other and enjoy being together, [but] this concept has failed, utterly failed.[4]
>
> (Angela Merkel at the CDU youth conference, Potsdam, October 2010)
>
> […]we have allowed the weakening of our collective identity. Under the doctrine of state multiculturalism, we have encouraged different cultures to live separate lives, apart from each other and apart from the mainstream.[5]
>
> (David Cameron at the National Security Conference, Munich, February 2011)

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[4] Kate Connolly,'Angela Merkel declares death of German multiculturalism' *The Guardian*, 17 October 2010 (http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2010/oct/17/angela-merkel-germany-multiculturalism-failures). Last accessed 14 September 2014.
[5] Quoted on BBC Radio 4's 'Analysis', 14 March 2011.

The nature of national identity is a perennially 'difficult' topic, disrupted but also affirmed through the differentiation of racial 'others' at home (Alexander 1996: 4; Gupta and Ferguson 2001: 13; Gilroy 2002) and the threat of the 'invading' immigrant from outside. However, the idea of a homogenous national identity, although appealing to some nostalgic quarters, does not stand up historically in the UK. Les Back evocatively portrays the hybridised, multi-ethnic London of the 18th century, a city founded on global trade connections, concluding that, '[t]he relationship between imperial expansion and Englishness is central to the story of what it means to be part of English society in general and London in particular' (2002: 14-15). John Solomos also highlights this historic relationship, pointing to the end of the colonial project as a possible reason for on-going debates as to the 'meaning of Englishness and Britishness' (2003: 209, and see Gilroy 2004).

Whilst in the 1980s and 90s, the UK embarked on strategies of anti-discrimination and equal opportunity legislation and 'positive action' in the work force (Solomos 2003: 105-109)[6] in more recent years, changing patterns of immigration of people from EU accession, and concerns with ethnic minority communities living 'parallel lives' (Cantle 2001) following the urban disturbances in Oldham, Bradford and Burnley, this discourse has been superseded by concerns with 'cohesion' and integration.

Unlike the UK, Germany did not perceive itself as a country of immigration until relatively recently, despite being the home of hundreds of thousands of so-called 'guest workers' and their descendants (Castles and Miller 1998: 186), the consequence of post-war reconstruction policy which was dependent on foreign labour. This has had a profound impact on the way ethnic and cultural difference is framed in Germany and on understandings of 'Germanness'. Until 2000, German citizenship was based on the principle of *jus sanguinis*, citizenship by blood (Anil 2005) and despite these amendments to German citizenship laws, the grandchildren of the original guest

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[6] This was in conjunction with reinforcing anti-discrimination policy, reforming earlier legislation with the Race Relations act of 1976, now replaced by the 2010 Equality Act: www.homeoffice.gov.uk/equalities/equality-act/

workers are still known as 'foreigners', or, to use the self-consciously politically correct terminology used currently, people '*mit Migrationshintergrund*', ('with a migration background'), marking German-born citizens with a migratory history that is not their own.[7] More recently, the publication of a controversial book by Thilo Szarrazin, *Deutschland schafft sich ab* ('Germany is doing away with itself') (2010), provoked much debate about the state of immigration and integration in Germany, and was followed in 2012, by Heinz Buschkowsky's *Neukölln ist überall*, which in its gruff tone, purported to give a 'no-nonsense' critique of multiculturalism and integration in the Berlin *Bezirk* in which he is mayor.

Through researching the lived dimensions of difference in public libraries, I aim to avoid the binary narratives of multiculturalism that are employed in the rhetoric of Cameron and Merkel. I understand multiculturalism not simply as something to be unfurled and celebrated (although at times it may be), thus removing it from the high expectations required by Merkel's understanding of the term - that successful living together requires an uncomplicated enjoyment of difference. At the same time, however, while ethnic and social differences are factors in significant social problems and exclusionary practices and inequalities, multiculturalism cannot be seen as simply a route to 'separate lives' and societal disengagement; and, so runs Cameron's logic - religious extremism and terrorism. In acknowledging that multiculturalism is not an either / or; but a social process of navigating multiple sources of belonging, it makes room for it to be ambivalent and ordinary. Through the focus on these themes within the space of the public library, an alternative way for exploring and trying to understand everyday manifestations of multiculturalism emerges.

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[7] *Migrationshintergrund* is a conceptually vague but commonly used term to describe people who aren't 'ethnically' German. It has elastic properties, referring both to people who migrated to Germany and who may now be German citizens, but it also stretches to include their children, born in Germany, and even their children. In their book, *Wir neuen Deutschen: Wer wir sind, was wir wollen*, ('We new Germans: Who we are, what we want') (2012) Alice Bota, Khuê Pham and Özlem Topçu problematise the use of the term, preferring to call themselves: 'New Germans'.

What kind of a public place is the public library?

How might the public library be situated within debates about public space? Claims made for the role and purpose of public libraries are expressed in both highly abstract and optimistic terms: libraries can act as 'an affirmative public institution linking the locality to a wider public sphere' (Greenhalgh et al. 1995: 96). Here I outline some of these claims and why they are important, but at the same time, I start to open out what they might be understood as meaning in practise - how is a sense of public life, public encounter and public participation enacted in the daily life of the library?

The public library is perceived as a strong civic institution whose history is closely implicated with the notion of participation and democratic responsibility. Evelyn Kerslake and Margaret Kinnel point out that the widespread development of libraries in the late 19th and early 20th centuries took place when 'local and central government suffrage was being extended' and that libraries thus remain synonymous with equipping citizens with the information required for democratic participation (1997: 15; see also Roach and Morrison 1998: 17). In the UK, public libraries constitute a statutory service. The 1964 Libraries and Museums Act states that public libraries have a commitment to serve their locality and a duty to provide access to material that is relevant to and necessary for their users.[8] However, as Anne Goulding points out, the Act 'makes it clear that decisions on the provision of a public library service should be made at a local authority level' (2006: 23), and furthermore, that the service's own political clout is minimal, with very little lobbying power at a central government level (Ibid.: 58). There is no equivalent public library law in Germany, with states and municipal authorities making decisions over the extent of library provision and funding (Seefeldt and Syré 2003: 26). In Germany, the post-war history of libraries is closely imbricated the rehabilitation of post-war civil society. Transparent and unrestricted access to library material was an important sign of Germany's democratic development - the model of

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[8]'…that facilities are available for the borrowing of, or reference to, books and other printed matter, […] and other materials, sufficient in number, range and quality to meet the general requirements and any special requirements both of adults and children.'
(National Archives: http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1964/75#commentary-c713328)

the 'gatekeeper' librarian was swept away and open access public libraries were built as flagship post-war projects.[9]

Janet Newman sees 'the public library service as an icon of the liberal public domain in its own right, and as an institution that mediates conceptions of public culture' (2007: 888). She presents an idea of an institution that exerts an iconic forcefield of its own, both occupying a space of intense public recognition but simultaneously open to shifting re-formations of itself as a public space. Goulding echoes this, arguing that libraries are able to offer services 'tailored to local communities, responding to local needs and strengthening local distinctiveness and identity' (2006: 24).[10] In its generous interpretation of who constitutes the local community, and in responding to the needs and desires of its users, the public library may be seen as an iterative location, repeatedly asking its users for feedback, and deliberately re-working itself to attract new users. Public libraries have a duty to serve all who wish to use them, and in the library there is a diversity of expectations, educational experiences and ages, making it a place of an especially broad form of diversity.[11] In this research, the experiences of young and older users of the library are highlighted, recognising this 'bookending' of ages as an important part of the particularity of what the public library can offer as a social space.

In the popular imagination, the library is used as a narrative of freedom and possibility – the archetypal escape route and site of individual and collective 'self-betterment'. The comprehensive collection in Accrington Library, which provided both a bolt hole and a series of formative experiences for Jeanette Winterson, as she recounts in her autobiography *Why Be Happy When You Could be Normal* (2012: 37), is one example of

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[9] *Die Amerika Gedenkbibliothek*, the America Memorial Library, a gift to the city following the Berlin Blockade, opened in 1954, and was the first open access library in Germany.

[10] The specialist collections held by libraries (Greenhalgh et al. 1995: 24) are seen to demonstrate the library's flexibility and responsiveness to local need.

[11] 'It shall be the duty of every library authority to provide a comprehensive and efficient library service for all persons desiring to make use thereof' (Public Libraries & Museums Act 1964: http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1964/751964).

this classic motif.[12] Public libraries offer both an unusual and very specific, highly legible form of urban public space, which operates through recognised and regulated codes of practise. They cost nothing to enter; they are generally warm and pleasant places. Greenhalgh describes the modern public library as 'one of the least threatening public spheres' and equates the welcoming environment with the atmosphere of a domestic space (1993: 12). This compelling mix of malleability and comforting solidity, which results in users 'knowing' how to perform being in the library contributes to its hold on the public imaginary as an inherently 'good' and important public institution.

The public library's location in the public imaginary along with the peculiarities and expectations of the spaces within the library itself, mean that it may be seen as occupying multiple sites of publicness. However, expressions of openness and freedom, while compelling, need to be treated with caution. The library's foundational openness does not make it automatically a place which appeals to everyone. Its lack of appeal for some can work as usefully exclusionary in allowing others to enjoy the space. Writing about the 'Finding a Way Home' project, Les Back quotes young girls from Bangladeshi backgrounds who experienced the Cubitt Town library in east London as a 'safe' site, free of racist bullying, observing:

> The library represented a cultural no-go area for the kinds of young people by whom these girls felt most threatened. It was off limits to the informal cultures of authority and recognition found in the street or the playground (2013: 61).

Can publics then usefully be discussed as *not* for everyone? Might the universality of the library's appeal be usefully, strategically, questioned? Despite its claims to fundamental openness, the library is not a place in which everyone finds themselves, as the membership figures cited above demonstrate. The same is true for expressions of libraries' contribution to the sustainability or vitality of a place. While libraries offer huge potential in terms of their use, the actual day to day manifestations of their use

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[12] With characteristic verve, Winterson relates how she resolved to read the entire fiction collection starting from 'A'. Moved to tears one day by T. S. Eliot's *Murder in the Cathedral*, she is sent outside to cry by the librarian lest she disturb the other readers (2012: 41)

are more complex. Services are provided on condition of accordance with certain principles and behavioural expectations.

Most fundamental to the daily life of the library is its location as a local authority service, where it is a site of mediation between state and locality (Greenhalgh 1993: 7; Krpič 2007: 97). Public libraries are closely bound to city politics: their buildings tend to be local authority property, and they are funded by local council budgets. This location locks libraries into particular strategic priorities, targets and bureaucratic procedures. Most importantly, it makes them highly vulnerable to budget cuts. The public library in the current moment is caught within and has become a highly visible symbol of the 'rolling back' of the welfare state. This structural and temporal location provokes some difficult questions for understandings of the contemporary library: how to reconcile the 'civility' of the library with the savagery of current austerity measures and welfare rhetoric? How to square statist ideas of citizenship with the attack by the state on public libraries?

In this research I discuss whether the public library may usefully be considered as a micropublic. In describing micropublics as 'sites that combine pleasure with the skill of negotiating difference' (2006: 1019), Amin identifies a sense that these public places have an openness to difference. This understanding of openness to difference seems particularly apt in the case of library use, where, within a framework of codes and expectations, people are at liberty to decide how they want to use the space (Greenhalgh 1993: 12). In considering the daily life of the library in terms of 'prosaic negotiations' (Amin, 2002: 969), I explore in what way the library's spatial qualities and social context create a place that is open to 'the daily negotiation of ethnic difference' (Amin 2002: 959). In the context of the discussions around multiculturalism outlined above, Amin's conceptualisation of the 'lived' experience of difference is key here, and helps to consider everyday urbanity through dynamic processes of negotiation, rather than captured in desires for integration or cohesion.

Furthermore, the curated nature of micropublics makes them an apt frame through which to discuss the library. These are not spontaneous encounters between strangers in the public square; they are deliberate and worked at through situations of negotiation and encounter (Amin 2002: 970; see also Amin 2008: 6). The institutional context of the library makes this public location a fitting lens through which to consider this term. Through its institutional forms of regulating the space, and the daily practices of negotiating the diverse needs and expectations of its users, I examine the ways in which the library engages with the complexities of local public life.

Seeing and listening – methods in the library

What does the library offer as a place in which to carry out ethnographic research? The public library straddles two fields of ethnographic work – it is an institution; a bureaucracy, and it is also a formal public space. Here I discuss my interpretation and use of ethnography in this research context, reflecting on positionality through different understandings of being 'at home' and 'away', and explore the work done by a multi-sited ethnography.

Research in Thornton Heath, London, was carried out between July 2011 and January 2012, while research in Wedding, Berlin, was carried out between March and September 2012, during which time I returned at intervals to London for work and personal commitments. Thus I was not classically away 'in the field' in the Malinowskian sense (2002), and in fact, was, if loosely, 'at home', for the first part of the project. However, these categories of being an insider and outsider, or being at home and away are not stable within a fieldwork project but shift, depending on perspective and situation (see Strathern cited in Aull Davies 2008: 41).

These categories are also destabilised by the inescapable technological changes which make fieldwork 'not what it used to be' (Faubion and Marcus 2009): e-mail connectivity, cheap air travel as well as the proximity and lack of significant time difference between Germany and the UK, all contributed to the relative ease with which I switched, both physically and psychically between one place and another. Arguably, this also meant I

was never entirely 'here' or 'there', I was potentially at least, always aware of, and committed to somewhere else, so perhaps it was never possible for me to achieve the 'depth' of involvement that earlier ethnographic work assumes.

Another way of understanding home or different levels of familiarity is through the lens of my personal relationship to the library. I have always experienced the library as a place where I felt at home, or when I was not actually at home, a place through which I could experience familiarity; a space I knew how to negotiate. My ease and familiarity with using the library arises out of my experiences of using libraries at various stages of my life: in weekly visits to the local library as a child, when I was allowed an adult card to accommodate my reading habit; years later, the steady satisfaction of winter evenings in the university library, cocooned in light and warmth while night darkened outside; and then, when living abroad in various cities, always joining the local public library as an early step towards making myself at home.

Familiarity with research settings can be problematic, limiting the observatory field of vision (Hammersley and Atkinson 2007: 81). However, in taking issue with the notion that researchers must 'fight familiarity' (1999: 21), Amanda Coffey problematises the virtuous stranger, linking it to heroic narratives of ethnographic enlightenment and self-mastery (Ibid.: 20-21, see also Marcus 1998: 246). Although familiar with the library as an institution, I am not a librarian, I thus was an outsider from a professional point of view, nor did I know the fieldwork libraries prior to the fieldwork period. In navigating this position I find it helpful to follow Coffey, and to see myself and my biography as making me 'a positioned and contexted individual […] [and] part of the complexities and relations of the field' (Ibid.: 22).

While the frame of ethnographer as 'insider' or 'outsider'is thus limited, the idea of being 'here', 'there' or even 'between' is useful for considering the multiply-situated nature of ethnography. Although this research covers two sites, and may be considered comparative, the comparative impulse is directed towards ideas of connectivity and contextualisation. The dual-sited nature of the work worked practically in terms of unwinding parallel and related themes, but also had conceptual significance as part of a

'multi-sited' research imaginary (Marcus 1995). The idea that there was another library, in another place, in a conversation with theirs, captured participants' imaginations.

This reflects the implications of 'unbound' ethnography (Burawoy 1991) which is inescapably situated within a global network of connectivity, relationships and effects. One way of understanding this use of a small scale method across two places is to provide a wider situationality and connectivity, as part of the suppleness of the ethnographic method. Between the two sites I am able to reflect on the relationship of what is seen, experienced and discussed to a whole set of other experiences, contexts and considerations (Rabinow and Marcus 2008: 116). Here, the libraries are used as thematic bridges; each site developing a strong thematic link which then is worked up and out to broader concerns. This I consider a form of 'comparative tracing and translation among sites' (Marcus 1995: 96); a process in which I describe, or 'trace' the occurrences, themes and relationships specific to each place, and then through analysis and critical reflection, open these out, relating them to wider discussions.

Fieldwork was characterised by a sense of moving between: seen first in the shifts between my role as observer, interviewer, and participant; between highly formalised interview encounters and spontaneous conversations; and between the libraries, and different countries, during the fieldwork process. Making a supple movement between these different layers of data, reflects the 'variegated approach' of ethnography (Hammersley and Atkinson 2007: x) and marks an attempt to produce a careful and critical engagement with places while open to the inherent problematic of writing and thinking about social practice (Law 2004: 155). This sense of 'being between' also comes from my position as a non-native German speaker, and my negotiations with this linguistic position during fieldwork in Berlin. My awareness of my speech and language capacity also marks a preoccupation with language which is prevalent throughout this research, seen in a concern with the implications of spatialised and specialised vocabularies, and in the ways in which language issues emerge as a way of talking about multiculturalism, ethnic and racial difference, and social class, particularly in the Berlin

research context. Through the research I start to develop an an alternative vocabulary, rooted in the practices and experiences in the daily life of the fieldwork libraries.

Fieldwork libraries

I initially entered the libraries as 'a member of the public', taking advantage of the low threshold to entry. In both London and Berlin I visited tens of libraries, looking for a library which, while not a central library, offered a range of activities and appeared 'busy'. I studied information leaflets and notice boards, 'tuned in' to what was going on around me, and as I go on to discuss further in Chapter Two, tried to 'read' the library's spatial and built qualities, as well as to get a sense of its atmosphere.

In August 2011 I made a whirlwind tour of many Berlin libraries in different parts of the city: Mitte, Neukölln, Kreuzberg and Reinickendorf. I was looking for a library that could relate in some way to Thornton Heath library; not a central library, but offering a range of activities and with interesting spatial qualities, perhaps having undergone an extension or refurbishment, again to 'echo' the library at Thornton Heath, while not being a direct comparator. The result of working in two libraries in Berlin emerged out of decisions taken during fieldwork. I first approached the Schiller Bibliothek and receiving a very warm welcome from the head librarian there, found this library a vital 'way in' to the institutional side of the library network in the *Bezirk*. The library itself was very small and I began to develop my presence at the Bibliothek am Luisenbad to complement the site.

Once I had decided on the libraries, I continued this 'quasi-covert' approach, eventually introducing myself to librarians at the issue desk and showing them an information sheet about my research (Appendix 1 and 2). I carried out a range of interviews with librarians, interviewing some several times over the course of fieldwork, undertook periods of general observation, attended library events, and eventually became a regular participant in several group activities run by the libraries, most notably the knitting group at Thornton Heath library, the *Vorlesen* (reading aloud) group at the Schiller Bibliothek, and the *Vorreiter* homework group at the Bibliothek am Luisenbad.

These groups enabled me to be a participant in this library as I joined in with activities, and I found the ways in which the activities and groups were situated within the library highly revealing of the extent of institutional capacities and personal priorities. I discuss this further in Chapter Two and Chapter Five.

In this research, while the library members of staff and library users I spoke to and participated alongside have been given pseudonyms, the names and locations of the libraries have not been anonymised. I see this as part of the commitment of the research to issues of place and to 'taking place seriously' as I discuss later. The different sites show that the struggles and compromises I discuss are echoed between the libraries.   It was therefore important that the libraries be identifiable, to show how the buildings they occupy have implications for the work they are able to do and the ways in which they are perceived, as well as to be able to reflect on the connections with their immediate environments; to be able to say, for instance, that the offices for UKBA are in Croydon, and to consider what implications that has for the locality around Thornton Heath library. This specific relationship will be explored further in Chapters One and Two.

Thornton Heath library, Croydon, London
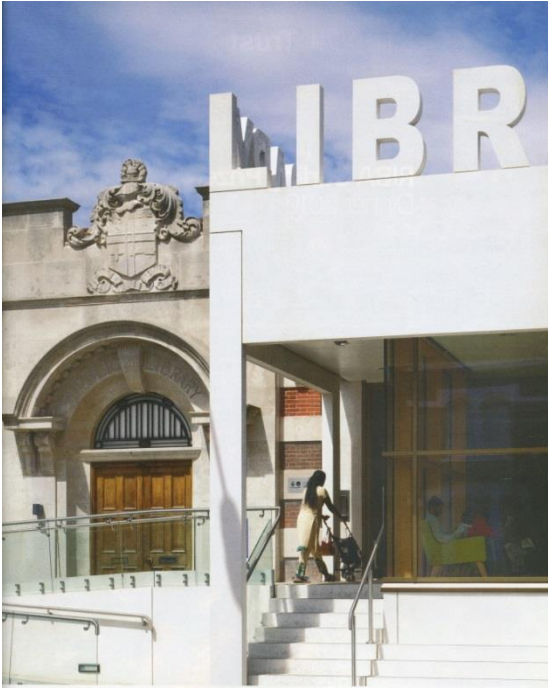
Figure 1. Thornton Heath Library pavilion[13]

Originally completed in 1914 following a direct appeal to the industrialist and philanthropist Andrew Carnegie for funding, Thornton Heath library can be considered a classically Carnegie library.[14] The functional layout of the original interior adheres closely to guidance published in the Carnegie Corporation leaflet, 'Notes on the erection of Library Buildings', published in 1911 (Kelly 1977: 171). At the time of its completion, the library was highly regarded (Croydon Libraries 1993: 66), and with its red brick and Portland stone it was solid, yet unassuming. The building, while modest, had pleasant architectural touches, with parquet flooring and green tiling, and a domed roof light above the central issue desk. As well as providing an extra source of light (Black 1996: 249), the use of a dome references classical, especially religious architecture,

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[13] Photo - Paul Riddle ©Architects Journal *Architects Journal,* 16 September 2010. www.architectsjournal.co.uk/buildings/-magazine-building-studies/thornton-heath-library-croydon-by-fat/8605951.article

[14] The records of the sub-committee meeting trace the process of the application for funding (County Borough of Croydon Libraries Committee Minute Book Volume 2, Croydon Archives)

demonstrating the secular sanctity of the library space, as well as symbolic of intellectual endeavour (Greenhalgh et al. 1995: 58; Markus 1993: 178).

Following major restoration and modernisation work funded by the Big Lottery, Thornton Heath library was re-opened in June 2010. The library layout was re-configured by FAT architects, who worked to reveal and retain the original features of the library, maximise the available space, and to make the library fit for contemporary use.[15] The process was described as recovering some of the essential qualities of its design, buried under decades of improvised adaptations, and explicitly returning to its purpose as a 'library'. In removing the suspended ceiling and uncovering the dome, the architects sought to re-animate the fundamentally civic qualities of the building:

> We wanted to reference the historic language of public architecture, taking elements from both classical and more recent public architecture – neo-brutalism was an inspiration, particularly Denys Lasdun's Royal College of Physicians [1964], which relates to the Nash terrace in terms of its proportions. […] The library is a version of the new civic; it uses classical public typology but mixed with an inverted commercial vernacular, the explicit commercial references in the signage. […] We did not want to go back to the styles of public buildings that were overly jolly - we didn't want it to have orange blobs stuck on the side. […] We wanted the building to have a sense of dignity which seemed important and increasingly rare.

> (Interview with Charles Holland, FAT, July 2011)

Implicit codes of deference and civic 'good behaviour' were built into the library's fabric, and can still be 'read': the functional high windows around the original walls of the library let in light but do not allow anything as distracting as a view. The inscription above the original door frame reads: 'Public Library – 1914' and the building is crowned by what was until 1964 the county borough crest with its motto: *Sanitate Crescamus* - 'let us grow in health'. The steps up to the library's central door are a powerful code for the figurative and physical ascent to knowledge that entry to the library implied.

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[15] FAT disbanded their collective in December 2013 http://www.independent.co.uk/arts-entertainment/architecture/fats-all-folks-architectures-biggest-jokers-sign-off-in-style-9011448.html
(Last accessed 1 May 2014)

The re-fit provided dedicated space for young children and a 'community room' in the basement, created a bright room for teenagers with soft furnishings, computers and work tables for the homework help group, and carved out a side room for 10 bookable computers with internet access. Most obviously, the library was extended onto the street through the addition of the pavilion-like concrete entrance, topped with bold concrete lettering. The frontage may thus be seen as an architectural nod to the mix of uses present in the buildings on Brigstock Road, both commercial and convivial. Amongst an architectural mish-mash of suburban semis, small shops, car washes and garages, the library has become a rejuvenated reference point, as the architectural writer Owen Hatherly observes: 'Thornton Heath Library takes a small-scale thing and makes it better, in a place with large-scale problems' (2012: 169).

These contemporary design elements evokes something of the nature and expectations of library use today - the pavilion sitting room with its large glass window, associated with ideas of legibility and transparency, presents a sense of the public library as convivial living room, an idea I discuss further in the next chapter. The dedicated room for computers, which are almost always fully booked out a day in advance, shows the importance of internet access as a need, almost like a public utility. The green space to the rear of the library has been cleared out and grassed over, and is accessible via doors from the children's library. In this heavily built-up area, the library garden provides an additional safe outdoor space.

Following its refurbishment, Thornton Heath library developed a considerable range of activities targeted to specific groups of people, differentiated by age: Rhyme Time for babies, the over-60s group, homework help group; or interest in terms of genre or activity: the crime and black interest reading groups, the knitting group, and writing groups.
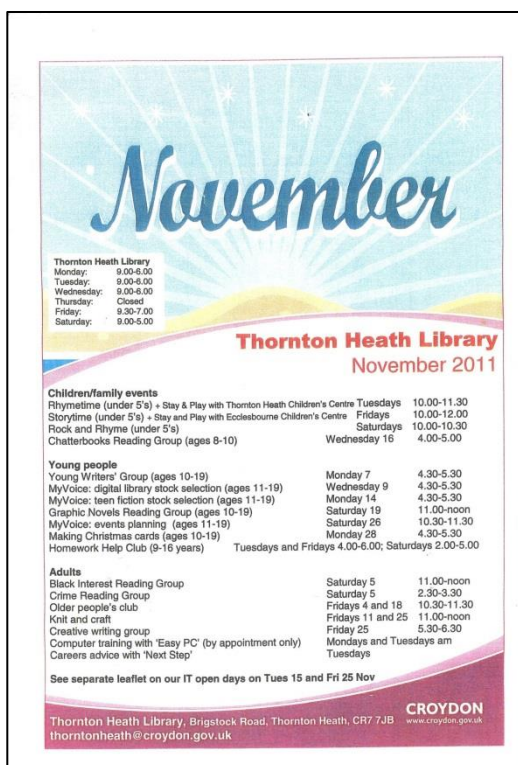
Figure 2. Library activity flier

The activities and events are partly a consequence of the conditions of the Big Lottery funding, which required the library demonstrate an increase in the community engagement with services, support adults in developing ICT skills, introduce refugee and asylum seekers to the library and to support literacy in families with small children (Big Lottery End of Grant Report pp.4-5). The expectations and forms of evaluation leveraged by the Big Lottery funding resonate with the conditionality of the original philanthropic funding from the Carnegie grant. In Chapter Three, I focus on the tensions and complexity around targeted outreach to new users, discussing the ways in which Thornton Heath library and the libraries in Wedding attempt to 'reach out'.

Schiller Bibliothek, Wedding, Berlin

Figure 3. Schiller Bibliothek, Rathausplatz, Wedding[16]

The Schiller Bibliothek lies at the southern end of Müllerstraße, Wedding's central shopping street, with its mix of well-known chain stores, as well as smaller shops, including independent jewellers and grocery shops. It is located on a busy cross roads, and close to the station where the *U-Bahn* (underground) lines U9 and the U6 meet. Although there has been a library in the area since 1936, it has never enjoyed a purpose-built site and was previously housed in other buildings, including in a former gymnasium. In its current location the library is part of a collection of 'civil' buildings grouped around Rathausplatz, the square. It is adjacent to Wedding's *Bürgeramt*, the local council offices, and opposite the town hall. Shrubs and trees surround the square, which is dotted with benches where people wait for appointments at the *Bürgeramt*, or rest after shopping at the nearby market.

Designed by the architect of the Amerika-Gedenkbibliothek (the American Memorial Library), Fritz Bornemann, the building the Schiller Bibliothek currently occupies was built in 1962 as an occasional formal meeting room for the local authority. It has housed the Schiller Bibliothek since 2005, after it became available following the re-alignment of

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[16] Photo: Robinson, 2011.

city district boundaries in 2001, when Wedding became part of Mitte and amalgamated its administration buildings with those of the other areas of the new district.

The shift towards lighter, brighter public buildings at the time of the building's construction is seen as reflecting the development of progressive attitudes and openness more generally in society. In his discussion of the increased use of glass in 20th century public architecture, Ken Worpole draws a parallel between developments in X-ray technology and greater social transparency; new ways of seeing both the individual body and the body politic (2000: 67-8). Greenhalgh et al. comment that the extensive use of glass in public libraries showcases both books and people (1995: 60), and while not purpose built as a library, the glassed walls of the building allow a view into the library, conveyed in the photo below, which shows the library glowing in the darkened square.

Figure 4. View into the Schiller Bibliothek[17]

The library's elevated situation is appealing; it allows a view onto the busy street life of Müllerstraße below and the outdoor tables of a nearby Turkish café, while its raised position above the street level gives it a calm and secluded feeling, rather like a concrete tree house. Libraries offer spaces 'where individuals are not overlooked or scrutinized by others' (Roach and Morrison 1998: 95), and 'where personal space is not expected to

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[17] Image ©Stadtbibliothek Berlin Mitte: http://www.berlin.de/stadtbibliothek-mitte/bibliotheken/schiller-bibliothek

be invaded', making the library 'a private public place' (Greenhalgh 1993: 12). This almost dichotomous sense of public privacy can be felt at work in the Schiller Bibliothek.

The building is listed and therefore there are limitations on the extent that it may be altered. Although its location is central, the building is less than optimal to house a library; only the upper floor of the building is intended to be used, and this level is accessible only by steps - either from the street or through an elevated walkway from the *Bürgeramt*. The spatial limitations were highlighted by the librarians as a source of stress and friction and as being fundamentally inadequate for a well-used public library. These limitations, as well as plans to regenerate the Rathausplatz, the square outside the library, as part of wider built environment improvements to the area, resulted in funding for the development of a new, larger library on an adjacent plot of land. As Greenhalgh et al. observe, the linking of libraries to wider programmes of urban regeneration is a widespread phenomenon (1995: 89).

In 2011 an architectural competition was held and the winning designs were submitted by av1 Architekten.[18] When I began fieldwork in the library, plans for its re-building were displayed in the entrance. Work on the new building began in May 2013, and the first stage of the building work will expand the usable floor area to 1,800m². At the time of writing, the new construction has a planned completion date of March 2015, and the Schiller Bibliothek's website is displaying a *Fotodokumentation* of the build.[19]

Despite its current space constrainsts, the Schiller Bibliothek hosts several regular activities - the reading aloud group with young children which is the focus of Chapter Four, and a homework club, *Du schaffst das!* (You can do it!). Both of the Wedding libraries keep shorter public opening hours than Thornton Heath library, opening from late morning or midday, and while they are open on Saturdays, only for four hours. However, outside of the public opening hours the libraries work with local schools and

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[18] The proposal may be viewed at: http://www.av1architekten.de/RD2/?page_id=541 (Last accessed 14 September 2014)

[19] http://www.berlin.de/stadtbibliothek-mitte/bibliotheken/schiller-bibliothek/fotodokumentation-neubau/ (Last accessed 14 September 2014)

nurseries, with children coming in for introductory tours and reading activities before the buildings open to the public.

Bibliothek am Luisenbad, Wedding, Berlin

Figure 5. Bibliothek am Luisenbad[20]

The Bibliothek am Luisenbad lies on the north eastern side of Wedding, between two *U-Bahn* stations and amongst a network of heavily trafficked roads, flanked with small businesses: 'casinos', community associations and social clubs, and snack bars. The library itself is one step back from the street within a green public space adjacent to the small Panke river. While its relative seclusion, tucked away from the busy Badstraße, can be seen as making it something of an oasis, at the same time, the library's separation from the street scene mean it is easily overlooked, and its vicinity to Pankstraße and the drinking and drugs scene there make it a *Angstzone,* a place avoided by many people after dark.

A formal, classical looking building with ornate frills and finishes, the library sits behind some colourfully tiled 19th century buildings, and provides an assemblage of its own, a complex of historic buildings added to by a semi–circular extension, sunk into the ground to basement level. Over the main door, small letters spell 'Bibliothek am

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[20] Photo: Robinson, 2012

Luisenbad' but the most prominent sign on the building is the '*Kafè Küche'* picked out in tiles. This sign, offering refreshments, points to the building's previous life as the Marienbad, a resturant and entertainment venue. The area around the river Panke has a history of recreational use, its situation just beyond the city and the discovery of a spring with putative healing waters making it a destination for 19th century day trippers from the city of Berlin.

The Marienbad buildings were narrowly saved from demolition in the late 1970s following intervention from local conservationists. In an interview, Robert Niess, one of the architects responsible for the re-build in the early 1990s, showed me images of just how close the building came to being lost, with the hole from the wrecking ball clearly visible in the image below. The rationale to demolish and the impulse to save and restore the building are tangled up in Wedding's post-war history. The ruination of huge areas of Berlin prompted huge re-housing and modernisation programmes, known as *Kahlschalg*, a 'scorched earth' approach in which whole areas of ruined slum housing were demolished and replaced with modern apartments.

Figure 6. The interrupted demolition of the Marienbad[21]

After a lengthy planning and building process, the Bibliothek am Luisenbad was opened in November 1995. The build was beset by the technical difficulties presented by the site, which included managing the complex challenges presented by the old buildings, as well as the engineering headache of building down into the water table for the extension. The reluctance to retain traces of devastation was combined with considerable political reluctance to provide an amenity of this kind in Wedding. 'You know, Wedding is *Wedding*', Robert Niess commented, this shorthand capturing the ease with which Wedding is discounted, and went on to describe lengthy wrangles with the local authorities in which the use of certain materials such as American cedar flooring and quality furnishings, were dismissed as 'too good for this area'.

Figure 7. Section showing the relationship between the new and old buildings[22]

Entry to the library, and the issue desk, is on the ground floor, but the majority of the stock is housed at a basement level, accessed via a ramp. While it is technically below ground, it it is a bright space, with huge roof windows and sky-lights, and doors which open onto a courtyard space. After entering through the old *Vestibül*, the bowl of the new library space opens out with an expansive view, as if from a promontory:

> that's kind of the surprise, I guess, that the space happens by doing that. And when you come in, the space opens up and it's an unexpected kind of opening,

and I think that's also inviting; it's light, it's generous, and it's - phew! It kind of gives you that little, wow!

<div align="center">(Interview with Robert Niess, Chestnutt_Niess Architects, August 2012)</div>

Above the entrance hall is the *Puttensaal*, a large and airy ball room decorated with stucco cherubs, and containing two large grand pianos. The Bibliothek am Luisenbad holds one-off events in this space - concerts and performances from the local music school, as well as readings by authors. The library hosts a branch of the *Lesewelt* reading aloud sessions for young children, and holds two different homework help groups - one organsied via adult volunteers in the library, and one in tandem with the Medienhof, a local educational outreach project. The homework sessions offered by this organisation are the focus of the discussion in Chapter Six.

Chapter outline

Chapter One: Placing the public library: situating the research

In Chapter One I situate the research and my position within it, reflecting on my previous research on Berlin. I explore notions of place, outlining debates about marginal places and the city's edge. I look at how places are framed as problematic through processes of mapping and categorising and discuss how these shape political and social characterisations of place. The exploration of various spatial categorisations at work in both Berlin and London shows the methodological and theoretical perspectives from which I consider the neighbourhoods around the Schiller Bibliothek and the Bibliothek am Luisenbad in Wedding, Berlin, and Thornton Heath library in south London.

Chapter Two: Listening to the public library

Chapter Two builds on the methodology of place to consider methods from the perspective of the library and how the library relates to its location. I discuss my starting approaches to fieldwork as an observer, describing how I learned to 'read' the library space and through my disquiet at my 'covert' role, started to appreciate the

library as a space which is open to being accessed by people, including those who are in highly vulnerable and difficult situations, in multiple ways.

I link my starting to read the library to those techniques of inference and curatorial tactics adopted by the librarians in their daily forms of knowing and reading of the library. The librarians frame ideas of public service and civility at work in the library through discussions of different forms of presence and tolerance, in particular focusing on instances of noise and behaviour as expressions of both acceptance to others and of the limit of tolerance, and I consider the labour of maintaining a public space.

I reflect on the vulnerability as a library as a social institution in which modes of accounting and measurement are used to quantify 'value' through targets and demonstrations of effectiveness; discussing the more qualitative, experiential mode of value negotiation enacted by librarians through their daily 'curation' of the library space.

Chapter Three: Opening out the public library

Concern with who is in the library and whose presence needs to be fostered in the library is discussed in Chapter Three through the work around maintaining and expanding the openness of the library. In this chapter I reflect on the tension between the library's 'openness' and its targeted approaches to under-represented groups. Openness is conceptualised in three different ways: at the threshold, through the library's material and through outreach work carried out in collaboration with other institutions. This chapter evokes the intense amounts of work required to manage a public space, which is inherently an uncertain space. It considers how openness demands forms of labour – the fulfilment of targets, the daily assessment of people's needs and desires, and the working through of dilemmas and decisions relating to openness.

Chapter Four: Reading aloud together

This chapter focuses on the Schiller Bibliothek in Wedding, and portrays the weekly reading aloud sessions with local children as an instance of local language intervention

strategies. The starting point is a reflection on language politics in the local area, with local multi-lingualism widely understood as representing a deficiency rather than an asset when set in a context of poor literacy skills and educational disadvantage. The weekly reading aloud sessions represent an intervention in this realm, where young, often multi-lingual children are encouraged to experience reading in German, and talking about reading as both ordinary and pleasurable. I use the term '*vermitteln'* to evoke the highly mediated ways in which communication works in the space of the reading group. *Vermitteln* helps to open out the significance in regular and small-scale activities which are under-estimated and explores both verbal and non-verbal acts of participation in the reading sessions.

Chapter Five: Knitting together

This chapter demonstrates how the knitting group at Thornton Heath library makes visible different forms of sociality and connectivity. The group may be seen as providing a purposeful activity for older women, but the discussion in the chapter goes beyond this to perceive the group as articulating acute social need and vulnerability. The chapter navigates between the interiority of the basement in which the group is held and the ways in which the social world of the women participants emerges out into the room. In it, I explore how experiences of family life, social isolation, and migratory histories lie just below the surface of the anecdotes and childhood memories that the participants narrate in the group.

The different engagements women made with the knitting group reveal wider social questions about what forms of sociality are valued and meaningful, and how these emerge through the sharing in a purposeful and highly material activity. At the same time, the group's slightly awkward positioning within the library framework of activities and its spatial location in an interstitial area of the library invisible from its more 'public' areas, makes it a space in which its value is under-acknowledged.

Chapter Six: Culture in a place like this

Chapter Six uses material from two interviews which took place in the Bibliothek am Luisenbad, one with the head librarian, Frau Körner, and one with a small group of teenage teachers working at a local education project, in order to chart paired accounts of under-estimation and competency. This chapter reflects on the relationship between culture and multiculture as framed through ideas of the possibility and limitations afforded by the locality. The teenagers' reflections on life in Wedding follow a discussion with Frau Körner, which is oriented around questions of cultural capacity and forms of cultural recognition in the area.

As practicing Muslims, these young people marked as 'other', encountering frequent resistance to their presence in the urban realm and having to manage the friction between their skills and capacity and the expectations of them they encounter. I discuss their experiences through a frame of cultural competency, where they relate their experiences of dealing with the limited competency and expectations of others and consider their creative and future potential. The library can be considered a space of possibility for these teenagers, a familiar space between school and home which becomes a place where they can express their creative and pedagogical agency.

Conclusion

I close with a discussion of the value of examining the everyday life and activities of the public library as revealing it as a site of complex meaning and investments, which are difficult for it to render visible and occasionally even impolitic to acknowledge. The public library creates skeins of local ties and affiliations, mediates and mitigates situations of acute need and vulnerability and attempts to work within increasingly restrictive, reduced and monitored circumstances. In offering a detailed and perceptive account of the daily life of the public library, I have shown how the library may be seen as offering a unique view onto contemporary urban living together. It is a space of tension and forbearance, and a space in which relations and capacities are negotiated daily, both successfully and in vain. It is an institution whose value is implicated in its

vulnerability as it must increasingly account for itself in ways which can never demonstrate its unquantifiable outputs. While this instability and fundamental vulnerability in the current moment of cuts and austerity makes the public library an 'uneasy' public space, the interpretations, personal investments and networks created through these constant negotiations make it a local *Multiplikator*; an institution which has impacts and effects in its locality far beyond its walls.

A note on language in the thesis

In Chapter One, I reflect on how my experiences of learning to speak German can be seen as having shaped this thesis. During fieldwork in Berlin, language became a way in which I was positioned and through which I positioned the work. I have translated material from interviews which took place in German into English, and use this material in the text of the thesis. These translations are rendered as idiomatically as possible, reflecting the tone in which the conversations took place. In some places, where interviewees use a German word which is highly apt, or does not have an obvious translation into English, I include the German word, italicised and within parentheses, after my suggestion of the approximate English expression.

Each extract from a recorded interview is followed by an endnote, which refers to the end of each chapter, where a transcript of the original German is provided. Material recalled from unrecorded conversations which took place in German is provided only in English.

I explain these decisions of how to render spoken words in another language for clarity, as well as to show that translation works in oblique ways; it is not a straight-forward exchange of one for the other but always a form of substitution and transformation (Benjamin 1968) - a rendering and re-shaping of words. Reflections on how to render language are not only relevant to material from the Berlin sites. In an effort to retain the sense of conversations and exchanges throughout fieldwork, I include, in material from all the fieldwork sites, references to gesture, laughter and pauses, where these help to emphasise what is being conveyed.

Chapter One: Placing the public library

Introduction

> It's a question of urban space, the less space there is, the more chance there is for conflict, I think. And in this area, around Pankstraße station, there's quite a strong alcoholic scene, and around the whole area, really; also at Leopoldplatz, there's always drinking and drug problems, and we have that here too. […] And so, sometimes these social problems seep in ['*reinschwappen*], because our toilet is used, or because it's cold and a little gang of youths are bored and don't know what to do with themselves, and so it's not always good, and it can create fear amongst different people, and understandably so, sometimes.[i]
>
> (Interview with Frau Körner, Bibliothek am Luisenbad, April 2012)

Fundamental to this research is the ways in which the broader social context and urban location of the libraries influence the daily practices at work within them. Throughout the thesis, I discuss how local contexts, to use Frau Körner's words, 'seep in' to the public library, and simultaneously, demonstrate how the effects and relationships the library generates stretch out beyond its walls to create skeins of local ties and affiliations. This two-way relationship is a starting point for seeing the public library as a window onto place, a lens on contemporary life in two distinctive and diverse neighbourhoods in Berlin and London. The city neighbourhoods of Wedding and Thornton Heath are not simply a backdrop to the research or its context; the libraries' locations in the city are written into my research.

In working towards a portrait of these locations this chapter considers some theoretical and methodological implications of researching place. I discuss how spatial orderings and boundary markings are worked out and made sense of in both these places, and how these are framed by broader considerations of urban spatialities in London and Berlin. I examine the continuing implications of historical spatial divisions in both cities, and reflect on cartographic and statistical representations as a form of spatial shorthand; two different registers of spatial understanding.
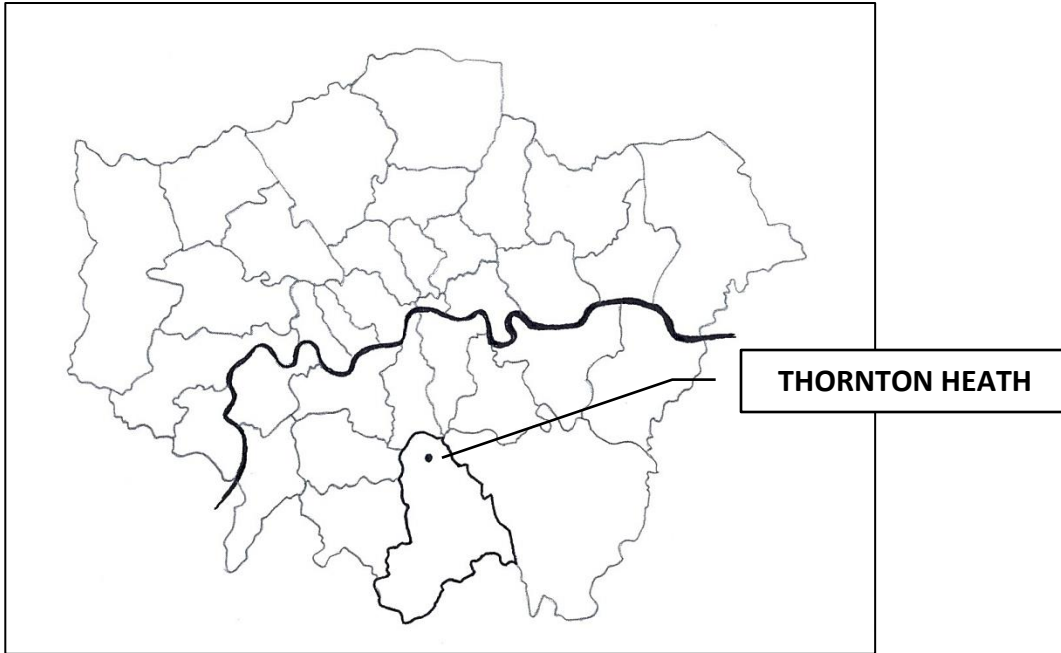
Figure 8. London, with Croydon highlighted and Thornton Heath marked[23]
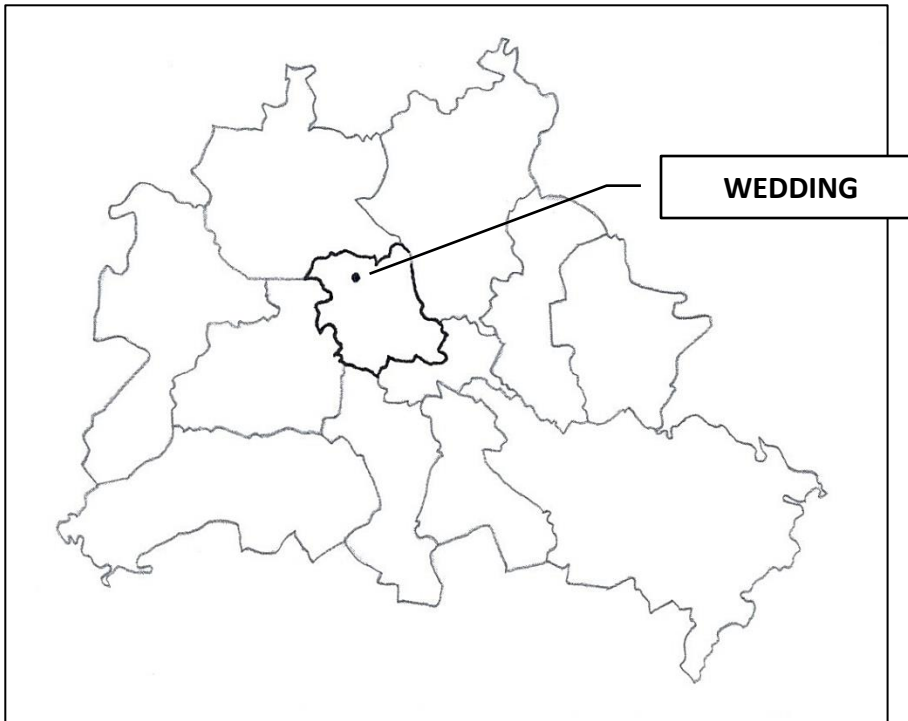
Figure 9. Berlin, with Mitte highlighted and Wedding marked

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[23] Both maps: Robinson, 2013

In both cities, I take the dynamic, multi-layered symbolic spatial order as a starting point for a critical discussion of narratives of place. I use ideas of the urban edge to consider ideas and processes of marginalisation, arguing that Thornton Heath and Wedding manifest complex edges, the former, while located on London's outer edge, having the characteristics of an inner city area, and the latter an example of inner city marginality. I show how using the edge as an optic starts to move towards a symbolic re-orientation, and move towards an expanded consideration of the edge as both problem and methodological lens.

Placing this project

I start by using ideas of the edge and marginality for situating myself in relation to my work and to discussing the comparative element of the research. I attend to a discussion of moving between research sites and how my methodological focus shifted inside and outside the library as I followed leads in and through each of the libraries, as well as between the libraries in the different research sites, and between London and Berlin. I reflect on my role as researcher, someone who was always moving between the sites.

From the outset, I envisaged this research as a project with two sites – one in London and one in Berlin. My desire to locate the project in this way was a consequence of the ways in which I am located within and between these two cities, which is itself partly a consequence of my own academic experiences. In thinking about ethnographic research as inherently comparative, reflecting on the researcher's own intellectual and biographical trajectory is crucial (Herzfeld 2001: 260). Situating myself within the research thus resonates with situating the research rationale.

Experiences of language

I started learning German in my first year at secondary school, aged eleven, following a family camping trip to the Black Forest in southern Germany. We had spent several summers in France but this was the first time we had gone to Germany. My dad had been learning beginner's German at evening classes at the local college – he was going

to 'do the talking' for us. We spent two weeks there, splashing around in the campsite's exciting but fiercely cold outdoor swimming pool and making friends with the German girls in the neighbouring tent. I came back with their address in Würzburg and our promises to write to each other, and a determination to learn German.

Back at school, we were given the choice between French and German, and declining to follow the crowd, I took German, along with one class of others. I would protectively defend German when people jokingly accused it of being difficult or sounding harsh. Falling into the clichés of car adverts, I would point to its consistently reliable, if technically challenging grammatical structures. I enjoyed sticking up for it, and learning a language that was a bit niche - and relatedly, somewhat peripheral and threatened. Several years after I had completed A-Levels, my secondary school stopped offering German as an option for some time, reflecting changes to the modern foreign language curriculum (Rampton 2006: 208). With languages no longer compulsory at GCSE, there was less natural 'follow through' to higher qualifications, and German, always the fringe language option, had, for the moment, disappeared.

Ben Rampton engages with the informal use of instructed language as a field of play and inventiveness by pupils at an inner-London school (1999; 2006), and considers it an example of 'language crossing' (1999: 481). In his research, he tape-recorded adolescents using snatches of German outside of their formal language lessons and called this improvised, joking form of German, '*Deutsch*'. Pupils used *Deutsch* to punctuate and animate the school routine, inserting short phrases and key words as interventions in classroom exchanges, as part of 'ritual performances' or in moments of 'transition' in corridors and doorways (1999: pp. 490-491). Rampton focuses on Hanif, a 14 year old boy who spoke Bengali with his family at home, and who was the main proponent of *Deutsch* in the voices captured by research project's sound recordings. Rampton identifies aspects of performance and pleasure in Hanif's use of *Deutsch* expressions, in one extract, recording him incorporating German words with complex vocalisation into his singing to himself as he walked along the school corridor. Rampton writes that this shows Hanif occupying: 'two simultaneous frames - one is the

institutional world of changing classrooms, crowded corridors and milling bodies, and the other is the musical realm of rhythm and melody [...] that he's involved in by himself' (1999: 492). Later Hanif is quoted saying: 'no I kinda like the language, I kinda like the language, because I dunno, the accent, the accent you can use' (1999: 497).

I relate the discussion of Hanif to show something about the possibility that language learning, and thinking about language, offers. Learning a language can be seen as providing opportunity - firstly for the pleasure and invention that incorporating a new form into your repertoire of self-expression provides, as Hanif and his peers show through their playful incorporation of *Deutsch* into verbal exchanges. Moreover, I experienced language learning as offering a spatialised form of opportunity through the idea of 'Germany' as destination, and as a place of a possible future, and in the meantime, the school language block as literally offering a place to go. Seeing an opportunity to escape the cold at lunchtime, small groups gathered to sit on the sofas in the foyer and watch French and German TV beamed in by satellite.

Using Rampton's discussion of Hanif occupying two simultaneous frames, I reflect on another form of possibility that thinking about and being able to operate in multiple language positions offers - that of multiple perspectives. Language may be understood as a marker and positioner of people and as a marker of their location. An ability to converse with and within more than one world, as so vividly seen in Rampton's brief but richly textured recording of Hanif, whose traversal of the school corridor contains greetings to others and fragments of emphatically pronounced German as he sings an advertising jingle to himself, opens out the multiplicity involved in a mundane moment of a day.

In contextualising these ordinary experiences of language I highlight the significance of language learning as a formative experience, and reflect on the particular locatory significance of that language being German. These experiences of language may be seen as foundational to my wish to put aspects of everyday life in London and Berlin 'in conversation with each other'. In this research these cities offer notions of different kinds of capacity for belonging through forms of language and ways of speaking and

navigating. The idea of navigation leads to a consideration of another space through which these ideas can be engaged, that of experiences of place.

Experiences of place

In my MA thesis I discussed Germany's complex relationship with conceptualising and 'managing' the presence of ethnic and racial others as German citizens, with a focus on 'Turkish-German' experiences of living in Berlin. Towards the end of the thesis, I discussed how locally spatialised ways of claiming affiliation are mobilised as a strategy in a context in which staking other forms of identity claims was more difficult, and I quoted an interview extract from an article by a German social anthropologist, Jens Schneider (2002). I quote the extract again here, as it usefully indicates another node of beginning for this chapter, and this research.

Schneider is interviewing a 'Turkish-German' woman - we don't know anything about her, other than what she says in the interview extracts, and the footnoted information that she was 35 years old at the time of the interview. The second interview extract he includes in his article indicates the difficulty she experiences in 'naming' herself with the terms he provides her. The question he asks her is not included, but it could be assumed, given the answer, that it relates to whether she considers herself 'German' or 'Turkish':

> [Interviewee:]   I think, I'm both: I'm a German and I'm a Turk. I'm a German-Turk.
>
> [Schneider:]   *Does it make a difference to say 'German Turk' or 'Turko-German'?*
>
> [Interviewee:]   No, I'm no Turko-German (laughs). I'm a German with a Turkish background.

> (2002: 18)

The woman's immediate response indicates uncertainty, or perhaps the indefinability or perhaps even the impossibility of this kind of question. She starts by mentioning both parts of her identity, carefully, and separately, then hyphenating her response – she is a 'German-Turk'. She rejects the 'Turko-German' formulation offered by Schneider with a

laugh, perhaps showing how far this idea is removed from her conceptualisation of herself, and highlighting how, in *her* hyphenation, she had foregrounded 'German'. As if to reiterate this, she concludes by opening out the hyphen into a sentence which clarifies the relationship between the two parts – she is *German*, with a Turkish background. This extended response of how to articulate a sense of both German and Turkish-'ness' is not mirrored in her response when Schneider asks her: 'Are you a Berliner?' She replies:

> Of course, I would even go a step further: I'm a Neuköllner, I think, I talk like these old ladies from World War II, who always say "I'm a born Charlottenburger" and so on. I have been living pretty long in Neukölln, 26-27 years. I've moved four times and never left Neukölln. So, at a certain point I said, I'm a born Neuköllner.

(Schneider 2002: 17)

As Schneider goes on to observe, Berliners are 'known' for being loyal to their *Kiez* – their area (2002: 18). The fealty his interviewee expresses to Neukölln even has its own word – *Kieztreu.* This woman's articulation of her affiliation with her *Kiez* takes on a heightened meaning following the questions relating to her identity which are expressed in a national frame. She is immediately happy to stake a claim as a Berliner, specifically a Neuköllner, situating her response as mimicking that of a *bürgerlich* older Berlin woman, who could say the same about Charlottenburg. It seems an identity connected with the local neighbourhood does not have to be qualified or explained.

This example of the capacity of smaller scale spaces and affiliations to create an opportunity for self-identity is an idea which has resonated into and has helped shape this research. I am interested in how the idea of locality affords a space into which people can stake a claim of belonging and affiliation. In this research, I consider how a small place, like a neighbourhood, or an under-estimated space, like the cues and codes adopted and adapted from a foreign language at school, can provide a point through which important personal and social claims can be made (Mills 2000).

Locating the research, finding the field

Ideas of who constitutes a local and where claims of locality are made are intensely 'placed' - that is; they are located within and have consequences for a place. In this research I consider these ideas of locality through a spatial lens in order to think about the 'lived out' consequences of spatial terminology. I am particularly interested in peripherality, the literal, geographic edge. I am also considering peripherality in a discursive sense for areas which had been identified as 'problem places' through reputations and myths as well as through statistical portrayals of need and lack. At the start of this research I found myself drawn to Croydon, an edge city on the fringes of London, while part of it too, and not far from where I lived in Brixton. Les Back's on-line text, 'So fucking Croydon' takes its title from a comment by David Bowie made in an interview with the music magazine *Q* in 1999: 'I think it's the most derogatory thing I can say about somebody or something' (cited in Back 2002). Discussing Bowie's vilification of Croydon, Back writes:

> For trendy cosmopolites Croydon is a place to expel from the 'body politic of urban chic'. It is essentially a doom suburb, a site of cultural suffocation from which the only redemption is escape. [...] In the urban imaginary that defines London's centres of cool, Croydon is a place of living torment, a culture vacuum, the negation of style, an example of 'Where it's not!'

(Back, 2002)

The denigration of Croydon seemed to sit oddly with the busy and modern town centre I visited in the early stages of research, a place with a highly diverse and multicultural population, a place with lots going on. I was drawn towards considering the relationship between its problematic portrayal and the everyday experiences of life in the area. I wanted the research to occupy a distinctive location. Wanting to make the sites mirror each other across the cities, I first started to look at the possibility of pairing large-scale housing estates, New Addington in Croydon and Gropiusstadt, a huge estate in Neukölln, on the south eastern fringe of Berlin. At the same time, inspired by Ash Amin's articles

on micropublics, I was thinking about pursuing lines of locality through municipal sites of belonging, and became drawn to public libraries.

The public library instantly seemed to 'make sense' as an interesting 'unit' of place. In its breadth of remit and municipal location, it is meant to appeal and reach out to 'everyone'. I was interested in 'testing' this assumption of openness and universality, and at the same time, to observe how huge themes get played out in the institutional context of the library. What happens to multiculturalism, when you try to pursue it through the library? What are the daily manifestations of multiculturalism and social difference in the library, and why do they appear and disappear in such interesting ways? Forms of ethnic and racial difference and other forms of social categories, get broken down into targeted formulations and limited facets; transformed and translated into terminologies of the 'hard to reach', or 'people with a migration background'; obfuscated behind depictions of poverty, unemployment and educational attainment, and amplified around cultural events and celebrations.

Moreover, the public library is also chronically under-researched as a social space. Despite various reviews and evaluations of the role of contemporary libraries, (Burton, Greenhalgh and Worpole 1996; Kerslake and Kinnel 1997), library design (Wagner 1992; Mattern 2007; Worpole 2013) the impact of library-based projects (Matarasso 1998), reviews based on surveys of librarians (Goulding 2006; Usherwood 2007) and historical overviews (Black 1996; 2000; Kelly 1977), there is little empirical work on the way that libraries are used by people and the significance they have in a locality.   Krpič states that public libraries are important for 'the social integration of immigrants' (2007: 98) but does not develop how or why this might be the case. In his study, Matarasso did not interview project participants, and yet remarks that 'most people whose lives may be affected by library facilities or special initiatives remain largely invisible' (1998: 4).

Comparable edges?

At the start of fieldwork, searching for clues about how to mirror the locations, I looked at different sources of statistical information for both Thornton Heath and Wedding.

Looking at similar statistical indicators across both fieldsites enabled me to make an elementary, initial comparison, a methodological first step at initial sense-making. Gathering statistics may be seen as a way of making place visible, or legible, reached for, as I did, as a form of spatial shorthand. However, statistics are always 'with' - they need to be read alongside the conditions of their production and dissemination. They are highly time limited; providing a snapshot of a particular moment, an implication conveyed in the term itself, as Fran Tonkiss observes: 'the static nature of statistical representation' (2004: 96). Moreover, because gathering statistical data is seen as a key tool in overcoming the very problems they seek to convey, statistical overviews are weighted towards a portrayal of lack – of employment, education and income; or highlight 'difference', simultaneously presenting difference as 'deficiency'.

Looking beyond the assumptions these categories indicate, other questions can emerge – what does it mean, for instance, that an area has a largely young population, or that a high proportion of its population is of a 'migration background'? Rather than jumping to the inferences that such statements might imply, can these forms of marking and categorisation be considered from a different perspective? Who or what might not be captured or made visible in statistics? Opening out the hidden complexity and assumptions contained within the apparent legibility of statistics starts to consider the socially constructed and practised nature of place. Places are situated within highly particularised circumstances; while statistics may provide certain indications, contextualising and questioning these allows other, apparently less-quantifiable markers to emerge.

I read research based on comparative approaches, looking for clues and precedents, reading work that recognized the implicit multi-sitedness of research in the contemporary global social world, making 'global ethnography' (Burawoy 2001) inescapably situated within a global network of connectivity and power relations and demanding an active, imaginative understanding of how global dimensions play out on a smaller scale. I find this helpful to use as a perspective, of seeing the global as 'an emergent dimension of arguing about the connection among sites […]' (Marcus 1998:

83). This sense of 'emergent connectivity' opens out relationships between the research site and elsewhere, and between the two field sites themselves. Working within a frame of emergent connectivity starts to open out the library as field site; to situate libraries as places which reach out beyond their immediate locality, and illustrates the relationship between the two field sites, the idea of the two sites being placed into a conversation with each other.

In her introduction to *Finding a Way Home*, the product of a collaborative project between researchers working with young people in neighbourhoods in Hamburg, Germany and London, Nora Räthzel (2008) charts various reasons for doing a comparison, invoking layers of similarities and differences between the two research contexts. She points to how using the same method and looking for similar areas in each areas hoped to locate differences between identificatory processes, while at the same time, observing that these processes are responses to different political and historical situations of each site (2008: 13). This seeking out similar places and similar methods are thus refracted through prisms of difference in the broader (national) context. Perhaps comparison always falls short, if thought about in the sense of finding a 'match'. The boundaries and limits to the comparison are revealed in the fundamental incompatibility or irreducibility of the comparison - that which cannot be contained or defined by the similarities or differences maintained by the comparison. The comparative relationship I develop through this research is one of *resonances* between places, where the comparison generates a point of reflection, a contrast or a moment of disquiet.

The shared resonance of edginess, marginality and peripherality drives the resonance between the sites in Wedding and Thornton Heath. While Wedding and Thornton Heath are both popularly seen as problem places, one of the problems facing both places is that they are not really problematic *enough*. They share a sense of being everyday, unspectacular, and rather overlooked places. While the spectacular does occasionally break out, as when the violent unrest which spread across London in August 2011 crept out towards Thornton Heath, it does not make them sites of extreme

social crisis, but there are serious social needs here.[24] Not dramatically crisis ridden, they are dismissed as scruffy, banal, inconsequential. This sense of being overlooked and undervalued is manifested through perceptions of edge and ordering.

 While the idea of the urban edge has a foundational symbolic significance in urban studies (Garreau 1991), conceptualisations of the edges of cities have an over-determined neatness (Herington 1984: 6), predicated on oppositional relationships (Fishman 1987: 27), understood through the formation of a 'constitutive outside', a means of identity formation and maintenance articulated out of a sense of negation (Mouffe 2007: 15). If the city's edge may be understood as having an over-determined neatness, here, I consider spatial definitions and forms of boundary making more broadly, not only as the edge of cities, but rather the forms of edges within cities; boundaries and symbolic orderings drawn between and within neighbourhoods. I show that while spatial debates and vocabularies have some dangers and limitations, they also offer significant potential as methodological tools. Following Suzanne Hall, I look at forms of 'symbolic spatial order' (2012: 40): boundaries, spatial divisions and classifications of urban space at work in understandings of London and Berlin. Analysing the way these categories and distinctions are formed, she argues, enables 'the understanding of the reciprocal processes by which boundaries are officially inculcated and regulated, their subsequent animation in the structure and texture of the physical environment and the gradual accrual of commonly held perceptions of what a place is like and who is deemed to belong in such a locale' (Ibid.: 41). In identifying these different understandings of boundaries, Hall draws out the simultaneity of multi-layered spatial categories and emphasises boundaries as lived and experienced.

The symbolic 'edginess' of both west Berlin and south London is a contextual starting point for this research. With the multiplicity of boundaries in mind, I provide an overview of how forms of spatial order have historically been manifested and maintained in Berlin and London, and continue to reverberate into contemporary spatial and 'placed' understandings at work in both Thornton Heath and Wedding. In tracing

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[24] I discuss these events in greater detail later in the chapter.

these I work on opening out the edge; moving from my concern with a site 'on the edge' to working with an expanded, and more productive, sense of the edge as a perspective.

South London's edge

In London, complex and diffuse patterns of urban functions challenge the idea of the distinguishable inner and outer city, but these exist alongside strongly-defined historical spatial and social boundaries. The residual potency of spatial hierarchies is still manifested most strongly through the river Thames, which divides the city into north and south. Historically, the south was considered conceptually more 'distant' from the powerful north, the location for the 'stink industries': leather tanning, and the manufacture of soap and tallow (Ackroyd 2000: 691).

NORTH LONDON
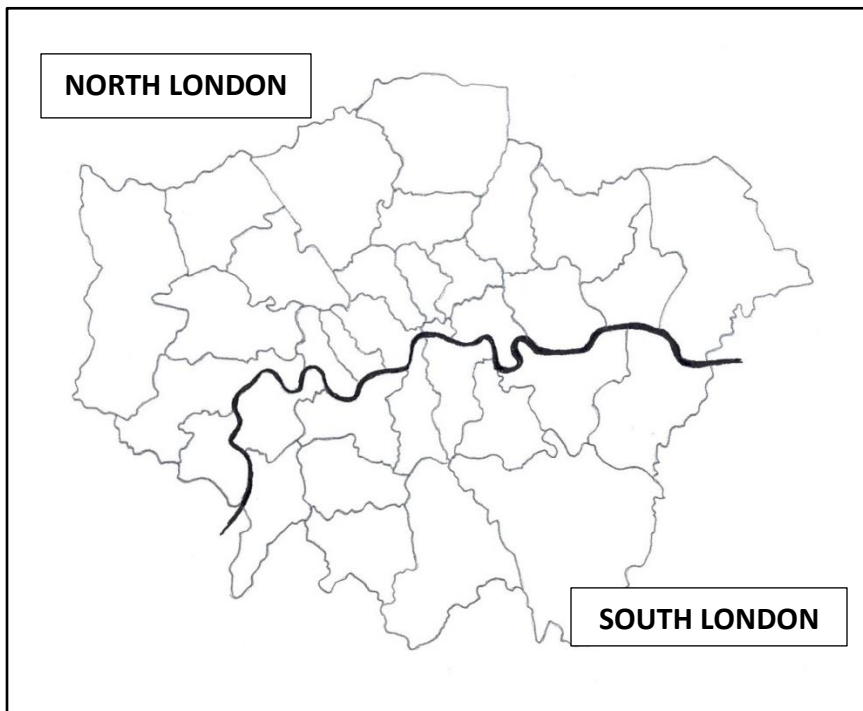
SOUTH LONDON

Figure 10. North and south London, divided by the river Thames[25]

Isolated by the river until the more wholesale construction of bridges in the nineteenth century, the south was considered a 'distinct and alien place' (Ibid.: 694), 'foreign

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[25] Robinson 2013

territory' to those venturing from the north (Ibid.: 696).[26] Despite parts of south London being actually much more geographically central to places of power, and the development of transport systems increasingly connecting both sides of the city, this conceptual division and generalised peripheralisation of south London remains, and Croydon is a target of particular derision.

In *The New Bleak*, Hatherley comments on the inner-London nature of Croydon, conveyed by unexpected juxtapositions of building typologies and uses:

> In its sense of chaos and drama, Croydon seems to have rather little in common with the typology of the commuter dormitory, but appears instead as a slice of Inner London on the lam. […] [T]he office-block landscape suddenly meets market stalls, butchers' shops and caffs […] In that tension is encapsulated what makes central Croydon feel as much a part of London proper as Peckham, or Tottenham, albeit much more distant from the centre. The accidental ensemble creates an acutely surreal experience, taking the capital's pre-existing aptitude for juxtaposition and amplifying it (2012: 166).

Eleven miles south of central London, and a twenty minute journey by train from Victoria station, Croydon borders the county of Surrey to the south and the London boroughs of Lewisham, Lambeth and Southwark to the north; it lies at the absolute limits of London. However, Hatherley astutely conveys the sense that in Croydon the expected symbolic order is being subverted; Croydon is not behaving like a suburb.

This symbolic narrative of Croydon as 'upstart' is echoed in the borough's political positioning within London local government, and as a huge borough, both in terms of geographical spread, and population - it has the highest population of all the London boroughs.[27] Croydon's relatively late incorporation into the Greater London Council (GLC) in 1965 resulted in the borough retaining both a strong sense of independence and a significant amount of political clout compared to its neighbours (Phelps et al. 2006: 187). While on the administrative edge of London, Croydon emphasises its

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[26] Since 1209, versions of London Bridge have connected the north and south of the city (Matthews, 2008: 145) but it remained the only stone bridge in London until 1746, when Westminster Bridge was built (Ibid.: 93).

[27] Using data from the 2011 Census, Croydon Observatory estimate that 363,400 people live in Croydon. (Borough Profile Quarterly Report, Croydon Observatory, January 2014: http://www.croydonobservatory.org/population/) (Last accessed 14 September 2014.) Croydon Observatory is a mapping and policy development tool hosted by the borough's strategic partnership, a collaboration of local agencies.

independence and importance and makes efforts to reposition itself through claims

about its economic capacity (Ibid.: 174-5) and through bidding to become London's

Third City.[28] This re-scaling and re-situating at work in the local authority's narrative of

itself may be seen as an attempt to overturn a persisting negative image of the borough,

which Phelps et al. link explicitly to negative perceptions of its faded concrete office

blocks and retail developments (Ibid.: 179). Croydon's urban ambition once made it a

trend setter in large-scale urban development, but the results now appear outdated,

even hubristic: 'the butt of numerous jokes. 'Mini-Manhattan', as if trying to be like New

York was somehow less interesting than being like Surbiton', as Hatherly comments

(2012: 164)[29].

Croydon's mis-match with the suburban periphery narrative is mirrored by the complex

patterns of connection and peripherality at work in Thornton Heath. Following the

arrival of the railway in 1862, Thornton Heath expanded into its current form. It was

thus part of the process of Victorian London's suburbanization and emerging commuting

patterns.[30] However, the contemporary situation and function of Thornton Heath

cannot be straight-forwardly categorised as suburban (Harris and Larkham 1999: 8).

Thornton Heath, while 11 miles out of central London, has a strong 'urban' character,

more in common with the 'chaos and drama' described by Hatherly than the leafy

purlieus of Purley. The area has a distinct lack of green space and significant traffic.

Moreover, it is the location for Croydon's hospital, and is permeated with extensive

retail and small industrial activity, although the character of the retail is relatively small

scale and down-market when compared to central Croydon's chain stores and shopping

centres.

Despite having a large local population and acting as an important transport hub for

north Croydon, Thornton Heath, with its unprepossessing appearance, and lack of local

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[28] The others are Westminster and the City of London. The bid, Croydon's third attempt to gain city status, was turned down in 2012. http://www.croydonadvertiser.co.uk/Croydon-loses-city-status-bid-Chelmsford-Perth-St/story-15517110-detail/story.html (Last accessed 14 September 2014)

[29] See also Back 2002

[30] The growth of the suburban rail network had the effect of drawing: 'the whole of the perimeter of the city […] ineluctably […] into its centre' (Ackroyd, 2000: 591).

landmarks, is dismissed as a place empty of significance.[31] In a local history column, the *Croydon Advertiser* commented on the lost significance of Thornton Heath Pond, a relic of the area's historical role as a staging post and cross roads on the route between the city and the coast, and now a traffic roundabout.[32] It seems that Thornton Heath is both geographically peripheral, situated on the edge of London, and on the edge of Croydon; and as relatively economically deprived area, it is simultaneously discursively peripheral.

Moreover, the northern fringes of Croydon were significantly affected by the intense violence which broke out across London in August 2011 following the shooting of Mark Duggan by police.[33] In the aftermath of his death, there were three nights of violence, arson and looting in areas across London and other English cities. Starting in Tottenham, north London, on Saturday 6 August, by early evening on the following Monday the rioting had spread to Croydon. Several huge fires were started in businesses on the outskirts of the town centre; one on London Road, the road connecting Thornton Heath to central Croydon. Images of these fires were shown repeatedly in rolling news coverage and served to comprehensively link them to the area to in the popular imagination, highlighting it as a place of danger and social unrest.

The combination of negative media coverage, as well as operations of popular symbolic and discursive tropes which simultaneously 'mark' and marginalise, as seen in the wake of the August riots, is powerful. During the weeks after, the area was placed under close examination as discussions about causes and ramifications reverberated through media channels, and became linked in the popular imagination to trouble and violence. This was reinforced by persistent physical reminders of the violence - on London Road, blackened shells of buildings remain, pinned together with intricate networks of scaffolding and surrounded by hoardings.

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[31] While the local authority tried to harness symbolic value out of the old clock tower on the High Street, a large Tesco remains one of the most important local landmarks.

[32] The article makes a feature of this perceived lack, with contrasting 'then' and 'now' photos and the caption, "Full pond is now a dry landmark" (12 July 2011).

[33] The circumstances of the shooting remain unclear and are the subject of an on-going investigation by the Independent Police Complaints Commission: https://www.ipcc.gov.uk/investigations/mark-duggan-metropolitan-police-service (Last accessed 14 September 2014).

An indication of the density of the population around Thornton Heath library is gathered from looking at the population figures for Bensham Manor Ward, in which it lies. Bensham Manor Ward has 16,201 residents while the wards to either side of it, West Thornton and Thornton Heath, have populations of 17,489 and 16,539 respectively. [34] High population density is no longer a feature only associated with the inner London boroughs.

According to the 2012 Croydon Borough Profile, the borough BME population average is 44.9% (2012: 29).[35] There are nine wards in the north of the borough which 'have a greater proportion of residents from BME communities than residents who classified themselves as 'white' (2012: 32). These are figures of intense ethnic difference; the report highlights Thornton Heath as having the highest proportion of 'black' residents at 42.9% (7,089 residents), while West Thornton ward the highest proportion of 'asian' residents at 37% (6,467 residents), and Bensham Manor ward has a BME population of 73.5% (2012: 32).

Lying on Croydon's northern fringes, Thornton Heath occupies a geographically peripheral space, with its below-average performance on the indices marking the area as socially problematic, and thus socially marginalised. However, the marginal narrative is simultaneously disrupted by the statistical analyses which show the area, in terms of its diversity, its patterns of housing tenure and its deprivation as demonstrating the social characteristics of an inner city area. If an edge place starts to have the characteristics of a central place, what sort of implications does that have? And if statistics can show us that Thornton Heath, while geographically edgy, has the characteristics of an inner city, what is the statistical and spatial narrative of Wedding?

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[34] Bensham Manor Ward Profile:
http://www.croydonobservatory.org/profiles/profile?profileId=46&geoTypeId=21&geoIds=00AHGG
See also: 2011 Census Snapshot: Ethnic Identity Indices for Wards February 2013:
http://data.london.gov.uk/datastorefiles/documents/2011-census-snapshot-ethnic-diversity-indices-wards.pdf
[35] The report gives the BME population average for London as 40.2%, and the UK average as 14.6% (2012: 29)
http://www.croydonobservatory.org/profiles/

West Berlin: an island in East Germany

If one of London's most significant symbolic boundary is between the north and south of the city, then Berlin's lies between its eastern and western sides. These boundaries were created in the post-war division of the city (reflecting the wider division of the country) into four sectors: French, British, American and Soviet. In August 1961, under increasing pressure to prevent mass emigration of Berliners from the eastern side of the city to the Allied sector, enabling them to move to West Germany, with serious economic and social consequences, the East German authorities began to erect a wall, physically separating the two parts of the city.
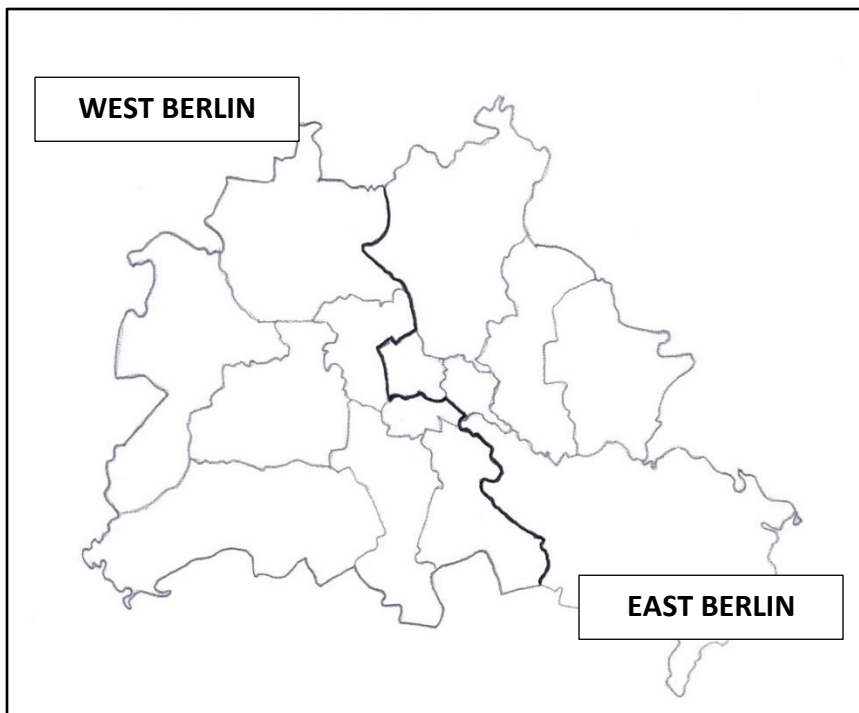
Figure 11. Route of the Berlin Wall mapped onto contemporary city districts[36]

The wall was known, depending on political perspective, as the '*Schandmauer*' ('shameful wall'), or the *Antifaschistischer Schutzwall* ('anti-fascist protection barrier') (Ward 2011: 72). The spatial effects of the division are aptly described by Brian Ladd:

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[36] Robinson, 2013

By severing long-established paths of inner-city circulation, the Wall created peculiar urban backwaters in the center of Berlin […] Unlike Easterners, West Berliners were free to heap scorn upon the Wall, or to gaze over it, but in the end, they, too, mostly sought piece of mind by accepting the Wall or ignoring it, by coming to think of their city as an island connected by causeways and air corridors to a Western mainland. The commonly used 'island' metaphor is an apt one, since the Wall created quiet recreational spaces on the newly established edge and, more generally, came to be seen – or rather not to be seen – as the edge of the world (1997: 13-14).

During the nineteenth century, Wedding had developed into an industrial hub - the location for huge factories (Siemans, AEG and locomotive engine building at Borsig), and a booming working class district, consequently becoming famous for its labour rights movement and given the moniker *Roter* (Red) *Wedding*. The city's population grew over 10 times between 1800 and 1900 (Ladd 1997: 96) and Wedding was the most densely populated district.[37] A large population and strong industrial base also encouraged prosperity and commerce, with Wedding noted as a lively place for shopping and entertainment (Komander 2006: 45-46).

While the division of the city into different sectors undoubtedly impacted on daily life, until 1961, Berliners crossed in and out of bordering sectors, with for instance, residents from Prenzlauer Berg in the Soviet sector continuing to use the shops and amenities of Wedding. However, the sudden erection of the wall along city administrative boundaries cut Wedding off from its neighbour, creating a literal dead end, a *Sackgasse*, with devastating consequences for the local economy. The western district of Wedding, now down at heel, remained un(der)developed, and marked by previous interventions in the built fabric, in which the the impact of post-war building decisions remains visible. Faded concrete housing developments became the legacy of the *Kahlschlagsanierung,* the 'scorched earth' re-building policy of the 1960s and 1970s, carried out under the motto, '*Der Wedding ändert sein Gesicht*' ('A new look for Wedding'), motivated by the

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[37] In 1855 the area had a population of 7,673, while by 1871 it had tripled in size, and by 1895 had a population of 114,000 (Komander 2006: 44). The speed and intensity of this population growth brought with it severe overcrowding and poor living conditions.

pressing need to improve the deeply unsuitable living conditions in the hugely overcrowded tenement blocks (Kohn and Schneider 1983: 15).

The wall precipitated a symbolic as well as a physical re-ordering of space in Berlin, and this symbolic re-adjustment is felt as keenly as the spatial re-ordering enacted in the city landscape.[38] In the 20 years following the fall of the Berlin wall, the city has stitched its infrastructure back together, re-joining severed transport systems, and filling up the spaces created by the dead zone of the death strip with modern developments, symbolising the desire to literally re-orientate itself, and then market itself as a contemporary international metropolis (Colomb 2012). Edges and spatial divisions thus continue to mark the city, even if the physical traces are being swept away.

One legacy of the wall which continues is dealing with the consequence of it making Wedding an area synonymous with isolation, neglect and decline. Quartiers Management, the delivery arm of *Soziale Stadt*, a nation-wide neighbourhood development programme which works to improve city neighbourhoods, has a strong presence in the *Bezirk*.[39] The project has both a built environment emphasis, targeting for instance, neglected or vandalised public spaces, and a social and cultural capital strand, where neighbourhood managers work to connect groups already working in the neighbourhood and increase the level of community participation.

Soziale Stadt works on three scales of intervention (intensive, medium and preventative) using data from the Berlin–Brandenburg Department for Statistics to assess the relevant scale of intervention in that area.[40] Flagged for intervention are figures relating to unemployment, people 'with a migration background', and people in receipt of benefits.

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[38] The abiding psychological presence of the wall is described as '*die Mauer im Kopf*' ('the wall in the head'); the division of the city and the abrupt shifts into, and then out of dual political systems leaving deep traces and emotional scarring Jana Hensel, Susanne Kailitz, 'Born in the GDR', *Der Freitag*, 27 September 2012
https://www.freitag.de/autoren/der-freitag/born-in-the-gdr (Last accessed 14 September 2014)
[39] It works in four neighbourhoods in Wedding: http://www.quartiersmanagement-berlin.de/Berliner-Quartiersmanagement.4210.0.html (Last accessed 14 September 2014)
[40] http://www.quartiersmanagement-berlin.de/nach-Interventionsgraden.4237.0.html provides details of the QM areas in Berlin, grouped into the different levels of intervention. (Last accessed 14 September 2014). The QM areas Reinickendorferstraße-Pankstraße and Soldiner Straße / Wollankstraße are placed in the highest intervention category.

The Schiller Bibliothek and the Bibliothek am Luisenbad are not within a QM area but lie between several, with four in their vicinity. The QM area Reinickendorferstraße-Pankstraße lies between the two libraries, so I use some of the statistics from the QM *Datenblatt* (data sheet) which was produced in early 2012. The population is given as 15,778, with the proportion of 'migrants' as 62.75%. At 12.54%, unemployment in the area is over twice that of the Berlin average and 43.60% of people are beneficiaries of some form of state financial support.[41]

Another example of spatial re-ordering is the *Bezirksfusion*, a consolidation of Berlin's administrative districts. In 2001 Wedding became officially absorbed into Mitte, a central district of the city, as its name implies, and a significant one - the *Regierungsviertel*, the *Hauptbahnhof*, and many important civic amenities and tourist destinations are located there. The new Mitte incorporated districts formerly separated into East and West Berlin / Germany; expanding up to Wedding, Gesundbrunnen and Moabit, and across to Tiergarten / Hansaviertel. Despite its vicinity to the city centre - Wedding is barely four kilometres from the very centre of Berlin - its current socio-economic character and history make it distinct and conceptually distant from the core of 'Alt'-Mitte. Perceptions of differences and divisions between the constituent parts of the district continue to have an influence on understandings of the area.

Looking at the maps, and considering these spatialised histories, can we think about how the notion of urban edges and boundaries might be useful for a consideration of spatial ordering in Thornton Heath and Wedding? I have discussed how wider patterns of symbolic ordering are at work in the cities in which they are located. The city limits are the site of services, warehouses, and suburbs, of 'functional space' (Sieverts 2003: 44). Bourdieu argues that the city's edge parallels a slackening of capital, leading to a unavoidable opposition of centre and periphery (2009: 125). The city's edge is also,

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[41] Figures from the data sheet (*Datenblatt*) for the Quartiers Management area Reinickendorferstraße-Pankstraße, south of the Bibliothek am Luisenbad, based on statistics from the Amt für Statistik, Berlin. http://www.quartiersmanagement-berlin.de/fileadmin/content media/Datenblaetter_Quartiere/Datenblaetter_Quartiere_neu/Datenblatter_2012/2012-01-23_Reinickendorfer-_Pankstr.pdf

however, seen as the logical site for its expansion and re-creation, with space for experimentation in urban form and the development of broader understandings of what a city can be (Fishman 1987; Garreau 1991). However, optimistic narratives are also tempered by work which considers the suburban periphery as a site for social problems (Power 1997; Wacquant 2008), and a site of stigmatisation, the *banlieue*, the troubled suburb, the 'social hotspot'.

Edges and 'edginess'

> '…forms of social exclusion and inclusion work through notions of belonging and entitlement in particular times and places. Within Europe's major conurbations, complex and exhilarating forms of transcultural production exist simultaneously with the most extreme forms of violence and racism.' (Back 2002: 7)

The simultaneity of contemporary urban life evoked here by Back, has great resonance for also considering 'edginess'; opening out space for places to exist in complex and even contradictory terms. Approaches towards discussions of place must themselves be situated. Symbolic spatial orderings and categories become a starting point for opening out a more contextualized and descriptive form of analysis. Rather than conceptualising the edge as a space of opposition, I work with the notion of the edge as a 'fuzzy' site – a place of complexity and simultaneity. In demonstrating how edge may not only used as a spatial marker, I am moving towards the idea of the edge, or the margin as a perspective, a way of looking and a way of questioning.

Thinking about the edge in this way is part of an attempt to pay attention to and to problematise terms that are used to define places, to ask what provokes these kinds of definitions, and to look at their effects. Expanding out the term from meaning the literal, administrative boundaries of cities must also acknowledge its continuing practical, political and symbolic significance. In demonstrating how the term is not used simply as a spatial marker, I consider how spatialised labels contribute to the wider significance of place. The edge perspective is a means of opening out possibilities and revealing investment, at the same time as highlighting problems. The edge might be usefully

opened out beyond a frame of limitation to serve as an optic for understanding place, and also as a metaphor for the research experience.

Going to Thornton Heath

People tended to be flummoxed on hearing that my field site is in Thornton Heath, either imagining that there is no value in social research there; that it cannot possibly be interesting, or conversely, that working there must be something of a risky business. This dichotomy is a good starting point for considering Thornton Heath as a field site. I discuss the experience of using public transport at the edge of the city to move away from this split condition of the area as either a site of 'nothing' or a container for social trouble and trauma and to start to contextualise and give a sense of place. Most importantly, it shows that in an area always known for being a stop along the way, to London, and to the sea, that ideas of connectivity and passage through remain highly significant.

I explore the everyday possibilities and connections opened out by my regular bus journey to Thornton Heath library. The 250 bus route, which extends from Brixton, in zone 2 of the London transport network, to Croydon town centre, which lies in zone 5, makes a stop outside Thornton Heath library in zone 4. These zones, while invisible, are conceptually and financially significant.   Spatial and temporal distances are therefore imbricated in each other, as Bourdieu observes (2009: 127). Distances, and the time it takes to travel them, are in turn linked to financial cost - the bus journey costs £1.30; the equivalent train journey at peak hour costs £3.40.[42] Despite being estimated at an optimistic 47 minutes on the bus timetable, the journey from Brixton to Thornton Heath library is more likely to take an hour.

Travelling on the bus became part of my fieldwork routine, and even an extension of my field site. On my way to the library I would join the bus at the very beginning of its route

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[42] Fare information from Transport for London, correct as of August 2011. In September 2014 this journey would cost £1.45 by bus and £5.70 by train: www.tfl.gov.uk/tickets/14416.aspx (Last accessed 14 September 2014).

on the north side of Brixton, and as the bus filled up with passengers, I would tune into conversations people were having with their neighbour or on the phone. Gazing out of the window I would watch the busy streets of Brixton slide away as the bus flowed south along the A23, crossing the south circular bypass, and traversing the hills of Streatham High Street, linking with railway stations - Streatham Hill, Streatham Common, and heading south to Brighton.

This tactic of travelling has its precursor in François Maspero's 1990 monograph, *Roissy Express,* a depiction of his and photographer Anaïk Frantz's month-long sojourn through the Paris suburbs on the RER train line, a journey punctuated with stops, diversions, and disorientation. The journey explores the changes wrought in the suburbs over the past fifty years, and provocatively inverts the distinction between the city and its edge.

Figure 12. Brigstock Road, Thornton Heath[43]

For Maspero, the true centre, where 'real people and real life' may be found, is in fact all around the centre, at the city's edge (1990: 16). In their journey, Maspero and Frantz thus dispel the idea of the suburbs as having nothing, or being 'nowhere' places. The

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[43] Robinson, 2011

edge, if understood as a separation, is nowhere to be seen. Iain Chambers writes suggestively:

> The referents that once firmly separated the city from the countryside, the artificial from the 'natural', are now indiscriminately reproduced as potential signs and horizons within a common topography (1990: 54).

I take this spatial and symbolic reconfiguration as a starting point to counteract the symbolic lack surrounding Thornton Heath with an account of connectivity and continuity. The bus route navigates a path through this topography, straddling parish and local council boundaries, traces of old landmarks conveyed in the names of bus stops, and passing through multiple urban centres and multiple peripheries, which fade and layer into each other.

The return journey would always be busier, the bus full from where I would join it at Thornton Heath Pond, and noisy; laughter and calling out from school children eating chips and chicken from red cardboard take-away boxes, phones ringing and people chatting loudly.   As soon as I could, I would wedge myself into a seat and start writing out my notes from my time at the library, and also 'listening out' to what happened on the bus.

> On the bus, a woman starts preaching, standing on the top deck. She might be in her sixties. She stands in the aisle, holding her Bible and Oyster card together in one hand, and hanging on to the yellow pole with her other, speaking to and over the noise of the packed bus.
>
> She says loudly and repeatedly: 'Brothers and sisters, if you want to get to heaven, you have to let Jesus into your life - and every little sin…' She goes on to list some sins: 'like fornicating…' 'We *know*!' chorus some of the school children from the back of the bus. 'Killing people', she continues, 'all those sins got to stop.' People seem to be ignoring her, carrying on their conversations, or tapping at their phones. Some of the teenagers comment in asides to each other, but no-one seems inclined to ask her to stop, or is obviously rude to her.
>
> After a period of fluid, rhythmical preaching, her voice rising and falling as she sways along with the bus, she asks: 'Who have a Bible at home?' I am surprised to see a young woman with dyed pink and red hair, put up her hand. The woman smiles warmly at her, and moves along the bus towards her, saying, 'I have some

quotations you can read when you are at home', and passes her a handwritten note on a slip of paper. The girl takes the slip of paper and says 'Thanks', 'th-fonting' the word with a perceptible London accent. She had just been speaking in Polish with the boy next to her. The woman then continues to the back of the bus where all the teenagers are, perhaps she could see that there had been interest from them too, and she spends a short while talking with them.

(Field notes, January 2012)

I'm quite surprised at this. I see a lot of preaching on the street in Brixton, and on buses occasionally, but never met with this amount of forbearance and eventual positive interaction. It was the space this woman was able to claim for herself on the bus and the way that she was able to engage with people, to draw people into a conversation, that I found so fascinating. She was in such an edgy situation, taking a public risk at giving voice to her faith in public, on a bus, where instances of noise and behaviour which 'takes up space' or contravenes the usual codes of travel produces angry flash points. This risk seemed to pay off and she is listened to.

Asha, a young librarian at Thornton Heath library commented that living and working in the area required a certain strategy, which she described as having 'ghetto' in order to work with local young people. She linked this to the broader stigmatisation of south London:

Asha: Whereas here, you have to have a bit more ghetto to survive, kind of, to kind of, reach out to the children, I think. [...] ...when you work and you live and you grown in an area like this, you do see the people that do seem to escape the drudges and the stereotypical kind of, connotations put onto somebody from 'south London', and, you know, when I meet my sister's colleagues, they always laugh about people from 'south London' - dirty south London, and I'm like, well, you know, we have flats, we've invested in property, we've done this, we've done that, and they find that very shocking!

Katherine: What's the stereotype 'south London'?

Asha: I think it's, we're very ghetto, a bit unruly, probably not as educated as the rest of society, erm, that is definitely a stereotype

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> in the corporate world anyway [...] they find it very shocking that
> we can even speak correctly, actually! [laughs]

(Interview with Asha, Thornton Heath Library, December 2011)

These instances of people claiming space for themselves can be understand as being closely tied to understandings of place and negotiations of their location. In their presentations of themselves and their interactions with others, these moments may be considered examples of disposition towards and active employment of ideas of edginess expressed in talk and everyday behaviour.

Figure 13. Thornton Heath Library, Brigstock Road[44]

Thornton Heath library lies almost exactly in the middle of the north side of Brigstock Road, within what is predominantly a residential area. However, the road is heavily trafficked, with three bus routes running along it, and is lined with small businesses: betting shops, accountants, estate agents and newsagents, phone and internet shops, car washes and work-shops; as well as civic and community spaces, the North Croydon Conservative Club, churches and temples; sports organisations and medical and dental practices, pre-school nurseries, and the Derby and Joan Club.

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[44] Robinson, 2011

The variegated character of Brigstock Road vividly exemplifies the mixed-up use of edge urban areas, with dwellings, guesthouses and retail abutting workshops, garages and healthcare facilities. It also represents histories of immigration to the area, and reveals multiple traces of globality in overseas products and services which offer international connectivity (Massey 1994: 153), and spaces of religious worship. The location of the headquarters of the UK Border Agency's immigration and asylum offices has important practical and discursive implications for Thornton Heath.

> In the minds of most overseas visitors and migrants, Croydon is associated with the Immigration Office located in 'Lunar House' on Wellesley Road. This building is perhaps aptly named, the moon is probably a more hospitable place to visit (Back, 2002).

Thornton Heath, and particularly the area around Thornton Heath library, is the location for much of the short-term accommodation for asylum seekers in the area, (as well as other homeless and vulnerable people) providing a foundation for myths and assumptions which circulate about the resources allocated to asylum seekers, couched in terms of (un)fairness and (neglected) rights. The guesthouses and hostels which line Brigstock Road and London Road, also mark the area as a space of transience, a place where people pass through, or perhaps, get stuck.

> Walking down Brigstock Road in the gloom I am struck by the lights coming from the huge houses, once 'Villas', now cheap hotels and hostels, their front gardens have been turned into car parking. From the front window of one of the houses a blue glow spills out from a bank of CCTV screens.

> (Field notes, November 2011)

In this area, where people might be transitory and unfamiliar with local services, there is a necessity to provide a clear and explicit sign of what the library is. The new expanse of window and bold signage give the impression of a shop front, and underline the powerful symbolic significance of the word 'library' expressing it as an instantly and universally recognisable brand. Discussing the refurbishment, Kay, one of the librarians, made clear how re-naming the library was not an option:

…we didn't want to be an 'Idea Store', we wanted 'library' – I think it's a bold statement they've made: this is the library. This is exactly what it is. […] In a borough like Croydon, where you do have a lot of people who are new to the country, their English isn't so good, to have 'Idea Store' would be meaningless, whereas library, *library-* that's easily identifiable, that's where you go for help, for information.[45]

(Interview with Kay, Thornton Heath Library, October 2011)

Finding the Bibliothek am Luisenbad

The Bibliothek am Luisenbad lies on the north eastern side of Wedding, in an area slightly cut off by large roads and the *S-Bahn* overground train line. It lies east of the small river Panke on Travemünder Straße, a short lane closed to traffic. To get the library I would cross Badstraße at its large junction with Schwedenstraße, both heavily trafficked streets flanked with small businesses: bakeries, social clubs, and community associations, a large carpet shop and several "casinos" and '*Spielhallen'*, betting shops and amusement centres with their windows blanked out. Continuing straight ahead, I would cross over a small patch of scrubby ground, then dive right onto a shaded gravel path, which crosses a wooden bridge over the small river Panke, where on sunny days people sit with fishing rods. People on bikes thump over the wooden bridge, the gravel scrapes underfoot, and emerging from the tree shaded path, I'm in front of the curved glass brick wall of the *Comptoir,* the library's administration building.   This short walk of about 50 metres marks a remarkable shift in surroundings. The unexpected juxtapositions of the library's situation is both a product of the ways in which this once semi-rural periphery of Berlin developed, and fateful accident in that the buildings in which it is housed narrowly avoided demolition.

'The village Wedding' was recognised in 1251, and while it became part of the purlieus of Berlin in 1289 (Komander 2006: 20-21), it continued to develop as an independent

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[45] Idea Stores, a borough-wide initiative in London's Tower Hamlets, provide public library services, along with adult education, careers support and training opportunities, arts and leisure activities, as well as meeting spaces and cafes: http://www.ideastore.co.uk/idea-story (Last accessed 14 September 2014).

entity, known as 'Der Wedding', the definite article in colloquial German implying familiarity.[46] While the area's relationship to the city centre was strengthened by the connection of Wedding and Gesundbrunnen with the *Ringbahn*, the circular train around the centre of Berlin in 1872 (Ibid.: 43), during this time it was an area outside the city. The area's almost rural situation and the discovery of a spring with putative healing waters made it a destination for 19th century day trippers from the city. It is important to pay attention to this very particular spatialised history. Considering Wedding as something of a destination locates an understanding of the situation and purpose of the original buildings of the Luisenbad and the area around the river Panke as a spa and *Vergnügensort*, an area people headed for recreation and relaxation.

In April of my Berlin fieldwork, I spoke for the first time with Frau Körner, the head librarian at the Bibliothek am Luisenbad. We met in the library administration's bright, cluttered office on the top floor of the *Comptoir*, on a warm spring day. She offered me fizzy water and showed me pictures on the computer of the library's *Puttensaal*, the large room above the main part of the library, decorated with stucco cupids; a semi - private space, where events and concerts were held, and which I hadn't yet seen.

Towards the end of our discussion, she asked about my focus in London and Berlin. We started talking about the how manifestations of the periphery worked differently in both cities, and then I referred to how different understandings of 'hyper-diversity' make for subtle shifts in how people communicate, and have implications for place. This was a cue for a discussion in which intensely coded understandings of Wedding as a very particular kind of place emerged. Frau Körner immediately drew parallels between the social enactment of hyper-diversity and its location within the immediate environment of the library:

> You can really say that about this really small microcosmos around the library. That if you are in the Badstraße, or the Prinzenstraße, it's- it's really multicultural – the *Brennpunkt* story, as it were, always more with a Muslim background. I mean, really, in some streets, you could actually be in Turkey, or in an Arabic area. But if

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[46] This has its equivalent in London, where people refer to 'the Angel', for instance.

you go then, for instance to the area around the Uferstraße, where the dance theatre is, then you see completely different people. If you were to go from where we are here, in the Badstraße, I think there is a map somewhere, I'll just have a look....

She lifts a large map out of a corner of the room and rolls it out onto another desk. We both stand up and look at it.

Ok, so, we're here, then here's the Uferstraße ... Panke – and Bellermanstraße, all around there for instance, it's a pretty wild corner, and then you go further along here, and in one of the streets, there's galleries...   Or like I said, there's the corner of Uferstraße, where the dance theatre is, and all of a sudden, there's a cafe, where you find people sitting- overwhelmingly German, overwhelmingly young people, yes? Where you think, ok, educated people, maybe artists, and then here, when you go along the Badstraße, you just think, that's not even 5 minutes away! [...] And this also, this "from Wedding to Prenzlauer Berg", you go through the Gleim Tunnel and you're in a completely different area, you know? [ii]

(Interview with Frau Körner, Bibliothek am Luisenbad, April 2012)

Frau Körner's comments on 'the multicultural, *Brennpunkt* story' refer to the highly visible forms of ethnic difference in Wedding, particularly along the busy thoroughfares in the north-eastern side of the district where Turkish pop music pumps out of shops and cars, car horns are beeped extravagantly to celebrate weddings, women wear headscarves, and men sit in groups outside shops and cafes, and gather inside Turkish social clubs. This is then contrasted with astonishing proximity of the 'Germans' who also sit outside cafes, but with entirely different connotations, that these are educated, artistic people, who go to art galleries, and perhaps even produce the art in the galleries.

Literally meaning 'the area of special focus', the term *Brennpunkt* is an example of how apparently innocuous phrases become loaded with negative implications to signify a highly problematic area. According to Hohm (2011: 44), the term *soziale Brennpunkt* emerged in the late 1970s and was used to describe situations in areas marked by unemployment and social problems. As Hartmut Häusserman comments, the term starts to denote not only the problems in the area, but also the areas themselves, making them synonymous (1996: 361). The *Brennpunkt* metaphor implies that the situation in question has the potential to heat up, or explode, and that it requires a

short, sharp intervention, analogous to calling the fire brigade, to sort it out. It can thus also be loosely translated as 'hot spot'.

The contrast between the areas is underscored by the evocation of Wedding's neighbouring district, Prenzlauer Berg, through the mention of the Gleim Tunnel. The tunnel separated the districts during the division of Berlin, but Wedding's once more proximate neighbour continues to occupy a space both tantalisingly close and separated, this time through understandings of ethnic and classed forms of difference. These two understandings of culture are seen as segregated and intrinsically 'different' - and while in utter proximity to each other, they are presented as conceptually 'worlds apart'.

Frau Körner reached for a map to try and convey some of the compelling spatio-social divisions at work in the area. This almost journalistic and impressionistic portrayal of Wedding provokes but also speaks to reassuring clichés about place. Bourdieu speaks of the difficulty of writing about so-called 'difficult places', as they are:

> first of all, *difficult to describe and think about*, and that simplistic and one-sided images (notably those found in the press) must be replaced by a complex and multi-layered representation capable of articulating the same realities but in terms that are different and, sometimes, irreconcilable. (2009: 3)

The shorthand or superficial description of forms of visible ethnic difference that are seen as characterising the area is also an example of the ways in which the existence of intense social needs and vulnerability is made visible through ways that bodies in public are marked.

Spatial mapping, like the use of statistics, marks an attempt to convey a sense of place. In both instances of numerical and spatial abstraction there is the heuristic value of simultaneity, as Bourdieu asserts in his analogy between the classification of social space into abstracted forms (2010: 165). The map allows a perspective impossible from the ground, a simultaneous arrangement of space made possible through its classification of social space into abstracted forms. Between the space of ordinary experience and its cartographic depiction there is the tension of the process of abstraction, a foreshortening. Most problematically of all, is the map's claims to

completeness (Massey 2009: 107). The map provides a truncated view which is always an approximation, a substitution, but this is simultaneously obscured by its purported wholeness.

This presentation of Wedding evokes a place of proximity, of contrasts; multiple places emerge in the one area. The map is a demonstration of how a portrayal of 'here' simultaneously sets up the proximity to 'there' as explicit and almost palpable. If 'here' becomes 'like Turkey', like 'an Arabic area', what impact does that have on the sense of 'here'? The description of place which emerges out of the use of the map may be seen as a something of a shorthand form of representation, an enactment of the different ways that place can be socially and spatially coded. Trying to understand the map as a very particular kind of tool can help unpick the rather abrupt schematic views which it might be seen to introduce. Within our conversation, it forms something of a shared point of reference, as Frau Körner tries to give a sense of what here is like, to *describe* here, as well as to mark where here actually is. The map becomes a tool for narrativising and performing place.

Figure 14. Badstraße, Wedding[47]

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[47]Robinson, 2012. The Bibliothek am Luisenbad is further down Travemünder Straße, between the two buildings.

While the library's proximity to green public space, and its relative seclusion, tucked away from the heavily trafficked and down-at-heel Badstraße, can be seen as providing something of an oasis, the library's separation from the street scene make it easy to overlook. There is surprise that there is a library, *here*. Although the idea of permeability and transparency is prominent in discussions of library buildings (Wood and Landry 2008: 191), the Bibliothek am Luisenbad must work with, and try to make a virtue out of its unexpectedness and slight hiddenness:

> Exactly, when you come from the Badstraße, and then go around the corner, you dive, really into another world, because over there, on the Badstraße, it's really very lively, and a lot of rubbish, really, as it were, and uncared for, and when you come around the corner, you don't expect this building here, with everything else that's here, you know? On the other hand of course, it's hard for a public library to be so clandestinely hidden away in the second layer of the street.[iii]

(Interview with Frau Körner, Bibliothek am Luisenbad, April, 2012)

The reflection about the characteristics of the library's position echo some of the observations of awkward places or unexpected juxtaposition between places on the map. These ideas of worlds which run in parallel, or places that are seen as hidden or unexpected; somehow not seen as 'fitting', re-emerge in discussions around the library and its assumed incompatibility with its area.

The idea of 'not fitting', seen within the broader context of inflated anxieties around Wedding as 'always already' a problem area, while important to observe, needs to be handled with caution. Considering the Bibliothek am Luisenbad as 'anomalous' in the context of its area is not to see this portrayal as definitive. Observing how the library is held within certain expectations of place, which circulate around ideas of what fits, and what disrupts, demonstrates how Wedding is caught up in systems of symbolic spatial violence (Bourdieu 1999: 126). The presentation of Wedding through the map shows how spatial expectations are invoked and disrupted and provides a starting point for reflecting on what the codifications around its location means for the everyday scope and work of the library here.

Conclusion: Paying attention to place

Thinking through modes of place representation can form a methodological and thematic intervention. Looking into maps and statistics as received forms of representation both introduces the fieldwork sites, the neighbourhoods around the Bibliothek am Luisenbad and Thornton Heath library, and forms an enquiry into the modes through which it is possible to try to talk about 'edge' places. This chapter signals the intention of the following thesis: to tease out a narrative from spatial and social cues, and through the public library to enquire into the nature of contemporary urban social life that cannot be straight-forwardly captured. This is a form of 'paying attention' (Back 2013) to those aspects of social life that are under-valued.

In Frau Körner's account of the library's struggle to convince people of its credibility as a consequence of its location, she is describing a struggle against panicked conceptions of what 'a problem place' must look or be like. Bourdieu calls these conceptions of place:

> phantasms, which feed on emotional experiences stimulated by more or less uncontrolled words and images such as those contained in the tabloids and by political propaganda or rumor. [...] One can break with misleading appearances and with the errors inscribed in substantialist thought about place only through a rigorous analysis of the relations between the structures of social space and those of physical space (1999: 123).

The difficulty of accounting for how life is really like 'here' means that 'elsewhere' is sometimes invoked to convey a sense of what 'here' is like. A community worker at a local literacy project described the area in stark terms:

> And here, and over in Soldiner Kiez, it's always being said, it's the Bronx of Berlin and stuff, but it's really not so bad here – this Panke, the water – it's green, and there are nice buildings, and nice courtyards, and nice people… And I've had - amongst all the young people who come here; we had one family which really made trouble. And there are hundreds and thousands of children who were all nice, calm, polite… [iv]

(Interview with Herr Bauer, Medienhof, August 2012)

This is a powerful way of describing the complexity of the area. As someone accustomed to trying to get the attention and political will of funders and government in order to secure the survival of his project, he must convey a pressing sense of social urgency through freighted descriptions which use effective shorthand to evoke difficult situations. However, in our discussion Herr Bauer went on to reflect that labels such as 'ghetto' or 'Bronx' do not translate entirely successfully into the Berlin context. He commented that it's a pretty green area, that in all of his years working there he's only had serious problems with a handful of children and families. His overstatement needs qualification- the area falls far short of the imagined comparison.   Herr Bauer's use of such labels thus strategically harnesses their potency in order to draw attention to problems rather than to make direct equivalence. Analogies or allusions to generalised conditions are made as a tactic of political expediency.

Another way of marking how discursive understandings of the area are evoked is through the headlines of dramatic statistical representations. An awareness of how the area is situated in statistical representations slides into the way people talk about place. In Wedding for instance, people are highly aware that the area was ranked towards the very end of the *Sozial Atlas* map of Berlin, a statistical overview of social characteristics and 'needs' in of areas in the city: '*wir sind Sozial Atlas ganz unten*', said one of the librarians in the Schiller Bibliothek. 'We're at the bottom'.[48] Labels and categories are constitutive of and made mutable by everyday experience (Williams 1988). Discussing statistical and categorical labels in this way both takes them seriously as something in themselves but at the same time, allows them to be part of a complex, detailed and contradictory everyday situation.

In places caught between being dismissed as inconsequential or highlighted as problematic, there is therefore significant value in the careful observation of the

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[48] *Sozial Atlas* 2013 The Atlas has been published during the term of every Berlin legistlature since 1990, and is described as an: '*umfassende Analyse der sozialstrukturellen und gesundheitlichen Lage in den Berliner Bezirken und Sozialräumen*' (Czaja, Senator für Gesundheit und Soziales, Vorwort). In fact the 2013 Sozial Atlas, published 28 February 2014, shows that Mitte has gone up a place and is no longer at the very bottom of the list. Summary from RBB shows the ranking changing (slightly) over time http://www.rbb-online.de/politik/beitrag/2014/02/sozialatlas-berlin-czaja-vorstellung.html (accessed 14-04-14)

everyday. This can also be understood as 'taking place seriously.' In an interview with the local Quartiers Manager at the start of my fieldwork in Berlin, she commented that, while the developments she sees happening in the *Kiez* might seem rather small fry, they do represent a serious form of investment in place:

> Of course, we're not going to become the economic centre of Berlin! [Laughter] I mean rather, that we don't value the local economy enough – the fact that there are active people here, who do things. And yes, when it's the fifth bakery, and the third late night grocers, and an internet shop, it's not so incredible, but I mean that people are here who do things, yes, who are active. [v]

(Interview with Marianne, May 2012)

'Taking seriously' experiences of the ordinary or prosaic – the everyday life of places, and looking at places through a lens not narrowed by expressions of crisis or extraordinariness, works in some way to counteract stigmatising narratives and prompts a reconsideration of taken-for-granted ways of seeing and labelling. The mode of 'taking seriously,' is not intended to 'rescue' or 'rehabilitate', or produce a categorisation of place which is blindly laudatory. Rather, the guiding preoccupation is to invest in place; to see scope and openness in its complexity and its ordinariness.

Articulations of place through spatial and statistical categorisation operate on large-scale and highly regulated notions of what is meaningful. The continuing reverberations of historical spatialising processes enables an appreciation of Thornton Heath and Wedding as located within layers of relegation or systematic marginalization, linked to their wider positions in relation to Berlin and London. The interrogation of how place is shaped by different forms of locatory modes has itself produced a 'grammar' of place, a highly specific and contingent understanding of where the research is located, which simultaneously enquires into these modes of making visible; opening out spaces of possibility within often quite closed down portrayals of place.

Opening out the hidden complexity and assumptions contained within the apparent legibility of spatial and statistical cues starts to consider the socially constructed and practised nature of place, and how, bound up with this, 'the way in which we

characterise places is fundamentally political' (Massey 1994: 114).   Places are situated within particular and contingent circumstances; while statistical overviews may provide certain indications, contextualising and questioning these allows other, apparently less-quantifiable markers and indicators to emerge.   Thus, the 'problem district' close to the Bibliothek am Luisenbad,' …is no 'accident' of current city politics, or a 'blot' on the political city map, […] rather it makes a contribution to the economic and social structures of the city, which should be respected' (Schnur 2005: 53).[49]

Highlighting the value of complexity that lies behind official presentations and teasing out alternative measures of value and significance does not mean uncomplicatedly valorising edge places, nor ignoring systemic issues, for instance a chronic lack of employment opportunities, or conversely, the implications of special improvement strategies.   'Taking place seriously' means listening carefully to what people in places say, and observing critically their everyday practice; to 'consider *the way we look* and *the way we tell*, to privilege neither but reveal the artifice of both' (Keith 2005: 80) in order for a more nuanced and multiple, or layered understanding of place to emerge, which is necessarily complicated and potentially contradictory.

In this chapter, I have situated the fieldwork libraries within their locations by providing an overview of their immediate locality and their characteristics, and at the same time, located them within broader discussions about spatial categorisations and narratives of place. This exploration of different spatialities in Wedding and Thornton Heath in terms of their peripherality and connectivity, and some of the different social, historical and political factors in the way they are positioned, has situated my research context. Examples of place narratives gathered during fieldwork have provided some conceptual and methodological indications of how I start to generate an account of place that appreciates complexity, contradiction and nuance.

This layering of places is reflected in the methodological layering of the two field sites, through which themes and experiences in both sites are brought into relationship with

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[49] '…ist kein 'Unfall' aktueller Stadtpolitik oder ein 'Schandfleck' auf dem politischen Stadtplan, […] sondern leistet einen Beitrag im Wirtschafts-und Sozialraumgefuge der Stadt, der respektiert werden sollte' (Schnur 2005: 53).

each other and analysed, traced and refracted, and then considered within broader contexts. In reflecting on the layered relationships between library and place, I argue that the library's location is key to its public role and its social meaning in an area. The next chapter will go inside the fieldwork libraries to consider how these different forms of practised investment in place work out in a highly specific form of public space.

[i] Das ist ja auch so ein Problem von Stadtraum, je enger der Raum wird, desto mehr ist die Möglichkeit für Konflikte gegeben, meine Meinung nach. Und hier im Gebiet gibt es - an dem U-Bahnhof Pankstraße, gibt es eine Alkoholikerszene, eine ziemlich starke, und dem ganzen Gebiet, also auch am Leopold Platz gibt es immer Trinker und Drogenproblem, und das haben wir hier auch, und das ist natürlich da noch mal eine ganz andere Variante, also wo manchmal soziale Probleme 'reinschwappen, weil unsere Toiletten benutzt werden, oder weil es draußen kalt ist, und so eine kleine Jugendgang vor Langeweile nicht weiß was sie machen soll, und möchte mal so ein bisschen aufhalten und das ist natürlich so, dass es nicht immer gut, das gibt Angst da bei verschiedenen Leute, und auch teilweise, verständlich.

[ii] und ja, ich – was hier in Mitte und hier, in diesem Viertel in Wedding, finde ich so interessant ist die Vielfalt, das ist so hyper -Vielfalt ist, es ist total – man kann nicht - wie Sie erwähnt haben, dass es so kompliziert ist, das es so subtil ist, wie Leute sich mit einander kommunizieren, und was für in Hintergrund steckt, das ist, das macht es so ein sehr spannender Ort.

Das kann man eigentlich in diesen ganz klein Mikrokosmus um die Bibliothek schon sagen, das wenn man in der Badstrasse, in der Prinzen, es ist, dann ist es eigentlich Multikulturelle, er, Brennpunkt Geschichte, sozusagen, immer mehr mit muslimischen Hintergrund, also da konnte man auch in manchen Strassen eigentlich irgendwo in der Türkei oder in einen arabischen Gebiet sein. Wenn man dann aber zum Beispiel in den Bereich der Uferstrasse geht, wo das Tanztheater ist, da sehen sie ganz andere Leute, sie gehen von uns in der Badstrasse, ich glaube da ist eine Karte – mal gucken… [She spread the map out on the table] Also, man ist hier, dann geht man hier die Uferstraße... Panke - und Bellermanstraβe in dem Gebiet ist zum Beispiel auch, so eine ganz wilde Ecke, und werden sie dann hier weiter, in der eine Strasse, - da gibt es Gallerien, oder, wie gesagt, hier ist die Ecke Uferstraβe wo man das Tanztheater hat - da gibt es auf einmal einen Café oder eine da sitzen Leute - überwiegend Deutsche, überwiegend junger Leute, ja? Wo man denkt so, gebildete, Künstler, und hier wenn sie dann die Badstraβe gehen da denken sie, das ist ja keine fünf Minuten! [...] Gerade eben auch, dieses von Wedding nach Prenzlauer Berg, man geht einmal durch den Gleim Tunnel und da ist man in eine ganz andere Umgebung, ne?

[iii] Es ist wirklich eine schöne Ort hier - mit der Fluss, mit der Panke, dass es auch so mitte im Gebiet in der Stadt, gibt es diesen Fluss.

Es ist eben auch so wenn man von der Badstraße kommt und dann so um die Ecke geht, dann taucht man eigentlich in eine ganz andere Welt, weil vorne auf der Badstraße ist es ja doch sehr lebendig, auch noch mehr Müll sozusagen, und ungepflegt, und wenn man hier um die Ecke kommt vermutet man dieses Gebäude gar nicht, mit dem hier, ne? Was natürlich auch an der anderen Seite auch für eine öffentliche Bibliothek etwas schwierig ist, wenn sie so etwas klammheimlich in der zweiten Ebene der Straße zu finden ist, ne!

[iv] Und es wird hier, auch im Soldiner Kiez, es wird immer gesagt, es ist die Bronx von Berlin und so, aber es ist doch gar nicht so schlimm hier – diese Panke, diese Mündung – es ist grün, es sind schöne Häuser, es sind schöne Hinterhöfe, es sind nette Leute… Ich habe hier, bei den Jugendlichen, die 'her kommen, hatten wir eine Familie, die wirklich Ärger gemacht hat. Und es sind hunderte und tausende Kinder, die alle nett, friedlich, höflich waren.

[v] Wir werden keinen Witschaftszentrum Berlin werden, klar! [laughter] Ich meine eher, dass wir diese lokale Ökonomie noch zu wenig wertschätzen, dass es einfach hier aktive Leute sind, die etwas machen.

Und auch wenn sie jetzt klar, die fünfte Bäckerei, und der dritte Spätkauf und einen Internetladen, es ist alles nicht so rasend. Aber ich meine, das sind Leute hier, die 'was machen, ja, die aktiv sind.

Chapter Two: Listening to the public library

Introduction

In 2010, when I first began work on this research, the UK government demanded local authorities make the first of several rounds of severe cuts to public services. Local boroughs embarked on a series of public cuts, weighing up the potential value of services to make almost impossible decisions about their relative worth, having to evaluate libraries, categorised as a leisure service, against care for the elderly and vulnerable, and other core council services. Although statutory in the UK, the political clout of the public library service is minimal, with very little lobbying power at a central government level (Goulding, 2006: 58). Public libraries are in local authority hands, a relationship codified in the 1964 Public Libraries and Museums Act. The locally devolved responsibility for libraries, combined with their relative political vulnerability – their lack of both the cultural prestige held by 'high culture' arts organisations and the ring fencing of essential educational services, meant that public libraries were amongst the first casualties of these measures.

In December 2010, Croydon Council outlined plans to close six of its twelve libraries. There was widespread public consternation and resistance, with the relatively paltry savings that such cuts and closures would incur prompting accusations of politicking.[1] In the face of public protest at the proposed closures, the local authority began a joint tendering process with Wandsworth Council for the outsourcing of all public libraries in both boroughs. This lengthy and controversial process was unresolved during my period of fieldwork in Thornton Heath library and was the source of much uncertainty and

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[1] The threatened libraries were: Norbury, South Norwood, Broad Green, Shirley, Sanderstead and Bradmore Green. *Croydon Advertiser*, 15 December 2010 http://www.croydonadvertiser.co.uk/Branch-libraries-facing-closure/story-11362693-detail/story.html. Groups rallied to save the libraries and protested at public meetings. *Croydon Advertiser*, 4 February 2011 http://www.croydonadvertiser.co.uk/Battle-waged-book-cuts/story-11368183-detail/story.html. The cuts were eventually postponed for a year following an overwhelming response to a public consultation. *Croydon Guardian,* 13 May 2011 http://www.croydonguardian.co.uk/news/9024881.Under_threat_libraries_given_12_month_reprieve/?ref=ec. (All internet sources last accessed 14 September 2014).

stress for members of staff in particular, who felt a sense of resignation at the inevitability of the process, as if they were caught up the slow-turning cogs of a bureaucratic machine:

> They might save the branch, but staff here aren't safer than anywhere else, because there'll be a big [*she draws a circle in the air with her finger*] re-shuffle, and who knows what will happen – we'll leave you a note!

> (Trish, Thornton Heath Library, January 2012)

Wry, or dark-humoured asides such as this from Trish were used by members of staff to buffer a very real sense of vulnerability in a deceptively off-hand way. While in London the financial threat to libraries was felt as a generalised philosophical vulnerability to the very *idea* of municipally funded public libraries, in Berlin the threat was expressed through experiences of specific cuts to libraries' purchasing budgets, and to the *Haushaltssperre*, the spending freeze imposed on all local authority budgets by the city.[2] Intended as a temporary measure, *Haushaltssperre* has become an almost permanent condition, as one librarian explained:

> Yes, it's pretty much *Haushaltssperre* all the time. There are a couple of days every year where you hear it's going to be lifted- word gets round like wildfire, then you get the money and you have to spend it, quick, before they take it all off you again. I've made sure I've spent everything for this year already.

> (Frau Walzer, Bibliothek am Luisenbad, May 2012)

In June 2012, the heads of the Mitte library service wrote an open letter to the users of the district's libraries, explaining, with deep regret, the extent of the cuts to the library budget. The direct address to the public of the library set out the extent of the severe financial need of the *Bezirk* and therefore the necessity for cuts, stating that this was a shared endeavour across the authority: 'All departments must do their bit.' The letter

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[2] There have been many public library closures in Germany too, as documented on this website, produced by the librarians' union, Berufsverband Information Bibliothek e. V. Their archive depicts a display of black-bordered 'death notices' for all the libraries they know of that have closed since 2004. http://www.bib-info.de/verband/projekte/portal-bibliotheksleben-bibliothekssterben/bibliothekssterben.html (Last accessed 14 September 2014).

drew attention to the significant efforts, made, it is implied, at some personal cost, to prevent them from being more severe. The readers are thanked for their support, and the managers close by resolving to keep on fighting, on their readers' behalf. The transparent and heartfelt tone of the letter was reinforced by its very public display - the letter was mounted in a clear plastic frame and stood on the counter of the Bibliothek am Luisenbad, and it was taped to the side of the stairs, along with other public notices, in the Schiller library, as well as displayed in full on the library website (Appendix 3).

After June 2012, the parlous state of Berlin's finances was popularly exemplified by the second disastrous delay to the official opening of the city's new airport, Berlin Brandenburg; the political, legal and above all, financial fall-out of which had become (and continues to be) a tortuous fiasco for the city:

> Money is so tight, and now we have this catastrophe with the airport. Everyone talks as though the worst thing about it was that some flights might not happen, but the true cost of the airport is really the impact that the delay will have on the municipalities. It's almost inevitable that money will be taken away from them in order to finance the disaster, and we can only guess how much and how this will affect us […]

<div align="right">(Frau Meier, Bibliothek am Luisenbad, May 2012)</div>

In the current moment of austerity, public libraries are caught up to stringent processes of evaluation, which look for spaces to save money. Monitoring and trying to evaluate public libraries is nothing new, however. From their early days libraries were subject to forms of close monitoring and evaluation (Greenwood 1886), and as a municipal service, they have been subject to the same kinds of demonstrations of accountability undergone by other locally funded services. However, the terms of engagement have shifted, and public libraries are operating in high stakes territory. They are not only having to demonstrate that they provide a comprehensive, efficient, and good value public service; in the context of uncompromising austerity measures, they find themselves having to demonstrate the value of offering a public library service *at all*. In this chapter I show how libraries engage in daily practices with targets, statistics and

evaluation processes which make it difficult to satisfactorily express their worth in outputs, and find themselves caught up in almost paradoxical systems of counting and evaluation.

In this chapter I contrast these quantitative tools for demonstrating the value of the public library with the everyday practices of knowing and understanding engaged in by librarians. These daily practices of library staff can be considered 'tactics' (De Certeau 1984) through which they are able to recognise and negotiate the needs and desires of a shifting public. I consider this move from 'evaluating' to the practised forms of knowledge, the showing and telling in which librarians involved, to be forms of 'listening' to the library (Back 2013). These practices are tacit forms of knowing, which do not sit easily on a scale of outcomes and which escape quantification.

I discuss these everyday practices of accounting as processes of 'giving accounts'; how librarians look for and talk about ways of identifying and knowing value in the library. I look at how these emerge alongside and are also bound up with formal structures of evaluation. 'Listening' helps to consider these processes themselves as forms of social telling about the library. In listening to these forms of understanding about the daily work and meaning in the library, I emphasise their how they are unacknowledgable within the usual parameters of evaluation.

I draw parallels between these forms of demonstrating and sense-making in the daily life of the library to my ethnographic fieldwork experience, discussing my own processes of making sense of the library. In considering the daily tactics of the librarians as practices of listening and knowing I place them alongside those of my own research methodology. I consider how the librarians as practitioners and myself as ethnographer are caught up in processes of trying to listen and then of trying to convey expressions of the value and meaning at work in the library. This chapter is therefore a methodological reflection on how to *tell* - in the sense of 'knowing' and 'conveying' - what is happening in the library, and how the library as a social and institutional space necessarily shaped my ethnographic engagement and ways of working.

An uncertain legitimacy: Starting fieldwork in Thornton Heath

> [...] we don't have enough work spaces; the school children sit on the floor to do their homework [...] People in Wedding seem to lack space to work at home – they really come here in droves just to spend time, whether it's loud or not, and I think, my God, how can you work here, when it's so loud! Or they come to read a newspaper, and sit there for hours, where it's so shabby! Or perhaps it's still nicer than round at theirs; I don't know… And this '*Wohnzimmer Deutschlands*' that's always being talked about, this idea that the library is the living room for Germany, we see it more and more; people really come and spend hours here.[i]
>
> (Interview with Frau Hoffmann, Schiller Bibliothek, April 2012)

As Frau Hoffmann says, contemporary library use relies less on the materials contained within the library, than the space of the library itself as a place to work and a place to be. She highlights not just the numbers of visitors, but also the considerable amounts of time that they spend in the library, making it analogous to a domestic space. The library is a space where it is possible to legitimately spend hours doing activities in public (reading, sitting, resting, playing - even sleeping) that might equally be done at home. The fact that people are spending hours in the Schiller Bibliothek in spite of the deficiencies she perceives it to have prompts Frau Hoffmann to make some inferences about their lives and their homes. While she doesn't know for certain, she is able to read certain things into what she sees - perhaps the people who come to the library lack other places to spend time, or lack space at home. If home offers inadequate space to work, to read, to be; then the public library offers an alternative space of domestic legitimacy, an idea she conveys in the sense of it being a 'public living room', and specifically a *national* public living room, a living room for Germany.[3]

The understanding of the library as a public living room has implications for the role of the librarian, who, as mediator of the space, is caught up in trying to manage people's

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[3] Claudia Lux, the former manager of the Zentral- und Landesbibliothek in Berlin, a confederation of the Amerika-Gedenkbibliothek in Kreuzberg and the Berliner Stadtbibliothek in Mitte, is quoted using a variant of the expression in this *Tagesspiegel* article from 2008: 'Wohnzimmer der Stadt' Anne Strodtmann, 15 September 2008 http://www.tagesspiegel.de/wissen/bibliotheken-wohnzimmer-der-stadt/1324944.html (Last accessed 14 September 2014).

behaviour. In the Bibliothek am Luisenbad, Frau Körner commented on the gendered implications of this understanding of the space for the relationship of the - predominantly female - librarians towards users, particularly younger users:

> […] if the library is considered a public living room, a public working space by different groups of users, […] then the role of the colleagues becomes sometimes that of a mother, because you're always saying, 'please don't do that, and please would you do suchandsuch, and you aren't allowed to eat here, and if you got that table and chair from somewhere else, it would be really very nice if you could put it back…' and you just can't communicate this convincingly every day, because sometimes, just like in a family, you have just had enough, and you think, not this again, I am just the loudspeaker for all these rules….[ii]
>
> (Interview with Frau Körner, Bibliothek am Luisenbad, April 2012)

At Thornton Heath library, the new reading pavilion, with its large glass window, gives it an appearance of a shopfront. Looking in from the street affords a domestic impression of people in armchairs reading newspapers, drinking tea, talking or snoozing.

> The signage is intended to work like a shop sign in the high street. The reading space in the pavilion is intended to be a public living room, a public reading room. There is a negotiation between it taking on the form of a shop window display; it grabs people's attention, but it also keeps that idea of civicness, that this is a room placed within the public realm. The front is a public reading room and it's a very nice place just to sit. There was this whole idea of the library having a sense of generosity to it, of going back to the public function of the library, and very obviously making a public statement about the building.
>
> (Interview with Charles Holland, FAT architects, July 2011)

Charles Holland situates the library as offering a place to be taken seriously in public, a place of public validity, and a place with both domestic and commercial cues. The spatial qualities of the library are appreciated as offering a peculiar form of public social space, bound up with a sense of generosity and conviviality. The new reading space allows people 'just to sit', supporting the understanding that the library is a 'free' space with: 'opportunities to wander, to browse, to stand and chat, to sit and watch the world go by' (Greenhalgh et al. 1995: 12). Going to the library has inherent legitimacy, it is assumed to be a place of respectability and 'good behaviour' (Greenhalgh et al. 1995: 95;

Roach and Morrison 1998: 42). The library is a space to legitimately *be*, a sense of being slowed down is conveyed through the idea of 'losing track of time when browsing' which was identified by users as 'an almost dreamlike state' (Greenhalgh et al 1995: 73).

The inherent tension implied in a domestic, yet public space conveyed by Frau Körner above can be seen as physically enacted upon the comfortable, high quality furniture in Thornton Heath library, specially designed as part of its architectural re-fit. The high volume of use puts great strain on it and people are not perhaps as careful of the library's furniture as they would be their own, and the furniture which looks so fresh and bold in the architectural photos quickly becomes scuffed and takes on layers of dirt.

Legitimacy is worked out in the library through these forms of institutionalised domesticity and patterns of routine. The idea of the library as a public living room has implications for the library as a public space, as well as for me as an ethnographer, inhabiting this space first as observer, and then increasingly as participant. These distinctive spatial and social qualities meant that on entering the library in initial visits I immediately became part of a diverse and fluctuating population of users. I did not have to talk to a gatekeeper to gain access, and, just like every other user; I did not have to explain my presence. I could sit in the library for hours, and do this repeatedly, habitually, without having to account for my being there. As I moved around the shelves, or sat at one of the work tables, my unobtrusive use of the space in accordance with its spatial codes and layouts based on my own years of accumulated knowledge about how to be a library user, gave me legitimacy.

This start to fieldwork was thus very different to that required when working within other institutions, for instance, a hospital (Becker 1963), a school (Ali 2003), or a youth project or organisation (Alexander 2000; Bendixsen 2013). Even where access to institutions is achieved via informal connections, it must be specifically and carefully negotiated in advance (Hobbs 1988). However, it was also different from those approaches by those working in the exterior public of the street (Liebow 1967; Duneier 2001), whose admittance into the fieldwork area was negotiated through informal practices of becoming known. However, being able to safely occupy this domestic space

did not make it necessarily always an easy or comfortable place to be. The library offers a space of complex and sometimes ambivalent legitimacy.

For several weeks in the summer of 2011, during my first visits to Thornton Heath library, I kept up a regular presence, persisting with 'trying to see' what was happening. I would move about the library, often beginning by sitting in the window space with the newspapers, witnessing who came in and left, and then proceeding to go deeper into the building, often ending up sitting at the back of the adult fiction and non-fiction section, where seats were cut into the shelves. Literally sitting among the books, I would try to 'soak up' everything that happened around me, straining to catch snatches of conversation.

Despite my assumption of my legitimacy in the library, this 'covert' start to my research made me uncomfortable. I felt I was benefitting from being able to 'pass' as a member of the public, whilst deliberately, albeit invisibly, occupying a different role. I was also taken aback by how physically exhausting 'just hanging around' and listening could be, a situation intensified by the considerable journey necessary to get there. Simultaneously, I struggled to contain my worry that 'nothing was really happening'. I was uncertain of how to make progress, and not sure if I was even doing research at all. In this initial period, I was looking for clues and inferences even about what I should be looking for, and it left me feeling uncertain about introducing my project to the librarians before I knew more about what I was looking and listening for.

Learning to read the library

The library is punctuated with daily temporal rhythms and flows, determined firstly by its opening hours and by the shift patterns of the staff members, and then by the daily patterns of its users: the morning quiet, the after-school throng, the sudden queue and haste at closing time, and the closing ritual – the librarians walk around, announcing the small increments of time left until they will close, and start to empty the coin machines, turn off the computers and even switch off the lights. These calm routines create a peculiar sense of time in the library, somewhat apart from the hurly burly of life outside.

Henri Lefebvre perceives significance in such daily, routine and regular rhythms. He points out that far from monotony, the everyday rhythm of daily life reveals subtle difference – for no two repetitions are exactly the same (2008).

Observing the small differences created through these rhythmical routines offered me a starting point for organising and reflecting on my experiences of trying to 'read' what was going on in the library. Rather than worrying that 'not much' was happening, I started to appreciate what *was* happening as important, or at least revealing about what the library offered as a space to be. Penetrating into the quieter spaces of the building I became aware how space in the library is highly purposeful and prescriptive; areas are carefully controlled or marked with their associated intentions and implications. However, at the same time, the library space is open to interpretation by users, and is transformed by different layers of daily practices. I started to think about what happened in the library as forms of 'small practices'; accommodations, exchanges, tensions and forms of sharing and participating that were shaped by the daily routines of the institution and the spatial qualities of the building.

> Sitting together around the large shared work table at the back of Thornton Heath library, people are focused - completing job applications, reading from textbooks tapping on laptops, and shuffling through piles of paper. Although they are not speaking with each other, there is a shared sense of purposefulness and a business-like hum around them.

> (Field notes, July 2011)

These embodied, and mostly quiet, or 'small' practices – ways of sitting, moving around the library and working, all convey implicit awareness of appropriate behaviour and also awareness of other people, even if this was not explicitly acknowledged. In the sharing of sound, Schafer perceives a form of social contact: 'hearing is a way of touching at a distance' (1994: 11). I also came to see how the ways in which people were sharing time became a form of shared presence in the library, as they worked within highly established and regulated slots of time in ways that are both of their own making and a response to the presence of others, as well as to the awareness of the almost perceptible presence of cumulative patterns of use and years of daily routine. With

reference to Fabian (2002), I consider the exploration of daily routines to be constitutive of ethnographic practice, the understanding of fieldwork as a praxis where the ethnographer occupies the same time as 'the Other.' I understand the library as a place where this simultaneity – this shared presence and time (what Fabian calls *Gleichzeitigkeit,* a kind of simultaneity) is produced by shared praxis of daily routines and rhythms which emerge as embodied practices by users.

The library's institutional rhythms thus intersperse with a layer of daily practice from users. Although the 'SILENCE' notices have long gone, and the noise levels have increased, the library remains a quiet place, in a sense of a place of small gestures and as a site of routine, or ordinary daily practices. These daily practices of using and being in the library may be seen as analogous with Suzanne Hall's work on 'the art of sitting' in a south London 'caff', which 'is organised by socially acquired measures of space, time and etiquette' (2012: 52). Like the caff, the library can become a local place for rhythmic forms of contact or engagement with others; the library too is a place where 'joining in simply meant sitting down' (Hall 2012: 65).

This very loose sense of participation concurs with James Donald's conception of 'a pragmatic urbanity' (1999: 167), which rests on an understanding of day-to-day spatial civility, and resonates with Martin Albrow's idea that in diverse urban places, social interactions become 'a cavalcade where passing actors find minimal levels of tolerable levels of co-existence' (1997: 52), based on forms of social competency. Participating in the public realm requires the recognition of others, even at a highly implicit level, and is carefully mediated through behaviour, silent and spoken acknowledgements of people, and exchanges of courteous, as well as defensive behaviour (Anderson, 1990). Referring to Goffman's 'civil inattention', Hammersley and Atkinson observe that anonymity demanded of public presence is carefully managed through bodily practices (2007: 43).

In the library, sharing space with people can be seen as more than the accommodation or tolerance of others, perhaps even appreciating the physical presence of others. Pearl, a participant in the knitting group which is the focus of Chapter Five, told me that she would come to the library to be near people:

Pearl:	Just seeing them and looking at them, like today, was very, very nice; it's a big difference for me […]
Katherine:	So, you don't even have to talk to them?
Pearl:	No! I just saw them and that was enough. I know they are friendly, I mean, if they are not friendly it's different, it puts you off, but they're friendly, so…

<div align="right">(Interview with Pearl and Bernice, December 2011)</div>

Pearl's assumption of people's inherent friendliness can be seen as arising out of what Amin calls 'reflexes of studied trust', a capacity to read people's intentions (2008: 8). Pearl's acknowledgement of the sustenance that this tacit form of sociality gives her shows that being with and among others, even silently, can also constitute a vital form of social contact.[4] Pearl's appreciation of the presence of 'friendly strangers' demonstrates that the understated, even silent practices which people use to negotiate, encounter and recognise each other in the public library, can be very powerful.

In coming to the library regularly, I came to recognise people for whom it seemed the library offered an anchoring point for their daily lives. I noticed a small group of men who would spend whole chunks of a day in Thornton Heath library, deliberately occupying the same spots each time. Tucked away in a corner of the library is an octagonal area, pictured in the image below. It is a quiet space, with a pleasing sense of containment, almost privacy, decorated with dark wooden panels and green tiles, and lit by a stained glass domed skylight. With individual armchairs at its edges it does not encourage interaction – it is a place where those who want to remain unnoticed can while away hours, and it was a favourite spot for two of 'the regulars', as I started to call them in my field notes. The men would tacitly pay lip service to the library codes by spreading a newspaper over their knees before falling asleep, or trying to eat a packet of crisps as discretely as possible.

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[4] This is reiterated by Goulding: 'Even when users are not necessarily interacting with one another, the mere fact of being in other people's company is sufficient for some to appreciate the public library as a community space' (2006: 245).

Figure 15. The domed reading space in Thornton Heath Library[5]

I had developed an initial 'feel' for the library and started to understand the importance of its clearly defined arrangements and institutional structures as well as its possibilities as a 'free space'. In recognising these 'regulars' I was starting to see how the daily routines of the library can also reveal signs of vulnerability and forms of exclusion. I felt that in order to go further I needed the librarians' approval and support, as the institutional gatekeepers, in order to establish on what terms I could participate. I wanted to go beyond being a 'regular user', without being a member of staff - to occupy an indeterminate place in the institution for the fieldwork period.

I came back from a holiday in Spain in early August 2011, the day after London and other English cities had been shaken by three nights of violence.[6] I was resolved to start to make my engagement with the library more official, firstly by joining as a member, and then by negotiating different forms of informal joining in. The day of my return to

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[5] Photo: Paul Riddle ©Architects Journal Architects Journal, 16 September 2010: www.architectsjournal.co.uk/buildings/-magazine-building-studies/thornton-heath-library-croydon-by-fat/8605951.article
[6] The context to this is discussed in Chapter One.

the library, I was sitting in the window space, slowly looking through a newspaper at the coverage of the riots, when the man sitting next to me started talking to me.

> This is a first; no-one has approached me before. He speaks quite poor English and I find him hard to understand – I think he must be living up the road in the asylum accommodation and later this turns out to be the case. We talk a little about the riots – I have the paper open at pictures of flames – and he says he hasn't seen what it's like in Croydon yet. He talks about how polite English people are and tells a story of how he was lost in Victoria one night and a drunk man helped him. He seems struck by this – that someone was kind to him, even when they were drunk. He said that things are so different where he's from. He has been living in London for one and a half months and is staying in Brigstock House – I know what this means, but later in the conversation he says specifically that he is an asylum seeker. We introduce ourselves. He says he enjoys coming to the library, he tries to talk to people, to practice his English; he uses the computers. He is booked onto a computer from 5-7pm; it's just now before 3 so he is hanging around until then.

(Field notes, August 2011)

People seeking asylum are accommodated in Brigstock House, a grey concrete building immediately up the road from the library. The library has an arrangement with Brigstock House that residents are welcome to register as library users. The usual rules of having to provide proof of address to join the library are circumscribed by the hostel providing residents who wish to join with a note.[7] The locatory note is exchanged for a library card with full membership and borrowing rights. A progress report completed for the Big Lottery states that, 'between June 2010 and April 2013 a total of 270 asylum seekers joined the library presenting letters issued by Brigstock House' (2013: 15). High uptake of library use is common in asylum seeking populations. A Liverpool librarian, quoted in Goulding's study, observed high ICT use amongst increase asylum seekers in the city's libraries (2006: 182). The library becomes another space to be, and the library computers become resources to keep in touch with friends and family far away. The

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[7] There is no fee to join public libraries in the UK, although certain services incur a charge and fines are levied for late returns.

library becomes a place of routine, a framework around which a day can be built. Most strikingly perhaps, the library becomes a space of waiting.

This man is waiting for a computer, and waiting for the Home Office to make a decision. He has come to the library at least two hours before his booking to use the computers. He has perhaps very little else to do, and nowhere else to go. He's also living in a peculiar state of time, the limbo of waiting put in place by the grindingly slow immigration bureaucracy. In *Live Methods* Les Back describes a man in a similar situation, whose keeping in touch 'with the unfolding lives of friends and loved ones – in real time – exacerbated his own sense of being trapped in the present' (2012: 22). The digitisation of social life, Back observes, enables people to be present and absent in many places simultaneously, thus compounding the sense of being held in the suspended time of the immigration process.

> He is from Kashmir, where, he says, people are stealing land. I find this hard to grasp initially, as he introduces it quite metaphorically, saying: 'I could steal your watch?', then pointing out the other things that could be easily taken from the library: the coffee table in front of us, for instance; then saying that in Kashmir, people steal land cultivated on large boats by tying them together in the night. He pretends that his chair is a boat and my chair is a boat and mimes tying them together. All of this takes quite a bit of time to say, I ask him repeatedly for clarification, or to repeat something. While we are speaking very quietly, almost whispering, another, older man, wearing a smart suit and reading the *Asian Times*, keeps looking over at us, crossly.

> During our conversation, I tell him that I am a student, that I am studying the library and that I am often here. He starts asking about rent prices and I tell him straight forwardly how much my rent is, and yes, that it sounds expensive but it is ok for London. I feel that I want to be direct with him and as clear as possible. I know that he should know how much it costs, but I also don't want to get too personal. He asks technical questions, how many rooms, etc, etc. Of course, he asks me whether I have a boyfriend, and I say no. After saying 'But why *not*?' and acting surprised, he smiles and says, 'I am looking for my life partner.' I say I can keep my eyes out for him if he would like! I want him to get the message that I am in no way a potential candidate. He asks for my phone number- I say no and that I will see him in the library. This sounds like it was a bit more pressured than it actually was. I just wanted to be super clear and direct with him.

He says that he studied law but is now a healer, Sandar, I think he says. [I try to look this up later but can't find anything]. He says it's stronger than Reiki; it's a unique kind of healing. He says this is what he wants to do if he stays in the UK. He is an asylum seeker and is waiting for the Home Office's decision. He has bad breath and smells a bit musty, but I wonder if this is because he is fasting [it is Ramadan]. He says he was involved in the Kashmir independence movement and that's why he 'had trouble' [these were his words] and had to leave. He doesn't have family or relatives in the UK. He has two brothers and four sisters. There is a different system of family there, he says, after I say: 'a big family!' He sees my ring and asks: 'do you believe in stones?' I say I just wear it because I like the way it looks. I start to make moves to go. He asks, 'Am I boring?' I say no, it was nice and interesting to meet him and talk with him and maybe I will see him in the library again. 'When?' he asks. I say I'll be in again on Friday morning. 'When?' he asks again. '10 o'clock?' I say, uncertainly.

(Field notes, August 2011)

In these notes, the idea of the library as a place where legitimacy and uncertainty, even vulnerability, are bound up with each other, re-emerges. It came at a local moment of crisis, and at a time I was shifting my approach to fieldwork. In our conversation, I try to negotiate between being clear and honest; wanting to respect his vulnerable situation, but also not wanting to offer too much or cross a boundary (by providing my phone number). Even while we sit in the most 'social' of the library areas, I am conscious that our conversation is experienced by others as disruptive. I am struck by the revealing precarity of this snatched conversation, and see this fleeting encounter – I did see him again in the library, but only once – as a highly resonant moment in the early stages of my fieldwork, a moment which revealed the vulnerability of this man and perhaps also of myself, a moment where I realised I was on the limits of what I could do without being officially recognised by the library. This conversation added to my feeling that it was time to receive the acknowledgement of the librarians, feeling it important that they needed to be aware of what I was doing.

What are the methodological implications of 'observation' as opposed to 'participation?' These experiences of watching, listening and becoming attuned were highly important for my starting fieldwork. Learning to develop an acute awareness of the library and its

users may be seen as a form of 'deep listening' (Bull and Back 2003: 3). Locating myself and others within the spatial and temporal situation of the library helped me learn to 'read' the subtle forms of engagement and participation it allows, and prompted me to consider how librarians do this as reading as a form of daily practice, which I discuss later in this chapter.

After I had introduced myself to key members of staff, I started to look for more participatory ways of being involved in the library, and gradually joined in with various groups and activities, as well starting to schedule interviews with people working at the library. I attended the fortnightly older people's group, the fortnightly knitting group, the weekly Rhyme Time with pre-school children, the homework help sessions, and the monthly crime reading group. Joining the groups required different forms of negotiating access and brokering, which were revealing of ways of working in the semi-public, institutional context. Shifts in my role or the development of the terms of my engagement were sometimes negotiated in quite direct ways and I followed up on suggestions or vague invitations quite persistently. Participating in groups became my way of becoming established as a face around the library and consolidated and validated my role. I would arrive early for each activity and hang around after, using the legitimacy gained through my participation on which to hook further conversations, and in some cases, having become familiar to several people, to carry out interviews. As my familiarity with and participation within the library increased through becoming a participant in the groups, there developed shared frames of reference (Aull Davies 2008: 105). My involvement in these groups generated huge amounts of material and had an important influence on the way the substantive chapters of the thesis developed, each of which has a focus on one of the library's activities at its core.

'Getting official' – finding my place as a library researcher

The start of the fieldwork in Berlin took place in a slightly different, more direct register. After my experience of the long commute in London, and the slow warm up to my participation in the daily life of the library, I decided to move quickly to introducing

myself. In Wedding, after a short period of visits, I joined the Schiller Bibliothek. I made this encounter with the librarians my entry to the field by introducing myself, outlining in broad terms what I was planning to do, and gently probing whether this might be possible. Schwartzman describes the first encounter as 'a rich source of data', with the ways in which informants make sense of the encounter having an impact on subsequent relationships and roles (1993: 48-9). Below I include an extract from my field notes, then reflect on the impact this first meeting had for my work.

> I go up the stairs. It's quiet - this evening they are closing at 6pm. I speak to one of the two women behind the issue desk, saying that I would like to register, and that I would also like to introduce myself - that I am a urban sociology student from London, that I am doing a project about public libraries, and that I thought, as I live here, that I could start here.

> | Frau Lange: | You know, we are quite a small library here [gesturing around her] |
> |---|---|
> | Katherine: | I know, I'm interested in neighbourhood libraries, not the big ones. The one I looked at in London was also a small one. |
> | Frau Lange: | Where were you in London? |
> | Katherine: | In Croydon - |
> | Frau Lange: | *Ach, Croydon!* [she laughs] – *das ist auch kein schicke Gegend!* ('Oh, Croydon! - not very chic there, either!') |
> | Katherine: | Do you know London? |
> | Frau Lange: | I used to live in Southgate, you know, Cockfosters, *was ein bisschen schicker als Croydon war…* ('which was a bit more chic than Croydon…') |

> I talk more about why I am in the area, saying that I am interested in the edges of cities, but that the edge of Berlin works differently to the edge of London, and so here might be a good place for me to work, as it has a similar atmosphere, a similar mix. Frau Lange reaches over for a business card: 'that's our manager – you can ask her things too, as and when…' We go through the registration process and she hands me a bunch of leaflets, pointing to the one about the introduction of the self-service machines.

Frau Lange:	That's coming in June and it's a big theme at the moment, because if people are issuing the books themselves, then they lose something of the social contact they want in a library. A lot of people come to the library and enjoy speaking to us – we're worried about the effects of this. Are you just here for a year? Because we're moving to a new building next year which will be built just over there.
Katherine:	I'm just here for the summer, really, but I heard about the building, and that's also why I'm interested in the library here – the library I looked at in London had just had some work done.
Frau Lange:	Ah, so you know a lot! [*laughing*]
Katherine:	Not really, I don't know anything! [*laughing*]
Frau Lange:	[*Giving me a second business card*] - she's not just responsible for building things – [*to her colleague*] what's the *schicke Name*?
Colleague:	*Ach, oh, so multikulturelle Sachen, ne*?
Frau Lange:	Yes, projects and things like that, she will be able to tell you about that – she doesn't work here – she's in Tiergarten, but she's responsible across all of Mitte.
Katherine:	Oh great, I'll write *interkulturelle* on here [*reaching for my pen*]
Frau Lange:	Yes, *that's* what it is, that's the thing.

(Fieldnotes, March 2012)

Literally becoming a library member strengthened my rights and presence as a user, thus marking a further layer of my authorisation, but in using it as an opportunity to start to go deeper into the library, it was also a moment of exposure, where I was vulnerable to refusal. Laughter punctuates this exchange – especially at points where I deliberately underplay my knowledge. In my field notes I called this process the 'reveal', which sums up well these feelings of trepidation. However, very similarly to when I introduced myself at Thornton Heath Library, the librarians are helpful and encouraging, and references to my experience acquired in London appeared to give me credibility.

This initial exchange provokes instant connections to the librarian's own knowledge of London and goes on to reveal themes that were to become significant during the fieldwork; the implicit connections between the poor public profile of Wedding library and the poor image of Croydon, the slightly self-conscious uncertainty over questions of 'interculturality', and the changes planned for the library- the new building and the imminent introduction of the self-service issue machines.

While the initial reference to contacting the library manager was framed in an off-hand way rather than a direct approach for permission, I was undoubtedly being referred up to higher in the library bureaucracy. I was aware of a greater level of institutional formality in Germany, so as a cultural and linguistic outsider, I took this cue seriously. I took the proffered contact details and laboured over a careful and formal introductory e-mail which, after a slightly nerve-wracking wait for '*grünes Licht*' ('green light') resulted in institutional approval and meetings with senior members of staff.

If in London I was a 'participant', in Berlin my role was defined more overtly as that of 'visiting learner'. This learner role also emerged in our first meeting when Frau Hoffmann mentioned a meeting she was attending the following week:

> I'm very happy to just take you with me. I mean - you, I won't - to all intents and purposes you're a *Praktikantin* [intern] - everyone takes their *Praktikanten* with them![iii]

> (Interview with Frau Hoffmann, Schiller Bibliothek, April 2012)

In this statement there is the definition of a role for me with which we could both identify and a kind of sponsorship (Hall 2012: 22-3), where the librarian acted to legitimise my presence at the meeting. This was one of several instances where librarians acted as an intermediary between me and the institution, making me aware of events and activities that were not widely publicised. I also completed and signed Mitte's Cultural Department's agreement form for volunteers (Appendix 4). The institutional emphasis was increased by the lack of regular activities in which I could participate as I had done in London, and which resulted in me attending more internal meetings.

In this first meeting with Frau Hoffmann, the warmth of the initial exchange at the issue desk is reiterated in how she related it was reported to her. Frau Lange, she said, 'had spoken for me so warmly;' (in German this is literally said as, 'she laid you on my heart') 'she was very taken with your project that you're doing here.'[iv] Frau Hoffmann offered to share contact details of key members of staff and said she would contact them first, 'as advance warning, as it were!' She recommended I e-mail people, rather than calling, and cheerfully told me to be persistent: '*Und lassen Sie sich nicht abwimmeln*!' (Don't be put off!) as people were often away, or off sick. This introductory process seemed overwhelmingly positive; I was received with warmth and even pleasure. At the conclusion of our first meeting, Frau Hoffmann said: 'Good! Great! Thank you for your interest in our little library! It makes us feel highly valued!'[v]

While these first encounters with the librarians were crucial, and set the tone for the start of my engagement with the libraries, access was not something that just happened in that first encounter at the issue desk, nor in the initial meetings, but was on-going throughout the fieldwork period (Hammersley and Atkinson 2007: 41). The constant management of access required a pro-active approach and a formal and informal range of tactics - following up on invitations, composing e-mails to make arrangements and carefully observing the timing of the cycle of meetings and events, as well as always being attentive to the possibility for ad hoc contact and conversation, chance moments and encounters.

In each library I interviewed members of library staff and I carried out interviews with other professionals for contextual understanding, including the architects involved in the re-design of Thornton Heath library and Bibliothek am Luisenbad. Interviews were in addition to many informal conversations I had with people, both users and staff, while I was involved in groups and meetings. Interviews would generally last at least an hour, and would sometimes stretch over two hours. In some cases I sat beside librarians at the counter and we talked between queries and phone calls, or we sat together in a corner in the library; occasionally we met in their offices. Regardless of the set-up, every interview with librarians was interrupted by phone calls, enquiries from

colleagues or moments when they were called away to sort something out. There was often considerable background sound, which sometimes verged on the disruptive. Thus the institutional setting is both revealed through the interviews and impacts on them.

Interviews were almost always pre-arranged, sometimes weeks in advance, as I did not want to interrupt the librarians while they had to be visibly available. Prior to interviews I would prepare a list of questions or topics that I wanted to cover in the discussion, and I made brief lists of key words to prompt me if necessary. In this sense, they were very loosely structured and could even be considered unstructured. However, even unstructured interviews involve the curation of a very specific and unusual situation. Moreover, like any kind of social interaction, they are structured by their participants - I would record the discussions while taking some notes as I went along, leaving me freer to absorb what was being said, and to concentrate on shaping the direction of the conversation through processes of 'active listening' and 'non-directive steering' (Hammersley and Atkinson 2007: 117-8).

My own speech made my outsider status very obvious in Berlin: I am not a native German speaker - I have a clearly discernible English accent, a much more limited range of expression, and I make grammatical errors. Furthermore, I experienced slight disquiet that librarians were absolutely unwavering in their use of the formal address (*Sie*) when talking with me, and addressing me unfailingly as 'Frau Robinson'. Coming from Thornton Heath library, where librarians very deliberately used only their first names, and had much more informal speech mannerisms, I found the form of address somewhat distancing.[8] I had anticipated that over the course of months of fieldwork, making the shift to the informal *Du* might indicate growing trust. However, my status as a temporary outsider, and role as respected guest, meant that I came to see that this

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[8] In Berlin, talk is generally more colloquial than in other parts of Germany; as well as using the familiar *Du* in social settings with my contemporaries, it would also be routine in bars and some shops. Moving from *Sie* to *Du* is a slightly delicate social ritual; it is conventionally the more 'senior' person who offers to change the form to the more familial, and this marks a significant shift in the relationship. However, using *Sie* in institutional settings is fundamentally a demonstration of mutual respect and courtesy – and it is absolutely, utterly conventional, in Berlin and throughout Germany. It is common for colleagues who have worked together for years to still use *Sie* (although colleagues in the Berlin libraries tended to use the familiar form and their first names, with each other).

expectation was the wrong place to look for growing rapport, which was demonstrated in other ways, for instance, by sharing more personal exchanges, and a warm tone.[9]

My position as linguistic outsider in the Berlin fieldwork libraries had a bearing on my interview style - because my capacity to kind of speak was more limited, I tended to intervene and prompt less in interviews than I would in London. I would summarise what people said in short statements or I might start to ask a question, and sometimes I just make an exclamation, laugh or pause, and these interventions would either prompt more elucidation, or would be a bridge to a new topic. This style was a consequence of my more limited language ability which I felt placed me in a position of trying to 'read' what was happening through more implicit cues, but it also tended to work with those at a senior level, who were used to their opinion being solicited, and were comfortable talking at length.

However, it also had certain implications, at least at the start of fieldwork, on what I was being told. In working with professionals who are skilled at presenting a certain public image of the library through positive sound bites such as: 'we've been a success from the moment we've opened our doors', I was aware that information was provided with at least a certain amount of circumspection, a careful tone and use of qualifiers. Where I felt it was appropriate, I made personal contributions and reflections during discussions and interviews. This was both a consequence of having become known, and understood as a trusted, or at least sympathetic person, but I also saw this as acknowledging an important political stance on interviews (Oakley, 1981). Where rapport was developed, it meant that the interview could in some instances become an act of co-production (Aull Davies 2008: 109). I recorded two interviews with each of the senior librarians in all libraries, and the material that emerges in the second interview is more reflexive, and has greater use of complex anecdote and storytelling, because of the development of a shared frame of experience.

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[9] Seeking clarification, I described the situation to a German colleague my own age – her interpretation was that I was being 'warmly', or 'heartily' *gesiezt*.

I transcribed the interview recordings myself, a highly laborious process, but one which brought increased familiarity with the material and provided space to review and make connections while listening. Listening to the recordings again, the sounds of the voices and the background noises keenly re-evoked the situation on that day, and often prompted further recollection. However, the detail of the recordings and the transcripts produced can be considered to provide 'an embarrassment of riches' (Aull Davies 2008: 126) from the potential abundance of material in even one interview. The various traces and nuances revealed on the tape contained the capacity for endless review.

I moved in and out of library time, observing its institutional patterns, and shifted between periods of active fieldwork and consolidation of my research material. I found that switching between sites became a sign of my own marginality in the field work. Although I was regularly in all of the fieldwork libraries, my presence did not become so regular that it passed without comment. I often had to explain what I had been doing, whether I had been away, or doing some work in another library, or writing at home, and reiterate how long I intended to be there for. These comments showed that my comings and goings and my absences had been noted, and that my presence was marked as both temporary, and out of the ordinary.

Making value visible in the public library

Browsing the shelves on my first day of fieldwork in Thornton Heath library, I found a copy of *The Spirit Level*, by Richard Wilkinson and Kate Pickett (2009). Looking up 'public goods' in the index, I found the following analysis of the economic logic of municipally funded services:

> Once the capital cost has been incurred, the more people sharing the benefits the better. Where municipal investment provides local internet access, there is no need to restrict access to it. When the Victorians established free public libraries, they recognised the same logic: a book can be read repeatedly at no extra cost.

> (2009: 266)

In Wilkinson and Pickett's text, libraries are held up as exemplars of efficient public investment through the effective circulation of material. This circulation is seen as *inherently* efficient; a system based on the indubitable logic of sharing. In the climate of austerity measures and threats to all council run services, this foundational logic of circulation and sharing is no longer a sufficient demonstration of the value of public libraries. They are placed under particular pressure to demonstrate that they are worth their local government funding. And while the library is not founded on a profit making model, it is increasingly assessed *as if it were*. However, their circulatory and non-profit structure means that it is difficult to demonstrate the public library's 'value' along purely economic models. This means that the value of the library has to be made visible through particular moves of measurement and evaluation. Libraries must demonstrate that they are fulfilling their strategic aims, meeting targets, and can successfully count and account for themselves.

In the Schiller Bibliothek, Frau Hoffmann described how library activities had to be packaged up as 'products' in order to be presented to the *Bezirk* in quantifiable terms:

> and then they're compared with each other and the prices – so, here in Mitte a loan costs so much, and in Steglitz-Zehlendorf [a district in the south west of Berlin] so much, and then it means the more libraries, and the more staff we have, the more expensive this product gets. And then we're not allowed to dip beneath this average, or we get less funding, and so, it's highly complicated, and of course, it's an attempt to get this management perspective, and completely justifiably, but in Berlin it's really a savings model – it's done in order to save [money] - and for us it's sometimes very, very hard to be able to still find a way to work well and to offer work of a good quality, and not just to look at the price.[vi]

> (Interview with Frau Hoffmann, Schiller Bibliothek, April 2012)

The daily activities of the library are isolated and packaged into measurable units, which enables them to be transformed into quantifiable objects and figures, and while Frau Hoffmann can appreciate the rationale for this form of measurement, she also sees its intention as a means of saving money, and experiences it as causing her and her staff to make difficult decisions about the value of their work.

Attempts to measure and reveal what is of value, what is at stake in the public library have clear parallels with my methodological approach as an ethnographer. In the discussion that follows I look at the different approaches of trying to understand or recognise what is happening in the library. I reflect on what I am told; what I am able to find out, and what I see in my daily experiences in the library. I argue that there are different registers of 'telling' and 'showing' about the library, and that while the formal measurements of products and outputs introduced above are (justifiably) given significant amounts of credence and authority, they are just one of the ways in which to make sense of the library, and moreover, as I have started to consider, have limitations and blind spots. I discuss ways in which value is made visible through more implicit or affective practices of recognition, arguing that affective registers which consider the emotional, practised and 'felt' experience of the public library are also significant. Furthermore, these different ways of recognising value, both those which might be considered more 'instrumental' and those which might be more affective, are closely bound up with each other.

'It's always, higher, better, faster'

This comment was made by Frau Körner as she spoke of the pervasive monitoring of libraries and reflected on in whose interest the collection of numbers was made (April 2012). During my first conversation with her in her office at the Bibliothek am Luisenbad we were interrupted by a colleague who put her head around the door, reporting that there was a French student downstairs, asking for statistics about the library. 'But they don't have an appointment, do they? And I'm with an *English* student right now, anyway!' replied Frau Körner, laconically.

This was reflected by an early conversation with Sarah, a librarian at Thornton Heath library, who when I introduced my project to her, immediately said: 'You'll be wanting to have some statistics, then?' Statistics, it seems are the starting point for any serious researcher. However, quantitative measures are simultaneously an uncertain field for the library. Back in the Bibliothek am Luisenbad, and the hasty enquiry from the issue

desk, there was reluctance to make the numbers available. As her colleague started to rush back downstairs, Frau Körner went on to say, 'But - ok, I don't know, could we - I don't even know whether we can just give that sort of thing out! Erm, could we maybe - ?' she started to say. 'Sabine!' she called out, but the door had already banged shut, her colleague was gone. In this exchange, something of the importance of statistics as an acknowledged starting point *and* as a point of uncertainty and even vulnerability – they cannot be simply 'given out' to whoever asks for them.

Officially, statistics matter a great deal and are the benchmark for assessing the impact of an intervention or for monitoring improvement. In October 2007, Thornton Heath library received Big Lottery funding for an extensive refurbishment. The successful bid for money was closely linked to widening and overhauling the library's 'offer': to develop 'events-led' activities that would attract more people in to the library. The relative success of these was to be monitored through recording levels of attendance and the satisfaction of participants, and measuring these against targets.

> We do have evaluation forms for the one-off events, and then for our regular things, like Rhyme Times and more regular reading groups we maybe do it once, twice a year to get some feedback on there. Because, again, you know, we were talking about statistics - we've now got targets for 80% of participants give an excellent or good rating for everything we do [laughs] - the bench mark is high!

> (Interview with Kay, Thornton Heath Library, October 2011)

The target culture has become embedded into the new-look library, with the library's targets fitting the strategic goals of the local authority, and grouped under particular emphases, for instance: 'A learning city – engage young people in decisions that affect them' (Library Service Action Plan, 2011- 13, pp.3-4). These targets are formulated on SMART principles (Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Realistic, Timely), and are recorded onto documents which have the appearance of log frames, a planning tool 'that aims to make interventions coherent and rational' (Krause 2014: 75). The log frame specifies time frames, lead members of staff and any target groups, and measures achievements as quantitative outputs.

Close attention is paid to the daily monitoring of what is relatively straightforward to count: people and books through the door. The generation of numbers is used to form a baseline from which improvement can always be made. All three of the fieldwork libraries had a 'leg counter', and the books are monitored by the computer checking in and checking out system. These systems of counting are fallible – Frau Hoffmann commented that the 'disordered' arrival of school children would throw the counter into confusion, and in Thornton Heath library, Sarah admitted that the counter had not worked for some time. The introduction of the self-issue machines throughout the Mitte libraries during the fieldwork period created myriad confusion as library users muddled the procedures for 'issues' and 'returns'.

However, the collection of data on the 'tangibles' of daily library usage enables library staff to powerfully describe the relative importance and success of the library; in Thornton Heath, senior librarians reported proudly that the library has the highest joining rate in Croydon after the Central library, and that post-refurbishment, user numbers increased by a third (interview with Stephen, October 2011). The utility of statistics was echoed by Frau Körner in the Bibliothek am Luisenbad, who, after expressing caution about the extent to which the statistics are gathered consistently across libraries, commented that it is important to be able to demonstrate to funders, politicians and publishing houses through statistics that collaborations are worthwhile, and that numbers have their own undeniable, inescapable quality – '*da kommt auch keine schnell vorbei*' (Interview, July 2012). The German library infrastructure expert, Olaf Eigenbrodt writes that one of the ways in which to give a clearer and more acute picture of what the public library provides is to make visible the other forms of library infrastructure and knowledge which would be lost if it were to disappear – a reverse form of accounting: 'how many free connections to broadband would be switched off, how much training would not take place, and what kind of information- and social competence would be lost […] (2007: 10).

Acknowledging the wider trend of managerialism and economisation in other spheres of work, there were instances where librarians seemed to have almost internalised the

importance of targets in their work. At Thornton Heath library, Gemma talked enthusiastically about the black interest reading group she had initiated and is responsible for, commenting:

> …it's like an enjoyment - even if I don't reach my target and there's only one person, I still, I just love it so much. Even if my numbers aren't very good, I still enjoy it.

> (Interview with Gemma, Thornton Heath library, December 2011)

Gemma implies that gaining satisfaction from her work *despite* not fulfilling her targets becomes something of a contradiction in the target-focused environment.

An episode in Berlin seemed to epitomise some of the fundamental issues with the way in which libraries were able to gather and use data. In July 2012 I was at a meeting of the sub-committee for *Interkulturelle Bibliotheksarbeit* in Mitte's town hall – a short *U-Bahn* journey from both the Schiller Bibliothek and the Bibliothek am Luisenbad. As part of a project for his library qualification, a trainee librarian had gone through the available data on users in the Mitte library system and for the first time, had tracked the number of 'active users' in each library, and where in the city they were living. Frau Birke passed a stack of beautifully presented documents around the table of librarians; grids of numbers and colourful maps which aimed to show the correlation between the libraries and their 'reach' into a local area.

However, soon into the discussion of the data, significant problems were uncovered; an 'active user' was defined as someone who had a valid library card and had borrowed material, thus not capturing the library users currently without cards.[10] The low overall numbers in the data set meant that the numbers were not finely differentiated on the maps, thus giving more of an impression of the connection between library and place rather than a clear demonstration of correlation. The inclusion of statistics on inter-library loans was felt to be unsatisfactory as it included figures generated by users from other Berlin districts ordering books from Mitte's libraries. Frustratingly, the largest group of users in all of the libraries were consistently those who could not actually be

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[10] In the Berlin library system, a library membership is valid for one year.

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mapped, owing to a lack of information, or inconsistent information gathered from them when they joined.

In some ways it was a powerful data tool, for the first time, providing librarians with some numbers that they had not previously managed to gather, and overall, the numbers were relatively encouraging. However, this episode seems to demonstrate a key difficulty in measuring the impact of the library. It is accessed in different ways, not only by those who are classified as 'active', and it works with the complex circulation of material. Moreover, I felt awkward at this meeting, as if I wasn't meant to be writing down the numbers that were bandied about the room, and I have not included them here. We were told that the material we had seen was not for further circulation, and after the discussion, the documents were gathered back in.

While much reference was made to statistics in terms of impressions, examples or generalisations, I often experienced a slight sensitivity or evasiveness around discussing concrete numbers. In an exchange about the figures for the usage of the computers in the computer room at Thornton Heath library, I was told, only half-jokingly: 'You do the math!' Moreover, I found it difficult to access sources of statistical information. After pursuing the matter over a chain of e-mails over several months with one of the area managers in Croydon, I resorted to making a Freedom of Information request to see the funding reports from the Big Lottery funding.

This experience made me reflect on that which escapes statistical capture and at the same time, how, in Beverley Skeggs' words, 'values will always haunt value' (2014). The disquiet and anxiety around numbers seemed to stem both from dissatisfaction with what statistics can actually say, and to reflect the absolute necessity of such statistical performances in order to demonstrate the library's value. However comprehensive the statistics are, they can never satisfactorily reflect the entirety of what happens in the library. This reliance on a tool that provides an incomplete picture of the work of the library make quantitative accounts a space of acute institutional vulnerability. The anxiety attached to these processes of making value visible in particular ways is closely linked to funding, and ultimately the survival of the library as a municipal service.

"There's an art to looking what's going on"

> Erm, so there's a lot of social worth in a library that can't be explained through figures, it really is a qualitative experience. You can't just look at hard stats, and say, well, that library had fewer visitors than that one, because it's a different community.

> (Interview with Kay, Thornton Heath Library, October 2011)

Kay gets to the heart of the issue – the social value at work in the library cannot be adequately conveyed in figures because it is in itself, qualitative, experiential and finely differentiated between libraries. Her point is echoed by the authors of a Comedia report on the UK library service:

> Statistics only make sense when measured against the objectives of an organisation. When dealing with social provision in a community hard-pressed by economic and social disadvantage, […] high levels of membership might be much less importance than the existence of a valuable support service for significant, though numerically small, sections of the community (1993: 35).

How can the qualitative social value of the library be thus made visible? I close this chapter on 'listening' to the public library with a discussion of the powerful mode of the everyday, in which small practices, concessions and negotiations become signs of larger structures and tensions and point to another way of conceptualising value in the library.

The librarians' daily working knowledge allows them to read the layers of the space, observing people's needs and behaviour and trying to make sure that no-one is compromised by the behaviour of others. In this sense, they are curating the library space. Commenting that staff have to keep a close eye on young people in the library, as they can be perceived as more combative or territorial in their use of the library space, in order to prevent that that older users feel intimidated or squeezed out, the library manager revealed how an awareness of targets and numbers influences the way people are treated:

> You've been downstairs, yes, in the library, and down there, in the space at the bottom, that's the area for children, but when the exams are happening, then school pupils are sitting there too, even the older ones, and they tend to spread

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themselves out the most – and then it's a bit of an art to look, that people aren't being squeezed out, because also the older people are important to us as a library, the adults, because they are the ones who bring in the borrowing numbers and that's important for the budget, and not just the visitor numbers - they're also important for the budget – they're both important for us…[vii]

<div align="center">(Interview with Frau Körner, Bibliothek am Luisenbad, April 2012)</div>

Her comments reveal how targets feed into the daily practice in the library, and the need to accommodate or to take into account the needs and expectations of different users. Frau Hoffmann told me '*da prallen so viele Interessen in diesem Raum'* ('So many interests collide in this space'), continuing:

> I can't accept it when we complain about teenagers who sit in our library, they just need a space, it's not their fault- they sit there, and they're loud, yes, and they're chatting, but they're also working together, and of course they're louder, than, I don't know, the elderly man who reads his newspaper in the other corner. And I'm sometimes not prepared to just immediately go and tell them off; I expect a certain level of tolerance [from other library users] […] That has something to do with democracy, and with tolerance, and with all that that we're always trying to promote, and it's happening here, in a small way, all the time. And I have to be able to represent this position.[viii]

<div align="center">(Interview with Frau Hoffmann, Schiller Bibliothek, July 2012)</div>

The conflicts and compromises around sound in the library work as a signifier of the openness or the democratic vitality of the library as a social space. While some of the work of maintaining the balance of the space might appear petty or trivial, as she concludes, the gestures of offering respect and understanding to users, and asking that they extend these amongst each other, is a daily demonstration of the fundamental values represented by the library.

With statistics unable to satisfactorily or convincingly capture the worth of the library, through their daily practise and cumulative experience, librarians develop other ways of establishing patterns of value and measurement, generating inferences and 'rules of thumb measurements' (Savage and Burrows 2007: 887). Knowledge about people's needs is accrued through the practise of observation, the daily scanning of the library,

and the 'reading' of users' needs and behaviour. Through this 'art' of looking, this daily

practice of observing, librarians become skilled curators of the public space, making

quick decisions on what is appropriate or inappropriate in given contexts, and to

generate their own inferences. One example of this is making extrapolations from what

people are using the library for:

> And they use the internet – it's not at all the case that everyone has internet at
> home – you can scarcely believe it, yes, but the computers are always in use, and
> they come with their laptops and they use our wireless and so on... [...] You think
> everyone's got all this equipment but it's not the case in these '*sozialen*
> *Brennpunkten*' in Berlin.[ix]

<div align="right">(Interview with Frau Hoffmann, Schiller Bibliothek, April 2012)</div>

Frau Hoffmann alludes to a form of tacit or quiet knowledge, a skill of gathering

knowledge through experience. This is not expressed as a formal practice, something

that librarians had to obviously learn or be trained to do, instead it is garnered by

sharing anecdotes and experiences with colleagues and developing and maintaining

relationships with readers, along with accumulating years of experience of working with

the unknown quantity of 'the public', on a day-to-day basis. In Berlin, one such

inference was made through whether or not people pay a membership fee to join the

library:

> I would say that almost two thirds of our users don't pay joining fees, which
> means they're concessions in some way.[11] Or they don't pay the full amount -
> students, they pay half, for instance, so they pay 5 euros rather than 10 euros for
> the year, or people on *Hartz IV* - the unemployed; school pupils and children, they
> don't pay anything, and this is simply the largest group.[x]

<div align="right">(Interview with Frau Hoffmann, Schiller Bibliothek, April 2012)</div>

The joining fee becomes an identifying marker of acute financial need of people in the

area, as well as the youth of the users. Inferring people's needs can thus be understood

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[11] In Germany, *Hartz IV* is commonly used as an umbrella term to refer to various forms of unemployment
or income –supplementing benefits.   The name comes from the politician who introduced the measures
in 2005. A scale of library registration fees is available at:
 http://www.berlin.de/stadtbibliothek-mitte/katalog-service/benutzungsinformationen/#anmeldung
Accessed 5 July 2014

as a tactful practice, requiring sensitivity, and developed through relationships. Speaking about Kulturloge, an initiative in Berlin that gives away free theatre and concert tickets to people on low incomes, and which sends volunteers to the Schiller Bibliothek to promote the campaign, Frau Hoffmann commented how she tends to act as an intermediary in this potentially delicate situation.[12]

Frau Hoffmann: They should really be more pro-active in approaching people, [...] but of course, it's a bit delicate, you know, to go up to a person and ask: [*she mimes an awkward encounter, speaking out the corner of her mouth*] 'so, er, do you earn less than 900 euros?' You know?

Katherine: It's a bit sensitive –

Frau Hoffmann: Exactly! And so sometimes, we send people over, 'ah, I know her, and she earns very little, and it could interest her…' I send them over when I think it could be something for them.

Katherine: But that's also, like you've just said, because you know them personally -

Frau Hoffmann: Yes, and I know that they receive *Hartz IV*, because they've shown us their documents. I don't have to ask, I know that. And I know when they could be people who might enjoy going to the opera or something like that, every so often.[xi]

(Interview with Frau Hoffmann, Schiller Bibliothek, July 2012)

Frau Hoffmann demonstrates how her knowledge of library users' personal situations, gathered initially through the bureaucratic mechanisms required for them to join the library, can help her interpretation of what else might be appropriate for or appreciated by them. She is able to tactfully direct the volunteers who are supposed to make the library users aware of the free concert tickets, and who, as she observes, are occasionally reluctant to approach people directly, to those library users for whom this opportunity might be welcome. Her accumulated knowledge, built up through regular contact with users, means that she is able to produce small but powerful interventions

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[12] Kulturloge Berlin website: http://www.kulturloge-berlin.de/die-kulturloge.phtml Last accessed 14 September 2014.

which are suited to people's situations and interests. At the same time, this attentiveness to who is in the library and what their needs is an additional and unacknowledged element of her role, a sign of her personal commitment to her work. In the interview Frau Hoffmann went on to express surprise that she had not mentioned this initiative previously, and that it was sometimes difficult to keep on top of everything.

Librarians' personal commitment to their work is expressed by their providing examples of where they had gone beyond the letter of their role in ways that cannot be recognised, or which go unrecognised. In Thornton Heath library, Asha related how staff would fill gaps in other overstretched services, on one occasion, for instance, helping a woman to write a letter about her income support. Rosie, a former librarian on Croydon's - now disbanded - mobile library service, spoke passionately about the invisible and unaccountable social support service provided by the library to people in difficult situations:

Rosie:	There was one day when we saw one old lady, all morning, but she'd recently lost her husband, and when she came in, she was in tears, she was suicidal, and she just didn't want to live anymore, bless her. And we just spent the whole morning we were there talking with her. Now, she didn't even borrow a book, and you see, my driver and I, we felt we'd done a good morning's work, but because we hadn't issued any books…
Katherine:	You can't show that in numbers, can you?
Rosie:	No! You're a waste of space, sort of thing, and we could never get over the fact that a mobile library is so much more than just a book lending service.
Katherine:	That social aspect of it…
Rosie:	It's the social aspect of it, absolutely, and unfortunately, in this economic climate, the social aspect of it just isn't allowed anymore! It's sad! [*Pause*] It's very sad – they make all this fuss about accessibility, and being there for the community, sort of thing, but when you try to do it, you know, you gotta, you know, it's all about numbers these days and ticking boxes, and you've got to tick the boxes that they say you got to tick. But there are

In this poignant anecdote from her days working as a mobile librarian, Rosie highlights the core issue at stake in this discussion – how to 'get over', how to convey or show, that the library 'is so much more than a book lending service'. Her and her colleague's successful support of a library user, which they considered a 'good day's work' cannot be counted; it does not become an outcome. Even more, the perceived success of that day in terms of its social impact is actually inverted according to the official outcome indices, because nothing measurable was achieved – no book was borrowed. Rosie works with the idea of the 'box ticking' approach of quantitative analyses of the library, and in her account envisages how 'getting over' the social side of the library in a credible way might mean creating some more boxes for aspects of the library's work which cannot be so easily 'boxed up'.

In going beyond the letter of what they are supposed to do, these librarians demonstrate values which are not linked to targets or monitoring and which are not accounted for. Providing elements of care and social support is not part of the library's remit; however these are generated as a side product of the daily relationships developed and maintained through the library. Librarians used their experience in judging what was appropriate. Occasionally, rule breaking was overlooked, or special allowances were made to accommodate users in difficult situations. Sometimes people were 'let off' large fines that had built up or were allowed to pay in instalments. At Thornton Heath library, Marja said that she felt it was better to encourage people to continue to have a relationship with the library, rather than carry out the letter of the law and pursue fines:

With some families you see the fines stacking up and they haven't returned the books, and we say: 'Ok, let's start again. Bring back everything that you can find at home, and let's wipe the slate clean. Let's start again.' And so you try to remind them and encourage them, rather than scaring them off.

Commenting on the arrangement with Brigstock House, discussed above, Marja saw it as an important commitment to a vulnerable group of users:

> We surely lose a lot of books that way because the population is very transient, but sometimes you have to make the decision that it's more important to have them in the library, than to lose a few books.

> (Discussion with Marja, Thornton Heath Library, December 2011)

In making a firm commitment to people who might actually prove unwittingly detrimental to the library numbers, specifically through the loss of stock, librarians demonstrate that they are prepared to make pragmatic compromises on certain library principles (the timely return of books and other material) in order to reinforce others (openness, outreach and engagement with vulnerable groups) that they feel are contextually more important.

However, making decisions about who to accommodate and how requires emotional labour, personal investment and can become a daily stress point. One day I overheard Kay, sitting on the front desk, on the phone to a reader. She was in the middle of a highly public and somewhat embarrassing negotiation around fines.

> Eventually she says, 'I've got rid of £17 worth of fines for you, which is a lot. You have £6 left to pay.' It feels like an awkward conversation.

> (Field notes, October 2011)

In these brief instances of the personal investment, effort and embarrassment that these librarians' (all of them female) personal interventions make into generating connections with and responding to the social and emotional needs of their users, something of the gendered complexities of providing care can be appreciated. Aspects of care and caring can be seen as present in much of their daily attentiveness to people. However, care is made invisible as a form of labour because it is not valued (Skeggs 2014: 12); 'care' disappears from the action plan and the log frame because it cannot be captured. The 'added value' which a recognition of the caring aspects of the librarians role might express, fails to be operated in demonstrations of the library's worth.

Conclusion

This chapter has started to convey the unique social and social landscape of the urban public library. The library provides a rich and dense location from which to explore ideas of public participation. However, the library is bound up with its location within the public bureaucracy and is highly vulnerable during times of fierce budget cutbacks. In trying to highlight the worth of the library, numerical expressions of value and impact are sought after, and careful and more contextual ways of reading and relating to people, 'small practices' and daily acts of recognition and dignity, find limited expression. At the same time, structured targets and assessments are unable to quite capture or respond to the other ways that people participate in and relate to the library. The core 'social worth' of the library remains fundamentally unaccountable through purely numerical measures.

In considering some of the issues around the ways in which value and everyday meanings are expressed in the public library, I have begun to interrogate some of the key terms, ideas and tensions which emerge in working with the public library as an ethnographic fieldsite. I have reflected on methodological perspectives which respond to the particularities of the site, tracing how my ethnographic engagement with the library developed during the fieldwork period, and shifted between the fieldwork libraries. In particular, I have focused on how both the librarians and myself as an ethnographer are concerned with ways of knowing – reading and listening to the library, and ways of showing – how to convey what is happening in the library.

I have shown how the work of the librarians and that of the ethnographer can be related. The librarians' accounts of the inferences they make in their daily work convey a relationship between affective and instrumental measures of valuing and evaluating the library. Librarians use their skilled inferences and accumulated knowledge to 'read' people and their needs, as well as to arbitrate over the library space itself, developing nuanced judgements about behaviour and the relaxation or enforcement of rules. As an ethnographer in the library, I became highly attuned to the library space, learning to

'read' what was happening and, whether as observer, participant, or interviewer to 'listen out for' the ways in which the daily playing out of targets, needs and the capturing of value was negotiated and conveyed.

[i] Wir haben nicht genug Arbeitsplätze, die Schüler sitzen auf den Boden und machen ihre Hausarbeit auf dem Boden […] Die Menschen in Wedding scheinen nicht gute Arbeitsbedingungen zu Hause zu haben – die kommen also wirklich in Scharen, einfach um sich hier aufzuhalten, und sei es noch so laut, und ich denke, mein Gott, wie könnt ihr arbeiten, es ist so laut! Oder kommen auch zum Zeitung lesen, und stundenlang sitzen sie bei uns, wo es so trüb ist hier! Oder vielleicht ist es immer noch schöner als bei ihnen zu Hause, ich weiß es nicht. Und diese 'Wohnzimmer Deutschlands', was immer mehr so im Gespräch ist, dass die Bibliothek das Wohnzimmer Deutschlands ist – das merken wir immer mehr. Die Menschen kommen und halten sich wirklich Stunden hier auf.

[ii] Von verschiedenen Benutzergruppen wird die Bibliothek als öffentliches Wohnzimmer oder als öffentlicher Arbeitsort definiert, das ist nicht so ein bewusster Prozess, sondern das ist so was man erlebt, und da ist die Rolle der Kollegin, manchmal die einer Mutter, weil man das immer wieder sagt, macht dieses bitte nicht, und würdest du bitte das und das tun, und hier darf man nicht essen, und wenn du den Tisch und den Stuhl von woanders geholt hast, wäre es wirklich sehr nett, wenn du ihn auch zurückbringst. Und das kann man nicht an allen Tagen gleich überzeugend kommunizieren, weil man manchmal, genau wie in einer Familie, auch die Nase voll hat, und denkt, oh nein, nicht schon wieder, also, ich bin der Sprechapparat für bestimmte Benimmregeln.

[iii] Ich kann Sie da immer einfach gerne mitnehmen. Also Sie, ich werde Sie nicht – Sie werden durchaus laufen als Praktikantin – die nehmen alle ihre Praktikanten mit, ja!

[iv] Sie hat so warm über Sie gesprochen - die hat Sie mir ja sozusagen ans Herz gelegt – war ganz angetan vom Ihrem Projekt, das Sie hier machen.

[v] Gut! Schön! Ich danke Ihnen für Ihre Interesse an unserer kleinen Bibliothek! Es wertet uns sehr auf!

[vi] […] und die werden miteinander verglichen und die Preise - also hier eine Entleihung, in Mitte kostet den Preis…, Steglitz-Zehlendorf…, die verglichen, und dann heißt es, je mehr Einrichtungen wir haben, und je mehr Personal ich habe, desto teuerer wird dieses Produkt. Und dann dürfen wir nicht unter diesen Mittelwert sinken, sonst kriegen wir weniger Mittel, und also, es ist hochkompliziert, es ist eine ganzer Versuch dieses betriebswirtschaftliche Denken natürlich in dem Verwand zu bringen, ja auch mit voller Berechtigung, aber es ist doch hauptsächlich in Berlin ein Sparmodell – es wird gemacht, damit gespart wird und es ist für uns teilweise sehr, sehr hart, da immer noch so einen Weg zu finden, trotzdem immer noch eine gute und auch inhaltliche Arbeit, qualitative Arbeit anzubieten, nicht nur auf den Preis zu schauen, das ist schon teilweise schwierig.

[vii] Wir haben ja, wenn Sie in der Bibliothek waren, im unteren, untersten Bereich, das ist der Bereich für die Kindern aber, wenn jetzt Prüfungen anstehen, dann sitzten die Schüler auch dort, auch die älteren – die machen sich dann am breitesten, und das ist so ein bisschen so eine Kunst zu gucken, dass da nicht so Verdrängungsprozesse ablaufen, weil auch die älteren sind für uns als Bibliothek ja wichtig, die Erwachsene, weil das sind diejenige, die uns die Ausleiezahlen bringen, das ist wichtig für's Budget, und nicht nur die Besucher, das ist *auch* wichtig für's Budget, aber beide sind für uns wichtig [...].

[viii] Ich halte zum Beispiel eben auch nichts davon, ich kann es einfach nicht billigen wenn wir sofort über irgendwelche Jugendlichen Beschwerden bekommen, die da sitzen in unserer Bibliothek, wollen nur einen Raum haben, da können sie ja nichts 'für, und da laut sitzten und sich unterhalten, und gemeinsam arbeiten, die arbeiten ja auch, und die arbeiten auch natürlich lauter als was weiß ich, der Senior, der über seiner Zeitung sitzt. Und da bin ich auch manchmal nicht bereit, diese Beschwerden sofort umzusetzen,

da denke ich auch ein gewisses Maß an Toleranz erwarte ich einfach – […] Das hat so 'was mit Demokratie zu tun, eben mit Toleranz und alles, was wir uns auf Fahnen schreiben – es ist hier im ganz kleinen schon ganz aktuell. Und da muss man auch, finde ich, also, eine Position vertreten können.

[ix] Und die benutzen das Internet – mitnichten haben alle Leute zu Hause Internet – das glaubt man nicht, ja? Die Plätze sind immer belegt und die kommen mit ihren Laptops und nehmen unser WLAN in Anspruch und so – denke ich – man denkt immer alle sind so wunderbar ausgestattet – so ist es nicht, jedenfalls nicht in diesen sozialen Brennpunkten in Berlin.

[x] Ich würde fast sagen zwei Drittel unserer Benutzer zahlen keine Gebühren, das heißt, die sind in irgendeine Form ermässigt. Oder zahlen nicht den vollen Einsatz, also Studierenden sind ja halbiert, die zahlen also fünf Euro statt zehn für's Jahr, oder Hartz IV Empfänger, Arbeitslose, Schüler und Kinder zahlen gar nichts, und das ist einfach die größte Gruppe. Ich denke das ist auch einen Grund - die gucken schon auf's Geld.

[xi] Frau Hoffmann: [...] die müssen mehr auf die Menschen zugehen, aber [...] es ist also ein bisschen heikel ne? [*speaks between her teeth*] 'Also, verdienen Sie weniger als 900 Euro?' Ja?

Katherine:	Das ist ein bisschen sensibel -
Fau Hoffmann:	Ja genau! Und darum schicken wir manchmal Leute, 'ah, die kenne ich doch - und die verdient sehr wenig und könnte sich interessieren –ich schick die 'hin,wo ich denke, das könnte 'was für sie sein.
Katherine:	Aber das ist auch, was Sie gerade gesagt haben, dass Sie die Leute persönlich kennen -
Frau Hoffmann:	Ja, und ich weiß, dass sie Hartz IV empfangen, weil sie das bei uns vorgelegt haben. Ich muss da nicht fragen, ich weiß das. Und ich weiß das könnten Menschen sein, die gerne mal in die Oper gehen oder so.

Chapter Three: Opening out the library

> The fact is, that libraries aren't for any one type of person, there's no barriers, it doesn't matter what age you are, what your background is, what your race is, your age, it just - it doesn't matter, I mean, everybody is welcome here. And ok, we might target certain groups specifically, certain age groups, or certain target audiences, but the doors are open to everybody. It really is the one free community space.

> <div align="right">(Interview with Kay, Thornton Heath Library, October 2011)</div>

The tension between the library's 'openness', and the delivery of targeted services in an atmosphere of cost-effectiveness and demonstrable outputs is neatly conveyed by Kay. While spoken in an affirmatory tone, her short statement is also hinged around a central dilemma of the public library – it might theoretically be open to everyone, but it is clearly *more* open, or attractive, or useful to some people than others. The public openness of the library is complicated by the ways in which the presence of certain groups, the 'target audiences' to which Kay refers, is highlighted as particularly desirable.

In the Bibliothek am Luisenbad in Berlin, Frau Körner developed this tension between the library's founding principles as a free and open space, and the political expectations that are loaded onto contemporary libraries in terms of strategies of intervention and targeted participation:

> What are we doing in terms of intercultural library? What are we doing about illiteracy? How are we dealing with disabled people? Everywhere it's expected that the library is also doing something about these issues, but on the other side, to be able to manage this balance, this equilibrium…

> <div align="right">(Interview with Frau Körner, Bibliothek am Luisenbad, April 2012)</div>

In statements by librarians, the idea emerges that a visible demonstration of various forms of 'difference' in the public library has become an important part of its role. Carefully-targeted approaches to under-represented groups are necessary in order for the library to start becoming a community space in a way that is envisaged by political demands. These expectations of the library's role result in certain people being highlighted based on particular characteristics. Kay's assertion that 'it doesn't matter

what age you are, what your background is, what your race is, your age, it just - it doesn't matter', whilst on one level undeniable, is belied when she then infers that these characteristics are simultaneously constitutive of identifying people as members of certain targeted groups. In the contemporary public library, people's 'race', age, and gender really *do* matter. These, like levels of educational achievement and disability, to which Frau Körner refers, are made visible as factors which are tied into 'issues' and become targets of which attention, action and 'results' are demanded.

The idea of the library as a 'managed' site of openness, difference and encounter resonates with Ash Amin's assertion that contact and encounter do not happen spontaneously but require a form of contextually appropriate moderation or intervention in specific sites (2002: 970); intercultural spaces need to be 'worked at'. This chapter explores what this 'work' entails in the context of the public library, a site with an inherent tension between 'providing targeted and focused services and resources for the excluded within an institution which continues to cherish universal principles of access and predominantly passive modes of service' (Muddiman 2000: 22). Reflecting on the words of Kay in Thornton Heath, and Frau Körner in Wedding, I consider how the tension between the library's philosophical openness and the task of opening out the library through an almost paradoxical focus on 'targeted' groups, must be 'worked at' by members of library staff.

While here I use 'openness' as a reference to generalised forms of social diversity which are seen as desirable in the library, as the chapter develops I reflect on the ways in which 'openness' tends to stand in for a focus on visible forms of racial and ethnic difference. In all of these instances, openness is a strategy which relies on various, but especially of racialised forms of 'making visible', highlighting the desirability of the presence in the library of obvious 'others'. This understanding of how 'others' are made visible takes its theoretical lead from the work of Nirmal Puwar, who considers how the entry of women and members of minority ethnic groups into powerful state institutions, in her case, Westminster, can both highlight and start to upset deep-seated understandings of how particular bodies are 'naturally' allocated space and others not

(Puwar 2004). The visibility of the 'other' highlights the natural universality (and therefore invisibility) of whiteness and maleness. Similarly, the desire to especially encourage the presence and participation of certain kinds of minority groups may be seen as located within difficult and ambivalent negotiations around the ways in which certain people are highlighted by implicit and institutional norms.

The extension of library work and the deliberate targeting of particular publics reflects the gradual shift from the notion of 'a' general public to an increasing awareness of the need to acknowledge within the public library the presence of and to encourage the representation of members of a diversifying society (Muddiman 2000: 21). Community library work emerged in the 1970s and 1980s as a development of earlier 'outreach' activities (Black 2000: 130). This early idea of outreach, as Dave Muddiman explains with reference to Stanley Jast's 'library grid' (1939), was based on an understanding of the library as an *already* inclusive service, the library itself as a 'metaphor for an inclusive social order' (2000: 20). Making the service *more* inclusive was seen to be a question of logistics and geographical reach.

Community librarianship, however, was a more responsive approach to 'the needs of diverse client groups', demonstrating, as Muddiman argues, 'an acceptance by the library profession that society might be pluralistic and diverse rather than homogeneous' (2000: 21). Greenhalgh et al. write that these services were aimed at 'people in disadvantaged communities' (1995: 33) while Muddiman clarifies that disadvantaged meant disadvantaged *from the perspective of the library*: 'specific services targeted at disadvantaged (in library terms) user groups such as black and minority ethnic communities, the elderly; teenagers; people with a wide range of disabilities and so on [...] (2000: 21). A report by Patrick Roach and Marlene Morrison found that library approaches towards diversity and race equality were 'ad hoc', excluded from performance indicators and monitoring systems, and that there was continued under-representation of ethnic minorities among library staff as well as uncertainty about how to develop more inclusive provision (1998: 169-70). These criticisms are made by a series of other authors and reports: institutional approaches towards minority ethnic

groups were programmatic and 'managerial' (Newman 2007: 900), and were far from representing sustained community engagement, usually amounting to 'the compilation of little-used leaflet packs' (Muddiman 2000: 22) and focusing on the dissemination of ethnic minority-targeted material in various 'community languages' (Seden 2003: 4), or the awkward and occasionally inappropriate promotion of cultural festivals (Newman 2007: 896).

While these efforts can be understood as well-meaning, they were based on a fundamentally essentialist approach to difference; to 'serve a series of specific publics defined as "black and ethnic minority" communities', thus 'rendering them "other" from the norm' (Newman 2007: 897-8). This use of the term 'community', as a foundational symbol of managed multiculturalism, is critiqued by Claire Alexander as promoting a fixed view of personal and collective identity formations (2000: 13). Les Back writes that in thinking about multiculturalism, 'the false comfort of simple cultural archetypes' which result in such reification, must be avoided (2002: 8) (see also Solomos 2003: 220). Back works with Stuart Hall's 'identity through difference', the production of 'new ethnicities' which emerge out of multiplicity and start to 'challenge what it means to be "black" but also call into question the dominant coding of what it means to be British' (2002: 4).

These debates demonstrate the political potential for multiple, shifting, challenging and understandings of 'race', identity and difference but how are these ideas expressed in the contemporary public library? As is the case for many other public institutions, in the library, commitment to racial and other forms of equality and diversity has become both legal requirement and something of a public mission statement.[1] The City Berlin library, a collaboration between central Berlin public libraries in Mitte and Friedrichshain-Kreuzberg, uses the Berlin's integration strategy's mission statement: '*Vielfalt fördern – Zusammenhalt stärken*' ('Encourage diversity – strengthen cohesion') in its statement of

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[1] Most recently in the UK by the 2010 Equality Act. In Germany, the introduction of the *Allgemeines Gleichbehandlungsgesetz* in August 2006 marked the country's first comprehensive anti-discrimination law.

aims as an 'intercultural' library (*interkulturelle Bibliothek*). Referring to the 500,000 people in Berlin who were not born in Germany, or who do not speak German as a first language, the text outlines how the libraries in the network aim to serve the city's diverse communities and those 'with a migration background'.[2] The intercultural approach of the libraries is predominantly focused on catering to language needs, commitment to collaboration with educational institutions and migrant organisations, and the provision of free internet.

This chapter considers the ways in which assumed inherent openness of the public library and the concern with its 'opening out', seen predominantly through the lens of cultural diversity, is played out in everyday discussions, decisions and actions in the fieldwork libraries. I discuss several ways in which libraries attempt to both demonstrate and manage their openness, looking at the notion of the library as both a threshold to public life, and considering the work of the library's physical threshold as a site where librarians attempt to 'read' the needs of a huge range of library users.

I examine the role of book stock and other material both as a sign of the library's openness and as a site of uncertainty amongst librarians unsure of how to 'read' it. I conclude by considering the work involved in the management and delivery of outreach events, understanding these as special performances of the library. As Sara Ahmed notes, 'If diversity becomes something that is added to organizations, like color, then it confirms the whiteness of what is already in place' (2012: 33). If 'special moments' of diversity and openness are introduced into a space which is considered *already* fundamentally open, then they may be seen as representing a challenge to this perception.

I consider the 'inclusion', or making visible of certain targeted groups as both bound up in the everyday institutional practices of the library, and as a form of emotional labour

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[2]'The *city.bibliothek* sees it therefore as an important part of its role to develop its offer for those new to Berlin and for Berliners with *Migrationshintergrund,* and to provide information about the cultural diversity in Berlin.' http://www.berlin.de/citybibliothek/kulturenbeutel/ziele.html (Still accessible via this link 14 September 2014. However, the website has undergone a substantial overhaul this summer and the document has disappeared from the new website.)

undertaken by library members of staff, which is made tangible through generalised uncertainty, pervasive awkwardness and occasionally, acute embarrassment. Considering the management of forms of openness as an emotionally taxing and uncertain effort expands on the implications of 'unsteady social spaces' which as Ash Amin writes, are desirable for the cultivation of cultural displacement and new forms of social encounter (2002). I see unsteadiness as a field of intense work and negotiation, which takes place at the limits of library staff's personal and professional capacity. While librarians are not only working with issues of diversity, these tensions and uncertainties reflect 'the complicated and messy situations in which diversity workers find themselves' (Ahmed 2012: 10).

The library as a threshold to public participation

Katherine: So, do you think that the library is somewhere where this idea of cosmopolitanism is demonstrated?

Asha: Yeah, I think so, I think it definitely is. It's not Prada! [*laughter*] But it's, erm, perhaps it's not the shopping side of it, but definitely the cosmopolitan cultural side of our society, without a doubt, definitely.

Katherine: And what do you think about, when you think of cosmopolitanism?

Asha: I think of people of people of various cultures, erm, and a kind of cultural milieu where they just mix together and interact with each other – that, to me is progress. And what makes us as a culture so advanced, erm, and I think libraries facilitate that, definitely, I don't think you'd find that in many other countries.

(Interview with Asha, Thornton Heath library, January 2012)

Here, Asha uses cosmopolitanism to describe the library as a place that is inherently mixed, a place of various cultures coming together within another cultural milieu, to mix and interact. She makes a distinction between a glamorous 'lifestyle' cosmopolitanism (or what Calhoun calls: 'consumerist cosmopolitanism', 2002: 105) implied through her reference to Prada, and the 'cultural' side of cosmopolitanism, which she expresses as

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an openness to mixing and interacting – loose forms of social encounter and participation. In this way, Asha's use of cosmopolitanism can be linked with the 'vernacular cosmopolitanism' put forward by Stuart Hall (2002: 30). She implies that this form of mixing, founded on mutual understanding of difference, is facilitated by the characteristics of the library which create a particular kind of social space. While she relates this vision with a tone of optimism and a trace of pride, what is not articulated in Asha's account are the the forms of work required in order for the mixing and interacting she envisages to take place. As Chapter Two discussed, the very use of the library implies sharing of space and mingling; however, this chapter proposes that 'opening out' the library to be a 'multicultural' space requires highly intentional strategies.

The public library has a tradition of impartiality and political neutrality (Goulding, 2006: 58). Greenhalgh et al. go further, claiming the public library to be a necessary and rare 'free space', evoking Habermasian ideas of the convivial civic realm (1995: 12) and that it is 'open to all' (Ibid.: 7).[3] Libraries are highly visible as a civic institution, with their direct engagement with the public emphasised by Kay in Thornton Heath Library: 'we are the main public-facing council team, really' (Interview, October 2011).

Libraries are regarded as offering a space of introduction to social and civic participation, with Greenhalgh et al. describing the library as a 'passport' (1995: 95; see also Wood and Landry 2008: 188) for 'new' citizens, with libraries providing language support, as well as, in the UK, holding UK Citizenship Tests. In Germany, this view was recently echoed by Heinz Buschkowsky, the mayor of Neukölln. In a newspaper interview during the promotion of his book, *Neukölln ist überall* (*Neukölln is everywhere*) (2012), where he writes from his experience of being mayor of the most 'socially difficult' area of the Berlin, he made explicit what he perceives as the necessary two-way exchange between provision of state infrastructure, and participation in it by those for whom it is deemed socially relevant:

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[3] The shift in the 1960s to the open access provision of books is symbolic of this openness (Newman 2007: 893).

Where the state makes commitments, it must also make provision. […] Society must therefore make infrastructure available. But immigrants also have to participate. In the public library, children get books for free. You don't need money in order to learn.[4]

In calling for 'immigrants' to use the library, a place which the mayor uncomplicatedly describes as providing education at no cost, he emphasises a wide-spread assumption about the role of the public library as working as a threshold, a route in, to public life, especially for 'newcomers'. However, this does not translate into everyone going to the library – far from it. As Herr Ercan, a librarian in Berlin's *Amerika-Gedenkbibliothek* exclaimed, after pointing out that in Germany, around 10% of adults are thought to be library users, 'So why should the numbers be any better among the foreigners, I mean, the immigrant population?' (Interview, August 2011). While perceptions of the openness of the public library are inherent to its public mission, in the fieldwork libraries there was great concern that getting people in through the door, especially 'under-represented groups', was a huge challenge. Barriers exist to participation in the public life of the library, and the offer and the role of the library needs to be communicated and carefully brokered by the librarians in order to engage with those who are not current users (Luckham 1971; Greenhalgh et al. 1995; Roach and Morrison 1998: 167). Clearly, despite what Buschkowsky seems to suggest, there is not a straight line between a service being offered and it being taken up by those who might most benefit from it.

The library threshold

The barriers to participation in the library are often conveyed through the idea of the threshold to the library - both as a metaphor, and as a physical space. The threshold marks the first layer of space in the library - it is the most public place, the place closest to outside. Often the location for the issue and information desk, this makes it the

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[4] Özlem Topcu & Heinrich Wefing, '*Da helfe ich gern beim Kofferpacken'* (I'm happy to help them pack their bags') *Die Zeit*, 26 September 2012 http://www.zeit.de/2012/39/Heinz-Buschkowsky-Neukoelln-Integration-Rassismus (Last accessed 14 September 2014)

busiest and loudest place in the library, with queues of people waiting, filling the space, and a steady flow of people passing through it as they arrive and leave. In her semiotic analysis of library space, Gulten Wagner sees this foyer area as 'a powerful control point' (1992: 88), and indeed it is a space of high visibility. The threshold is where user numbers are measured by automatic counters, marking the collection site of one of the library's key statistics: 'getting people through the door' is an essential measure of the library's performance.

The library threshold is highlighted by librarians as an important space, which, once crossed, confers an immediate purposeful presence on those who enter. In narratives of joining the library evoked by librarians in London and Berlin, ideas of crossing the threshold are combined with the implicit dignity that the process of joining confers on users. While membership of the library may thus be seen as highly significant in itself, people do not (only) acquire a library card for its symbolic power - it is a very tangible and moreover, instant, key to free services, particularly the internet. In Thornton Heath library I watched as people joined then, with the ink of their name still wet on their library card, headed straight over to the computer room to book themselves a slot.

However, I argue that the publicness of the threshold also makes it a place of uncertainty and insecurity, and a potentially difficult place. The double meaning of the threshold, as both a site of entrance and a location of anxiety over who might enter and how, is contained in the German word for threshold: *Schwelle* - which simultaneously means barrier. In the Schiller Bibliothek, the red line of tape on the floor asks for discretion, and a polite queue, but this is easily transgressed. Unlike an educational institution, or a public office, the library is not a place people have to be so the threshold metaphor is frequently used in the sense of how to 'get people in' over it:

> And once we get them in, well that's it, it's like, 'did you *know*, that you can do this as well, and we've got this, and this is coming up', so it's kind of, like, getting them in to begin with, and once they're with us, it's like, 'right, you're not leaving, there's more, there's more' - keep handing out leaflets...! [*laughter*]

> (Kay, Thornton Heath Library, October 2011)

Kay emphasises the power of the threshold several times, where it appears both as a hurdle, if not an outright barrier, but also, once crossed, confers instant legitimacy on the user. In literally entering the building, getting over the threshold, before even using any material, people become valid library users, and are exposed to what the library can offer them, which, it is implied, they might not known or realised until they cross the threshold.

The work of the threshold

In interviews with librarians they described the inherent openness of the library as demanding effort, requiring nuanced judgement calls and provoking encounters that are occasionally highly difficult. This is particularly seen through the inherent stressfulness of the threshold - a place where literally anyone could walk in. Dealing with the uncertainty of people who come through the door requires strategies of emotional work. These are managed by the librarians through developing various strategies of pragmatism, avoidance and differentiation. They learn to 'read' the variety of people who stand in front of them, trying to establish what their needs and desires are, and in the process, having to be open to their readings being challenged, mis-understood or transformed, as Gemma says:

> Gemma: Working in the library you can see two sides to everything. You may see someone come into the library and you held a preconceived judgement of them, but when they speak to you and their mannerism, you just, your concept and your judgement of them can completely change. […] So you can't say, 'Oh, no, you're not coming in' -
>
> Katherine: 'You don't look smart enough' -
>
> Gemma: Exactly. It's open to every single person - whether you like it or not!
>
> (Interview with Gemma, Thornton Heath Library, December 2011)

Gemma sounds upbeat about the openness of the library to 'everyone's' presence in the library. She offers a very cosmopolitan view of difference in the library, indicating that

being open to difference can be a transformative process in which people's opinions of each other are changed.

The threshold is a place where people encounter the library for the first time, and it is important that this first encounter is carefully negotiated. In this field note from Thornton Heath library, I observe an encounter between two young men and the young librarian at the desk. Their extremely limited English makes me wonder whether they are perhaps residents at Brigstock House, the nearby accommodation for asylum seekers. I note how the librarian communicates the stages of the registration process with patient resourcefulness:

> Two teenagers queue to join the library – they barely speak any English, so the young librarian at the counter patiently tries various tacks of questioning, 'What's your date of birth?' This does not get a response.
>
> She tries a reformulation, 'When's your birthday?' This is not understood either, so she tries again, trying to make the question clearer, 'What month is your birthday?' She starts counting through the months of the year, 'January, February…'
>
> 'April' one of the young men says.
>
> 'Ok, April.' She presses on, 'Which day? What number?'

<div align="right">(Field notes, July 2011)</div>

The librarian's attempts to re-frame the 'standard' library joining questions to make them more understandable is an effort, a demonstration of her skills at being a public broker. She mediates between the standardised registration form and the people in front of her, and in the process performs an act of translation, breaking down the question into ever smaller parts to make it understandable. This small exchange, the effort taken to generate one answer to one question, can be seen as demonstrating the amount of interpretative and communicative work carried out at the library threshold. It also shows how the experience of being taken seriously at the threshold can be perhaps the first positive experience of a public institution for 'new arrivals'. The experience of being taken seriously is having to be 'worked out' on a minute level and requires a large amount of personal and professional investment.

In Berlin, Frau Körner reflected on how she used her own experiences of negotiating a first encounter in a public situation to consider this experience from the point of view of a new library user:

> …it's just like when I go to another public office, or I go to a shop, for me it's also important that this first contact - how does it seem there, does it feel ok, is my enquiry taken seriously […] It's exactly like when you want to do something, and people react to you as if you're completely daft […] You notice that you're irritated, and you think, no, I don't want to be treated like that, and then perhaps to take your own experiences and to use them to think: how is it for the person on the other side of the counter? […][i]

<div align="right">(Interview with Frau Körner, Bibliothek am Luisenbad, July 2012)</div>

She recounts how she uses her own experience to understand how people at the threshold might feel. Her capacity to translate experiences from her personal life demonstrates empathy and requires effort and emotional labour. The ways in which librarians work hard to convey their commitment to library users can also be seen on an intensely corporeal level. During an informal conversation, Asha, the young librarian at Thornton Heath library, spoke of how she had learned from a colleague how effective it was to try and be near people when they were in a difficult situation. She said, in the case of a dispute or when someone was angry, she would go and stand beside the user to show that she was trying literally, to be on their side. Her anecdote also illustrates the informal skill sharing and capacity developing that is produced through sharing experiences and practice-based knowledge with colleagues.

Very often librarians experience the sheer breadth of people coming in to the library and their close proximity to the physicality of massed bodies as a source of acute stress and anxiety. Frau Hoffmann related that one her colleagues was so bothered by the uncontrollable nature of people's bodies in particular – their smells and 'effluvia', as she put it, that she had expressed the desire to work from behind a glass screen.[ii] The stress of dealing with the public is focused through bodily anxieties, the literally embodied,

body public.[5] Frau Hoffmann, on the other hand, spent some time reflecting on how she is not prepared to ask people to leave, who through corporeal signs such as smell or behaviour, show vulnerability. She imagined one of the '*Trinker'*, a group of alcoholics who sit immediately outside the library, coming inside, and said:

> I don't know what's happening in his life; perhaps for him it's also an oasis from his mates and their eternal arguing outside.... And as long as he doesn't go on the sofa, or go around shouting, or stinks so much that it's unbearable, I think, as far as it goes, that I'm open to this for as long as we can manage it. They live here, these people, and after work I go home; I go back to Friedenau, and - I'm lucky! (*Ich hab's gut!*) I just think, as long as I'm here, I have to confront what I find here.....[iii]

(Frau Hoffmann, Schiller Bibliothek, July 2012)

Frau Hoffmann describes a strikingly personalised response to the situation. She feels that as someone who, because of her relatively comfortable life, and her ability to travel away from Wedding after her day's work is done, she has additional capacity to almost personally bear some of the social strain made visible around the library. In her example, these social problems are made present in the library in the form of vulnerable people whose unwashed, and possibly noisy and unpredictable bodily presence has the potential to create stress and anxiety, and the terms on which whose presence in the library can be borne is uncertain and requires constant awareness. In contrast to her colleague who wishes to protect herself behind a screen, Frau Hoffmann is at pains to demonstrate her personal commitment to be 'confronted' with the difficulties and vulnerabilities of people in the library. This might be seen as an example of the inherent dignity that presence in the library confers on people first discussed in Chapter Two; as long as he 'knows' how to perform being in the library, this hypothetical man is allowed to remain there. At the same time, Frau Hoffmann's example demonstrates that the presence of certain people is predicated on individual responses by librarians to the

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[5] Anxieties about germs and contamination from 'the public' can also be seen through the avoidance behaviours I observed around giving people the key to the public toilet in the Bibliothek am Luisenbad. The large key on a heavy metal fob was handed over in exchange for the user's library card, or other form of I.D. Librarians would occasionally offer the box in which the keys lay to the library user, rather than picking up the key and putting it in the person's hand.

situation; presence is negotiated each time, and while she claims the capacity to allow his presence, her colleagues might feel differently.

Librarians in both London and Berlin commented that it was necessary to be able to relate to people and their needs in a way which is also institutionally supported, for instance in the form of skills training, which Asha in Thornton Heath library referred to as providing staff with:

> …tactics to deal with people from different backgrounds, because it's not always easy, […] you can't always just draw on your own life experience, because sometimes people are just from such different worlds and it's difficult to relate to them, it's difficult to provide the service that they need. As a council that's what we're here to do, so if we're not doing that efficiently enough then we're failing in our roles […]
>
> (Interview with Asha, Thornton Heath Library, January 2012)

Here, the idea of using skills from your own life experience and individual capacity is supplemented by official forms of skills training. Capacity can be considered on both individualised and institutionalised levels. But what happens when the official capacity to support librarians' efforts is seen as threatened or lacking? There is a relationship between people's individualised capacity to work through and work with the challenges that being on the front desk involves and the capacity of the institutional context to support the negotiation of these encounters. Responses to stress and the challenges of the inherent uncertainty of the public-facing role are not only founded on individualised levels of tolerance and competence, but also determined by structural capacity and limitations.

In Berlin, these were conveyed through the recognition that across public institutions there was an aging workforce, which no longer satisfactorily reflected the local population. Intense cost-cutting measures, ever-shrinking budgets and the generalised insecurity around people's jobs also had an impact on the ability to 'deal with' difficult situations, as Frau Körner relates:

What consequences does this situation have for colleagues, when they are no longer satisfied and do not feel secure about their jobs, how are they then to give off a positive feeling (*eine positive Ausstrahlung*) in the library? I think that's so important as to whether you can be customer-orientated because you are happy to be there; and if you're not, if you're thinking, oh God, now I have to do a turn on the desk, and face the noise and the complaints again, and I just can't take it...[iv]

(Interview with Frau Körner, Bibliothek am Luisenbad, April 2012)

The anxiety around threats to funding and job insecurity feed through to how the librarians feel when they are on the front desk. Librarians are dealing with the lived consequences of the general conditions of lack and uncertainty which were evident throughout Berlin public institutions. The structural situation has emotional effects which then bears on how librarians have the capacity to deal with the public. The capacity for librarians to convey a sense of openness towards the public while performing their role can be seen as closely connected with the financial pressures and future uncertainty facing public institutions in the city.

The general 'unknowability' and unpredictability of working with the public can be seen as stressful and demanding different forms of individual and institutional capacity. There is particular discomfort and unease around issues of 'difference' which so far in this chapter have been alluded to through examples of interaction with people with highly limited language skills, or the tactics necessary to, as Asha says, 'deal with people from different backgrounds'. The capacity to deal with visible forms of racialised difference and the consequences this has for interactions was a recurring issue in the Berlin libraries but was largely expressed in terms of national and 'cultural' differences:

[…] there are also days when you're not feeling so strong, and then its a constant overload to say, now all these different cultures are here, and who is it who is sitting in front of me, and if someone comes in, what are they bringing with them?

So, I recently had two people register, an Italian, and a Dutch man. And I just don't know, is the Dutch man unemployed, or is he someone who is coming here for educational reasons, who on earth is he? It's not as if we work in a system where we know; where we work in a 'solid' middle-class (*gut-bürgerlich*) area of the city which means that this or that sort of behaviour is suitable. It's not at all

like that around here. Because here we have really all kinds of educational backgrounds, all levels of language ability, and these can't be recognised through looking at people's appearance.

It's difficult for colleagues and it's difficult for users, because, if one thinks: headscarf, conservative, not German, and then someone comes in and speaks great German and you had just been thinking, 'oh no, how am I going to explain everything about the registration process?' It can lead to very uncomfortable situations because they are also then thinking, 'what is she thinking, who does she think I am?' If you misjudge a person then it can lead to intercultural misunderstandings! But then also if you had someone who had really had no schooling, and was really someone who was almost illiterate, then it would also be highly inappropriate to talk with him in the same way you would a colleague. [v]

<div align="center">(Interview with Frau Körner, Bibliothek am Luisenbad, April 2012)</div>

In this long reflection on the personal stress of dealing with the uncertainty of everyday manifestations of difference, Frau Körner says this can be experienced not as an enriching variety, but rather as causing situations in which there is no certainty, and which depending on people's individual capacity, which she notes, might vary from day to day, can be demanding and even overwhelming. In the area around the library, a place of ethnic diversity, high population turnover and a huge range of educational backgrounds, requirements and expectations, librarians find it challenging to 'read' the public and their needs. The social complexity of the local neighbourhood means there can never be certainty about who is who and what their needs are. In her example of the two recent registrations of non-Germans, Italian and Dutch citizens, Frau Körner describes how she is unable to locate them and their needs satisfactorily. She contrasts the absolute variability and intense unknowability of the area 'here we have *every* type of educational background, *every* level of language ability' with the supposed stability offered by a more middle-class district.

She reflects on how the inherent uncertainty around people's educational and social situation can lead to very uncomfortable situations. She works to show how certain stereotypical assumptions based on visible difference, the signifier of 'veiled woman' used as implicit code for 'uneducated', do not stand up. They lead to each person

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imagining – *sich einbilden* – the worst of each other, rather than being able to satisfactorily communicate. At the same time, the over-estimation of people's skills, when they might in fact be limited, can also be discomforting for everyone involved. These situations are used to explain how misguided it is to try to draw connections between people's appearance and their needs or requirements while also showing how uncertainties around obvious signs of difference were more acknowledged in the Berlin libraries. The example is also illustrative of the heightened awareness and problematisiation of the headscarf in Germany, which I discuss further in Chapter Six.

The library threshold can thus be seen as a highly symbolic space in the library, a site of openness and difficulty. Having entered the library through the threshold, I turn to look at another highly invoked sign of its public openness, its range of stock.

Library stock: sign of openness, sign of need

One early summer's morning, I was being shown around the children's section of the Bibliothek am Luisenbad with one of the children's librarians prior to attending a pre-school class she was running. She remarked that the library was getting more children's books in a wider range of languages in an effort to encourage parents to read with their children, and by extension, to encourage these adults and children into the library. From this starting point, the library would then seek to expand its range of adult stock. This statement assumes that the provision of different types of stock can be directly linked to the presence of different people in the library. One, it seems, will lead to the other. However, as this discussion will show, this cannot be expected to happen automatically. In this instance, the presence of 'hard to reach' adults in the library is mediated through the presence of their children. Reaching 'hard to reach' adults through their children is a tactic which is replicated across library outreach strategies, as will be discussed later.

The way the children's material was presented by the librarian is demonstrative of how the library's stock is seen as potent and symbolic, the scope and range of a library's collection even considered as embodying diversity in itself (Greenhalgh 1993: 9). There

is a high expectation of the function of the library's stock overall, with the material

stocked by the library having implications for its role locally. On the Bibliothek am

Luisenbad's website, the library is presented as demonstrating a deeply pragmatic and

practical commitment to its locality through its stock:[6]

> Our key concern is that visitors are provided with non-fiction to address the
> multiple problems that arise out of everyday life at school, in professional training
> or in the challenges of daily working life. If you don't have a PC or an internet
> connection yourself, you are welcome to use one of our 14 PCs with internet
> access.[vi]

The library conveys the message that its material demonstrates value in terms of its very

material *usefulness* in providing tangible support with coping with the difficulties

present in everyday life, not just its implicit cultural worth, and not to mention that it

might be simply 'entertaining'. There is a sense that this kind of stock, dealing with life's

problems is necessary 'in a place like this'. The provision of material which is relevant

and necessary is important, and above all, useful in itself, but also functions as a sign of

other priorities and politics in the library, ideas of representation, and the work of

'reading' needs.

This is most obvious in the provision of material in a targeted range of other languages,

which may be considered an attempt to accommodate the needs of the local ethnically

diverse population. As discussed in the Introduction, the provision of material 'relevant'

to local concerns is part of the library's statutory remit. The stock of material in

'community languages' and 'for communities' is imbued with even deeper significance

and freighted with highly specific intentions. Diversifying the library's stock of books

and other material is used as highly tangible and *demonstrable* signs of the institution's

increased openness to more diverse publics. Newman notes the ironic appropriateness

of the bureaucratic solution produced by an inherently bureaucratic institution - in

facing the politics of representation, librarians sought to identify and then provide

material for a few more categories of people (2007: 898). As the children's librarian in

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[6] From the Bibliothek am Luisenbad webpage: http://www.berlin.de/stadtbibliothek-
mitte/bibliotheken/bibliothek-am-luisenbad/ (Last accessed 14 September 2014)

the Bibliothek am Luisenbad hoped, the material is pre-supposed to have a role in reaching, or that it has at least the potential to 'reach' certain people, and to draw them into the library. This speaks to the great intentions and the rather functional expectations placed upon the provision of material in community languages.

The fieldwork libraries all held stocks of books and other material in other languages. Rather than being a general selection of foreign languages, they were heavily oriented towards 'community languages', those widely spoken in the area. In Thornton Heath, there is a collection of Tamil, Urdu and Hindi adult fiction, each allocated a separate block of shelving in the adult fiction section. In Berlin, the main adult foreign stock was Turkish, with the Bibliothek am Luisenbad offering the largest collection. Here too, the children's stock was much more diverse, with a range of books in a breadth of languages. The largest selections are in Turkish and Arabic, but they also have English, Spanish, French, and some in Scandinavian languages. One book, *The Very Hungry Caterpillar* by Eric Carle, is available in multiple languages. While it was used by library members of staff in several events as an example of the breadth of the library's stock, such children's classics are not consistently available across languages.

In Thornton Heath, the provision of foreign language books appeared to be surrounded by uncertainty which arose from an understanding of the local population as being highly transient. This unstable population was perceived as difficult to represent or cater for, and the shifting temporariness of people's residency in the area was palpable when I spoke with Kay about the stock of foreign language children's books:

> It's very difficult in Thornton Heath because we have such a transient population. We've got a lot of people who are brand new to the country, living in Brigstock House, they're here for a few weeks, so there might be a temporary need for books [in certain languages] and then they'll move elsewhere, so our collection - I'll just pick up a few -
>
> [*She stands up and heads to a nearby shelf, and comes back with a handful of dual language children's picture books, dropping them on the table as she lists them aloud*]

We've got Somali, Tamil, one in Russian, one in Polish, Chinese, Arabic, and oh gosh, what's this one? Romanian. But there's not an actual collection, of any of these languages, it's literally one, two titles. […] But they are nice stories in their own right. And sometimes it's nice to use these in schools, just to show that we have books in different languages…

(Interview with Kay, Thornton Heath Library, July 2013)

In an area with such a transient population it was difficult to provide collections of books representing the language needs of local children. While the library is unable to develop significant collections in relevant languages, in her example of taking the books to schools to show children, Kay indicates that the library can use the more limited selection of books as a sign in itself. The limited number of titles the library is able to provide doubles as a demonstration of the library's openness to the range of local languages, even if their provision cannot be either wholly consistent or sustainable. Even if the provision of material in other languages cannot be considered comprehensive, it is still seen as useful in providing a sign of the library's openness.

However, this demonstration of diversity through the range of library stock can become a rather hollow performance indicator. In an interview with a librarian at one of the Berlin central libraries, he dug out a lengthy survey which indicated the scope of the languages represented in the library's collection of stock. Exasperated, he flicked through the pages, and highlighted a box which indicated that the library had material in Inuit, but which, it transpired on closer investigation, was simply a DVD on which there were six language options, one of which was Inuit. He found this response to diversity, this literal box ticking exercise, both frustrating and politically dubious, calling it 'smuggling'.[vii] Because material is used as a demonstrable signs of the public library's diversity, there is disappointment when this sign is mis-used. Sara Ahmed asks questions of the way in which diversity is performed through documentation, asking, 'What does it mean to be good at equality or diversity, or for equality or diversity to be a measure of the good?' (2012: 85). The breadth of the library's stock can be used to indicate excellence; but the lived implications of the material get lost in the push to indicate the material as *itself* symbolising diversity.

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In both London and Berlin, the libraries use centralised book stock ordering systems, which limit capacity to provide differentiated stock in response to specific local needs. In interviews in both cities, librarians mirrored each other in their descriptions of a situation in which concerns over cost and lack of time have wrought changes in the methods of stock selection. The decline in the centrality of librarians' own discernment in selecting books has led to a far more pragmatic approach, seen here in Thornton Heath library:

> The group discussed the Community Language Selection Day held late the previous year. The librarian reports that 17 people popped in and out of the event, but as there were no Polish speakers, she chose that selection, using their covers as a guide. She breezes over the slight absurdity of this situation. 'Oh, you can tell a lot from the cover' she said, and she mimed picking up the books and looking at them, 'this must be a romance, that one is a crime novel…'

(Notes from Library Advisory Committee Meeting, Thornton Heath library, January 2012)

Uncertainty around the 'different' stock goes beyond the inherent forms of differentiation of the library classificatory system. Material in other languages is seen as different to other stock, an unknown quantity, and this was expressed in terms of uncertainty of how to how to shelve and arrange material, as well as how to choose it. In cases where non-Roman alphabets were unreadable for library staff, uncertainty was expressed in terms of illegibility. While this librarian was able to enact a superficial form of discernment over some foreign language books, the note shows that selecting and working with material in other languages prompts uncertainty and fundamentally, provokes questions around the legitimacy of the ways it is carried out. Kay highlighted a serious shortage among staff in the skills necessary to 'read' and manage the foreign language stock. She related how this is performed by a part-time member of staff in an informal way:

> There is a member of staff, a librarian, in Broad Green Library, […], she sometimes works here, and she speaks a few different languages. So she can go through the stock that we do have […] Of course *we* look at it, and we don't have a clue! […] I think what she was finding was that Tamil, or Hindi translations or English novels-Charles Dickens was in there. She was saying, 'that's not what they want to read!'

They want [...] more practically, books on life in Britain and learning English, that's the stuff that they actually want, so they can actually function in society, and not feel, kind of, contained. She did say that there were quite a few bizarre things sitting on the shelves, so she's gone through them to a certain extent.

(Interview with Kay, Thornton Heath Library, July 2013)

The unsuitability of stock was framed around the idea of its lack of practicality. Translated classic fiction was seen to not make 'sense', whereas it was assumed that more functional stock, addressing 'managing' life in Britain, would. The foreign language books have to work harder than other stock to be given shelf space by having to demonstrate obvious utility.

Fundamentally, the idea of legibility emerges in a sense of lack of knowledge- the staff literally can't read the texts. The literal illegibility of otherness comes to the fore. The slightly jokey tone of the way Kay says 'we' and the self-deprecating comic exaggeration of, 'we don't have a clue!' reveals the vulnerability around exposing this lack of skill. Lack of knowledge means that staff are in a position of relying on the advice of a part-time colleague who, as a consequence of her multi-lingual and presumably, racialised positioning, is considered someone with a 'direct line' to 'them'; seemingly able to mediate 'their' needs and desires. This part-time colleague occupies an interstitial space and is caught up in the complex pressures of being the person who represents; of being 'the race person' (Ahmed 2012: 4) in an institution which lacks the skill to read difference.[7]

This discussion has shown that the provision of library stock representing 'difference' or addressed towards specific needs may be seen as a demonstration of various forms of commitment – to ideas of diversity, to local interests; and simultaneously performed in ways that are institutionally regulated and confined. Provision may be seen as uncertain, improvised, bureaucratic, and sometimes, as a politically dubious 'end in itself'. The provision of 'appropriate' material is a tricky negotiation, which takes place within a context of always limited, and now ever-declining funding and centralised purchasing

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[7] The lack of long-term funding for members of library staff with specialist training and skills was also highlighted by Frau Körner as a concern (Interview, April 2012).

arrangements, alongside individualised understandings of 'what is suitable'. Material in other languages is held up as a highly visible manifestation of difference and multiculturalism in the library and functions as an important sign of the library's openness to diversity. However, providing diverse material, in other words, creating diversity on the shelf, does not directly translate into the arrival of diversity in the form of the people who come to the library.

> It wouldn't be enough here, if I, for instance with the foreign language stock, if I just bought it, then put it on the shelf. People also need to know that it's there, the relevant people, that there are these languages *im Haus* [here in this library].[viii]

> (Interview with Frau Körner, Bibliothek am Luisenbad, April 2012)

As Frau Körner points out, the presence of these books and the work which the library is committed to as part of this provision needs to be communicated to the 'relevant' people. Just as the children's librarian observed, these processes of communication are often mediated via more easily accessible points, whether this is via people's children, who more likely networked into educational provision of some kind, or through other initiatives or institutions to which people are already connected. The library must mediate this stock through its processes of outreach, often carried out in collaboration with other institutions, in order to communicate its commitment to openness. The final section of this chapter considers some aspects of these processes of outreach.

Outreach and 'reaching' people

> So, really, I think that people then must be familiarised (*vertraut machen*) with what we offer in ways which are easily accessible (*niederschwellig*) - either via their children or through schools, then it's quite easy, but if you offer it in more open ways […] perhaps in a way that is not so open to being easily accessible, or it's not a cultural offer which will gradually become recognized, then it makes little sense.[ix]

> (Interview with Frau Körner, Bibliothek am Luisenbad, July 2012)

According to Frau Körner, people have to be made familiar, '*vertraut'*, with what happens in the library and what it might offer them, in ways which 'make sense'. One of

the ways in which the communication of the library's offer may be made to make sense is to embed this within activities and access points into which people are already connected, to which, as Frau Körner went on to say, there is already a 'tradition', and thus to lower the threshold to accessing the library.

Part of the rationale for this, more roundabout recruitment of people may be seen as arising out of the library's 'low threshold', as discussed earlier in this chapter. While libraries are under pressure to demonstrate that they provide a range of services for people with hugely different backgrounds, levels of education, expectations and demands, as well as to target specific groups because of their under-representation in wider society, they do not directly gather information from their users about their needs. When I asked Frau Körner whether, because of the demands made of the library to demonstrate its 'reach', it could be useful solicit wider forms of information from people when they joined, she immediately said:

> No, and I wouldn't want to ask either. It could quickly turn into something negative, couldn't it? Think about what we just said [referring to the family literacy project], about these people not having ever been in the library before. If we were to ask them what level of education they had, well, that just wouldn't be on! [*she laughs*][x]

> (Interview with Frau Körner, Bibliothek am Luisenbad, July 2012)

Just as categorising people according to particular identifying characteristics is highly problematic, trying to immediately establish the 'needs' of new, vulnerable, or 'hard to reach' users is considered highly inappropriate. The library's absolute commitment to the principle of 'openness' and the inherent processes of tact and discretion at work at the library threshold means that work with 'targeted' groups must be carried out in a mediated, more 'roundabout' way in order to 'get them over the threshold.' In practice, this means that libraries spend considerable time and resources developing and establishing forms of partnership with other local educational providers, whether schools, *Kindergärten*, Sure Start centres, places of adult education, and institutions which provide links to other 'hard to reach' or vulnerable populations, such as charities and housing associations.

The Bibliothek am Luisenbad has a close co-operation with the local *Volkshochschule*, the adult education college*,* and has worked hard to develop a series of library inductions which are tailored for people enrolled on their family literacy courses, predominantly women and some men, '*mit Migrationshintergrund'* ('with a migration background') who are identified as having a particular set of needs. Frau Körner spoke about the importance of curating a good first impression through successful personal contact, and above all, of the creation of a positive and welcoming atmosphere. In the extract below, she links the approach made to the students on the course as a response to the specific social environment around the library:

> That's why, when we started this family literacy project […], we discussed how it couldn't be the usual kind of library induction, where you just take people round and show; this is what you do in the library, this is how you register… but rather that it is important to create an atmosphere. I mean, if it is really serious that you want to bring these people into the library, and not just because it is something that's politically voguish, then it's this first contact, and the next, but above all this very first contact, that must make people feel accepted; that they don't feel discredited because perhaps they don't speak German, or don't immediately understand the formal criteria that are important when registering. You have to be able to get across this sense that they are welcome, that they are truly welcome.

(Interview with Frau Körner, Bibliothek am Luisenbad, July 2012)

The collaboration with the *Volkshochschule* creates a highly orchestrated, 'special' introduction to the library, which is very deliberately run in a different way to the 'usual' induction. There is resolve to create a special atmosphere, to make people feel welcome, and usual introductory session is expanded into a whole morning's work for the participants and the librarian who facilitates. Moreover, this session does not happen spontaneously, it takes enormous efforts of collaboration and co-organisation between the institutions and months of planning.

In May, I went to a session of the extended induction to the library, which took place in the stucco *Puttensaal* upstairs in the Bibliothek am Luisenbad. I was struck by the carefulness with which the room had been prepared, and by the similarity of the set up

with that of a library induction session for pre-school children that I had attended previously.

> On one of the grand pianos there is a collection of glasses and some bottled water, along with a display of books, including children's picture books in Turkish, as well as some teaching textbooks. On the other grand piano leaflets on using the library in various languages are spread out, there is also a library card, and a print-out receipt of books borrowed. During the session, Frau Eschenbach holds these up and describes them carefully. There are about 8 chairs in a small circle at the front of the room. On one of the chairs is a huge version of *The Very Hungry Caterpillar*, the children's book by Eric Carle. Later, during the session, I carefully hold this open on my lap, craning the book round to the participants, as Frau Eschenbach reads the story aloud. In the middle of the chairs, spread out on the floor, is a piece of blue velvet fabric, with laminated pictures spread out over it, along with a stuffed toy caterpillar. Frau Eschenbach says, 'I got it all ready before the holidays – we just need to air the room a bit as no-one's been in here all weekend.' She opens the windows wide and gusts of fresh air billow in.

<div align="right">(Field notes, May 2012)</div>

The mirroring of the ways in which the rooms are set up for both the nursery children's introduction to the library and that for the adults – the same careful arrangement of toys and books on a soft cloth on the floor and the neat circle of chairs, seems to emphasise the way in which children are the absent bridge, the invisible conduits to bringing the adults into the room. Working with adults with limited German language skills, the tasks and activities which are offered as part of this session also take on a child-like quality which is at times slightly uncomfortable. The two adult participants take it in turn to throw a large fabric dice with photos on its sides which are used as cues to explain key pieces of information about how to use the library. Frau Eschenbach, the teacher who has accompanied the adults from the *Volkshochschule* and I do not take a turn. The parents are there because of their involvement in the family literacy project at the *Volkshochschule*, and the session can also be seen as functioning as an ideal-typical demonstration of good practice with children. The careful reading aloud and the time taken to explain things within a calm and unhurried atmosphere underlines the nature

of the wider intervention into which the adults are enrolled, where, as well as improving their German, they are being supported in their role as parents.

While the creation of a welcoming atmosphere in these sessions was seen as highly important, at the same time, the session is punctuated with small difficulties and awkwardness. There are moments when the planned activities seem over-ambitious and beyond the language capacity of those present. The participants struggle to manage the task of matching up pictures of the finely differentiated types of food pictured in *The Very Hungry Caterpillar* (in particular two different types of sausage) with the labels for these pictures. The teacher is occasionally dismissive of her students and even undermines them, saying, 'these books are far too advanced for them'. The group, much smaller than was hoped for, feels awkwardly small in this large, grand room, and before some additional participants arrive, very late, a moment which itself creates a certain amount of friction, the two women students from the literacy course are outnumbered by the other adults in the room.

Towards the end of the session, two attendance lists, one for the course and one for the Job Center are circulated and people laboriously search for their name and initial the column. The teacher carefully draws a thick black line through the boxes for the names of the people who haven't come. Attendance at this session is recorded, and fed back to the Job Center, through which punitive sanctions (for instance, the withdrawal or refusal of *Hartz IV* payments) can be enacted. At the end of the session, I am exhausted, and I suspect the participants are too. Some of the students rush from the room as soon as it's made clear the session is over. It has felt a difficult and not entirely successful morning:

> 'Phew', says Frau Eschenbach, helping herself to a glass of water, 'well, that was pretty hard work'. […] 'I love doing this, and usually it's fun, but you need people to have *some* interest, otherwise it's so hard!' Back in the office, she flops back into her chair and pushes her hair off her face. 'God, it was so hard today, Connie', she says to Frau Schwitters.

> (Field notes, May 2012)

What emerges through this session is an acute sense of effort and labour and a highly personal sense of disappointment at its perceived difficulty. There are moments of palpable awkwardness in the way in which the librarian, the teacher and the participants of the course are positioned. While the session has been very thoroughly planned in collaboration with the *Volkshochschule* and set up carefully, the sense of welcome that Frau Körner was at pains to convey seems compromised by moments of awkward communication and misunderstanding, and the point at which it becomes clear that participants are in fact compelled to be there by a system of conditionality overseen by the Job Center. In trying to expand its public, the library has to develop a very deliberate, and often a very different kind of approach to people who are 'under-represented'. However, this specially curated space can be seen as containing in-built limitations and difficulties.

In the Schiller Bibliothek, Frau Hoffmann reflected at length on a family event they had held earlier in the year, where the appearance of a man among a group of primarily Turkish women had caused a minor furore and caused her to question her capacity to curate a particular kind of public space:

> I had this experience at the 'Open Night for families' [...]. We arranged this evening, with the emphasis on families, and of course, for us that means families with *Migrationshintergrund* [...] and over 30 people came, and lots of, really almost only Turkish women with their children, but great, it was nice.

> Everything was going well, but then a man came along - he hadn't registered, but he had read about it, he brought the flier with him [...] he didn't have children with him, and I think he was perhaps slightly mentally ill, but [...] we thought at the beginning – he's a dad, [...] he spoke with everyone and I took him for someone who belonged to one of the Turkish women, but he was German [...]

> But then suddenly one of my Turkish colleagues came over, and said that it wasn't on, there's a man, and nobody knows him, and he doesn't belong here, and he has to go [...] I felt so bad for him, he was simply someone who came looking for social contact, and then he was completely shut out [...] and so I went to speak to him and said, please don't speak to the Turkish women, but I thought, this can't be happening - I can't just run an event for my Turkish women and seal them in here

hermetically, and no-one else is allowed to come in - that can't be the job of the library! [...]

And this is my liberal Turkish colleague, this chic young woman, who doesn't wear a headscarf - very trendy, and she says, he has to go, and I said, no, I can't do that - he belongs here just as much as you! [...] And the women who we have such difficulty getting into the library, they immediately come with the demand that only those who are like themselves are allowed to be there. It's sad, really, isn't it?

[...] So, what's it called, diversity, [she uses the English word] - it's not really diversity. Diversity is somehow different - there must be more mixing, everyone has to be prepared to mix, and that's difficult – I notice there that we simply come up against the limits of what we can do.[xi]

(Interview with Frau Hoffmann, Schiller Bibliothek, July 2012)

In this extract she wrestles with the notion of the definition of what it is to be a public place. She first comments on the limited public that the event managed to attract, partly because of its part-organisation through a Turkish colleague who 'mobilised her networks'. She then goes on to note the irony of the women the library finds it hard to attract themselves tolerating only a female public space, and she is deeply disappointed by the episode, seeing it as representing a very unsatisfactory form of diversity. This disappointment could be seen as a consequence of the special conditions of the event – that in having made efforts to specifically accommodate these users, to find that they then did not extend their tolerance in return was felt more keenly.

However, more tellingly, this episode reveals a core dilemma about how the library tries to expand its public. In having to make the library visible to certain people, in working to reach 'these women we find so difficult to get into the library', the library finds itself having to curate certain kinds of public conditions. Trying to open the library to a new public simultaneously places limitations on the broader openness usually expected of it. This episode thus conveys the 'tensions between a collective public imaginary and the new discourses of social inclusion and social investment' (Newman 2007: 888). The curation of an event aimed at a specific group of people fundamentally generates a different kind of public environment. Importantly, it's an environment which because of the way it was constructed, could *never* be diverse in the way that Frau Hoffmann

desires. The ways in which the event was set up, advertised and mediated locally meant that it was inevitable that it would result in a roomful of women '*mit Migrationshintergrund'* and their children, a point which Frau Hoffmann herself makes at the beginning of the interview extract.

Conclusion

> We have to, on the one hand, actively recruit for this to be a public space, and on the other, to maintain this public space in a respectful way.[xii]
>
> > (Interview with Frau Körner, Bibliothek am Luisenbad, April 2012)

This chapter has navigated some of the implications and complexities of the library as an 'open' public and institutional space. I have explored some of the tensions and ambivalence present in how everyday forms of difference butt up against received political agendas and ambitions, showing how the library occupies a site imbued with layers of expectation about the social role it should perform. In discussions about the public nature of the library, the library threshold emerges as a key metaphor. The philosophical openness of the public library is assumed to make the library both a cultural and social threshold, an entry point to participation in public life. The library is a space of perceived legitimacy, a site of civic inculcation and a space in which people are taken seriously and treated with dignity. The threshold is required to be low; entry is not made contingent on membership and in principle, those who enter are not asked to account for themselves in any way.

The low threshold through which *anyone* might enter, is accordingly also a space of stress and uncertainty, particularly for members of library staff who are engaged in processes of trying to 'read' and attend to the needs and desires of library users. The openness of the public library simultaneously creates an intensely fraught and fragile situation in which librarians encounter the daily uncertainties of 'the public'; their desires, frustrations and their vulnerabilities. These encounters are negotiated both through individual librarian's capacity for forbearance, empathy and ability to use acquired 'on the job' knowledge and life experience, and influenced by institutional

support and limitations. At the same time, there is concern that the threshold is not low enough, and that despite the potential for anyone to enter the library, it is far from everyone who does.

In working in localities with diverse and shifting populations, these libraries are placed within complex patterns of social investment, and is burdened with high expectations of its capacity to effect demonstrable social improvement while in the grip of ever-tightening budgetary constraints. In trying to fulfil political objectives, the library must be seen to reach out to an expanded public of people who, socially situated in very specific ways or highlighted as having particular needs, require encouraging over the threshold. Engaging with the daily manifestations of racial and ethnic difference and the huge range of social and educational needs present in the public library is experienced as highly demanding by library staff. Librarians who already perceived themselves as working at maximum capacity felt overwhelmed by the demands of working towards these objectives in stressful conditions of reduced staffing.

I have shown some of the ways in which openness and diversity strategies are 'worked out' in the institutional space of the library, focusing on the provision of targeted forms of foreign language stock, and the curation of outreach activities. Identifying and responding to targeted forms of difference must be negotiated within a context of the library's institutional reluctance to gather information on its users. Libraries engage in forms of mediation, often using children as a way of brokering contact with vulnerable or 'hard to reach' adults, or carrying out projects in careful collaboration with other institutions, predominantly educational providers.

Expanding the library public thus involves distinct and sometimes paradoxical negotiations with its fundamental principles of openness and tolerance, as particular conditions are curated to reach a certain target audience. As this chapter has shown, these negotiations require intense amounts of work and produce unintended consequences, sometimes even discomfort and a sense of failure. In discussing the approaches used to open out the library and to expand its reach within a context of it

being an 'already' open space, librarians articulate the fraught balancing act that this

requires.

i […] also wenn ich in eine andere Verwaltung gehe oder in ein Geschäft, also für mich ist es auch wichtig, dass der erste Kontakt - wie sieht es da aus, kann man sich da wohlfühlen, wird man mit seinem Anliegen ernst genommen […]. Es geht eigentlich auch so wenn man irgendwas machen möchte und die Leute fangen so an, als wäre man ganz blöd […]. Dann merkt man da auch, dass man da gereizt wird, und denkt, nee, so möchte man nicht behandelt werden oder so was und diese eigenen Erfahrungen dann vielleicht doch umzusetzen und zu denken - wie geht es jemandem auf der anderen Seite der Theke oder des Pförtners, und zu gucken, wie ist das?

ii Eine Kollegin sagt, ihr großer Traum wäre, sie könnte sich als Auskunftsbibliothekar in einen Glaskasten setzen. Das meint sie ehrlich, weil sie so eine, weil sie sich so belästigt fühlt, an allem was da ans Geruch und an Ausdünstung auch an Bakterien, das sie wirklich am liebsten in so einer Pförtnerloge sitzt. Finde ich ganz schrecklich!

iii Ja, also, sie tun nichts, vielleicht genießen sie einfach auch mal... was weiß ich was für ihn vorgeht, vielleicht ist es für ihn auch eine Oase gegen seine ewig pöbelnden Kumpels, die da draußen sind… -und so lange er nicht auf's Sofa macht oder laut 'rumgrölt, oder so stinkt, dass es nicht zu ertragen ist, denke ich – ich bin, so weit wie es irgendwie geht, dafür offen, dass wir das aushalten. Die leben nun mal hier, diese Menschen, und ich gehe auch hinterher nach Hause und fahre nach Friedenau, ja, und ich hab's gut! Ich finde immer - ja, so lange ich hier bin, muss ich mich mit dem konfrontieren, was ich ich hier vorfinde...

iv Welchen Konsequenzen hat die Situation für die Kollegen, wenn sie sich nicht mehr zufrieden an ihren Arbeitsplätzen fühlen, auf eine positive Ausstrahlung in der Bibliothek? Das, finde ich, ist schon ganz wichtig, ob man kundenorientiert sein kann, weil man da gerne steht, und nicht wenn man denkt, oh Gott, jetzt muss ich Benutzung machen, und wieder der Krach und wieder die Beschwerden, und kann ich nicht mal aushalten...

v Wenn man sich nicht abshottet, weil man sagt ich kann das einfach nicht aushalten, ich empfinde das nicht als eine Bereicherung und als eine Vielfalt, sondern als eine Überforderung, weil immer ist noch was und noch was, und nicht mal ist es so wie ich es denke - es gibt mir keine Sicherheit im Umgang mit jemandem, ähm, das ist hier auch manchmal, je nach eigener Verfassung, schwer auszuhalten, und es gibt denn auch Tage, wo man selber nicht so stark ist, dann ist es eine permanente Überforderung sozusagen, jetzt kommen diese vielen unterschiedlichen Kulturen, und wer ist es denn, der vor mir sitzt, und wenn jemand kommt, was bringt der mit?

Also, ich hatte neulich auch zwei Anmeldungen, einen Italiener, einen Holländer, ja, und dann weiß ich auch nicht, ist er ein Holländer, der arbeitslos ist, oder ist er einer der hierherkommt um eine Ausbildng zu machen, oder was ist das denn für jemand? Es ist so als wenn Sie in so scheinbar festen Systemen arbeiten, wo Sie denken, ich arbeite in einem Stadtgebiet, da wohnen gut-bürgliche Leute, oder da wohnt der Mittelstand und kann ich mich so und so verhalten, das haben sie eben in - an unserem Ort überhaupt nicht. Weil wir haben eben auch wirklich alle Bildungshintergründe, alle Sprachkompetenzen, und sie sind nicht durch ein äußeres Erscheinungsbild sofort zu erkennen.

Das ist schon manchmal auch für die Kolleginnen sehr schwierig und auch für die Benutzer, also, wenn man eben denkt, Kopftuch, konservativ, nicht Deutsch, und dann kommt jemand, der spricht super und man selber hat vielleicht gedacht, oh Gott, wie kann ich jetzt jemandem erklären, wie man sich hier anmelden muss? Kann das auch zur sehr unhöflichen Situationen miteinander führen, weil der andere

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denkt, was bilden die sich eigentlich ein? Was denken die, wer ich bin? Also, das ist ja so was wenn man so in seiner Person gesehen wird, und dann kann man vielleicht auch respektiert werden, aber wenn man das nicht einschätzen kann, gibt es auch interkulturelle Missverständnisse!

Das es schief geht, oder schief gehen kann.

Ja. Es gibt eben auch andere Leute die genauso aussehen, und da trifft es auch dann zu, dann ist es auch dann so, das jemand vielleicht in seinem Ursprungsland gar keine Schulbildung hatte, wirklich mit Analphabetismus zu tun hat, und wann man dann anfängt so zu reden wie mit einem Kollegen, dann ist es auch eine schwierige Situation, dann schafft man das auch nicht.

[vi] Unser Hauptanliegen ist die Versorgung der Besucher mit Sachliteratur zur Bewältigung der vielfachen Probleme, die sich aus dem Schulalltag, der Berufsausbildung oder den Anforderungen des Arbeitsalltags ergeben. Falls Sie selbst nicht über einen PC oder Internetanschluss verfügen, können Sie gern einen unserer 14 PCs mit Internetanschluss benutzen.

[vii] *Eine* DVD - sie ist sechs-sprachig, und *eine* davon ist Inuit, und *die* gibt sie hier ab. Und das ist politische - tut mir sehr leid, wer das gemacht hat... Das ist politisch… Schmuggel.

[viii] Das reichte hier nicht nur wenn ich, zum Beispiel Fremdsprachenmedien, dass ich sie kaufe und dann hinstelle, die Leute müssen auch wissen, und dann die richtigen, dass es diese Sprache gibt im Haus.

[ix] Also, ich denke die Leute müssen dann auch […] neiderschwellig mit diesem Angebot vertraut gemacht werden, entweder über die Kinder und Schulen, da ist es noch einfach, aber wenn man das so als offenes Angebot macht […] weil wenn das nicht ein Ort ist, der für so niederschwelliges Kulturangebot offen ist, und dann auch langsam bekannt werden kann, dann hat es wenig Sinn.

[x] Nee. Das würde ich auch nicht fragen wollen. Dann geht es manchmal im Negativen, ehe, ne? […] Was wir vorhinein gesagt haben, als Sie gesehen haben, dass die Leute noch nie in einer Bibliothek waren, die mit dem Elternkurs da waren, wenn wir jetzt noch fragen würden, was die für eine Bildung haben – das geht gar nicht!

[xi] Ich hatte dieses Erlebnis bei diesem Langen Nacht der Familie [...]. [Wir] haben so einen Abend gestaltet, schon natürlich mit, also Schwerpunkt Familien, heißt es bei uns immer Migrationshintergrund Familien [...] da kamen auch wirklich über 30 Leute, und Kinder, aber eben ganz viele, also, fast nur, türkische Frauen mit ihren Kinder, aber schön, es war nett. Alles gut - aber da kam einen Mann dazu - der war nicht wirklich angemeldet, er hat das aber gelesen, kam auch mit dem Zettel rein und der war, glaub' ich, so ein bisschen [*und er hatte keine Kinder dabei*] hatte keine Kinder, und ich glaub' er war so ein bisschen geistig gestört, aber [...] wir haben am Anfang gedacht - es ist ein Vater [...] er sprach mit den Menschen und ich hielt ihn für irgendeinen, der zu einer türkischen Frau gehört – er war aber Deutscher [...]. Aber dann kam plötzlich eine dieser türkischen Mitarbeiterin zu mir, und sie hat gesagt, ja das gehe also gar nicht, da ist ja ein Mann, der spricht ja mit den Frauen, und die wissen gar nicht, und der gehört gar nicht hierher, und der musste ja jetzt gehen… [...] Und der tat mir wirklich so leid, der wollte einfach nur Kontakt, [...] einer der also wirklich Kontakt gesucht hat, und es gab total die Abgrenzung [...]. Und ich habe gesagt, naja, sprechen Sie mal die türkischen Frauen nicht an, aber dachte ich auch - das kann ja auch wieder nicht sein, ich kann nicht eine Veranstaltung machen nur für meine türkischen Frauen, die hermetisch da einkasten und da darf kein anderer mehr 'zukommen, das kann auch nicht die Aufgabe der Bibliothek sein! [...] Und das sagte meine aufgeschlossene türkische Mitarbeiterin, die ist eine ganz schicke junge Frau, ohne Kopftuch, und ganz chic, und die sagte, ja der muss jetzt gehen, ich sagte nee, das kann ich nicht machen – der gehört genauso hierher wie Sie auch! [...] Und die Frauen, die wir es so

schlecht haben, in die Bibliotheken zu bekommen, sie kommen sofort mit der Förderung, hier dürfen aber nur die kommen, die so sind, wie wir! Ist doch traurig, oder?

[xii] Und da ist auch eine Grenze, das man sagen muss, egal wo man herkommt, egal was für einen Bildungshintergrund man hat, egal was für eine Anforderung man hat, es gilt auch immer, das geht alles, soweit man den anderen nicht einschränkt, nicht hindert, nicht stört, und das passiert eben nicht selbständig, sondern das ist sehr mit Kommunikation verbunden, wenn man da so abtaucht und denkt, hoffentlich passiert das nicht, das reicht in so einem Haus nicht. Wir müssen da öffentlichen Raum auch auf der einen Seite aktiv bewerben, auf der anderen Seite, aber auch aktiv respektvoll halten.

Chapter Four: Reading aloud together

Introduction

> At the top of the stairs to the library is a sign saying: *Wir Lesen vor – jeden Dienstag 4-5pm*. (We read aloud – every Tuesday). Many more children have arrived – there are at least 15 – and they, along with their parents, all mothers, are noisily milling around at the front of the library. The adult helpers start to gather the children together in preparation for them splitting off into groups. 'All the children who want to do reading come over here!' calls out Giesele.

> (Field notes, June 2012)

This chapter focuses on the weekly *Vorlesen* group, an hour of 'reading aloud' for young children, which is hosted every Tuesday afternoon by the Schiller Bibliothek in Wedding. In the previous chapter, I discussed how ideas of 'opening out' the library are seen in targeted outreach delivered through processes of collaboration and through the strategic acquisition of relevant material. The children's *Vorlesen* group may be usefully seen as another example of the 'opening out' of the library to another highly delineated and targeted group, carried out in partnership with an external organisation - *Lesewelt* ('Reading World'), a Berlin reading charity. The children who attend this weekly group predominantly have a '*Migrationshintergrund*', which often means that they grow up in households where languages other than German are spoken. These children, now entering pre-school education, as well as mainstream schooling from the age of six, are therefore navigating pathways into dual-lingualism and in some cases, multi-lingualism.

This chapter takes its starting point to be the fundamental importance of '[p]aying attention to the way people use language' (Harris 2006: 90). 'Paying attention' to the use of language in the context of the reading group and in the ways that language learning is mobilised as a political issue helps to opens out the experiences of the children involved in the group as more than simply reflecting need or insufficiency.

Looking closely at the *Vorlesen* sessions, this chapter discusses the impact of these regular slots of time for the Schiller Bibliothek as well as for the child and adult

participants, and how this group provides a route into a consideration of some of the complexities and difficulties around discussions of language learning in Wedding. In a context in which German language acquisition is seen as a marker of 'willingness' to 'integrate' (Boos-Nünning and Karakaşoğlu 2005: 211), children coming from households in which German is not spoken are seen as in need of special care and attention and at risk of educational failure and social disenfranchisement.

Feridun Zaimoğlu's 1997 book, *Kanak Sprak: 24 Misstöne vom Rande der Gesellschaft* ('Kanak sprak': 24 discordant notes from the edges of society) is composed from the voices of young men 'on the edge', whose language use is seen as symbol of their disenfranchisement and social exclusion. Zaimoğlu's capturing of '*Kanak Sprak'*, an '*Untergrund-Kodex*' '*eine Art Creol oder Rotwelsch mit geheimen Codes und Zeichen*' 'a kind of creole or argot, with secret codes and signs' (1997: 13), a shape-shifting amalgamation of Turkish, German and English forms a powerful linguistic evocation of extreme social exclusion.

From this larger perspective of multi-lingualism as problem, rather an asset, linguistic (in)ability is perceived as a worrying indicator of children's potential difficulties in the educational system. These concerns may be seen as part of the continuing fall-out from Germany's calamitous performance in the 2001 Europe-wide PISA educational survey. There are fears around young children *mit Migrationshintergrund* entering school without sufficient German skills to enable them to engage successfully with the curriculum there, and embarking on a struggle with education which ill-prepares them for the world of work. Gerhild Komander, a local writer and historian, points out that unemployment among young people in Wedding '*mit Migrationshintergrund'* is linked with poor language skills (2006: 251). As Stefan Wellgraf, a German sociologist observes, the under-development of language skills must be considered within the context of the school system.[1] Following his ethnographic research on Berlin schools,

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[1] Secondary schooling in Germany has traditionally been based on a tri-partite system. Aged eleven, children are recommended to either attend the *Gymnasium*, the most academic of schools, which offers *Abitur*, the equivalent of A-levels, and prepares students to enter university and professional roles. The *Realschule* offers a shorter period of secondary education, culminating in a diploma which is recognised as

one a *Hauptschule* in Wedding, Wellgraf writes a trenchant critique of the *Hauptschule* as preparation for success in neo-liberal job market (2012, see especially pp. 112-128).

The reforms introduced by the Berlin Senat in 2011-12, which included the extension of the school day, and a move towards the dissolution of the tri-partite school system, to be replaced by the *Integrierte Sekondarschule*,[2] are a sign that these issues are starting to be tackled to a more concerted extent. However, the emergence of reading aloud groups throughout the city may be seen as an informal response to the perceived language needs among local children. These groups are intended to address some of the issues children face in developing their German skills by providing another space in which they can listen to, and discuss books together with their peers. Almost every public library in the city runs at least one reading aloud group with young children, in which external adult volunteers (often known as *Lesepaten*, 'reading mentors')[3] read aloud to children, and they also take place in other educational settings. The popularity of this as a form of voluntary work can be seen through the provision of further education courses on skills development for reading aloud at Berlin's Freie Universität, which highlights this form of volunteering as a skilled endeavour, benefitting from training.[4]

My awareness of and interest in the reading group came early in the Berlin fieldwork, when I happened to be in the library as a session was taking place. I was struck by the ways in which the small, and as the librarians habitually presented it, fundamentally inadequate library space was transformed by the presence of young children sitting in

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qualification for 'white collar' jobs, and might be followed by a period of vocational training. The *Hauptschule* offers a more limited education, and the opportunity to eventually undertake a paid apprenticeship.

[2] The 'integrated secondary school': http://www.berlin.de/sen/bildung/bildungswege/sekundarschule/

[3] *Pate* is also the word for godparent, which provides a starting point for considering some of the responsibilities the readers describe as feeling towards the children, as I discuss later.

[4] '*Programm zur Förderung der Lese- und Sprachkompetenz von Kindern*' The extent of volunteer reading provision in the city is highlighted by the programme's website: 'Week in, week out, in more than 90 of Berlin's *Kitas* and 170 primary and secondary schools, as well as libraries, volunteer reading and learning mentors are active, helping children to develop their reading and speaking competency.' http://www.fu-berlin.de/sites/weiterbildung/weiterbildungsprogramm/kuki/lesefoederung/ (Last accessed 14 September 2014)

small groups on cushions between the shelves in the adult sections. The *Vorlesen* group peoples the library with children, who spill out of their delineated area to fill the entire library space with their voices and small bodies. The presence of the children's reading group in the library requires both the negotiation of physical forms of manoeuvring and displacement, as well as the extension of sonic tolerance from the librarians and the other users in the library. After introducing myself to the adult readers, I gradually started to take part in the group, sitting on the edges of one of the circles and towards the end of my time in the library, becoming more involved in the group as a reader by drawing attention to and making use of my own linguistic difference as an English speaker. I returned to the library a year after the official end of my fieldwork, and recorded an interview with three of the primary adult reading volunteers from *Lesewelt* in the café next to the library. The material in this chapter is thus both drawn on my time in the field and from data collected after, following a period of time in which the idea of this chapter about children's voices in the library started to germinate.

I start by considering the local situation regarding perceptions around reading and learning and reflect on how this is connected by local educationalists to children's lack of life experience beyond the everyday of their *Kiez*. I think about how words and experiences are linked in compelling ways and what the substitution of words for experiences might achieve. I consider to what extent the highlighting of language as problematic may be seen as an example of the ways in which the rather provocative term *Bildungsfern*, which literally means 'far from education', is 'worked out' in the area, and the ways in which the term frames poor literacy skills and educational disadvantage.

In the previous chapter I explored how librarians were engaged in processes of reading people's needs, and in doing this, both trying to 'read off' people, to find them legible or illegible in some way, and also making people visible through highlighting their specific needs. Reading, in this broad sense, demands acts of recognition and mediation; it is both a skill and a practise. In looking at reading in its most obvious, direct form, as a form of speaking and voicing, I consider it as an example of the ways in which the group

may be considered a site of intense social communication, and start to consider reading as an important and sociologically rich form of participation.

In exploring the broader communicative processes which are located within the reading group I use a German verb frequently invoked by the adult readers in the reading group: '*vermitteln*'. This word has a series of meanings: the first conveys a sense of 'giving' or 'conveying', rather like the sense of 'imparting knowledge'. It also has a sense of mediation, or acting as a go between, thus reflecting the highly moderated tone of the discussions, which are framed through the careful questioning of the adult reader. The third possible meaning of the word is its sense of 'to intervene', which returns to the sense of this linguistic terrain as being a site of insufficiency, need and intervention. In this chapter I discuss how the different forms of participation in the session; the forms of attention, effort, listening and speaking which the reading session provokes, may be understood as expressions of *vermitteln*.

While the group represents something rather routine, the participation of children and adults in these sessions can be seen as constituting communicative processes that have transformative, or at least open-ended potential. In working with words and learning to speak their experiences and opinions, the sessions demonstrate children's developing capacity to speak and participate together. As well as this optimistic reading of the group as a site of potential and of forms of participatory expression, towards the end of the chapter I look closely at some 'telling moments' that occurred during the sessions – instances in which difficult forms of communication and acts of resistance emerged in the group. I see the discussions, tensions and everyday work involved in the reading group as concomitant with its positive potential, revealing the contingent and shifting processes around language which disappear in discussions of linguistic lack or inability.

Through the *Vorlesen* sessions voices and exchanges emerge which add empirical texture to the broader anxieties around local language learning and fears of inability, which in their particular connection to children '*mit Migrationshintergrund*', have a 'raced' and 'classed' connotation. The sessions may be considered an instance of using

a close examination of words read aloud and spoken as a form of what Roxy Harris and Ben Rampton discuss as '*non-propositional* expression', 'the many ways in which race and ethnicity are *indirectly* evoked, performed or noted in the ordinary encounters of everyday life' [Italics in the original] (2009: 95). In listening to how language is played out in these everyday forms, I argue that understandings of language simply as 'problem' are refracted into a more complex appreciation of language as both a form of social participation *and* as a social destabiliser (Hewitt 1986).

Reading and speaking in Wedding

Since 2000, *Lesewelt Berlin* has organised weekly reading aloud sessions with primary school-aged children in public organisations across the city, delivered by a rota of trained adult volunteers. On *Lesewelt Berlin*'s website, the benefits of the weekly sessions for children with a non-German background in particular are spelled out:[5]

> And for children from non-German cultural and language backgrounds (*Räume*), the *Lesewelt* reading aloud sessions are a carefree opportunity to improve their language skills. Reading aloud, telling stories, and playing games together expand the vocabulary and encourage speaking.[i]

The benefits of reading aloud are made obvious here - not just the enjoyment that the activity provokes, although this is implied in the paragraph as well, but also because it has pedagogically significant and important consequences, particularly for children who have a 'non-German' background. What are the local implications of the initiative for children who are not from a German background in terms of speech, language and learning? In Berlin, the idea of those 'with a migration background' as having inadequate, incorrect or insufficient language is deeply embedded into everyday life. The perceived language needs of people, especially children 'with migration background' is used as both a marker of social change and social problem.

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[5] Lesewelt website: http://www.lesewelt-berlin.org/index.php?article_id=6 (Last accessed 14 September 2014)

During fieldwork it was not unusual for me to encounter casual comments such as: 'she's an Arab, her German's very good though', backhanded 'praise' which I found unnerving and disquieting. At the same time, and while continually feeling highly self-conscious about my own linguistic limitations, I encountered the experience of my language ability as being met with both surprise and praise. Being praised for speaking German so well, I felt, served to highlight my awkwardness, and would invariably result in my stuttering and making grammatical mistakes in the immediate aftermath of receiving the compliment. Instances of praise, however well-meant, can serve to highlight relative power positions and to emphasise difference.

Figure 16. A residential building in Wedding.[6]

Discussions of language limitations hide another language in Berlin, *Berlinerisch*, the local dialect spoken by long-term Berliners and which has working-class connotations (Dittmar and Schlobinski 1988). The Berlin accent 'roughens up' standard German (also known as *Hochdeutsch*) – it switches the soft 'ch' of '*ich*' ('I') for a more forceful '*ick*' and

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[6] Photo: Robinson, 2013. In 'standard' German this slogan reads: *Ich stehe auf Wedding – es ist mein Ding*, which can be translated as: 'I'm into Wedding – it's my thing'

changes '*was*' (what) into '*wat*'. It lengthens vowels - '*klein*' (small) becomes '*kleen*'. While simultaneously maligned as uncultivated, it is also adopted self-consciously, parodied ironically and used as a badge of honour and as a sign of the *Berliner Schnauze* – the plain-speaking, gruff tendencies of Berliner talk.[7] The image above shows one instance of Berlinerisch harnessed as a form of marketing, ostensibly for Wedding, but also for the housing association which owns the apartment block. *Berlinerisch* underscores debates around language in Berlin as always occupying a highly marked space of meaning. One in particular of the *Lesewelt* reading volunteers in the Schiller Bibliothek, had a pronounced Berlin accent and all of the women used slang forms of expression alongside very deliberate, pedagogical language.

In this area, local multi-lingualism is widely understood as representing a deficiency rather than asset when set in a context of poor literacy skills and educational disadvantage. Many children in the area who come from households in which the lingua franca is Turkish, or Arabic, but who have not been consistently read to or not encouraged to express themselves in these languages, lack the breadth of vocabulary in their mother tongue which would enable them to transfer expressions from Turkish, or Arabic into German, and thus lack reference points for things and experiences that aren't part of their daily lives.

> They don't have the terms, even in Turkish or Arabic, for things that aren't part of everyday life in Wedding, because they don't read. […] So, yes, the immediate, everyday things, they're there, but only in spoken language, and everything else that there is, is not there. Even in the mother tongue – in Turkish, or Arabic, and that's an enormous problem, because the terms aren't there – because if it was there in Turkish- it would be easy to transfer it over – that is such-and-such in Turkish, and that is such-and-such in German.[ii]

> (Interview with Herr Bauer, Medienhof, August 2012)

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[7] *Berliner Luft und Berliner Schnauze,* Deutsche Welle: http://www.dw.de/deutsch-lernen/berlinerisch/s-12462 (Last accessed 14 September 2014).

Children in families in which there is acute lack of resources, both of time and money, rarely leave the local *Kiez* to be exposed to new experiences, and as a result, they lack the words for experiences and things which they might literally have never seen before:

> Herr Bauer: It is so unbelievably limited that even I'm sometimes astonished. I sometimes can't believe it. I was working with some 11 year olds, and we were looking at a picture of the skeleton of a horse, so, the bones of a horse. [And I said:] 'horses, they walk on their tiptoes, anatomically.'

> *To me, he says, 'ok?' and then in English adds, 'on the tops', demonstrating with his fingers curled under his hand.*

> And then I asked: 'they're strengthened, their tiptoes are much stronger than ours, a horse's tiptoes are especially strong, but what is it, down here, at the end of the horse's leg? What's it called? What's it walking on?' And then they said: 'horns'

> *He demonstrates horns by pointing his index fingers out of his head*

> What's Huf in English, again?

> Katherine: [*Says in English*] Hoof.

> Herr Bauer: They didn't know the word for hoof, because there aren't any horses in Wedding. They didn't know the word for hoof, and they were in their fifth school year. It shocks me, sometimes. [iii]

> (Interview with Herr Bauer, Medienhof, August 2012)

Herr Bauer's frustration with the gaps that local children must negotiate at school on a daily basis is palpable in this short extract. He layers his anecdote with rhythmical allusions to the way in which he questioned the eleven year olds, and provides dramatic emphasis through his use of gesture, miming the horse's hoof with his hand and then gesticulating with his fingers to make horns which poke from his head. His blunt statements demonstrate his exasperation at the situation, and his commitment to 'telling it like it is'. There is also a unintentionally picquant moment where, uncertain, he asks for a clarification of the word *Huf* in English, the word which the eleven year olds did not know, and which in English, is almost identical to the German word. Moments like these might be described, as Roger Hewitt writes, as 'the hovering, hesitant,

stepped moments of insight which the people we talk to convey' (2003: 196). The 'slip' between Herr Bauer's uncertainty in English, and the uncertainty in German of those young people he is supervising in the homework session, can be seen as a 'telling' moment, a moment of mirroring, in which the uncertainty of the children Herr Bauer is working with, is reflected by his own, and which reveals the translations and substitutions which are always at work in thinking and talking about language.

In saying 'there aren't any horses in Wedding' Herr Bauer shows how much he considers the work of experience to be bound up with the words available to the young people. Giesele makes a similar point about how books enable young children to make sense of the world, creating links between that which they see in books and then around them:

Giesele: Even if it's just a picture book, there is a storyline there, like *Pippi and the Bear* - they see the bear, they see what he looks like, they see his red ribbon each time, and all these small things picture books have, even if it's just a picture book for two year olds. [*Spoken in a sing-song tone*] The ball is round, the ball is colourful, [in German these words rhyme] the ball is blue, or whatever – or the stars in the sky, they see all this. And then if they look at the sky later, then they can say, 'Oh look! It's just how it looked in the book!' That's learning, about what things are, isn't it?

Katherine: They're able to order the world.

Giesele: Yes, just to put it in order![iv]

(Discussion with *Vorlesen* volunteers, September 2013)

Giesele recounts how children are learning to order the world, to make sense of the world through objects. The readers and the children are working on minute levels of *vermitteln* – exploring and highlighting the connections between that which is denoted in the book and that which is 'out there' in the world. Does the chanting, the repetition of more immediate words, such as ball: 'the ball is blue, the ball is round', perhaps lead to ownership of the words in ways that more unfamiliar words, like hoof, perhaps, does not? Here, a local primary school teacher describes how unprepared for school her class of six year olds were, lacking knowledge about the world around them:

So, the problem our children have is that they really have very little experience of the world around them; I took a class for six years, and in their first year they didn't know, for instance, what a forest was. They had never been to a forest, not once in their entire lives. They had never been to the zoo; they had not even ever really been outside Wedding. […] And that doesn't provide enough of a foundation for them to be able to make a good start here [at school].[v]

(Maria Posener, Andersen Grundschule)[8]

In these examples, the learning taking place in childhood demands both a discovery of the natural as well as the social world, and children's books draw heavily on images from nature. As Frau Posener and Herr Bauer make clear, it cannot be assumed that the children in this urban environment are familiar with these images and experiences. In equipping children with the words even though they might not have had the *experience*, can words work as a substitute for experience?

Frau Posener's reflection can also be considered in relation to the particular resonance and pressures that starting school in Germany has. It has its own verb: '*einschulen'* (to enter, or be enrolled in school) and is accompanied by celebrations and rituals on a scale not matched in the UK: children are sent a welcome letter from the local authority, there is gift giving, in particular, a school bag, as well as a *Zuckertüte*, a large cone containing small gifts and sweets which children carry with them on their first day. Children enter school aged at least six years old, and generally, having already completed some form of pre-school education. Even if they do not already have some reading and writing skills, and many do, they are at least expected to have picked up elementary 'rules of the game' – to know how to comport themselves, express themselves in German, and to interact with others in an educational setting. The expectations surrounding school enrolment provoke an acute sense of time pressure in making sure children are ready; they must have these language basics in hand before they get to school, otherwise they are in danger of being left behind. Giesele conveyed

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[8] From a short video produced by the Medienhof: '*Hürdensprint: Probleme der Sprach- und Buildungsförderung in Berlin Wedding'* (Eigenproduktion der RAA e.V., Herbert Weber) May 2008 https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=W6SbwvbUDuw#t=304 (Last accessed 14 September 2014).

this sense of the immense pressure for children to be linguistically capable in time for school:

> And there are many foreign children, (*Ausländerkinder*) and I mean also German, but the foreign children, they have difficulties with language, as their parents simply can't communicate it to them. [She uses the word *vermitteln.*] You notice this. You notice this. Otherwise they would long since have managed it. Because I'm not working with two year olds, I have four year olds in front of me, who will enter school in two years. And in two years' time, they have to be able to do this![vi]

> (Discussion with *Vorlesen* volunteers, September 2013)

In this short extract, Giesele identifies *Ausländerkinder* ('foreign children') as having particular trouble with language, because their parents also lack the security in the language to communicate with them. She works with clearly defined expectations of age – in her group she has four year olds who have the ability of what she might expect from two year olds. The entry into school in another two years time already hangs over these children and her worries about their ability. Gerhild Komander observes that over half of the children with German-speaking parents needed intensive language support in their first year at school (2006: 251). A booklet for parents published by the Berlin education department highlights the absolute necessity of a good grasp of German for educational success.

> In Berlin there are over 180 nationalities. But without German, it doesn't work. Berlin is not only the German capital, it's also an international metropolis. People from all over the world come together here and live here. It's no surprise that 37.3 % of all pupils who started school in 2013/ 14 had a mother tongue other than German. […] The citizenship of the children is immaterial. In the family, is German or a different language spoken? Whoever wants to be successful at school must be able to speak and understand German well. (2014: 28) [vii]

> 'Let's go! The first day at school. School start 2014'[9]

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[9] 'Los geht's! Der erste Schultag: Schulanfang 2014', Senatsverwaltung für Bildung, Jugend und Wissenschaft, Juni 2014 http://www.berlin.de/sen/bildung/bildungswege/grundschule/ (Last accessed 14 September 2014)

This situation is often summarised in the contested term *Bildungsfern*, which can be literally translated as meaning 'far from education'. However, the term roams around discursively. Understandings of *Bildungsfern* are positioned along a spectrum of negativity, from families where parents are keen for their children to do well, but are uncertain about how best to support their learning, to households where responsibility for the children's education is considered the job of the school, to examples where parents do not have the capacity to engage with their children: *'es heißt eher, 'halt den Mund', als 'jetzt erkläre ich es dir''*, as Herr Bauer exclaimed when we spoke. ('It's more a case of 'shut your mouth', than 'now I'll explain it to you'). Some people expressed discomfort and dissatisfaction with the term *Bildungsfern* while continuing to use it, employing qualifiers to distance themselves from it.[10] And as the Vorleser volunteers I spoke with were keen to emphasise, uncertainty and unwillingness around intervening and supporting children's education were not in their experience, limited to families *mit Migrationshintergrund*:

Maria:	They're just not interested!
Giesele:	That's true, but that's also the case among Germans too.
Maria:	That's why I say, it goes through all, through all classes [*Schichten*].
Paula:	I think that if they haven't had an education themselves, then they can't tell how important it is. So I'd say that there are *Bildungsferne Schichten*.[viii]

<div align="right">(Discussion with Vorlesen volunteers, September 2013)</div>

The volunteers gave examples of parents who are really keen, almost over-keen and who intervene in children's homework, and spoke of a time when a Russian-speaking mother came, who sat beside her child during the sessions, using a dictionary to looking up almost every word and asking Giesele for clarifications. Paula pointed out the *Vorlesen* group tend to be already working with engaged families, families who can make the session every week:

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[10] In our first interview, Frau Körner made reference to '*den sogenannten bildungsferne Migranten*' – the migrants who are so-called 'far from education', positioning her own antipathy towards the term.

I think they are helping [their children] because they're coming to us every Tuesday. For some of them that shows a lot - because they have to – well, I don't know where they're all travelling from, but, the ones who end up here; they're the engaged parents – even if they're perhaps a bit helpless..[ix]

<div align="right">(Discussion with Vorlesen volunteers, September 2013)</div>

This first part of the chapter has discussed the local context around language use and acquisition and how ability in German becomes a sign of integration, participation and most pressingly, for the children in the reading group, of readiness for school. I now turn to consider what happens during the reading sessions themselves, discussing how instances of voice and participation emerge.

"Wir lesen vor" ("We're reading aloud")

Some children are kneeling at the low boxes of library books, where hardback books are laid with their spines outermost, so they can be flicked through, like CDs or records. They pull them out of the boxes and start to make small piles. They gather around Giesele, who is giving out their reading record cards from a yellow index card box, as they say their names. There is pervasive noise and chatter – children arriving and parents, mainly mothers, moving around. Many of them are familiar and are greeted and get their card without saying their name. Some children say their name quietly or indistinctly, sometimes 'foreign' names are not immediately understood: 'What letter does that start with?' she asks brightly, 'aha!'

At the back of the library, the larger room, which houses the adult section and the work spaces, the reading groups have taken over. Two loose groups have formed, one which occupies the blue sofa and the surrounding floor space at the back of the library, and one which hovers between two shelves, right in the middle of the room. This group has formed a small, ragged circle around Paula, and have taken off their shoes. They sit on cushions, and some children have taken several cushions and wobble about on the mini tower they have constructed. Giesele continues to sit in the children's section at the front of the library, with children sitting beside her on the red sofa and on the floor on cushions shaped like trucks and cars. They tend to hold their cards in their hands while listening to the story, bending them around and waving them around in the air when talking. While listening implies quietness, the groups are loud and chatty. A man sitting at one of the nearby computers puts his headphones on. (Field notes, June 2012)

Reading aloud *is* loud, and for an hour every week, the entire floor of the library is filled with the sounds of children's voices; they chant responses to questions, exclaim loudly, chatter together, laugh, shout, and cry and move around noisily of the adult fiction section. The library becomes blanketed in the sound of children's voices and movements, and while this noisy busyness is appreciated as a sign of the library's vitality, it is also seen as occurring at some cost: '*So ein Lärm*!' exclaimed Frau Hoffmann,the librarian, '*man kann sich kaum verständigen*!' ('What a racket! You can scarcely make yourself understood!') (Interview, September 2013). While the library is often noisy, the level of noise in these children's sessions far exceeds that which is usual and is accompanied by other disruptions and a generalised sense of minor chaos. The library's spatial limitations which cause the sessions to 'take over' the entire floor of the library, lends them an improvised air. The children spill out of their allotted area at the front of the building to occupy the adults' section; they sit on the floor in small circles, almost hidden between bookshelves, and clamber over the sofa at the back of the adults' section.

Reading aloud, while highly desirable in this context, is simultaneously socially disruptive, and requires the extension of forbearance from the other library users. While it might be considered an inconvenience, the group is embedded in the weekly rhythm of the library. Library activities continue around the knots of children and there is a very matter of fact approach to the sessions and to the disturbance they created. However, the group is also acknowledged as being highly successful:

> We are the fourth most successful library using *Lesewelt*. That means, this small library, across the whole of Berlin, *in the whole of Berlin,* has the fourth largest number of children coming to *Lesewelt*! I found that so fab! Because they also operate in really large libraries, where there are many more visitors and much higher circulation, but we are the fourth best in Berlin! This is really (*doch*) great! For all that it's between the shelves and so squashed here, you know? I was really proud, and they were highly surprised that there is so much interest here.[x]

> (Interview with Frau Hoffmann, September 2013)

Frau Hoffmann is highly proud of the group's success in the library where it has out-performed more 'obviously' successful (larger, and with higher circulation rates) libraries across the city. In tandem with her pride she expresses acute surprise, both from her perspective and that of *Lesewelt*, that the group performs so well in this small and rather inadequate space, where it has to be managed in such an improvised and unsatisfactory way. The unexpectedness of this success is revealing about the position of the group within the library. Here, 'success' is framed through the amount of children participating in the group. In the next part of the chapter, I want to consider other ways in which the success, or as I start to consider it, the social significance of the group might be considered.

Figure 17. *Vorlesestunde*[11]

Reading creates a chance to speak

As the introduction to the *Vorlesen* group made clear, the reading aloud sessions foregrounds children's voices in the library in which which are both highly public and

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[11]Robinson, 2012. 'Reading hour for children aged 4-12 years'. Poster in the entrance to the Schiller Bibliothek

highly unusual. While the Schiller Bibliothek hosts another regular children's reading aloud group, this happens outside of the public opening hours, as do most of the activities with children from local *Kitas* (nurseries) and schools. Every Tuesday at 4pm, however, the children expand out of their usual space, taking over the entire library. While the sense of the group's presence in the library has up until now been conveyed through sound – which highlights the noise and even disturbance the group creates, I now move to consider how children's voices are made audible in the sessions.

> And often, the reading aloud is just to make an opportunity to speak (*Gesprächsanlass)*, so the things that we say, I mean, the things we read, that we use it, to ask them [for instance], 'what do *you* like eating?' in order to expand their vocabulary, or to improve their grammar. It's so common that the children *do* know a lot of words but are really bad at grammar.[xi]
>
> (Paula, *Vorlesen* Volunteer, September 2013)

The importance of the group lies in the form of the social and linguistic interactions which it enables, with children encouraged, through the reading of books, to speak. Considering these interactions and contributions important, however, removes them from demonstrating success in the way that highlighting the amount of participants can. I look at some of the exchanges I observed during the reading sessions which demonstrated the negotiated forms of communication at work in the group. In considering these exchanges as negotiated, I am exploring the use of the word *vermitteln*. I draw out the different ways these negotiations draw out the adult's capacity to mediate the texts they are reading in ways which suit the highly differentiated needs and abilities of the children, the ways in which children are encouraged to respond to the books and to 'voice' their participation, and the extent to which and the terms on which children participate in the session. Through discussing the ways in which children's voices emerge in the session, I start to reflect on what this sort of space in the library makes possible, and where its tensions, difficulties and limits might be perceived.

Fundamentally, reading creates a chance to speak. The adult readers are doing far more than simply 'reading aloud'. Particularly with the youngest children, they read with exaggerated vocal emphasis and attentiveness to the book's pictures.

> Stefanie reads in a very lively and active way. She makes sound effects and sometimes reads very loudly and emphatically, or assumes a funny voice. Her group are reading a book called '*Martin der Tankwart'* ('Martin, the petrol station attendant'*)* and while reading, she pauses to ask the children to identify certain things in the pictures. They race to point to what she's asking for, getting to their feet or kneeling up and stretching over to touch the right part of the page. 'What's his name?' she repeatedly asks, and *'*what's his job?' By the end of the book all the children in the group are loudly chorusing: '*Martin!' 'Tankwart!'*
>
> (Field notes, September 2012)

In this example, Stefanie, one of the *Vorlesen* volunteers, uses a build-up of repetition during the story, as well as the repeated invocation to identify something in, or to identify with the images, to create a shared sense of recognition within the group. The prompts presented to the children are highly focused and kept tightly within the text, which results in them developing a group awareness and then a group performance of the 'right' response to make, a shout in unison, which floats across the room.

This engaged approach can be used to animate the most unprepossessing of books. In the same session, Stefanie tackled a book describing the process of paper recycling, which to my ears, sounded in theory at least, rather dull. The children, however, were fascinated by Stefanie's lively rendition of the multi-staged process, as she highlighted aspects of the text that drew them in, asked questions which linked the contents in the book to their knowledge and ideas, and created a sense of wonder around the whole process. She constantly checked the children are following, sometimes asking, '*what* do you think will happen *next*?' and used events in the book to explore how much they know and to prompt a wider discussion around the book. This 'talking around' a book can be seen as an important sense of *vermitteln*.

As Paula says, above, the prompt questions encourage the children to think about their experiences in relation to the material in the books and to articulate these to the group.

In using the books as a spring board to conversation, the adult readers are aware that the children love to comment and report on their experiences. In this session, Giesele has a group of the youngest children, the four to six year olds:

> Giesele reads a story about an elephant with a lot of expression, carefully turning the book around so the children can see the pictures. 'The elephant picks the leaves with his - what's this called?' she asks, waving her arm in front of her face to denote the elephant's trunk. The children don't know the word for trunk. '*Rüssel*, *Rüssel*' says Giesele several times, emphatically rolling the 'R' at the start of the word. Some of the children repeat the word. 'It's like his nose', she goes on. 'And then he puts the leaves in his - what?' Two little boys sitting next to each other put their hands up when they want to answer, '*Mund*!', they call out, his mouth.

> 'The elephant covers himself in sand to stop getting bitten by insects, like hornets', continues Giesele. 'What are hornets?' She asks. 'They're like bees', she goes on, not waiting for the children this time. But at this point, they start to chime in: 'I got bitten', says one, 'I've got a scar.' 'I've got a scar here' - Giesele points to a spot beside her eyebrow. The children jump in with more scars and injuries: 'I've got scars on both my knees!' exclaims Max. 'My dad has a scar on his chin!' says the little boy sitting next to him. In the midst of this, Mahmoud starts recounting a tale of how he was going down a hill and got a big graze on his forearm, and the little girl who arrived late fiddles with the blue plaster on her arm while she explains how her accident happened. All their voices mingle with each other – they are not waiting for each other to finish, nor do they appear to be listening to each other.

> (Field notes, September 2013)

Like Stefanie, Giesele harnesses highly emphatic and demonstrative ways of speaking to animate and support the action in the text. Through the use of dramatic gesture, the waving of her arm to make an elephant's trunk, she provides an embodied clue to a word that is unfamiliar to the children. She emphasises this word through its emphatic repetition, 'sounding out' the word exaggeratedly. She follows up the introduction of this unfamiliar word by linking it to one the children do know – the elephant's trunk is like a nose. Rather than being specifically asked to contribute to the discussion, the introduction of the word 'bee' appears to prompt a spontaneous connection to the

potential damage a bee might cause (a sting, which could leave a mark) and an accompanying outpouring of talk relating to scars and injuries, both current and old, on their bodies and those of people they know. In their eagerness to speak, the children talk across each other, their words tumbling over each other. They seem to direct their talk to Giesele, scarcely paying attention to what the others are saying; they are not listening to each other. In conversation with the adult readers after the session, they spoke about how children often articulated this intense need to speak:

Giesele: And, but sometimes, children have so much to say, at least, this has happened to me, that we just don't get as far as reading, because they are so chock-full with things they want to say, that you say, ok, well we won't read today, we'll just chat together. Because speaking can get a bit neglected in Kindergarten, because there are just too many children there, for each one to be able to talk,

Maria: Or in families, when there are lots of siblings.

Giesele: Exactly. At home when the parents don't have time, or maybe have problems, talking can suffer, it's just like that. They just want to talk. And then they should talk, and then they should tell things, and explain together…

Paula: But what I find difficult, for instance, is if children are in the flow, and then go completely off track, and don't stop – what do I say to that child, 'right, be quiet now, we're going back to the story'? I'm a bit torn, whether to cut off a child like that, [she literally says *abwürgen*, 'to choke'] but also, the others, they don't want to listen, they're not listening – it doesn't interest them, what the other children are saying. They just want to speak themselves, or listen to the story, and I don't know … […] because I wouldn't do this to adults, do you know what I mean?

Giesele: But you have to![xii]

(Discussion with *Vorlesen* volunteers, September 2013)

The readers demonstrate sensitivity to the children's need to speak, and relate this to the possible limited opportunities they have to express themselves in busy *Kindergärten* or within families with limited capacity. Recognising this, the readers let the children

speak at length, or even, as Giesele relates, change the plan for the session from reading aloud to concentrate on talking together, if they feel the children have 'too much' to say that day. However, in this extract, a slight tension is provoked when discussing how far to let children 'run off track' with their spoken contributions, or how to 'manage' their speaking during a normal session, when the conversation can veer quite wide from the book in question. This might be especially acute when the other children are not ready to engage in listening well to their peers. In their eagerness to talk to the adult, the children are not necessarily interested in hearing what each other say; they are still learning how to listen to each other. Sensing how much to intervene into and refocus these *off piste* and sometimes one-sided conversations requires tactful forms of listening on the part of the adults, and this may also be seen as a form of *vermitteln.*

While the readers are highly aware of the necessity and the importance that children should be given the opportunity to speak, the reality of letting them speak actually presents a challenge. The adult readers exercise different forms of judgement around the ways in which to manage this situation. Paula is concerned with how to listen respectfully to children, and how to let them give voice to their experience. She tries to emphasise the inherent rudeness of interrupting a child by comparing it to interrupting a conversation with an adult in the same way, which would be considered highly inappropriate. Giesele on the other hand, is much more certain of the necessity to try to control children's contributions, especially if the other children are not listening to what they are saying. From her perspective, it is better to keep the children focused on the book, as a single, unifying point of interest for the discussion and as a courtesy to the whole group.

The adult readers also considered the nature of children's contributions, which often took the form of unfiltered reportage from home which was occasionally embarrassing or highlighted a potential cause for concern:

| Giesele: | […] you've probably noticed this; they speak all at once about their experiences. |
| Katherine: | Yes, they like to – they're reporting… |

Giesele:	Yes, exactly, they're reporting details from home – you get to know a lot about life at home!
	Laughter and exclamations from the others
Katherine:	Who has a scar, and where -
Paula:	Who has their own bed, or their own room, these sorts of things…
Maria:	Sometimes their mum or dad is there to collect them, or is already there in the library, and they can find this sort of thing embarrassing.
Giesele:	Just think, Nushat told me – her mother was there – Nushat told me that she slept between mummy and daddy, yes?
Paula:	Yes, yes, exactly!
Giesele:	She doesn't have her own bed. And her mother was highly uncomfortable, I think, wasn't she? She doesn't have her own room; she sleeps in mummy and daddy's room.[xiii]

(Discussion with *Vorlesen* volunteers, September 2013)

In her work, Suki Ali considers children's narrations of their 'subjective experience', considering the constructed nature of accounts of the self (2003: 29) through which children narrate their relationship to others. The accounts the children present from home can reveal home lives which are difficult in some way. The children have not yet reached the stage in which they might censor their telling of their experiences.[12] The adult readers feel that because of their role and the situation in which many of the children are in, that they have a sense of responsibility towards these children. This is seen, first and foremost, in doing a good job in the session, and also, in carrying concerns about children with them, as Giesele says:

Of course I think it's work; if we were just 'reading aunties' we'd just rattle through the words and then go, and give it no further thought! We only have to read aloud. But we're thinking when we're doing this, and of course you

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[12] As Maria says in the interview, '*Kindermund tut Wahrheit kund*' ('out of the mouths of babes and sucklings').

sometimes worry about particular children – we sometimes speak to each other about certain children – of course we worry.[xiv]

Maria spoke of how she felt they had an *Erziehungsauftrag* - a responsibility towards the children's educational development. Paula joked about feeling she should take a child who she feels has very limited life experience to a museum with her. However, this feeling of responsibility is negotiated alongside a sense of uncertainty about how much it is possible, or politic, to intervene. Despite *thinking* about this child, and imagining how she might enjoy or benefit from a trip to the museum, Paula had not pursued this activity with her, and there was a sense in which their interventions could be seen by parents as interfering. Giesele relates how she had a very uncomfortable time explaining to a mother that she thought her child should have some extra help from a 'special' educationalist before he was enrolled in school, saying, 'she got a bit stroppy, you know what I mean?' ('*die wurde ein bisschen pampig, ne?*').

This concern is framed, particularly in the case of the younger children, around the progress they need to make before they are six years old, in order for them to make a successful start at school, as discussed earlier. This is so crucial that it forms one of the core concerns the adult readers have about certain children; that their current language ability, which is perceived to be insufficient, has already sealed their educational fate:

Giesele:	And we have many children, where you know exactly, for instance the little dark haired boy, who came today [Mahmoud] and whose mother was sort of, asleep - [*she taps her finger on the table for emphasis*] he's *four* now, and he has two years to learn to talk properly, but he's not making progress. He's not making progress. And then he'll fail at school…
Paula:	But perhaps he'll still make a leap…
Giesele:	Maybe![xv]

The work of participation

In participating in the group, children are not just practising reading and speaking together, they are also practising 'being' together; being exposed to the rules of behaving in this context, of listening to each other, of making decisions together, of respecting other people's decisions, and observing punctuality. The regularity of the sessions and their highly routinised nature creates feelings of dependability and trust. The temporary construction of special, semi-private spaces, dotted between the bookshelves makes a den-like area for each small group of readers, an intimate space of play and sharing in the middle of the library. In the sessions I participated in, we took off our shoes and sat close together on small padded cushions, our knees almost touching. Some of the children snuggle into the adult reader, or lean over them to look more closely at the pictures in the book. In one session, a little girl wrapped the drawstrings of her cardigan around Stefanie's arm as Stefanie read the story, literally binding them together.

The children are being socialised into the regular use of the library, learning to feel at home there while (generally) working within the boundaries of what is expected of them in there, as well as the expectations within the reading session itself, where there is significant work involved in the broader dynamic of the group. The children arrive at the library after a long day at school or in the *Kita*. Even though it might not be considered an especially onerous activity, the children are working hard at listening. They must negotiate taking their turn, participate in decision making, and make their own decisions about when and how to contribute to discussions, or to ask questions, and for the older children, whether they read aloud themselves. Paula's regular group of eight year-olds tended to vote on which book they wanted to read next by putting their hands in the air. If their attention seemed to be wandering, she would ask for a show of hands about whether or not to continue with the book. However, opening book choice out to group decision making did not always result in a decision:

I move over to Paula's group, where they are voting on every book and they can't reach a consensus. 'Well, we'll just have to vote again', says Paula, smiling a bit long-sufferingly.

The adult readers skilfully manage difference in ability between the children in each group, having to accommodate different needs. Here, Daniel, a child who, while although younger than the others in his group, has knowledge, confidence and reading ability that is considerably more advanced, has chosen a book for the group.

> Daniel has picked a rather overwhelming and old-fashioned looking book about the 'American Indians', packed with dense print and serious-looking illustrations and Paula does her best to make the most of it without it getting too heavy. She holds the book open at a page with lots of illustrations and asks, 'Now, who are the Indians? And has anyone ever seen an Indian? And what did he look like?' She highlights the images of maps and masks and we talk together about the medicine man going into a trance, taking quite a bit of time to explain what this is. 'What must it feel like?' asks Paula. 'Perhaps like drinking too much!' she exclaims, 'although you lot won't know what that's like! Or maybe', she continues, thinking of a more appropriate example, 'just like before you go to sleep, when you're not awake and not asleep.' 'I was like that!' says Daniel. 'I had appendicitis.' 'And how did it feel?' asks Paula. 'It was strange – it was like I wasn't able to do anything myself', he says. 'That's it', says Paula, 'that's a bit like a trance.'

This example is a demonstration of the importance of the talk in-between the reading, the absolute necessity for the contextualisation of what the group is reading, and the connections the readers make between the children's own experiences and those in the books they're reading. It also shows the work of compromise involved in every book choice – Daniel's choice, although a hard-going book, was taken seriously, but so were the needs and reading ability of the other members of the group. The work of 'reading' the mood and needs of the group of children requires a lot of impromptu descision making and filtering, 'on the hoof' edits and page turning, as well as quick decisions about strategies for managing behaviour.

The regular routine of attending the reading session also demands significant amounts of work. Many of the children attend the session every single week, and the effort of making it to the group must be worked into the family's routine commitments:

> Daniel's mother arrives with Daniel's brother, who doesn't want to do the reading, but must come and pick Daniel up from the reading every week. '*Was ein bisschen doof ist'*, (it's a bit of a pain) she says. 'We're thinking about a solution for this - wondering whether just to come to the reading group every two weeks'. She is often in the library, choosing her own books while Daniel goes to the *Vorlesen*.

> (Field notes, September 2012)

This dedication to the weekly time slot, which for some requires a journey across town, and complex arrangements of family's schedules show how much investment is required for something so routine. While waiting for their children, parents fill the time in different ways. Flora's mother reads a crime novel, sitting on the floor nearby with her back against the shelves. Mahmoud's mother sits near her on a chair, nodding off asleep. Max's mother wants to go and do some shopping. The mothers of Nushat and another girl say they are going to go and have a coffee, and once they know their mothers aren't there, their daughters become very unsettled. Expectations around punctuality were revealed:

> About 10 minutes after we've started, a girl arrives with her mum. Giesele makes a point of saying, 'you are late, and it is disruptive for the group, and this often happens – can you come on time?' The mother starts explaining that they had to come from somewhere else but Giesele is rather short with her. 'Aha', she says brusquely, 'ok, but this is not really on'. I pass the child my cushion and she takes it to the edge of the group near the window.

When we speak later in the café, I refer to this moment:

Katherine: It's also quite an effort, to come here every week, you saw it with that mother, who was late, and you said –

Giesele: *Really* late.

Katherine: And they had come from another activity -

Giesele: They had come from somewhere else, yes.

Katherine: She was a bit stressed -

Paula: […] and they're really, I mean some of them see it as childcare, but really they're also stuck there in the library for an hour, and they have to wait until the child has got their stamp but altogether, when you think about it - the way there and the way back, then you're looking at two hours…

Giesele: But in spite of all that, I say, I also travel – for me it is also a disruption, for her [the child] it is also a disruption when she comes a quarter of an hour late. I have to interrupt myself; I come out of the flow, for a child who is often late -

[*I start to giggle, as the others want to interrupt her but Giesele continues*]

Giesele: For the children who come fifteen or twenty minutes late, then they don't get a stamp. Not to punish the child, give them a stamp on their hand…[xvi]

In this extract, Giesele will not be swayed by my efforts at trying to introduce a note of sympathy for the mother, nor Paula's comments that attending the group and waiting around for the children requires parents to be available for sizable chunk of time. She comments at length on a situation which she has found highly provoking for her and compromising for the other children in the group.

'Telling' moments

The work of participation can also be seen as revealing difficulty, compromise and complexity. Participation in the group requires an adjustment of schedules, the incorporation of less-willing siblings into the arrangement, and abiding by the 'rules' of the group, as seen most obviously above in the example of punctuality. Where breakdowns or disruptions happen also becomes a point at which the work that is continually being undertaken by everyone in order for that not to happen ordinarily might be recognised. In this part of the chapter, I develop these points of tension and misunderstanding into a consideration of the reading sessions as something of an ambivalent space through the idea of 'telling moments' thinking about what is shown by particular points in the session when children do not want to be there, or do not have the capacity to participate, as well as where the responses of children to the text reveal

knowledge and capacity that cannot be acknowledged. In this part of the chapter I

focus on two moments from the last session I was part of, where I sat with the smallest

children, who were reading with Giesele:

> Giesele moves on to a book about pirates and the smelly cat, with lively
> illustrations. Giesele keeps the chat very small-focussed, 'he's got so much gold,
> because he's stolen it from people…' 'What's he wearing? He must be the cook…'
> 'But there aren't any pirates any more', she says, reassuringly. '*Doch*!' says
> Mahmoud, immediately, 'there are'. 'Oh, really?' says Giesele, acting surprised.
> Then she moves on, briskly. 'What's the cat earing, a bow? He's wearing a blue
> bow because he's a boy. But do boys wear bows?' she asks. 'Men wear ties',
> Giesele explains, 'you know what a tie is, and sometimes they wear bows too, they
> wear bowties and it's called a *Flieger* because it looks like a fly!'

> (Field notes, September 2013)

This extract reveals how the reading sessions are introducing children into a world

where male cats can wear *blue* ribbons, and boys and men might wear forms of ribbons

but they cannot be called ribbons, they are called ties, and bow ties; a simplified,

comforting world with everything in its right place. In these elementary forms of order

and categorisation there is little room for complexity. The moment where Mahmoud

says '*Doch*!' marks a disruption of this simplification of showing and telling, his *doch*

introduces a moment of complexity and disquiet which simply can't be dealt with in that

moment in the session. What makes this moment so compelling, what is heard in this

child's contribution, his intervention into the discussion that makes it so *telling*?

He disrupts the neat narrative he is being presented with – he introduces complexity,

and first of all dissent. He disagrees with the adult, he says there is an option which she

has closed down as not exisiting, that *doch*, (the way Mahmoud perfectly uses the

German form of 'no' that is not really a 'no', it's the particle that is used to counter a

negative statement with a positive, and the neatness with which all this is contained in

doch, also makes his intervention so compelling) they *do* exist. It is perhaps his

knowledge of pirates – piracy I must assume in its current form, the pirates which he

might have seen in pictures on the news, the pirates who use automatic weapons and travel in speedboats off the coast of Somalia, rather than the 'jolly' pirates brandishing cutlesses that are seen in the picture book, which perhaps provides the basis for this disruption.

Mahmoud's knowledge of this contemporary iteration of piracy just cannot be dealt with by Giesele in the framework of this moment - she feels she cannot respond to his knowledge, which is both matter of course, in its innocent assumption of veracity - of *course* there are still pirates, how can this be denied? - and presents something of a challenge to her authority. In his irrefutable logic he cannot but link the pirates in the book to the other pirates he knows, whereas the adult might be able to introduce some form of analytical distinction between the two, no matter how artifical this is. The childish portrayal of pirates covers over the brutality and savagery of piracy; it becomes a tale about the ship's cat, presented in a rambunctious but reassuring way, which is underlined by Giesele's additional assurance that 'pirates don't exist anymore'. Mahmoud's intervention, his knowledge that there are still pirates, out there in the sea, in speedboats and with weapons, perhaps makes visible something adults try to suppress when reading 'cosy' books about piracy. All Giesele can do in this moment, with the resources available to her, is to say, 'oh, really?' to put a pause on his assertion, which does not deny its undeniable truthfulness but also serves to close down the opportunity to talk about this further. 'Oh, really?' seems to holds off Mahmoud until an indeterminate future point.

Mahmoud is the child who was described in the interview with the adults as not being as advanced as he should be, and around whom there was anxiety about whether he would be ready for school in time. In this episode, his engagement with the group may be seen in a different light. It also underlines the contingency and unpredictability of what happens in the reading session; what reading aloud opens out for children in the connections and associations which is prompted. Sometimes it seems, the forms of communication which the reading aloud prompts exceeds that which is possible to

contain within the format. Mahmoud's point goes beyond that which can be satisfactorily explained in that moment.

In this same session, I observe the following interaction with another child:

> A little Polish-speaking boy is sitting on the floor next to me – his mother has brought him over with another child, but she says in a mixture of very broken German, sign language and Polish that it's best if they go in separate groups. Giesele gets him to come up and sit beside her on the sofa, anticipating that if his ability is not strong, at least he can see the pictures in the books.

> In the session he finds it hard to pay attention, and he can't seem to focus on the book. (He might not understand anything.) If Giesele directs him a yes or no question about what's she's reading he'll shake his head, then nod, solemnly, to cover all possibilities. At one point, about half-way through the session, he turns around over on the sofa, tipping himself over its arm, and then turning back round and putting his head in the cushions at the back of the sofa, burrowing himself into the sofa. He has completely turned around, and has his bottom in the air. Giesele ignores this and by the end of the session, he has wriggled around the right way.

> At the end, when the mums and one dad come to collect the children, his mum comes back over and talks to him in Polish. 'Do you want to come again', asks Giesele, as she gives him a card with his name on for the box. *'Hat es dir gefallen?'* ('Did you enjoy it?') He's looking away, and she tilts up his chin and says, gently, 'look at me when I'm talking to you.' He shakes his head.

> (Field notes, September 2013)

I remember finding this a highly uncomfortable moment at the time, and in considering it again for this chapter, experienced it as a painful instance of how distress can be the consequence of the most well-meaning of impulses. This child has been brought to the group by his well-intentioned mother, who has tried to convey something of his needs to Giesele, who welcomes him and tries to accommodate him within the session. However, in his absolute incapacity to understand what is happening in front of him, he cannot take pleasure from and absorb something of the book through its pictures, as Giesele had hoped he might. His response to her questions – his combination of a nod and a shake of the head reveals a tactic he has started to develop in the face of not

understanding, a way of always retaining the potential of offering the right response. Eventually he gives up on even a superficial participation in the group, turning away from Giesele and the rest of the children, and gradually starting hiding himself away in the sofa. He burrows down, hiding his head, and blocking his ears, a highly physical refusal of what is happening in front of him; he seems to be turning himself away from something profoundly uncomfortable.

When later, he refuses to make eye contact with Giesele, and she gently takes hold of his chin and moves his head so he must look at her, it marks an imposition on him. Giesele's question of whether he had enjoyed the session is placed in almost violent opposition to his profound, yet non-verbal disengagement from the group. The question ignores the palpable discomfort he has endured for the past hour and it is forced on him through her physically moving his face. The incapacity to register his resistance to the group also seems very difficult. A child who lacks the linguistic capacity to engage with the group on the terms in which it is offered physically demonstrates his withdrawal from the activity by turning himself away. The question as to whether he enjoyed the session, which is imposed on him in a highly physical way, ignores the terms on which he could participate in the group and the way in which he registered his discomfort. In this question, his withdrawal and resistance to the group are also taken away from him. It is a highly awkward and a 'telling' moment which conveys the significance of non-verbal participation in and resistance to the group.

Conclusion

This chapter has shown how, through hosting the *Vorlesen* group, the library can be seen as hosting a form of learning to speak and participate. I have developed an understanding of the forms of language work important in the library and its locality as active and mobile. The library space is inhabited and transformed by the presence of the reading group, and accommodates the hard work which this activity demands for everyone involved. In trying to understand the different forms *of* 'work' *at* work in the

reading group, it can be considered an ordinary but significant intervention into a local situation that is inadequately expressed in the language of need.

I have introduced the idea of '*vermitteln'* as a way of thinking about the processes of communication and participation which are present in the group*. Vermitteln* marks an alternative form of vocabulary to the language of limitation and insufficency through which concerns about language are conveyed, and opens out some of the complex negotiations of language which are involved in the *Vorlesen* group. Understanding the reading aloud sessions as a form of mediation, a form of *vermitteln*, both in the ways in which words are understood and interpreted but also in the ways in which the group functions as a space in which lots of ways of listening, speaking and 'being' together are possible, opens out the reading group as a potential space in the library.

These local children, very often multi-lingual, are coming to the library to practice and develop German, their public language, different to the language they might speak at home. In working on their German, they are developing the tool to help them access other forms of public life. For most of these children, in the immediate term, this access to public life is represented by the importance of their making a good start at school, which is seen as contingent on them developing their German competency. The narratives and images from books are woven together with children's reflections on their experiences to help them use their German skills to navigate their way through a sense of order in the world. In developing their reading and expanding their vocabulary they are starting to establish themselves as skilled operators of the German language, and so to be able to situate themselves in this German-speaking world. While there is only German spoken in this context, the reading aloud sessions might be regarded as an example of what Roxy Harris calls ''everyday multilingualism' through which these young children on a low-key, routine basis negotiate their way through this world in complex but unspectacular ways' (2006: 115).

Beyond the work of working with German, the children are also 'learning to speak' in highly participatory, perhaps even democratic, ways. They choose books for the group - in Paula's group, voting on the choice of book - and must listen to the books others have

chosen. The children are called on to respond to the texts in front of them, to bring their experience into relation with the material in the book. These forms of interaction are highly mediated by the adult readers through didactic forms of questioning and the children's participation requires being able to speak in the 'right' kind of way. The adults are concerned to 'mange' children's words and are highly aware of the multiple points in the session when the children's words might become too much: if they become distracted and run away with themselves, or they speak at the wrong tone or in the wrong register, or say things which appear disjointed or unconnected, or are embarrassingly or distressingly revealing about difficult home lives. There are also points at which participation is severely limited or impossible, where children cannot understand, refuse to engage with the group on the terms on which it is offered, or demonstrate capacity which is beyond the scope of the group. In looking carefully at these small moments, I observe that part of the significance of the group is the potential that it offers for negotiation and ambivalence around speaking as a form of being together.

i Und für Kinder aus nichtdeutschen Kultur- und Sprachräumen sind die Lesewelt-Vorlesestunden eine unbeschwerte Möglichkeit, ihre Sprachkenntnisse zu verbessern. Vorlesen, erzählen und gemeinsame Spiele erweitern den Wortschatz und fördern das Sprechen.

ii Sie haben auch in Türkisch oder Arabisch kein Begriff für Dinge, die es hier in Wedding im Alltag nicht gibt, weil man nichts liest. […] Also, der unmittelbare Alltag und nur die mündliche Sprache ist da, aber alles was es noch gibt, ist nicht da…. Auch in der Muttersprache - im Türkischen oder im Arabischen, das ist ein riesen Problem. Auch dass das Begriff nicht da ist, auch wenn er im Türkischen da wäre, wäre das einfach zu übertragen -das ist das und das auf Türkisch, und das ist das und das auf Deutsch.

iii Und es ist **so** unglaublich reduziert, dass ich manchmal selbst staune - ich kann es manchmal nicht glauben. Ich hatte hier elfjährige Kinder – und wir hatten so eine Zeichnung vom Pferdeskellett, also von den Knochen des Pferdes. Und die Pferde gehen, pysiognomisch gesehen, auf den Zehenspitzen – ok? On the tops und dann habe ich gefragt, die sind verstärkt, die sind stärker als unsere, die Zehenspitzen beim Pferd, das ist besonders stark, da unten am Beim des Pferdes, was gibt es da, wie heiβt es denn, was am Ende am Bein des Pferdes ist, worauf läuft das Pferd denn? Und dann haben sie gesagt "Hörner". Was heiβt Huf noch mal, auf Englisch? *Hoof* [...] Sie wussten nicht was ein Huf ist, weil da kommen keine Pferde vor in Wedding, und sie wussten nicht was ein Huf ist, im fünften Schuljahr. Das schockiert mich manchmal.

iv Giesele: wenn es sogar nur ein Bilderbuch ist, es ist ja eine Handlung d'rin, in Bilderbücher vielleicht nicht so, Pippi und den Bär, oder weiß ich was, aber die sehen den Bär, die sehen wie der aussieht, man sieht da diese rote Schleife immer, und so weiter. Diese Kleinigkeiten, die Bilderbücher haben und wenn es sogar nur ein Bilderbuch für Zweijährige ist. Der Ball ist rund, der ist bunt, und blau, oder weiß ich was, oder so – oder Sternchen im Himmel, die sie sehen, und sie können dann, wenn sie den Himmel sehen, können sie, ach guck' mal, die sehen genau so ähnlich aus wie im Buch. Das ist lernen, wo was ist, ne? Zum Beispiel, ist auch beim Mahlen. Wenn jemand Rasen mahlt, der aber rosa ist, dann sage ich, das ist nicht richtig – wo hast du schon mal rosa Rasen gesehn? Er ist grün!

Katherine: Es ist die Welt ordnen zu können...

Giesele: Einfach zu ordnen, ja!

v Also, die Schwierigkeit unserer Kinder, ist dass sie ganz wenig Umweltvorraussetzungen haben, also ich habe eine Klasse sechs Jahre lang geführt und die wussten in der ersten Klasse zum Beispiel nicht, was ein Wald ist. Die waren noch nie in ihrem Leben in einem Wald. Die waren noch nie im Zoo; die waren noch nie überhaupt außerhalb des Weddings. […] Und das schafft nicht genug Grundlage, hier gut anfangen zu können.

vi Und da viele Ausländerkinder, aber ich meine auch Deutsche, aber besonders hier, weil es hier viele Ausländerkinder gibt, weil sie oft mal Schwierigkeiten haben mit der Sprache - dass die Eltern, ihnen es einfach nicht vermitteln können. Das merkt man. Det merkt man. Sonst hätten sie das schon längst gekonnt. Denn bei mir sitzt keine Zweijährigen, sondern Vierjährige... die in zwei Jahren zur Schule kommen. Und in zwei Jahren müssen die das können...

vii In Berlin finden sich über 180 Nationalitäten. Aber ohne Deutsch geht es nicht. Berlin ist nicht nur deutsche Hauptstadt, sondern internationale Metropole. Menschen aus aller Welt kommen hier zusammen und leben hier. Wen wundert es da, dass 37,3 % der Schüler der Schulanfangsphase aller

Schularten im Schuljahr 2013/2014 eine nichtdeutsche Muttersprache haben? […] Dabei ist die Staatsangehörigkeit der Kinder ohne Belang. Wird in der Familie Deutsch oder eine andere Sprache gesprochen? Wer in der Schule erfolgreich sein will, muss gut Deutsch sprechen und verstehen können.

viii Maria: Die interessieren sich einfach nicht!

Giesele: Das gibt es, aber es gibt es auch bei Deutschen.

Maria: Deswegen sage ich, es geht durch alle, durch alle Schichten. [...]

Paula: Ich denke wenn sie selber keine Bildung haben, dann können sie nicht abschätzen, wie wichtig es eigentlich ist, deshalb würde ich sagen, dass es bildungsferne Schichten sind -

ix Ich denke die helfen, weil sie jeden Dienstag bei uns sind. Das ist für manchen eine Akt, ja, sie müssen dann - ich weiß nicht von wo sie überall herkommen, also das sind, die die bei uns landen, das sind sehr engagierte Eltern, vielleicht ein bisschen hilflos...

x Wir sind die viertstärkste Bibliothek bei Lesewelt. Das heißt, in dieser kleinen Bibliothek, in ganz Berlin, in ganz Berlin, kommen die viertmeisten Kinder überhaupt! Das fand' ich *so* stark! Wo es im ganz großen Bibliotheken installiert ist, wo viel mehr Benutzer and ein und ausgeliehen, wir sind die viertbeste in Berlin! Das ist doch klasse! Zwischen der Regalen und so eng wie es hier bei uns ist, ja? Da war ich sehr stolz, ja und sie waren auch total überrascht, das wir wirklich so einen guten Zulauf haben.

xi Und oft ist das Vorlesen eigentlich nur ein Gesprächsanlass oder das, was da gesprochen, also vorgelesen wird, das wir es nutzten, um zu fragen, was esst ihr denn gerne, um den Wortschatz zu erweitern oder ihre Grammatik zu verbessern, das ist auch oft so, dass die Kinder schon viele Wörter kennen, aber ganz schlecht in Grammatik sind.

xii Giesele: Und, aber manchmal, haben Kinder so viel zu reden, dass man, also bei mir war es schon so, dass ich gar nicht zum Lesen komme, dann sind sie manchmal so übervoll mit was sie erzählen wollen, dass man dann sagt, also lesen wir heute nicht, ich werde mich einfach nur mit denen unterhalten. Denn oftmals kommt es im Kindergarten zu kurz, weil einfach zu viele Kinder da sind, dass nicht jeder einzelne mal was erzählen kann.

Maria: Oder in Familien, wenn viele Geschwister da sind.

Giesele: Genau. Da kommt es oft mal zu kurz, dass die Eltern nicht die Zeit oder so haben, mehr oder weniger Psychologen – es ist einfach so. Die wollen einfach erzählen. Und dann sollen die erzählen, und dann sollen sie auch sprechen, zusammen erzählen [...]

Paula: [...] was ich zum Beispiel schwierig finde ist, wenn die Kinder im Fluss sind und dann so abschweifen, und nicht mehr aufhören – was sag' ich dem Kind, so, jetzt ruhig, gehen wir zurück, oder? Da bin ich ein bisschen hin- und hergerissen so ein Kind abzuwürgen, im Grunde weil die anderen wollen, hören nicht zu - die hören nicht zu, es interessiert die nicht was die erzählen, die anderen Kinder. Die wollen eigentlich nur selber sprechen, oder eine Geschichte hören, und da bin ich , ja, habe ich [...] weil bei Erwachsenen würde ich es nie machen, weißt du?

Giesele: Aber man muss es machen!

xiii Giesele: [...] das hast du wahrscheinlich bemerkt, bei uns sprechen die durcheinander um ihre Erlebnisse [...]

Katherine: Ja, die mögen - die berichten –

Giesele: Genau, die berichten von Zuhause Details - man erfährt viel von Zuhause! [laughter and exclamations from the others]

Katherine: Wer hat eine Narbe und wo –

Paula: Wer hat ein eigenes Bett oder ein eigenes Zimmer und solche Sachen, ja.

Maria: [...] Manchmal ist die Mutter da oder der Vater um sie abzuholen, oder die sitzen auch gleich in der Bücherei, und könnte die Eltern Sachen peinlich finden, weil sowas –

Giesele: Überleg' mal, Nushat hat mir - da war die Mutter dann da, Nushat hat mir gesagt, dass sie zwischen Mama und Papa schläft, ja?

Paula: Ja, ja, ja, genau!

Giesele: Sie hat kein eigenes Bett. Und das war die Mutter äusserst unbequem, glaube ich, ne? Sie hatte dann auch kein eigenes Zimmer, sie schläft dann im Zimmer von Mama und Papa.

[xiv] Ich denke schon, dass es eine Arbeit ist, wenn wir nur Vorlesentanten wären, denn würden wir nur unsere Texte 'runterrasseln, dann gehen und uns keine Gedanken machen. Wir lesen vor. Aber wir denken dabei [...] Man macht sich Gedanken über die einzelnen Kinder manchmal – wir sprechen manchmal über die einzelnen Kindern, man macht sich schon Gedanken.

[xv] Giesele: Und wir haben viele Kinder, wo man genau weiß, also der kliene schwarzhaarige, der da kam, und die Mutter, die da so schlief, der sagen wir, er ist jetzt vier, das heißt, noch zwei Jahre hat er noch Zeit, um richtig sprechen zu lernen, aber der kommt nicht weit. Der kommt nicht weit. Und daran scheitert er in der Schule.

Paula: Aber er macht vielleicht nochmal einen Sprung...

Giesele: Kann sein!

[xvi] Katherine: Aber das ist auch eine Arbeit, jede Woche herzukommen, und mann merkt es an der Mutter, die spät war - du hast gesagt -

Giesele: Super spät.

Katherine: Die ist von irgendwo anders gekommen, und –

Giesele: Die ist von woanders gekommen.

Katherine: Die war ein bisschen gestresst –

Paula: und die mussten teilweise in die Bücherei, viele Kinder gehen auch kurz noch Besorgung machen, aber die sind, erstmal eine Stunde gefesselt, ja - sie müssen wiederkommen, und warten bis das Kind den Stempel hat - aber insgesamt, wenn sie mit Hin- und Rückweg, ich weiß nicht, anderthalb Stunden, fast zwei Stunden, zu tun haben.

Giesele: Aber trotz allem sage ich mir, ich fahre – für mich ist es eine Störung, für sie ist es eine Störung, wenn ein Quartal später, nicht? Ich muss mich immer unterbrechen, komme aus diesem Fluss 'raus, für ein Kind, das späte Kind, wie auch immer, ist das nicht schön muss ich sagen, und hier eigentlich, bei manchen ist es auch so, dass sie spät daran waren, dass sie von der Arbeit oder dem Bus oder so spät gekommen sind, die

machen das mit Absicht. Und dann sag' ich – […] Für die Kinder, eine Viertelstunde, oder zwanzig Minuten spät da, und dann kriegen die keinen Stempel. Strafen das Kind damit, aber das Kind bekommt einen Stempel, aber auf die Hand – [...]

Chapter Five: Knitting together

> In the stairwell, a high-ceilinged space flooded with light from a ceiling skylight and long narrow window, I catch Bernice looking at the fire escape leading to the garden. She wonders if this is a way of avoiding the stairs, and the lift, which she doesn't like to use. I say that there are steps that way too. The three of us get in the lift. An improvised sign on the lift door says: 'No joy riding!'

> It is clear that this is far from a joy ride - Pearl and Bernice are really uncomfortable. With its self-operating button, the lift is experienced as slightly intimidating and used reluctantly. 'You have to keep on pushing the button', says Bernice, '*you* do it!' she tells me, and I do. Pearl is visibly bothered during the brief ride up and touches her hand to the side of the lift, as if for balance.

> (Field notes, December 2011)

Introduction

Down the stairs at the back of Thornton Heath library and along the narrow corridor, then through another door is the 'community room'. The basement room has small high windows which let in light, but no view. It is a semi-private space, hidden from the comings and goings of the library upstairs. As the field note opening this chapter shows, accessing this room can be a difficult, even fearful moment. For Pearl and Bernice, the combination of stairs and lift makes it an awkward threshold to cross. This slightly hidden room is the venue for several of the library's regular activities for adults: the reading groups, the over-60s club and the fortnightly knitting group, the focus of this chapter. Knitting is a quiet activity, and the activity of the group in this hidden room passes almost unremarked in the rest of the library. This can be contrasted with the visibility and audibility of the *Vorlesen* group in the previous chapter. While knitting might be quiet, in this chapter I argue that it is intensely meaningful, and like the reading aloud group, may be considered as another instance of a library activity creating a chance to speak.

The community room offers a starting point for thinking about the knitting group as a important, if interstitial, public space. In offering a purposeful activity, the group may

be seen as highly intentional. However, as well as discussing the form of sociality offered by the group as an opportunity to knit as itself important and meaningful, in this chapter, I evoke the sense of there being so much in the room that is conveyed *through* knitting together. I argue that this interior room offers a view - onto an under-considered aspect of public space, working as a demonstration of how the less visible areas of a public institution, its interior nooks and crannies, can provide legitimate and valuable forms of public interaction and social investment. In giving a thoughtful account of the knitting group, I show how knitting makes visible different forms of sociality and connectivity generated between the participants. It is the evocations and understandings of the different forms of social contact enabled by the knitting - forms of 'doing' and 'being' together that I call the multi-strandedness of the knitting group, which threads through the room in specific, contingent, temporal ways. Knitting together can be seen as a practice of sharing; sharing space and time, and sharing in an activity together. Participants share knowledge, with people of different levels of skill supporting others in acts of verbal and non-verbal intervention, evoked through highly demonstrative performances of how to carry out a certain stitch or technique.

As well as its physical location within the building, the location of the group within institutional commitments and programming provides a starting point for considering the relationship between the library and the users within it. As with the *Vorlesen* group in the previous chapter, the knitting sessions are both an element of the library's outreach and public participation, yet at the same time are considered something of an aside to the usual library activity, and are not made visible as an outcome in the Big Lottery funding report. I note how the knitting sessions are both held within the institutional framework of the library and require the personal investment of one particular librarian to support and enable the group. I reflect on how the institutional positioning of the group also places certain boundaries on the group, in, for instance, limiting the time the librarian can give to the group, but at the same time, lends the group a form of legitimacy which enables the participants to seek out diverse forms of social contact from the group.

While all the participants are women, they are a heterogeneous group in terms of level of skill, age and background, embodying the everyday multiplicity in the area. The ways in which contact is sought is revealing of wider social relationships and situations. Within the group there are women whose social isolation means that the most tenuous of social contact is welcome, to those whose involvement with the knitting group is founded on the specific intention to develop skills, as well as highly experienced knitters with considerable talent, who see the knitting group as providing a valuable hour in which they can keep on top of one of their projects. Members of the group referred to the variety and 'difference' of the women present as a sign of the group's vitality and interest. In Chapter One, I sought to evoke this multiplicity, particularly that of ethnic and racial difference, through statistical forms of representation, as well as through the signs of global connectivity visible throughout the built fabric of Thornton Heath. In this chapter, I evoke how these forms of difference are alluded to and narrativised by participants.

Avtah Brah's 1996 work *Cartographies of Diaspora* is a key point of reference for thinking carefully about the locations and trajectories of difference. Brah develops diaspora as a 'conceptual category' for mapping shifting forms of identification within articulations of power relations (1996: 196). Diaspora is not only dislocation, a state of 'homelessness' but is simultaneously a process of becoming re-rooted and re-located. More than being a site of individual journeys, Brah understands diaspora as having significant social and profoundly spatial effects. Her term, 'diaspora space' refers to the complex situationality of people in place, conveying the simultaneous enmeshing of movement *and* placement: 'the entanglement, the intertwining of the genealogies of dispersion with those of 'staying put'' (1996: 209). The women in this small room can be understood as situated within 'a diaspora space' most tangibly seen through different trajectories of migratory experience as a consequence of the lingering effects of Britain's colonial history but, as Brah writes, the diaspora space is not only occupied by those who have an 'obvious' migratory history, as I go on to discuss.

I start to work through some of the stories and other forms of sharing which emerged in the knitting sessions as a kind of diaspora space, a site which is made present through, as Brah writes, 'the everyday stories we tell ourselves individually and collectively' (1996: 183). In this chapter, forms of diasporic connectivity, multiple attachments to place and manifestations of ethnic and racial difference are narrativised by the participants in the knitting group through acts of sharing and telling. Traces of family genealogies and migratory histories lie just below the surface of anecdotes and childhood memories. The conversations and interactions in the knitting group are situated within larger contexts of diasporic experience and the forms of everyday connectivity in which they are embedded. Later in the chapter, I evoke how three members of the group, Smita, Pearl and Rithika shared their connectedness, their isolation and their vulnerability through small but important, 'telling' moments.

In the knitting group, difference, connections and interactions are situated and emergent within fields of recognition and understandings of difference. The range of individual engagements with the knitting group reveal wider social questions about shared experiences, forms of social contact, and social vulnerability (Mills 2000). The relationships, experiences and needs of the women who sit knitting around pushed together tables stretch beyond the small interiority of the community room. At the same time, however, its lack of public visibility generates a sense of the room as an intimate public. The slightly contradictory and unexpected nature of the room might usefully be brought into conversation with ideas of the public library as being an explicitly and wholly public space. I conclude that this interior basement room, despite having no view on the world, is intensely situated within it by the experiences and needs of its participants.

A multi –stranded space

Multi-strandedness can be used to conceptualise the multiplicity at work in the knitting sessions. As well as a nod to the activity itself, and the piles of wool on the table, understanding the room as a multi-stranded space evokes a sense of the different ways

in which the group was accessed by people, and the spread of different approaches towards the activity in the room. It also points to how the knitting worked as an access point, threading out towards other forms of discussion and communication, the sharing of life experience and personal anecdotes which were incorporated into the space. Considering the basement community room as a multi-stranded space opens it out to the possibilities and experiences carried by the participants. For me, multi-strandedness becomes both a way of seeing what was happening in the space, and then later, a means of loosely organising and conceptualising the material from the sessions.

In this discussion I start to contextualise the knitting group as forming an intensely meaningful space in the midst of my fieldwork and situate myself in the room. I go on to consider the positioning of the group within the institutional framework of Thornton Heath library, where appreciation of its success and acknowledgement of the undeniable pleasantness of the activity is partnered with concerns about its composition as an 'accidentally' women-only space, as well as the institutional awkwardness around the fundamental appropriateness of knitting. I then discuss how the inherently social and physical aspects of knitting can be seen as an activity of shared meaning. I show how the actions and instructions of knitting are demonstrated and de-coded by the group's participants, which creates an understanding of the knitting group as an environment in which people share, firstly by knitting together.

From here I consider how the activity in itself promotes a particular form of communication, a kind of attentiveness in the room, through which the diasporic threads and connections, different ways of being 'at home in the world' and of being vulnerable might be registered and shared. This sharing can have an understated power - allusions to 'elsewheres' and 'elsewhens' as well as absent loved ones, which are threaded through the conversation in the basement room, make this a subtle and sometimes poignant form of communication.

Knitting together

The knitting group at Thornton Heath library started in September 2011, after I had been 'hanging around' at the library for some weeks and shortly before I 'made myself official' by embarking on a series of taped conversation with the librarians. While I did not attend the first session, I observed it happening in the library's window space that day, writing in my notes how Sarah, a part-time librarian, was sitting with a small group of women. I sat nearby, 'eavesdropping' on the talk: 'the chat is all technical, knitting-related', I noted, later.

I detect a sense of disappointment that it wasn't more exciting, but I was struck by the transformation of the window space, habitually a place where men quietly sat with the newspaper, into a circle of women knitting and talking together.

Figure 18. Flier advertising the library's Knit and Craft Group

The development of the knitting group was part of wider expansion of regular group activity sessions at Thornton Heath Library post its Big Lottery-funded renovation, which were used to create a 'hook' to draw people into the library. The development of the

knitting group is founded on the interest and involvement of Sarah, and can be linked to a more widespread revival of knitting as an activity.[1] In an early interview with Kay, she introduced the range of groups now present in the library as encouraging a sense of the library as 'a meeting point'. She then underlined the inherent sociality of the groups by describing the knitting session as a 'social club' and a 'knit and natter group'. She hastily went on to emphasise the skills and learning element of the group, that while it might seem 'just' an opportunity for a cosy chat, it has implicit value in terms of learning:

> […] it's that nice gathering, it's a social gathering, but they're learning a new skill, because of course libraries, they're about learning as well, in whatever format it comes in, not just about reading and language but that whole thing about learning new skills as well, and getting the community together.

(Interview with Kay, October 2011)

Kay presents a broad view of libraries as places of learning and skills – not just the obvious skills of reading and language. Moreover, this learning happens in a collective and participatory way – it's about 'getting the community together'. Kay's presentation of the group as having elements that were both nice in themselves *and* substantive reflects the framing of library activities around ostensible utility in order to 'pass' as productive, and which aim either to be universally appealing or highly targeted. The uncertainty around the nature of knitting as an institutionally suitable activity is exemplified through its absence in official reporting of library activities. It could be that the timing of its introduction prevented it from featuring in the list of targets and provision in the Library Action plan for 2011 – 2013.[2] In the 2013 Big Lottery Fund End of Grant Report, the knitting group is not mentioned in its own right as an outcome, but

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[1] This newspaper article gauges the knitting revival to be approximately 10 years old and identifies a shift from 'cool' to 'ordinary'. Perri Lewis, *The Guardian*, 6 July 2011 http://www.theguardian.com/lifeandstyle/2011/jul/06/wool-rise-knitting (Last accessed 14 September 2014)

[2] The Croydon-wide Library Action Plan is based on the strategic plan for Croydon, which is formulated around different 'visions' for Croydon, and focuses on 'protected characteristics' as outlined in the 2010 Equality Act. 'Age, Disability, Gender reassignment, Marriage and civil partnership, Race, Religion or belief, Sex, Sexual orientation' Equality Act 2010, The National Archives: http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2010/15/contents

is mentioned as an indicator of the enthusiasm of staff to develop and run groups (April 2013: 22). A hierarchy of events and activities becomes noticeable, where activities directly related to needs and vulnerabilities are emphasised, but knitting disappears.

Kay's comment about 'getting the community together' provokes questions of who this community might be. Looking around the group of knitters, the 'community' being brought together here is female, older - above 50 as an average - and ethnically diverse: there are women from south Asia and the Caribbean, as well as black and white British and European women. While it seems this is a broad community, there are evident institutional concerns that the group is so female. These dilemmas around the gendered implications of knitting are evoked in the shifting nomenclature of the knitting group. Marja, another librarian, commented that the group was originally called 'knit and craft' in an effort 'to keep it open and encourage men'. She seemed concerned that referring only to knitting would both limit the perceived activities and indicate a particular gendering of participants. Despite this attempt at openness, not one man attended the group while I was participating, and while the group is not targeted at women or older women, it seems because of the activity and its timing in the day, older women are (almost inevitably) the participants who self-select to attend.

Making a start

In November I started to attend the knitting group as a participant, having introduced myself to the group as a 'researcher' in very broad and general terms, and saying that I was interested in what happens in the daily life of the library. By the time I started attending the group, the sessions had been moved downstairs to the community room. From mid-morning on alternate Fridays, between nine and twelve mostly middle-aged and older women sit on red plastic stacking chairs arranged around several pushed together tables. A selection of library books on knitting are spread over the large table, as well as a small pile of knitting magazines and a selection of needles and wool for people who want to have a try. The room is very warm; the heating in there is switched on especially for the scheduled activities. On a table to the side of the room, a hot

water urn stands ready for 'special' events, alongside equipment for making tea and a collection of plastic cups and stirrers. It is not switched on during the knitting sessions (knitting it seems, is not special enough). The library's incapacity to provide refreshments because of budgetary constraints is thrown into relief in an awkward exchange I discuss later.

My participation in the knitting group was one of several regular activities at the library in which I was involved during this period and my attendance at this group seemed no more interesting than anything else I was doing at that stage. However, I gradually became aware of the variety of forms of sharing at work in the group and started to see the group as forming an important, if low visibility space in the library. Reviewing the material for this chapter, I saw how my regular attendance at the knitting group provided me with a key entrée into the life of the library, marking me as a 'regular', and leading me to form relationships with key research participants. Most of all, in terms of 'making a start', I came to see the 'technical chat' that I had rather dismissed on the first occasion I encountered the knitting group, as itself performing an important entrée to participation.

There is an inherent purposefulness to knitting, an individualised activity which intensely occupies the hands. However, even a minimal level of skill leaves the mind free to engage in conversation, allowing knitting to become incorporated into a social activity. In their analysis of a knitting group in a public library in Ontario, Canada, Elena Prigoda and Pamela McKenzie describe knitting in a group as a 'parallel performance' (2007: 95) in which there are multiple ways to participate; as teacher, learner, onlooker, and craftswoman. In working on something material together, even in the form of individualised projects, a shared materiality emerges through this shared doing. I go on to explore how the physical qualities of this form of interaction shapes tangible and less tangible forms of interaction within the knitting group.

At my first session I took along a piece of knitting I started several years ago, the very beginnings of a shrug cardigan knitted in a soft grey wool shot through with a strand of silver, which I'd found in a charity shop. I brought this piece with me to every session I

attend but made very little progress; I am a beginner, the pattern was perhaps too ambitious, and I found the wool, with its slippery silvered extra strand, difficult to manage. My slowness was compounded by my intense 'listening out' to what is happening in the room and I could only do one or two rows each session. On occasion my awkward style prompted interventions from other, more experienced knitters. But my evident novice status was useful to invoke - sometimes I would joke about my lack of progress, and my commiserations with those who also found it difficult were genuine. Above all, however, my slow yet obvious participation meant that I could take a 'back seat' role from where I could more easily observe.

This 'back seat' role can be contrasted with that of Sarah the librarian, who started the group, and is the institutional point of contact - responsible for promoting and organising the session, as well as 'overseeing' it. As seen in this field note, however, she is keen to open out collaborative forms of support in the group:

> Sarah tours the circle, asking each of us what we are making. […] She recommends that Shauna sits next to Margaret so that she can show her how to join together some squares she's been working on, part of a baby blanket she is making for her pregnant daughter. 'Such fine work', compliments Sarah, gently. A few more people arrive, new people, and ask who's in charge. 'Well, I started the group' says Sarah 'but we all help each other with our projects.'

<div align="right">(Field notes, November 2011)</div>

Sarah 'sets the tone' for the session and conveys the ethos of the group. People bring their own, highly varied projects to the session, but Sarah is able to foster forms of collaboration and support by pairing people who can share skills and encouraging them to sit with each other. While she acknowledges that she started the group, she immediately emphasises its mutual and collaborative nature: 'we all help each other'. Despite perhaps trying to step out of it by referring to the mutual nature of the group, Sarah simultaneously formalises assumptions of her official role by deliberately circulating around the group once, looking at each person's piece of work and commenting on it, which seems to work both as a way of starting the session and of

introducing them to the group. Beginning this way highlights the purposeful activity at the heart of the group.

The knitting being produced thus forms a starting point for introductions to each other. Asking, as Sarah does, 'what are you working on?' is used as an introductory overture, an easy conversation starter, which does not require knowing someone's name. This question is taken as interest in a person's work and is often reciprocated. References to the materials people use, their patterns or wool are often used to start a conversation. Engagement with other people's knitting occurs through an almost exclusively complimentary lens. The wool I'm using and find so awkward is frequently complimented by other members of the group as looking 'soft' and 'gorgeous', and sometimes people ask to see the pattern. Skill is highly respected and complimented, but it tends to be deliberately down-played by the skilled person, and the proffered compliment either gently contradicted or negated in some way. There is a demonstrative, purposeful air to those acknowledged as expert and, as this fieldnote shows, a clear deferral to knowledge and experience.

> Ursula is knitting, incredibly quickly, and in 'continental style', a shawl with a flowered edge. She's not using a pattern, but is working out the shaping as she goes along. Ursula's continental style of knitting and her instinctive approach mark her out as different to the majority of the group. Like the other highly skilled knitters, she deliberately underplays her skills. The first time she attended the session, Margaret, the knitter most deferred to and respected, shows her respect of Ursula by openly admiring her skill and speed and going over to her to look over her shoulder to see how she does purl stich. Margaret says she can do knit stitch using 'continental style', and they talk about how to get the tension right, which seems to be slightly trickier using this method. Smita says to me, slightly conspiratorially: 'but I think this way is easier, though!'

> (Field notes, December 2011)

The techniques and physical actions of knitting produce collaborative and physical forms of interactions. The knitting manuals written in coded language spread out on the table use highly stylised drawings of active hands to depict the actions of each stitch or technique. It is difficult to absorb from the diagrammatic drawings what the hands are

really meant to be doing. Much of the time in the group is thus spent demonstrating in physical and tactile ways how to do things. People lean over each other to get a closer look, and watch the hands of others closely. Very often when demonstrating, people simply take the knitting out of the hands of the person struggling and knit the stitch emphatically and slowly alongside them, commentating on what they're doing.

'Reading' the knitting has a distinctive physicality - items are pulled, stretched and manipulated in order to assess progress, locate errors and extract information about how something was made - people flip pieces of knitting over and look at them from the other side, turn things inside out, peer down closely at things:

> Bernice, Ursula, Shauna and I gather around looking at the moss stitch pattern on a scarf and Shauna and Ursula explain how to 'read' the stiches, which is a purl and which is a knit. 'There's the bump! Now the bump's on the other side' they say.

(Field notes, January 2012)

Learning to 'read' a piece of knitting is as important as knowing how to translate the code of the knitting pattern and to extrapolate from the drawings in the knitting books – these processes of translation from the page to the physical product are achieved through highly material and tactile demonstrations of sharing knowledge and skills.

The knitting people do, what they are making, who it is for, and their approach to it can also be read as an introduction to themselves. The women's projects can be seen as indicating something about themselves, their situations and their connections. Here I introduce Pearl and Smita, two members of the group whose voices feature strongly in the rest of this chapter, and discuss their projects as a way of situating them within the group. Both women, who I imagine are in their seventies, are new to Thornton Heath in different ways: in the last year, Pearl moved to Thornton Heath after 30 years in Balham, a district in Wandsworth. Smita is on an extended visit from India to her daughter's family who live nearby, and divides her time between Bangalore, London and New York, all places where she has family.

Smita is talkative, and her conversations are often directed at seeking connections with people. She carries a tiny notebook with her to write down people's names and contact details. Her knitting seems to also demonstrate her connectivity:

> Smita is knitting a lilac scarf for her granddaughter. I notice that her rows start off a bit wonky, but are getting better towards where her needles currently lie, indicating her gradual progress and increasing skill and confidence. Smita says she is going to put buttons on the short scarf to make it into more of a snood, with the ends joined at a jaunty angle – this was Sarah's idea, and Smita thinks this is a good solution. She starts to cast on stitches for a matching hat. Unsure of how many are needed, she moves across the room to see if she can measure the scarf around the head of Huma's youngest daughter, using it as a guide for how many stitches she needs to cast on. Smita engages with the little girl brightly, gently binding the half-finished scarf around her head.

> (Field notes, December 2011)

This short passage conveys how the knitting itself can be 'read' in multiple ways. For those who are new to knitting or are picking it up after a long break, their progress can be 'read' in the increasing regularity and shapeliness of the knitting they produce. Furthermore, much can be read 'between the lines' of the knitting, as being situated within people's relationships with others. Smita, an outgoing and high-spirited woman, binds others in the group into her project, a gift for her much adored granddaughter: Sarah gives advice and Huma's youngest daughter is used as a proxy for Smita's granddaughter.

While, as she tells me later, she is an experienced dressmaker, Pearl is a completely new to knitting. As the weeks passed, Pearl makes almost no progress with a small test piece of knitting, repeatedly starting, unravelling, and re-starting, winding the wool into knots and tangles:

> Next to me, Pearl is stoically jabbing with her needles, literally going through the motions. Over the weeks she has made scarcely any progress, she is still working on casting on, still struggling. I help her to start her first row, trying to break down the stages of the stitch, explaining how the stitches move between the needles, how the row starts on one needle, then one by one, gets transferred to the other.

Later Margaret comes over, and sitting down next to Pearl, instructs her in the childish rhyme that gives anthropomorphic prompts for each stage of the stitch: 'rabbit goes *down* the hole, *rouuund* the big tree, *up* she pops, *aand…. off* goes she!' She catches me looking over at them and says, 'I know it's childish but it's the *best* way! It's how I was taught; it's how I taught my daughter and grandchildren.' 'Oh, I know', I say, hoping she didn't feel embarrassed by my watching them. ' - It's how I learned too!'

(Field notes, February 2012)

Pearl's difficulties prompt interventions from others as they try to guide and advise her. Shauna says to her: 'You need a project, that's how you'll practice. You learn by doing and it makes you happy to see it coming along.' These interventions, the small pieces of advice and the rhymes work well as illustrations of what Richard Sennett describes as in *The Craftsman* as 'techniques of experience' (2008: 289) the ways in which craft is expressed through forms of lived practice. Although Pearl did not appear to be making visible progress with her knitting, this does not mean that the group was not fulfilling something meaningful for her. While not struggling as visibly as Pearl with my knitting, I also made scant progress during the sessions, yet appreciated the sociality of the space. Later, Pearl discusses the group as being something to do; a purposeful reason to leave the house. Perhaps also the purposeful materiality of knitting itself, the wool in her hands and the support of the other participants, are an important part of the sociality she seeks.

Purposeful sociality

Smita related how while she was a regular visitor to the library before she discovered the knitting group, her experience of the library had much improved since her involvement:

'I would come and read the newspapers, the *Asian Age*, and read the Indian news but it was very quiet. I never got to know anyone that way. This is so much better. I didn't know anyone; it was boring. You wouldn't get such a cosmopolitan group as this!'

(Field notes, December 2011)

Smita appreciates the social aspects of the group – in contrast to the solitary pursuit of reading the newspaper, she has found this group a place to meet and get to know people. She draws attention to the group's diversity, which she describes as 'cosmopolitan', and I discuss this in more depth later. It is interesting to note how for her, reading the newspapers is not felt as a significant activity *in itself*, whereas this was experienced by Mehmet, an older man who I'd met through going to the Library Advisory Group meeting, and then spoken with after, as in itself an entirely valid reason for being in the library. He described his almost daily trip to the library to read the newspaper as an important part of his self-care routine, emphasising the importance of 'putting your shoes on twice a day' and 'getting out of the house' - the upkeep of regular activities outside of the home.

The importance of establishing and maintaining structuring points in the day is observed by Mitchell Duneier, in his ethnography *Slim's Table* (1992). Duneier finds the regulars at Valois, the Chicago restaurant at which he was customer and participant observer over several years, carving out a purposeful routine of 'things to do' (1992: 34) through which they both keep busy and acknowledge themselves as respectable participants in social routines. He observes how retired or out of work men constructed a daily routine around movements between different local restaurants and cheap eateries, carefully maintaining distinctive patterns of eating and drinking, talking with others, and reading the newspaper.

Duneier considers the observance of these patterns as a form of daily labour, analogous with the shifts in pace of the working day. 'Hanging out', he observes, 'not unlike traditional forms of work, is organi[s]ed around specific bundle of tasks' (1992: 35). In shifting between periods of companionship and solitude throughout the day, the men shape their day into manageable chunks of time and develop purposeful and distinctive social routines that are acknowledged by those they encounter every day – they become '*habitués'* (See also Hall 2012: 62).

The importance of having a purposeful reason to be somewhere and to have the dignity of companionship is reflected by Pearl. Pearl attends the knitting group with her friend

Bernice. They always arrive and leave together. Often, after the knitting session, Bernice sits in the front window of the library, reading the newspaper, and Pearl sits next to her, waiting for her to finish, before they move off together to go shopping. It became clear how being with or among people was itself important for Pearl, rather than necessarily for the activity itself, and her continued participation in the knitting group despite her marked lack of progress showed that the group was something of a 'front' for getting her out of the house in a purposeful way:

Pearl: Something like this is very nice for people like me, because you know, I'm so lonely in that house, and in the new era, it's so lonely, you know. […] So it's good to have something - three times per week is not too much. […]

Katherine: And what do you when you come to the library, and there's not a group…

Pearl: No! I don't come here – this is the only time I come, so if there was a group who comes here, meet, and something going on, I would come! Yes, I would, just to get you out, innit?

(Interview with Pearl and Bernice, December 2011)

Pearl's persistence with knitting, despite finding it very difficult, demonstrates the severity of her need for something to do. Like Smita, Pearl went on to explain that she wouldn't come to the library *just* to read the newspaper, for her to involve herself in something, it has to be purposeful, and it needs to be satisfying. Both Smita and Pearl, in their different ways, are attracted to the group by its possibility to be engaged in purposeful activity; but moreover, and unlike the solitary activity of reading the newspaper, *the chance to be among others.* While Pearl was not as obviously active in conversations as Smita, her regular participation in the group despite her finding the knitting difficult, can be seen as a sign of how important the group was to her as a point of social contact.

Pearl's wearing a bright blue top and looks more outgoing than usual - although she's hardly made any progress knitting she seems to be enjoying being part of the group. At one point Rithika comes over and takes her knitting out of her hands for her to watch. She casts on neatly and efficiently, then hands it back to Pearl.

Later, Sarah comes by, saying, 'how are you getting on, well, you've cast on very well anyway!' Pearl laughs – '*she* did it!' acknowledging Rithika.

These introductions to Smita and Pearl have demonstrated how people can find levels of participation in an activity which makes sense to them. For both women, the purposefulness of the knitting group can be seen as providing a bridge to social contact. The necessity for there to be 'something to do' in order to come along was common to the members of the group. Prigoda and McKenzie found a similar purposefulness in their interviews with the women who made analogies with North American quilting circles, ostensibly purposeful activities, but simultaneously a space for respite and social contact (2007: 110). The craft activities create purposeful sociality, and produce forms of sharing and participating.

A common room; allusions to difference

As the weeks passed and the knitting sessions became an established routine, I observed how the room started to assume the role of a meeting point, or a drop-in. Sarah's reluctance to lay claim to ownership lent a looseness to the group, with people trickling in, and coming and going in the middle. Women I recognised from attending other activity sessions were deliberately 'looking in' on the group, hoping to bump into people they know there, and would sit with the group for a while, talking, but without joining in the knitting. The community room seemed to become known to those who were familiar with it as a kind of 'common room', a place where people would drop in to see what was going on and who is there, without any real intention of getting involved in the 'official' activity.

As the discussion featuring Smita and Pearl has shown, the women in the group are not *just* here to do knitting. They can be seen as using the group as a reason to be present; it forms part of grounding routine, an opportunity to cement social connections and works as a springboard to other kinds of social events, seen through Smita gathering people's contact details and calling them at home to make further arrangements with

them. In the case of the women 'looking by' the group, the social possibilities it offers

as itself a regular space to meet are appreciated without a need to join in the activity.

The sense of the group becoming a regular space could also be seen in the ways in

which people started to refer to the people in the group, often, as Smita did in her

comment about the 'cosmopolitan' nature of the group, taking the visible forms of

difference perceived in the room as a sign of the group's distinctiveness.

In this part of the chapter, I draw on the work of Avtar Brah to think about the potential

for considering the community room as a 'diaspora space', a location through which

stories and histories of identities are articulated in complex and sometimes ambivalent

ways (1996: 208). As Brah writes, 'diaspora space' is situated within differentiated

power relations and intertwined genealogies (209); and it is embedded within and

articulated through everyday spaces and locations. In the next part of the chapter, I

show how diasporic ideas and experiences are strategically mobilised, invoked and

downplayed in the community room through recognitions and articulations of

difference, and start to consider the knitting group as offering a diaspora space.

The knitting session is not an evening 'Stitch and Bitch'[3] meeting in a pub or coffee shop

- the mid-morning timing influences who can attend. The age composition of the

women attending the knitting session can be roughly split into two - those who are

older, and retired, who are in the clear majority of the group: Pearl, Smita, and Margaret,

for instance, or younger women bringing up children: Ursula and Huma, whose children

are occasionally present in the room. Sarah and I are considered 'the young women' -

although we are not that young - and once I observe how Pearl mistakes us for each

other, both perhaps through our appearance and our (assumed and actual) links to the

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[3] Knitting groups meeting in public places, popularized by Debbie Stoller, author of *Stitch and Bitch: A Knitter's Handbook* (2003) the first of a range of knitting guides featuring contemporary designs. In the introduction to her book, she situates her re-connection to knitting within a highly personal account of her family's early 20th century migration from Europe to the USA and a recollection of how her re-discovery of the calm absorption created by knitting accompanied her return to The Netherlands to say goodbye to her dying maternal grandmother, the woman who had taught her to knit as an adult (pp. 3-11).

library. This difference in age, although not wide-ranging, creates a mixed presence of older and younger women and is remarked on as positive:

> Shiraz, a young woman, says that she used to go to a monthly knitting class at the Parchmore Community Centre, which she found out about through searching on the internet. 'It was mostly old women' she says, 'I was definitely the youngest! But it was nice; it was nice to be somewhere a bit different, with different people. And it was free, there were some other classes I found but you had to pay.'
>
> (Field notes, January 2012)

> Margaret says that it's great to know people who are different ages and if you don't know younger people then it gets very depressing when all your friends are getting older and having problems. She says she does the U3A [University of the Third Age] 'but that's enough older people for me!'
>
> (Field notes, December 2011)

Margaret, in her mid-seventies, distances herself from her age and her peer group and the difficulties of old age. She went on to relate an anecdote in which another elderly woman assumed Margaret was much younger than she really was, and was very pleased at this. As Blakemore and Boneham observe, 'growing old is far from uniform, and is in many ways a continuation of individual life patterns' (1996: 1-2), and it is continuing to be socially and intellectually active, and to pursue her extensive craft activities, which allows Margaret to disassociate herself from being 'an old person'. At the same time, the circumscriptions of old age, shown in her allusion to her friends 'having problems', are also unavoidable.

While age is played out between the loose division of younger and older women in the room, another very obvious form of difference, expressed through Smita's allusion to cosmopolitanism, is seen in the huge variety of different ethnic and racial backgrounds of the women in the room. This difference is not named but is alluded to as 'difference' and as in this instance from Margaret, as something positive; 'it's like with my lace making group' says Margaret, stitching at a tablecloth, 'we're all very different, but we all get on, and we help each other' (Field notes, January 2012). However, an encounter

between Pearl and Smita demonstrated how highlighting these allusions to difference could also provoke an uncomfortable moment:

> Pearl says she has 'just arrived' in Thornton Heath, after living in Balham for 30 years. 'Where are you from, *originally*?' asks Smita, curious. 'Balham', says Pearl, firmly, shutting down the opportunity for doubt or further questioning.

> (Field notes, December 2011)

Pearl has a clearly distinguishable Caribbean accent, (I later find out she is *originally*, to use Smita's words, from Jamaica) which perhaps prompted Smita's curiosity, but Pearl makes it clear that she does not want this curiosity to form the start of a conversation. Pearl and I did talk on a different occasion, together with Bernice, about her relationship to Balham and Thornton Heath, as well as more generalised expressions of 'home' but this was not discussed in front of the group. Pearl's unwillingness to engage in talk of origins cautioned me against this as a way of positioning difference in the room, and I never asked anyone directly in front of the group, 'where they were from'. Instead I listened closely to what people wanted to say about themselves in this space - what emerged from anecdotes and small pieces of talk.

Telling stories

The shared material purposefulness of knitting as described in the first part of this chapter can be seen as creating a space in which participants also share through forms of 'telling'. In the knitting sessions, I observed how personal anecdotes were shared as interventions within 'large' social themes - conversations which invoked topics of marriage, bereavement, religion and loneliness. The knitting group may be seen as becoming a conduit for the expression of life narratives and experiences which come into this small space. The developing sense of warmth and growing understanding of the knitting group as a social situation sits slightly at odds with the library as an institution, even starting to show it up as a 'bad host'. In this extract from my field notes, the 'official' hour given over to the group is up and Sarah prepares to leave the

group downstairs to finish or continue as they like, as she must move around the library according to the staff rota:

> Sarah comes back from doing a bit of photocopying of some patterns for people, gives them the pages and says, 'I've got to go to another part of the building now, but you're welcome to stay, it's nice and warm in here now…'

> 'But where's the coffee?' jokes Shauna.

> Sarah gives a slightly anguished smile and says: 'I know - we used to be able to offer coffee and biscuits; we just don't have the budget for it now. But you're welcome to bring in cakes and things if you like. And we've got the drinks machine upstairs, so you could have a cup of tea for 50p, if you like - I'm sorry.'

> (Field notes, January, 2012)

Faced with Sarah's obvious awkwardness, some people in the group murmur that she is not to worry; and thank her for her help. There's a sense of trying to make Sarah feel better, to 'repair' any misunderstanding from the comment which was intended as humorous, and to cover up her embarrassment that she is unable to satisfactorily 'host' the group within its rather straitened institutional framework and limited budget for the group. Sarah is caught between her commitment to the group and its institutional position - her personal sense of responsibility and ethos of care must be negotiated against what is possible within the institutional setting.

Prigoda and McKenzie observe the emergence of practices of care within an institutional framework, characterising these as transformative for the institution: 'the public space of the program[e] room becomes a site for the sharing of activities, the shared enactment of women's identities, and the performance of caring' (2007: 94). Rather than the public room simply becoming a space of care and attentiveness, I consider the instances of sharing and care giving to be bounded by the terms of what is institutionally possible. In Chapter Three I discussed the forms of 'emotional labour' (Hochschild 2003) the librarians are engaged in on a daily basis as they encounter 'the public'. In the space of the knitting group there is considerable institutional awkwardness around caring, with limitations on manifestations of care, and tension created by Sarah, in this instance, not being permitted or given the space to care 'too much'. While Sarah's presence is

necessary in order for the group to feel official and legitimate, when she leaves the room, more personal matters are discussed. This could also be an effect of the timing of her absence, as people start to warm into the activity, they become slightly lulled into different kinds of conversation by the '[…] dreamy, calming pleasure' of the activity itself (Diski 2013, 39).

In titling this part of the chapter 'telling stories', I draw attention to the sense of 'telling' as revealing, both that it is an act of revealing, and that in telling, a wider resonance is created. Listening to the stories and exchanges passed around the knitting table, I was acutely aware of how these snippets from life stories and experience were forms of narrating and sharing in a wider diasporic condition, what Brah describes as the 'simultaneous situatedness within gendered spaces of class, racism, ethnicity, sexuality, age; of movements across shifting cultural, religious and linguistic boundaries, of journeys across geographical and psychic borders' (1996: 204).

Several women in the group share similar experiences of their early lives which were influenced by the consequences of growing up in the remnants of colonialism and within processes of post-colonialism. Smita's life trajectory in particular has several cross-overs with other women - she and Jaya each lived for a period in Mauritius and her experience of attending an Indian convent school run by Irish nuns is shared with Carol, another member of the group. However, as Brah writes, the diasporic condition is not limited to those who themselves have a diasporic history. Everyone in the room shares in the 'simultaneous situatedness' held in these moments of talk and sharing. For the women in the knitting group, their shared differences, their shared relationship to difference as a way of being in the world, become points of reference and exchange.

In the brief stories the women told each other, the contextually situated and multiplicity of their life experiences formed spaces of recognition and matter-of-fact ordinariness. Here, I share the words of three of the participants of the knitting group, Smita, Pearl and Rithika as demonstrating some of the ways in which sharing emerge in the group. Experiences of vulnerability, loneliness and grief, as well as personal capacity -that offered by personal relationships, and by religious faith, are evoked in the room. A tone

of sociality and fellowship emerges through these exchanges - while often deeply affecting, they tend to be either offered up directly and matter-of-factly, or hinted at and alluded to. I evoke three registers of telling stories garnered from exchanges in the knitting group: Smita's sense of 'being in the world', Pearl's account of seeking and receiving fellowship, and Rithika's expression of grief and loss.

Smita

> 'I learned to knit in primary school', says Smita, 'but I haven't knitted since!' She is from Bangalore and went to convent school there, where she was taught by Irish nuns. Smita says they were taught to be 'prim and proper' and 'to be ladies': 'you weren't allowed to peel a banana and just eat it, you had to use a knife and fork, and cut it up. The same with mangoes – we have delicious mangoes there, and you had to peel them round, and then turn them out, all very proper! Of course, my mum was very pleased […].'

> (Field notes, December 2011)

Smita's recollections place her schooling within a cultural context in which education was seen as part of the colonial civilising mission, a territory on which ideas of propriety were played out in particularly gendered ways. Her humorous anecdote about the etiquette of taming exotic fruit through mannered and awkward preparations to make it suitable to eat playfully exposes one of the principles of her education as a process of indoctrination into gendered understandings of corporeal propriety.

In her easy mingling of the 'here' and the 'there' when recounting her story, Smita brings the colonial past into the room. Smita's story of eating mangoes illustrates Brah's understanding of 'home' as evoked through sensual memories and stories, 'mediated by the historically specific everyday of social relations' (1996: 192). The joking tone of her anecdote both underplays and emphasises her elite education, an education which she and her husband made huge efforts to give to their daughters:

> We wanted our daughters to be independent, to earn their own money and have good jobs, to be doctors, engineers. […] It was important for us to give them a good education, so they can decide for themselves. It cost a lot of money! So we never travelled then. We do our travelling now! I never worked. I used my

husband's money but he gave it to me freely and I never squandered it and he understood that.

<div align="right">(Field notes, January 2012)</div>

Smita's declarations of family values point to a fierce pride in the success of her daughters and a complexly intermingled approach to modern mores and familial expectations. She tells me how one of her daughters had an arranged marriage with a distant relative, while the others had 'love matches':

> People are worried about arranged marriages, but they work! Between families with a similar outlook and good education – it works. You get problems if people can't read, and so on.

<div align="right">(Field notes, December 2011)</div>

Smita's outlook on arranged marriages is based on her own successful marriage, in which she and her husband negotiate their mutual independence. Smita has brought up her daughters to be well-educated women who have taken advantage of the opportunities afforded them to work internationally in finance and software engineering. Her daughters' success and family arrangements means that Smita has become accustomed to travelling and living 'between':

> I live in India but my husband travels a lot for his work and my daughter has a daughter, so I want to help out. My other daughter lives in New York so I will visit her next. I will be here until January, then I will go to India until March, then I will go to New York. New York is a wonderful city. Everything you could ever want is there! Everything is in walking distance.

<div align="right">(Field notes, November 2011)</div>

Smita's travel itinerary, a sign of her ties to her daughters and *their* locations, punctuates her life. Through her extended stays in different cities, Smita has the next year mapped out in her head. In her short description of New York, the classic tale that 'everything you could ever want is there!' is mixed with her personal reading of the city. Smita has the city mapped out - she concludes with the sense of possibility the city affords her, in the image of her being able to walk everywhere, walking New York. It is not just the physical travelling the world, but the way that Smita conveys through her

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travel plans, and her evocation of where she is going, a sense of being at ease with her own shifting sense of her place in the world.

Pearl

Just before Christmas, I recorded a conversation with Bernice and Pearl, where we talked a little bit about knitting and learning, specifically their considerable and repeated efforts to improve their IT skills, and a lot more about living - moving house, and in particular about being alone and unfamiliar in a place. We started off by exclaiming over the way they had met while waiting at a bus stop together:

> Bernice: […] This was how it all started, and in a few minutes time, the bus came, and obviously we got in the bus and we still continued, because her friend was saying to me, am I from Barbados, and I said yes, and asked her if she was from Barbados, and I knew from her accent! [laughter] […] and we started talking in the bus, I was going to get off the bus before her, so she was telling me, Pearl's friend […] said if I could, you know, speak to Pearl and we could exchange numbers but we didn't have a pen, so she said that she lived at [says exact line of address] and I remembered that, so when I got the opportunity I popped in just to say hello and I said to her when I got to her house, and she opened the door, I said to her, 'do you remember me?' [*Laughter*] And she said, 'yes, I remember you!' So this is how it started, and this was how long ago, it must have been about, a couple of months ago, about four months ago?

> Pearl: No, I think it's longer than that. 'Cause I'd just moved. I been living here ten months, it must have been about eight months ago. I lived here about ten months now, innit, so it must have been about eight months ago…

<div align="right">(Interview with Bernice and Pearl, December 2011)</div>

I was struck by the directness of their meeting, and how Bernice very deliberately 'followed up' the invitation to remain in touch with Pearl, presenting herself at her door. While their meeting is framed as unusual in the unexpected way it happened, when participating in the knitting group and other library groups with older people I repeatedly came across examples of participants exchanging details of their home addresses and phone numbers after very little conversation or interaction. The small

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notebook Smita carries around with her for this express purpose underlines the targeted and 'up-front' approaches that this group of women makes to each other. This urgency generates what I came to understand as 'telescoped' social interactions, where older women take up very immediate, if loose, forms of connection with each other, based on minimal social contact but large amounts of social trust gained through experience.

Pearl's acutely accurate accounting of the length of time she has lived in Thornton Heath reflects her difficulty to adjusting to her new life in the area. Her life in Balham remains her reference point, resonant with past affiliations and positive experiences. These two places, less than five miles apart, seem like different worlds when she described her previous routines of church and Bible study and other social activities in Balham, contrasting with her present feelings of loneliness and disconnection in Thornton Heath.

While her current experience of home is one of sadness and isolation, Pearl is aware of the risk that idealising 'home' can have, making reference to how she knows people who have gone 'back home' to the Caribbean, and feeling disheartened that it's not how it was, or how they imagined; home has become a 'place of no return' (Brah 1996: 192).

> I talk with Pearl afterwards, in the window. Bernice is reading the newspaper while Pearl sits. She says they are going shopping together after. I say that I'm going home to do some DIY. I say that I'd asked my dad for advice and that he'd said what I needed was a big strong man to do it! Pearl asked about my brothers and said that they should help me; they should look after me. She asked if I had a sister and I said no, and she said that my brothers were lucky to have both a sister and a brother. I asked about her brothers and sisters - they are all living in America. They talk on the phone but 'it's not the same; it's not like having them near. So lonely, so lonely, it's not right, people being so lonely. People move back to Jamaica and it's different, people have moved away and they're lonely. They go all that way, thinking it will be different, but it's not.'
>
> (Field notes, January 2012)

Although she does not talk about her faith in the sessions, Pearl is recognised by other members of the group as a religious woman. During one knitting session, Margaret had given Pearl a religious book, saying, 'I don't like throwing things out and I don't need it, *and something made me bring it today* and I was thinking who might want it and I

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thought of you, but if you don't want it, just give it away. He's a preacher', she continued, pointing to the photo of the man on the cover. 'I know this man', says Pearl, taking the book. In our conversation later, she gets the book out of her bag and says, 'I don't know why she don't want it, maybe I find something in here for me' (Field notes, January 2012). Margaret's approach to Pearl may be seen as a form of fellowship which both recognises Pearl's faith and is offered as a sign of her own, but she does this in a way which is deliberately underplayed. In another conversation, I commented that there were several churches in the vicinity of the library, but for Pearl the ease of getting to these churches was counteracted by her need to have a friend with her:

> But you got to have a good friend, you know, that you […] I don't mind going with a friend. Me, I'm like that, that's my way, we both go along, you know, not to be like a fool, I feel stupid, yeah, and I don't want to go back. […] And it's a long way out, and I've been getting problem getting there. My lot would give me a lift, but it's making a lot of problems: 'Oh, you're going too far, get a nearer church'. So I don't know if I'm going to get there tomorrow morning and Sunday. I don't know if they give me a lift; I get ready and see what happen.

> (Interview with Pearl and Bernice, December 2011)

Blakemore and Boneham point to the importance of the church in the lives of older Afro-Caribbean people - especially women (1996: 71). Pearl's experience, however is an acute illustration of the difficulty that re-establishing a church routine in a new area is fraught with, as an older and socially isolated woman. Her need for people as an entrée to church exposes her social vulnerability – she doesn't want to go alone, and to 'feel like a fool' if she doesn't know anyone. While she is locally mobile, her desire to go to a particular church, further away, and to which her family might take her, is dependent on their commitments and availability, as well as, implied above, their rather grudging willingness - the perception, perhaps, that Pearl is choosing to make things complicated. The image with which Pearl concludes, of her dressed and ready for church, waiting to see if her family will be able to take her, demonstrates her resignation towards the situation and conveys a sense of her being both geographically fixed and utterly dislocated. Pearl's experience of dislocation and vulnerability seems completely

different to the ease with which Smita juggles continents, but she recognises her

vulnerability, which for her is bound up with her experiences of her family life:

> Pearl: It's just me, maybe, another person like me, they would just make themselves go around…. 'You mustn't be shy - you got to be bright and springy….'
>
> Katherine: People do things differently…
>
> Pearl: Some people, you know, will just go here and tour, you know, all over… […] Shop around, and look around, but as I said not by myself. I don't like that. […] I grew up with ten sisters and brothers, so, yes, so for me, I just like to have someone with me, whether a cousin or a friend, I just like to have another person with me, you know?
>
> Katherine: You're used to having a lot of people around you, that's the thing.
>
> Pearl: I'm accustomed to the crowd.
>
> (Interview with Pearl and Bernice, December 2011)

She was aware of her less outgoing nature, but at the same time, linked her experiences

of growing up in a large family to how she thrived 'among' people – she was

'accustomed to the crowd'. Pearl is comfortable 'being among', and this is conveyed

through her continuing presence at and participation in the knitting group. In her

interactions with Rithika, which I go on to discuss below, she demonstrates how she is

good with people.

Rithika

Rithika, a woman who attended several sessions towards the end of my period of

fieldwork in the library, is a craftswomen - she described how she had several knitting

and sewing machines at home, one of which had been a gift from her family, and during

the sessions she helped and advised others with their knitting, while not bringing a

project of her own with her to do. Towards the end of one session, where Carol had

been talking about being unable to get rid of her mother's sewing machine, Rithika was

moved to talk of her husband who had died recently:

'We were together 44 years, and he died last year, and what can I do? He did everything! I don't know how to do anything. That's why I try and come out, get out now, and do what I can.'

'Keep busy!' say some people. This sentiment is echoed by others in the room - 'That's important'. 'And think of others', says Pearl, quite firmly, gesturing around the group - 'we all know how it is to lose someone.'

(Field notes, January 2012)

The dignity and importance of 'keeping busy' emerges as a response to how people are urged to cope with bereavement of loved ones. Pearl's assertive intervention is significant here, in its self-assuredness, and its ambiguity. I am left unsure of whether she implies that Rithika should take comfort in the fact of others' grief, or be humbled by it. I am slightly surprised by her speaking out in front of the group like this, but also see her intervention as a sign of her ease with people and her developing ease at being part of the group. The words Pearl spoke to Rithika in this session have a bearing on what happens in the next session, the last knitting session I could attend before I was leaving for Berlin, when the three of us share an interaction which feels highly meaningful.

Everyone has gradually packed up their things and left but Rithika continues to sit, looking through the knitting books and pattern magazines scattered about on the table. I realise that Rithika is delaying. Pearl has sat down beside her and I join them.

Rithika is keeping up a commentary on what she's looking at as she turns the pages, saying,' isn't that good?' 'I wonder how that works', twisting the books around to turn the pages towards us. She is playing for time, trying to keep us talking. 'I am so lonely,' she suddenly says. Pearl agrees, murmuring: 'depressing, very depressing.' 'Where do you live?' asks Rithika. Pearl gives her address. Rithika doesn't know it. 'I live on […] road', says Rithika, 'nearer Tesco. Come round my house any time. Come and visit. It'll be nice. You come too!' she says to me. 'That'll be nice' I say.

'What's your name?' Rithika asks Pearl. Pearl says her name then spells it out as Rithika writes it in a little book. The swap their home phone numbers. I say I have to go and Rithika takes my right hand and kisses the back of it. Pearl and I stand up but it looks like Rithika wants to stay downstairs until her next scheduled

activity starts – she's booked a slot on the computers. Moving about seems really difficult for her, she is a very large woman, who uses a walking stick. Pearl coaxes her into going upstairs: 'don't stay down here all by yourself.' We start our slow way up to the main part of the library, Rithika and I take the lift, while Pearl slowly climbs the stairs. Once upstairs, Pearl melts away, leaving Rithika and I together at the coffee machine. Pearl has made an intervention and helped to get Rithika upstairs but does not then become responsible for her.

(Field notes, February 2012)

Afterwards, I am slightly stunned and overwhelmed at what happened. Rithika used the materials on the table in front of her as a way of 'holding' Pearl and me in the room, trying to extend the knitting session through the 'front' of looking through the magazines together. Rithika's invitation to Pearl to come to her house before even knowing her name felt so sad – a sign of her being deeply, deeply lonely and craving social contact. I felt guilty at my response to her inclusion of me in the invitation; that it was glib and even untrue, given that I knew I was imminently leaving the country for fieldwork in Germany. But overall I was astonished by the contrast between the direct and no-nonsense tone of the exchange between Pearl and Rithika – the purposeful sharing of addresses, exchanging names and numbers and Rithika writing these down in her small notebook -like that carried by Smita - and the depth of need behind this. Her old-fashioned, courtly gesture, an act both unusually intimate and strangely formal, as she kissed my hand, seemed so striking and even out of place but at the same time, indicative of the strength of feeling that was at times in the room. In previous sessions Rithika had spoken of the deaths of two of her adult children, and the loss of her husband and her grief is palpable, and powerfully symbolised in this gesture.

This simultaneously business-like and affecting exchange between Rithika and Pearl is also indicative of the way in which social intimacies are occasionally telescoped in this room, where invitations, revelations and confidences are offered up as generalities or form part of wider exchanges, but deliberate sharing is not the focus of the conversation. These brief portraits show how, through the shared activity of knitting, the sessions

become a space of sharing and mutual support. The weight of experience and of loss, sorrow and loneliness lie heaped up around the edges of conversations.

Conclusion

This chapter has shown that the knitting group is bound up with different forms of sociality. It has moved from the basement community room out into the world to show how the people who come to the knitting group are placed within broader networks of meaning and connectivity. The significance of knitting can be understood in many different ways – it can be emphasised as a form of learning, as a skill and a craft, as a connection to family and childhood, as a gift for others, and simply as a reason to get out of the house.

In exploring what happens in the knitting group, I have opened out forms of meaning making produced by shared 'doing'. The purposefulness of the semi - structured activity provided a justification for being there stronger than that of 'simply' going to the library. The women participants share in loose and shifting forms of participation around the group, which is enabled by the material purposefulness of knitting. Whilst engaged in making their own projects, they are collectively engaged in making another materiality. 'Doing' knitting together allows different forms of participation and communication, and its purposeful mode stretches out to those who aren't actually knitting but who enjoy being in the same room as the knitters. Knitting encourages different registers of speaking and sharing, and at the same time, allows silence.

The knitting group is a multi-stranded space, working within fields of recognition and difference, skill and self-assurance, and vulnerability and loss. Rather than difference being so everyday that it goes without comment (Wessendorf 2013), implicit commentaries on difference and different places emerge through the knitting sessions. The small stories people tell mark identificatory practices, acknowledgements of shared experiences around marriage, family life and bereavement, and become shared points of reference and signifiers of trust among the women. Through the regular expressions of purposeful collectivity enabled by participation in the knitting group, this group of

women starts to form a 'we' identity, demonstrating Leonie Sandercock's (2003) point of the necessity of "something like daily habits of perhaps quite banal intercultural interaction in order to establish a basis for dialogue' (in Wessendorf 2013: 89).

Several of the women in the group make sustained efforts to reach out to each other whether by sharing deeply personal and affecting pieces of information, gently acknowledging and supporting experiences of difficulty or more energetically making plans for shared social arrangements and sharing contact details. 'Fellowship' can be used to describe the reflexive sharing and mutual support in the group, expressing a form of companionship without necessarily implying individualised closeness. Acts of listening, manifestations of sympathy and expressions of 'tough love' can be seen as manifestations of fellowship, as well as demonstrative of acute forms of loneliness and social isolation experienced by some of the older women in the group, and the profound need for social contact.

Earlier in the chapter, I discussed how the knitting group was slightly awkwardly accommodated within the library, seen through attempts to frame the group as useful as well as the way in which the group was not cemented through the delivery of needs based work, and absent from official documentation. What is the capacity of a 'public' activity and the expectations it is made to carry? How public, or 'representative' can a knitting group in a library basement be? Perhaps it is important that a group is allowed *not* to be representative, to be somewhat skewed towards older women, to be self-selecting. This chapter can be seen as a reflection of the acute needs expressed within and the accompanying value of the knitting group as an interstitial space – a 'public' group in an almost private space, through an activity which invites particular forms of shared participation. These forms of shared participation may be seen as demonstrating the range of needs and experiences locally, which spill out into the room. Through the stories the women participants tell, the basement room is given a view.

Chapter Six: Culture in a place like this

> The library is leading a lonely battle here: libraries are places of education, of reading - and within a *Kiez* where there's just very little education, very little opportunity for reading […]. These are really difficult surroundings (*Umfeld*) for a library, but they manage pretty well, I think …
>
> <div align="right">(Interview with Herr Bauer, Medienhof, August 2012)</div>

Introduction

In the interview extract above, Herr Bauer considers the implications of the pervasive educational lacks he perceives in the *Kiez* for the work the Bibliothek am Luisenbad is able to do. In using the metaphor of a 'lonely battle' he evokes the idea of the library fighting to make its presence felt locally through playing an educative role. This view from outside the library, of its role in this locality as being primarily purposive, and above all, educative, reflects the Luisenbad's description of its material and facilities on its website, as discussed in Chapter Three. The 'functional' role of the library in its area is engrained in such statements, which make an explicit connection between the library, where it is, and the expectations contained in this connection. The 'difficult' *Umfeld* which surrounds the library is seen to impact on the form of educative and creative possibility it is able to offer.

This chapter explores how the library is implicated within localised understandings of need, competency and expectation and makes visible the relationship of the public library to broader questions about contemporary urban life (Eigenbrodt 2007). I consider how the existing cultural potentials *and* limitations of this *Kiez* can be considered through a conceptualisation of the role of the Bibliothek am Luisenbad in its locality. This discussion of 'cultural' places in 'difficult' area offers a highly particularised form of cultural topography which is expressed in a localised landscape of need, expectation, capacity and competency. Just as Herr Bauer does above, understandings of locality are used as contextual markers to frame ideas of cultural expectations and appropriateness.

The material for this chapter comes from two different discussions, one with Frau Körner, the head librarian at the Bibliothek am Luisenbad, and one with three local teenagers, Naaz, Hiba and Fatima, young women working in a homework project which is hosted by the library. I draw out how, in both discussions, connections between the local area and the expectations surrounding educational and cultural capacity and forms of social competency are made. In both the reflections of Frau Körner and those offered by the teenagers a sense of place emerges through 'knowing where you are', a skilled reading of place which is partly formed through understanding perceptions of positionality within place. In juxtaposing these experiences, I discuss how broader social expectations are made visible in, or 'worked out' through the library. I unfold how 'knowing where you are' can be understood as both recognising the inherent difficulties of local needs, and a competent awareness of what might be possible. This emphasis on 'knowing' how to navigate around and within expectations as a skilled form of competence started to resonate with me as I approached the end of fieldwork in Berlin.

I start with a discussion I had with Frau Körner in the Bibliothek am Luisenbad, in which she gives examples of how the location of the library, and the idea of good quality library provision in Wedding, was perceived by those unfamiliar with the area as unexpected, and even anomalous. She reflects on how she and her staff struggle with forms of discursive distancing that shape the ideas of what culture might mean for a library and its users *here*. She frames expectations of what culture is, or can be, as depending on 'knowing where you are'; strategies which enable librarians to work successfully within their local context. 'Knowing where you are' is meant to produce forms of cultural and social work which are appropriate and 'relevant'. These are seen through highly deliberate practices of institutional partnership working to expand the capacity of what is possible within and beyond the library, and efforts to make the library more visible as a local educational and cultural actor within the neighbourhood. 'Being here' in this 'difficult' *Umfeld* requires certain tactics and engagements which both recognise the potential and delineate the limits of what might work here. In this way, 'knowing where you are' becomes a 'placed' form of cultural competency.

The interview which forms the second part of this chapter took place right at the end of fieldwork, almost immediately before I returned to London. I had got to know Hiba, Fatima and Naaz through going to sessions of the *Vorreiter*, a peer-led homework project for primary school-aged children, hosted by the Bibliothek am Luisenbad and organised by the Medienhof (the Media Yard), a local after-school education provider. The teenagers are part of a small group of young people doing their *Abitur* (loosely the equivalent of A-Levels) or enrolled in other forms of post-16 education, who are paid a small amount to support younger children in the twice-weekly after-school sessions.

In this part of the chapter I consider the location of the *Vorreiter* group within the library, then move to a discussion of wider forms of cultural and social competency, the expectations these three young women encountered, and the ways in which they could be navigated. They reflected on how, as practising Muslims wearing headscarves they were consistently marked out as 'culturally' different in public.[1] Their appearance invokes automatic assumptions of '*Migrationshintergrund'* and their future capacity as young women with personal and professional ambitions is systematically under-estimated, and as I will discuss later, structurally limited. The young women teachers demonstrated an acute sense of 'knowing where they are'; reflecting on where and how their educational attainments, their appearance, and their place of residence positioned them. Their words have prompted me to write about the different forms of competency and expectation which they navigate in their everyday lives, and how they dealt with the limited cultural competency of others.

The development of this chapter and its position in the thesis can be seen as reflecting my growing understanding and appreciation of life in the *Kiez*, my own development of 'knowing where I was'. Knowing where you are is both located in and stretches out to beyond the library; this is the starting point for Frau Körner's reflections about the role of the library 'in a place like this.'

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[1] I use the word headscarf throughout the chapter as the teenagers consistently used the German word *Kopftuch* in our discussion.

Sozialkompetenz – 'you have to know what it's like here'

Frau Körner: It always happens when people not from here come to an event, and you say to them: 'Yes, over there is the sculpture workshop, and that's the dance theatre' it's always: 'Oh really, that's *here* too?' And: 'What a lovely building!' as if it's a contradiction that there's culture here. And that it's meaningful. It's not, 'Just three students who kind of do a bit of dancing on the side...'

It's something that leads sometimes to a negative reaction with people, which we get a bit fed up with – always being put in this box. I mean, why *shouldn't* something like that be here? Or: 'I didn't expect to find a library like this *here,*' when you think, well, how have you imagined a library in a '*Brennpunkt Gebiet',* yes? Picture books for illiterates or what have you?

Katherine: That it could be ambitious…

Frau Körner: Many people who really don't go that often to the library comment, 'Oh, you have new books!' So we're back to this again, [...] how can we make ourselves plausible, how can we get this message out? […] So, the users who come regularly, of course the library is worth something to them. But we're forever having to make ourselves plausible to funders, to politicians, to our partners: yes, it's the library, it's not a statutory institution (*es ist eine freiwillige Einrichtung*) but still, it's not as if we can do without it.[i]

(Interview with Frau Körner, July 2012)

In her account of how she has to convince visitors of the library's credibility in spite of its location, Frau Körner describes a struggle against highly limited conceptions of what the role of the library in a *Brennpunkt Gebiet*, might be. The library's capacity as a local actor is systematically placed in question by these incredulous responses to its very presence in this *Kiez*. The expected 'phantasms' of fear and social crisis appear first in the visitor's mind, (Bourdieu 1999: 123) obscuring the cultural life which is simultaneously present. Frau Körner is determined to fight against the implication that 'here', a public library must necessarily offer a stunted or limited form of cultural life; that a library 'here' may not occupy a beautiful building, nor be seen to provide new

books for its readers. With her rhetorical questions, she evokes the persistent under-estimation of the library and the exasperation this provokes in her and her colleagues.

Frau Körner counteracts pervasive pre-conceptions of cultural insufficiency and low standards by making claims to the authenticity and the quality of the culture that exists and is possible here. The dance theatre she alludes to is close to the library, part of a complex of studios either side of the Uferstrasse, beside the river Panke. A former bus garage, the buildings on the north side of the street now comprise of a flexible art space with rotating exhibitions, the Uferhallen, while since 20008 those on the south side have become the Ufer Studios, the Wedding home for a highly-regarded Berlin contemporary dance company, Tanz Fabrik. At the same time, she reflects on the continued struggle to get this message out, through forms of making the library 'make sense' here, making it 'plausible' to people. The library has to negotiate its place within these ideas of what is understood as culturally valuable and valid in Wedding, as distinct to what might be the case in other areas of the city. Understandings of what is most appropriately placed where help shape this mapping of the cultural and spatial terrain, both in the negative sense of the stereotypical assumptions she reports, and in the sense of really understanding where you are as a tactic to counterbalance such assumptions. Moreover, in representing an institution which is *not* statutory, Frau Körner and her colleagues have to repeatedly make the library make sense as a valuable and vital cultural asset which must not be dispensed with.

While admitting that 'I don't want to spend all of my time in this microcosm here', Frau Körner underlines the importance of having an attuned awareness of what is culturally significant locally; both through, for instance, knowing what productions are currently underway at the Uferhalle, but also in the sense of having an understanding of the meaning and shape of ordinary life in the area. She makes an analogy with school teachers who do not live in the area and who lack an appreciation of the circumstances in which the children in their classroom live:

> They just come in, work with the children, make demands on them, and then wonder: 'Why don't I ever get anything back from these families?' When they

really just don't know anything about the reality of life for these children, you know?[ii]

Knowing where you are, as Olaf Eigenbrodt discusses, is a key competency offered by small libraries. He sees the branch library, '*als kontextbezogener gesellschaftlicher Raum*'; as 'a social space that is sensitive to its context' (2007: 11), but which requires care to maintain: 'one must make sure', he writes, 'to keep the threshold suitably low and to keep the social area in view' (2007: 8). 'Keeping the social area in view' requires specific forms of awareness and engagement which are manifested in terms of networking, sharing and competency. Knowing about the 'reality of life' for people in the area can be understood as a form of *Sozialkompetenz.* In the Bibliothek am Luisenbad the complexity of these negotiations is seen through the involvement of and presence of young people in the library, despite it not having an emphasis as a young people's library:

> That we have so many young people here has, I think, neither to do with our material, or with any particular programme that we're running, rather simply that the library is a living and working room for young people. Because firstly, young people [round here] live in rather close confines because it's a pretty difficult social situation around here - [*we are interrupted briefly*]. Ok, yes, because they live in narrow circumstances, and then the situation is that they're meeting here with their friends to work here, yes? And it's also the case that, especially in some Muslim families, the library is seen as a safe (*geschützter*) place for girls. The parents let them in the library, because they think, they're studying there, that's ok.[iii]

<div align="right">(Interview with Frau Körner, April 2012)</div>

Frau Körner's empathy with the difficulty of young people's difficult and spatially cramped domestic situations which results in them using the library as a living room emerges simultaneously with a note of caution about the impact their presence has on other users. She went on to describes how teenagers in groups could be perceived as intimidating, particularly by older library users, and gave a rather negative portrayal of the way teenagers use the space, describing their tone as 'actually verging on borderline, sometimes' ('*manchmal schon etwas grenzwertig im Umgangston*') and commenting

ruefully that, 'they sit there pretty self-confidently, let's say!' (*und sie sitzten da eben auch selbstbewusst*!). The awareness of 'knowing where you are 'provokes a complex picture of the perceptions of people within it and of the library's own location within wider networks of cultural and educational providers:

Frau Körner: Exactly - as a public library, as we said earlier, you're not necessarily successful just because you *are* somewhere, we have to know a bit about what happens here, in order to know; we have to offer such and such, otherwise you do things which in another context could be quite sensible, but in this location are no use at all, you know?

Katherine: It has to fit, what is offered here.

Frau Körner: Yes, because in essence, it's no different to a greengrocers, is it? It doesn't run itself. [...] You are just a small entity in a community, so to say, in the middle of a big city! Aren't you? And then you just have to know, I think, where you are, otherwise you aren't, erm, valued.

Katherine: You have to be part of the area...

Frau Körner: Yes, you have to be part of the area (*Teil sein*), and that can only happen when you take part in it (*teilhaben*), and not when you say: 'Ok, well, I'm here and you can just come.' That's not enough, I think, not really.[iv]

(Interview with Frau Körner, April 2012)

The library is embedded within a larger system – it is both part of a larger political and administrative structure and simultaneously, works to incorporate itself into a network of local institutions that collaborate and share similar goals. The play on words in the balanced phrase: '*Teil sein / teilhaben*' indicates the situated relationship Frau Körner sees for the Bibliothek am Luisenbad as part of the area - and that being part *of* something is only possible when the library actively takes part *in* it. Frau Körner relates how she and her staff undertake different forms of taking part: going to consultation meetings about plans for local development; being active members of the *Bildungsverbund*, a local network of educational providers; partnership work with *Kitas* (pre-school groups) and local schools; as well as the nearby *Volkshochschule* (adult

education college). In making the library an established presence at key local meetings and playing an active part in networks, Frau Körner reflected on how she and her staff were engaged in processes of increasing the local visibility of the library:

> So yes, I think that if you don't make yourself visible, then it's of little use to others. Particularly in areas where it's not obvious to use the library. If we just stayed where we were, and opened, and closed, and only lent out material, then that just wouldn't be enough here. And I think that it shows a mutual awareness and respect to look at what others are doing in the area, and how they are managing the difficulties [here], and not that you work in a place and you don't know what's going on.[v]

> (Interview with Frau Körner, April 2012)

Taking part means more than simply opening and closing the library each day and issuing books, although this might reflect how the library continues to be popularly imagined. The connections the library makes with other local actors are essential to the work of making it more visible as a player in the cultural and educational scene in the *Kiez*. While this collaborative strategy is an important part of being taken seriously as a local cultural provider, it is necessary to recognise the limits to the capacity of what the library can do on top of its usual remit. Frau Körner described how additional outreach activities had the tendency to compromise the capacity to undertake the 'usual' work:

> Every other activity gets disrupted, because there's the computers, then there's meant to be reading aloud, and then all the usual things that go on in the library…[vi]

> (Interview with Frau Körner, April 2012)

The library can be seen as risking becoming a victim of its own success, almost over-whelmed by the additional work its commitment to the area has created. Frau Körner related how the library is completely booked up a year ahead with activities with and visits from local *Kitas*. The experience of finding it highly difficult to run special activities alongside the 'usual' work of the library means that the relationships and collaborations with other local actors are embedded in the library through *Umwege*, finding a 'way around' the limitations of space and time within the library itself.

While these networks of the library's reach are vital, the collaborations with other organisations and special events are frequently not advertised on the library's public catalogue of events. In order to make them 'fit' within the remit of the library, they are kept separate from the institution's habitual and more visible daily work, and might even take place outside of the library, or during times at which the library is closed to the public. As Frau Körner describes below in relation to the *Vorreiter* project, it is sometimes a question of literally finding a space for an additional activity to take place, which leads to the physical separation of activities within different areas of the library:

> That's where school pupils and students give homework help, twice a week, and we do that in other rooms, outside of the library, in our events rooms, because it just wouldn't be possible in the library.[vii]

(Interview with Frau Körner, July 2012)

The young people in the *Vorreiter* project occupy an entirely different space of the library, so that their presence does not compromise that of other users. This makes the twice-weekly group and the presence of up to 30 small children and their older helpers almost invisible to the other users of the library. While they might go unnoticed by members of the public, these collaborations are an important part of the strategy of making the library *more visible* as a serious cultural player and engaged local cultural mediator to people outside the library. As Frau Körner evoked above in her description of the library's relative size and its nested situation within the local authority and within the city, by being aware of its limits and its relative smallness within the network of local cultural and educational provision, the library works to develop itself as a local cultural player while remaining responsive to its own capacity.

I now turn to discuss the *Vorreiter* project as a counterpoint to the institutional reflections of Frau Körner, but also as a complementary narrative in which the shared themes of expectation, competency, 'being taken seriously' and 'knowing where you are' are considered. I focus on the roles and experiences of the young teachers in this group, in whom responsibility is invested and upon whom there is pressure in their position as exemplars for younger children. In considering what it means to be made an example of

in the context of the *Vorreiter*, and within the broader context of life in Wedding, I show how these young people's reflections on their experiences in the sessions and at school, their thoughts on life in Wedding, and the futures they imagine for themselves create a complex and profound narrative about how and where they can negotiate and claim a space of competency for themselves.

The *Vorreiter* Project

Vorreiter can be translated as 'pioneer', or 'trailblazer'. The Wedding-based initiative is premised on the capacity of older teenagers, who themselves have often been supported by the homework club at the Medienhof educational project, to support and act as role-models for younger children who are still at primary school. Herr Bauer described it as the younger children seeing someone 'like them', who is motivated to work hard at school and who, having advanced to post-16 education, has ambitions for their future:

> And then also that the children see, 'aha', there are older kids, who are really working hard, who are really interested in things, who read, and that is an example which they [perhaps] don't see in their families, or in their parents, but which they can see from these older siblings, and then they have greater motivation to study, and to be like them. At school, if you're keen, you're often picked on or called a swot, but then here they see: they want to be engineers, they want to be teachers and doctors – 'I could also do that.' This is so important for us, that it's the young people themselves who take on this responsibility, and it's not always us, as white Germans – you know what I mean – who tell them 'what's good for them.'[viii]

(Interview with Herr Bauer, Medienhof, August 2012)

Herr Bauer identifies the reluctance children can have to be seen to be keen, knowing that this has socially undesirable consequences. In *Hauptschüler*, Stefan Wellgraf describes the penalties and small humiliations of being even perceived to be successful in a Hauptschule in Wedding (2012: 113). This was also conveyed by Naaz, one of the teenage teachers I spoke with, 'If you're clever; if you get good marks, then you're instantly a swot.'

Herr Bauer alludes to the notion of *Bildungsfern*, in his example of families who do not read, but simultaneously sees the capacity for academic success emerging in the same families through older brothers and sisters. These older siblings, who the children can see as being *like them*, can then act as a demonstrative example, and this is presented as more effective, or at least more compelling than being rather tiredly conveyed through a channel of admonition, by the usual people, 'the white Germans'. Stefan Wellgraf relates an instance of this dynamic when an exasperated teacher at the Wedding Hauptschule tells a class of 16 year-olds that '*Hartz IV* is not a job' and a frustrated student retorts that 'at least you get money'(2012: 114). Tellingly, Herr Bauer's depiction of these two different ways of communicating this message of achievement and ambition are racially coded - children hear the message from 'white Germans' or from young people 'like themselves', who, it is hoped, will encourage and inspire them, and to whom they will be receptive.

The *Vorreiter* is a very popular group - there is a waiting list for new participants.[2] Rather than being a drop-in, the aim is to create a space of consistency and continuity for younger children, who are still at primary school. On Wednesdays and Fridays, the children come to the library directly from primary school. They go straight up to a suite of rooms behind the *Puttensaal*, the large stuccoed hall used for events, using a side door and a separate staircase, not entering the public part of the library. Upstairs, there is a lounge space with soft chairs and round tables, and two classrooms, where children sit in small groups around pushed-together tables. Each group is closely supervised by a young teacher, who makes sure the children understand what they are meant to be doing; following their progress through tasks, coaxing and joking them along, and thinking of activities for them to do once they have finished their homework.

The sessions are chatty and busy but calm - there is little running around or coming and going; the children know they must stay until the end, and they bring drinks and snacks

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[2] *Vorreiter* website: http://www.foerderunterricht-sprint.de/das-projekt/vorreiter.html (Last accessed 14 September 2014)

to share. The sessions are punctuated with small rituals. Jonas concluded one session by gathering all the children together in the one room and asking everyone to repeat one sentence: 'Today I have learned *that,*' and started off the chain with an example of what *he* had learned, relating something one of the other male teachers there that day had explained to him. In German, saying, 'that' in this way sends the verb to the end of the sentence, so constructing this sentence requires some thought. Jonas went around the room, prompting the children to say what they had learned, and making sure that they spoke the sentence in its entirety, sticking to the correct construction. Some children needed several attempts at the sentence before they could say it correctly but Jonas did not move on until each child had said a sentence. The pedagogical device of encouraging all of the children to speak an answer to the statement may be seen as an attempt to break down the reluctance to speak out in front of the class at school. After the sessions, the group hovers around outside the library, talking and hanging around, sometimes playing a semi-organised game of 'tag', before being met by parents or older siblings or filtering home in a small group accompanied by one of the older teenagers.

In thinking about the *Vorreiter* group as a space in which educational competency of the teenagers is demonstrated and that of the younger children is developed, the group can perhaps be thought of as a space of competency which is embedded both within the library and within local concerns about the educational performance of children 'with *Migrationshintergrund'*. It is also helpful to think of the group as providing a 'space of the possible'. A place between home and school, it is where the teenagers are in positions of responsibility and authority, and where their time and competency with younger children is valued and financially rewarded. In a context where teenager's presence in the library - their occupation of the space and the noise while they work - is seen as sometimes problematic (as Frau Körner states, above), the *Vorreiter* sessions are a legitimate gathering space for young people who are occupying acceptable roles as the *Betreuer* (supervisors) of younger children, often in fact younger siblings or friends' siblings, children to whom they are familiar. Most importantly of all, the *Vorreiter* group is a place where young people are seen in a professional (if informal) capacity, where

they demonstrate pedagogical skill and social competency. The notion of the 'possible' presents a more mixed and nuanced picture of the role of the teenagers in the group. I now turn to discuss how the experiences and reflections of teenage teachers from the group can help develop the sense of 'knowing where you are' and the applied competency that is necessary 'in a place like this'.

Sozialkompetenz – being taken seriously

At one *Vorreiter* session I met Hiba, whose older sister Naaz was also a Vorreiter teacher, who taught on Fridays. 'One of your many sisters!' joked Jonas. Hiba, packing her things together, says with comically exaggerated forcefulness, 'He hates me!' She is 16 years old and has a charismatic presence and a romantic turn of phrase. 'Come again!' she says, as we are getting ready to leave, and before I know it, I have my diary out, and I'm telling her when I'll next be there.

My attendance at the *Vorreiter* group took place during the final stage of my research in Berlin, the last month or so of fieldwork which was so enlivened and enriched by my interactions with the young people in this group. My meeting with Hiba was illustrative of how, through going to the *Vorreiter* group, I made contact with several local teenagers working there as teachers. I chatted with Hiba and the other teachers in the sessions about what they were up to, their role in the sessions and their lives outside of the group. They were interested in life in London, and Hiba in particular expressed a desire to go there. They told me about the school trips they were hoping to make and Hiba and Naaz told me about the German course their mother was having to take currently, 'It's the last straw, this German course!' they joked. They found my interest in Germany and my ability to speak German, even though I had no family ties to Germany, slightly confusing. Fatima, another teacher, posed scientific questions about my project – what was my *Leitfrage,* my research question; what was my *Fazit*, my findings? Through these conversations over the course of several weeks, I started to develop a trusting relationship with several of the *Vorreiter* teachers, perhaps helped through their assumption of my closeness in age – the teenagers were habitually surprised when

I told them how old I actually was. Eventually, right before I left for London, I asked if they might meet with me in the library for a longer conversation, and we swapped mobile phone numbers in order to make the arrangements.

At the very end of September, on a Saturday two days before I was going back to London, I met with sisters Naaz and Hiba, as well as their friend, Fatima, with whom they have been friends since early childhood. We talked outside in the library garden, on a cool clear day of an early autumn morning. We spoke at length about their involvement in the *Vorreiter* group, their experiences of school, and about life in Wedding as young Muslim women, trying to negotiate expectations from home, school and society about who they can be and how they can live. Coming right at the end of my period of fieldwork research, this interview felt highly significant. Tellingly, it marked one of the few times in the Berlin research that I spoke with 'non-institutional' participants, a sign perhaps, of my becoming connected with a wider network later in my fieldwork. Early on in our conversation, I asked how they had got involved in the *Vorreiter* project, and they explained that they themselves had benefitted from the homework help provided by the student teachers at the nearby Medienhof. Naaz made the connection between the support she had received and the progress she had been able to make in German as a result:

Naaz:	[…] I could – my spelling wasn't so good, and then since I went to the Medienhof – there was a Katrin, and she helped me […] And seriously, whoever goes to the Medienhof and takes school seriously, their grades will improve in German, because in Wedding not everyone speaks German that great…
Hiba:	*'Ey alta'* (slang form of greeting)
Naaz:	And this '*alta*' - '*digga*'!
Katherine:	*Ja*, *alta*! And sentences which aren't built right -
Naaz:	And sometimes the verb-article is missing, and I think that's bad, but it's really improved with me. I also read a lot and my German's also really improved a lot that way, my spelling and grammar. It was always great to go to the Medienhof, it was always fun… [ix]

As well as highlighting the improvement she saw in her own German skills after going to the Medienhof, Naaz makes the immediate connection between her German and forms of slang spoken locally, which are not only demonstrated through highly colloquial forms of greeting, but also through non-standard sentence structure. While children might be highly adept at this form of casual German, they can be ill-prepared for the formal German they encounter at school. In identifying the ways in which local patterns of speech are linked to her own situation of having to work at her German outside of formal school time, Naaz illustrates both her own determination to succeed and the way in which the local context, her deprecating depiction of 'people in Wedding not speaking great German' has influenced her own ability to handle formal German at school.

Naaz, Fatima and Hiba have all 'made it' into a form of advanced post-16 secondary education. Fatima and Hiba are doing their *Abitur*, while Naaz, whose Maths MSA result dipped her grade average to just below the standard she needed to take the *Abitur*, is now approaching her post -16 education 'using a detour' she says, working towards a qualification in translation from a *Wirtschaftskompetenzschule* (a college with a business emphasis) which specialises in languages, in Tempelhof-Schöneberg, a *Bezirk* in the south of the city. There is acute awareness of 'knowing where you are' in the way that you are positioned within the German school system, which while in Berlin is now becoming less divided, at the time these teenagers were entering secondary school, was streamed into three different types of school, as discussed in Chapter Four. In theory, while transfer between the school systems was possible, in practise, with the different schools offering very different scholastic and professional outcomes, the system was heavily criticised for reproducing class difference. Even as a small child, Hiba was intensely aware of how the dice were loaded and knew she had to embark on a precipitous scramble. She described how she found primary school hugely difficult, feeling socially isolated and discriminated against by her teacher, but had to fight her way through, knowing that she had to get the recommendation for the *Realschule*, with its possibility to make the huge and fateful leap to the '*Abi'*, and the route to university.

Because the *Gymnasium*, the school which only offers A-levels, occupies such a field of cultural expectation in itself, there is an incredible expectation of assumed knowledge or assumed background of the pupils who traditionally progress to this stage. When young people with '*Migrationshintergrund'* make it into the *Gymnasium*, or do their *Abitur* via an integrated *Sekondarschule,* they often face significant problems in coping with the work; lacking the foundational understanding which the old-fashioned and uncompromising education system takes for granted. Schools in Wedding acknowledge this situation, offering students entering the *Abitur* or other post-16 qualifications, a *Probejahr*, a 'trial' year, to try to prepare students more satisfactorily for the substantive part of the course. As Naaz related, she experienced conceptions about who will make it through the *Probejahr* as hamstrung by limited expectations from the staff:

> For instance, my English teacher, when I started this qualification in translation, she was astonished, and said that she'd thought that I wouldn't manage it, the *Probejahr* […] and I was totally shocked, really – shocked, because a teacher said to me, 'I didn't expect that you would manage it'. So I said to her [in a sarcastic tone] that she didn't need to have these prejudices.[x]

Naaz went on to say that when she first enrolled, her teacher had expressed surprise that she wasn't already married. Her shock that a teacher could reveal her doubts about her educational achievement follows an exchange in which I had suggested to the three girls that it seemed like they found themselves having to defend themselves; that they were under huge amounts of pressure at school to prove themselves:

Naaz:	It's because of prejudice, to be honest, it's because of prejudice...
Fatima:	But defend ourselves? It's not that we're directly defending ourselves, I think, it's more you must, for instance, achieve something, in order to show, that you're worth something. That's what defending ourselves means. For instance, at my school –
Katherine:	That there's a pressure – I mean also generally – you get up in the morning, you think – *I have to* – then there's quite a lot on your shoulders.
Naaz:	Yes, really, it's a burden. Totally.

| Fatima: | Yes, at school for instance, there's pressure on me at school, I always try to get good marks, and yes, why? To be able to show, indirectly, I'm *also* good – you can't always be preferring the Germans, or... |
| Naaz: | Yes, just because I'm wearing a headscarf and long [i.e. 'modest'] clothes, it doesn't mean I'm stupid, or uneducated.[xi] |

In being high achievers, studying for their school leaving examinations, Naaz, Fatima and Hiba are working within a field where the stakes are high. Fatima feels that in demonstrating her capacity, and being successful at school, she is not only demonstrating her own ability, but also working to prove a point that goes beyond her own individual achievements. She uses her school achievements in order to show that she is 'worth something'. This suggests something of the discursive pressure around educational achievement, and the continued drag of stereotypical assumptions by teachers (see also Brah 1996: 80). In her forceful statement, 'I'm *also* good – you can't always be preferring the Germans', Fatima's determination to prove herself goes beyond her own achievements to want to send a message on behalf of the many girls like her who feel systematically under-estimated by assumptions that pupils 'with *Migrationshintergrund'* are low achievers. In her comment, Naaz points to the physical basis these assumptions are located in, explicitly highlighting her appearance as *not* indicating educational failure.

Throughout our discussion, Naaz, Hiba and Fatima reflected on how they are having to negotiate fields of intense pressure to achieve at school, which involves being made highly visible in particular ways - being exceptional, being the exception which proves the rule, being exemplary, standing in for the success of many, while simultaneously 'always already' being made highly visible as practising Muslims signified through their attire. Proving yourself, showing that you are 'worth something' and wanting to use your individual success to make a broader point are all ways in which the idea of being exemplary is negotiated through their school lives and attainment, as well as in their working as 'examples' in the *Vorreiter*, where the group depends on the success of individuals to provide a sign for the group.

For these three young women, their gender marks an additional field of expectation. Girls are in the large majority of the participants at the Medienhof, as Herr Bauer explained:

> The girls want to get out – they want to be independent and self-sufficient, [...] that's why we have 70-80% girls here. And on the other hand, the boys think they're already the greatest; they don't have to bother studying – they already have their job [...] and will just get waited on later anyway. [...] And so the girls tend to have a more developed sense of social competency, and it's good for our project that it's two-third's girls – it's all very calm... [xii]

> (Interview with Herr Bauer, Medienhof, August 2012)

Herr Bauer sets the girls' ambition against his denigrating portrait of the boys, who in his view, do not have to prove themselves. While this portrait might be exaggerated, it exemplifies the idea of girls in particular, occupying a space of particular expectations around achievement and fearful consequences if they fail. The capacity of the teenage girl to provide an example is brought into relief by the teenage girls as symbol of fraught territory for social progress and fears. The emphasis on girls' success as a sign of progress and a policy emphasis has been theorised by Angela McRobbie in her work (2009). Anita Harris divides this emphasis, noting a split in rhetoric between 'Can Do girls' - girls to whom the world is their oyster, and 'At-Risk girls', those highlighted as 'in need' (2004).

When we talked about their future plans, Naaz, Hiba and Fatima articulated the importance of education and eventual employment as providing a *Stütze*, an anchoring form of support for themselves:

Naaz:	I want to – I don't want to be like the stars, if I have a career, I won't have children. I don't want to do that.
Katherine:	The stars?
Naaz:	Like Angelina Jolie.
Katherine:	Oh, right.
Naaz:	I want to finish school, then have something to depend on (*eine Stütze*), a place to start from, to work and get a proper salary. I

don't want a cheap job, like being a hairdresser, a job that anyone could do. I want a proper job which people respect, and respect me too. Where they, sort of, accept me how I am. […] I don't want to live on *Hartz IV.*[xiii]

Naaz reaches for an exemplary gendered figure in her depiction of her imagined future. If she has a career, she wants to concentrate on that, she asserts, and not be like the figure of 'the star' exemplified by Angelina Jolie, who combines motherhood with a high level acting career. Moreover, she is aiming for a 'career' - a 'proper' job that commands respect, and is not just a job that 'anyone could do'. At the end of her utterance, a kind of bottom line emerges; most fundamentally of all, she doesn't want to live on state support. The sureness with which Naaz identifies what she is aiming at and the exemplars which she chooses to illustrate this; the figure of 'the star', the figure of the hairdresser, and the threat of *Hartz IV*, work as points of navigation through which she tries to imagine her future self.

In returning to the distinctions of 'Can Do girl' and 'At-Risk girl' outlined above, Naaz, Fatima and Hiba can be considered as crossing in and out of these categories in interesting ways. Highly visible as a 'troubling' minority group - headscarf wearing, practising Muslim youth, they are 'at risk' of educational failure. In drawing attention to their education as a sign of their success, occupying a space of exemplary achievement in the *Vorreiter* group and expressing ambition for the future, they simultaneously invoke the ethos of the 'Can Do girl', the girl with ambitions for her future. At the same time, their future ambitions can be seen as heavily circumscribed by structural factors – most obviously Berlin's federal law on religious neutrality.[3] Article 29 of the Berlin Constitution forbids the wearing of religious symbols for those working in schools, the police, or the legal profession, as well for as other civil servants. The teenagers' awareness of how this law might impact on their futures is already ingrained into their plans, as Hiba made clear in our discussion. When I asked her about her plans for the

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[3] Law Concerning Article 29 of the Berlin Constitution, 27 January 2005. (Gesetz zur Schaffung eines Gesetzes zu Artikel 29 der Verfassung von Berlin und zur Änderung des Kindertagesbetreuungsgesetzes)

future, she commented that she might leave Berlin to live in London. She said she felt that London seemed '*kulturfreundlich'* ('culture –friendly') and I asked her what she meant:

Hiba:	I googled London, I researched! [*Laughter*] I wanted to know what rights does a woman who wears a headscarf have there.
Katherine:	Oh, you googled that...
Hiba:	I definitely thought that was important, and I saw - for instance in Germany, we can't be officials, we can't be proper people, we're the sort of class, the bottom class - and in London we could be police women, with a headscarf, we could be [...] we could be *anyone*, look, it's *krass* [...] but I'd never really heard anything about London, and then they say, you can wear a headscarf, you're accepted, because here, you're hassled on the street, because of the way you speak, because of the way you look, and above all because of the headscarf - [xiv]

Hiba's strategy, to 'google' London and to see what kind of options might be open to her there as a woman who wears a headscarf, can be seen as an early stage in her developing tactics to imagine her future. Her statement, 'we can't be proper people, we're the sort of, bottom class' shows the stigmatising effects of law on religious neutrality running deep into her self-identification. Her wearing of the headscarf has a very direct impact on the kind of work and professional life she can look forward to. When imagining London and thinking about what possibilities that offers to her, these are seen as limitless ('we could be *anyone'*), and the contrast between the situation in Berlin and that she has perceived through her research of London, is observed as incredible (*krass*).

Fatima is working towards her *Abitur* at Diesterweg Gymnasium, a local grammar school, which would prepare her for university entrance, and then, as would be traditional for this route, for entry into one of the professions. However, the Article forbidding the wearing of religious symbols by *Beamter* (public workers), effectively forms a bar to accessing the professional class, keeping girls like her, in Hiba's words, 'at the bottom'. Fatima, Naaz and Hiba face significant barriers to entering the professional roles their

education has prepared them for, which in turn has an invidious impact on their sense of themselves and the possibilities open to them:

Fatima:	It's not that we get hassled so obviously – it's more from inside…
Naaz:	And the looks!
Fatima:	For example, if I walk around like this [she's wearing a long black dress on top of other clothes and a black headscarf] I recognise it through the looks I get, but it doesn't bother me. I mean, if I'm happy with myself then, if others…
Naaz:	Yeah, I don't care.
Fatima:	But what bothers me, is that they're saying indirectly, that you haven't earned it; you can't be a teacher, you can't be a doctor here, with a headscarf, I mean.
Katherine:	You're not taken seriously.
Naaz:	They make us look ridiculous!
Fatima:	Exactly, we're not taken seriously, that's what I don't like.[xv]

Fatima professes 'not to care' that she is stared at in public because of her appearance. This was similarly expressed by Hiba later, who said because she was 'happy with how she was' she refused to let looks and snide comments get to her. She related a story of how she had retorted a woman's lengthy stare with a triumphant, 'thanks very much! I *also* think I look very nice!' which resulted in the woman apologising. However, what does injure Fatima is the deep structural injustice, this absolute barrier that the city government has stood in front of her, which she sees as a fundamental denial of her right to prove herself. No matter how hard she tries, she will never 'earn' the right to work in these roles without a fight at every turn. In her ambition to be a doctor, she is thus striving towards a goal that is impossible. The immense pressure to prove yourself, whilst being denied a platform to show professional success through employment as teachers and lawyers; being denied the opportunity to be 'taken seriously', results in feelings of acute pressure and cognitive dissonance in the everyday lives of these teenagers.

The determination of Fatima, Naaz and Hiba to be 'taken seriously' while being true to their faith can be explored through their comments around the significance of wearing the headscarf in Wedding, which here Hiba conceptualises as gaining the wearer respect in a tough area:

Hiba: Why should you be, or how will you be respected by where you are (*Umgebung*), if you don't respect yourself, with the headscarf? They say the headscarf is like respect for yourself, that's how you get respect, in ghettoes, like in Wedding. Because I know, unfortunately, loads of girls in Wedding who wear it, in order to say, I have to wear it, although it doesn't have anything with having to. If you're really committed...

Katherine: You have to decide...

Hiba: Exactly, if you're really committed about what you know about faith then you're happy to do it. Because, well, look, I'm not the best believer, or the most committed - I mean, I know that God exists, I know that there's a life after death, and I hope that I can turn into a good person - I try to develop myself in that direction, and not towards the negative, and I try to watch what I say, and I try to be modest (*nicht auffällig sein*) but sometimes there are days when you could really just shout at people, because [*pause*] - you're just not understood. Not really. And you just want to say what you feel, what you think, and you're just, [*says in a dismissive tone*] 'nah, she's wearing a headscarf, no...'

Katherine: You've got no opinion...

Hiba: No opinion, her parents are just forcing her –

Katherine: No voice...

Hiba: Exactly, 'she'll just be married one day', things like that...

Katherine: She's a bit invisible...

Hiba: Exactly, it's like she doesn't really exist...[xvi]

I was struck by the rather harsh tone of Hiba's comments on other young women who, in her opinion, wear their headscarves as 'accessories', without the intention she feels they deserve. As her reflection develops I see this judgement on others as perhaps being bound up with her own heightened awareness of the discursive penalties enacted

by wearing the headscarf. In the second part of her comment, Hiba's frustration is palpable. She sees herself as trying so hard every day to be a good person – efforts which she frames through a religious lens: being modest, being respectful and careful about what she says. However, out of all these efforts, it is the visible demonstration of her faith, her headscarf, which results in her capacity being underestimated, even dismissed by people's assumptions about what it implies. Her sense that her own agency in matters of faith and her life is not understood, results in her feeling that she could shout at people with rage. Hiba and I then exchange common negative inferences made about young women wearing a headscarf, our voices mingling as we list off the common assumptions it provokes. Hiba's comments about the ways in which her capacity to have a voice seems denied, leads me to this final part of this chapter, which focuses on her success and self-presentation as a writer, and of writing as having helped her develop a powerful form of expression.

Being taken seriously as a writer

> I took out my school things and tried to distract myself with my maths homework. Of course, I didn't understand anything, and as the door was flung open, and my step father came into my room, I stood up. My entire body trembled. I tried to gulp down some air but I almost couldn't manage it. He came up to me and grabbed me by the hair. He pulled me down into the cellar, the place where he would beat me.[xvii]

> (From Hiba's prize-winning story, 'Home, a prison!')

Earlier that month, during the *Woche des Sprachen und Lesens*, a city-wide festival of 'speaking and reading', Hiba had won a first prize in the writing competition organised by the Medienhof. The prize ceremony was held in the Bibliothek am Luisenbad up in the Puttensaal, which was filled with children and young people and a sprinkling of local celebrities, who along with the young authors, read aloud and performed the prize-winning entries. During our discussion, I asked Hiba if she could say more about her story, which centres on the struggle of a teenager who wants to protect her younger

sister from the violence of her stepfather and for whom an eventual crisis prompts an escape from the nightmare at home. Hiba commented:

> I wanted to, by writing about this theme, make people aware of domestic violence, because it's not just an 'issue' - I mean 'domestic violence': great. Who's interested in that? I wanted to *show* people, there are still people who beat their children, who hit their wives, their mothers, their families, and that's why I decided to engage in this way, through this story.[xviii]

The story was read aloud at the presentation by an actor from a highly popular soap opera, '*Gute Zeiten, Schlechte Zeiten'* ('Good Times, Bad Times'), and Hiba was presented with a bunch of flowers, as well as a book voucher and a voucher to go to a month of dance classes. She commented:

> The woman who was giving me the prize for first place – she was almost crying; she said, 'I found it so moving', and she asked me if I had been beaten by my parents – I had to laugh! [xix]

Hiba had also given the prize winning story to her teacher to read and during our discussion we read aloud the note the teacher had written, commenting on the work. Like the woman who had been moved, but also concerned by Hiba's story, the teacher also wrote, after some praise of Hiba's work, that she wondered whether there might be a '*konkreten Anlass'* for her writing - a reason as to what had prompted writing the story. The social positioning of Hiba as potentially an 'At-Risk girl' is made evident through the concerned interpretations of her choice of theme, making her story a potential flag for concern. Although Hiba laughs off the concern of the woman at the prize-giving ceremony, she cannot control how her words are interpreted via readings of how she is socially positioned, and her capacity for self-invention and artistic license is, however unintentionally, called into question. Refuting these concerns expressed by others, when we spoke she said she gets her inspiration from TV shows and from the world around her; how she's always thinking about her writing and developing stories in her head. While we were sitting outside in the library garden she described how the surroundings were provoking a new story for her:

Hiba:	I just have to, so here I'm imagining, when I see this space, ok, for you guys it's probably not like this, but for me it's like being trapped inside…
Katherine:	Here? In this garden?
Hiba:	I feel trapped, I don't know; I feel like I'm in a forest, it's green…
Katherine:	And so there are these immediate connections –
Hiba:	I think I've already got a new story in my head! [*laughter*]
Naaz:	See, she's always writing. [xx]

In this performance of writerly inspiration, Hiba demonstrates how her imagination is constantly ticking over, taking cues and clues from her surroundings. During this exchange she took out a small notebook from her bag, and indicated how she would carry it around with her to capture such moments. She was at pains to try and emphasise just how deep the significance of writing was for her:

> I don't know, I just feel, when I'm writing, I just feel different. I don't feel as inferior, like they're thinking, you know, because of my headscarf and things. I just think that writing, it's like music is for other people, it's a time where I…. When I'm writing, my brothers and sisters know, ok, Hiba's somewhere else now […]. I go to the mosque on Saturdays, and I meet girls there, who are very religious, and very friendly and very open, and Fatima is one of them, and - I don't know, perhaps they gave me some courage, just to do it, because writing - and I'll say it fifty thousand times - writing has become the most important thing to me. I can't imagine life without it. Because writing is like a way out for me, it's like a response - to all the stress…[xxi]

Hiba invokes the power of writing as a form of self-expression, of self-realisation. From feeling like she could shout at people, because of the impossibility for them to imagine that she has a voice, she demonstrates how she is finding her voice as a successful young writer. For her, writing is a demonstration of being taken seriously as an individual, achieving public recognition and through her words, making interventions in topics which she feels are important. Hiba uses writing to carve out a space for herself – both in a physical sense – saying that her siblings know not to disturb her when she is writing, and leave her in peace with her thoughts and ideas, and also conceptually, as a way of establishing a space for herself in the world, as a writer. She evokes her

friendships with girls at the mosque, which she says have given her the courage to write. Staking out her identity claim as a writer and carving out a writing practice which is recognised by her siblings, parents and peers has required great investments of personal commitment, hard work and in its recognition and publicness, some risk. In writing she is working herself into a form of validatory expression which acts as a 'response – to all the stress', the moments in which she experiences being positioned in ways which under-estimate her and deny her agency.

Conclusion

> My passport is German. Ok? My blood is Palestinian, but my heart beats for Lebanon. I'd explain it like that. But my heart also beats partly for Germany, on the one hand, and on the other, it beats for Palestine and Lebanon too. But if someone was to ask me: what are you? I would say, 'I'm German, I have a German passport, but I'm Palestinian, from Lebanon'. Then they would ask, 'how come?' Then I just say, 'I'm German – but if I sit in the *U-Bahn*, no-one wants to sit next to me'.[xxii]

(Hiba, *Vorreiter* teacher)

Hiba starts with the technicalities, the legalities. Her Germanness is undisputed by her paperwork, but she simultaneously evokes other corporeal and emotional signs of belonging, her blood and her heart, to indicate multiple allegiances. She imagines, or perhaps relates a conversation she has already had, in which the difficulty of saying who she is, in terms of where she and her relationship to Germany could be positioned, is made explicit through the questions of her imaginary interlocutor, who is not satisfied with her compound answer and metaphors of multiple bodily affiliations. In the face of yet another question she comes up with an answer which articulates the contradictions which have run throughout our discussion in the library garden, that in her everyday life, she experiences 'being' a German but not 'being taken seriously' as a German, of feeling that the outward *signs* of who she is, a headscarf -wearing young woman '*mit Migrationshintergrund*', are taken more seriously than her attempts at expressing who she is. She concludes with an acute summing up of this impossible situation through the

powerful image of how these tensions are embodied within her presence in public, as she experiences herself being a person to be avoided on the underground.

This chapter has engaged with the ways in which different forms of '*sozialkompetenz'*, understandings of cultural and social competency, are expressed by Frau Körner in the Luisenbad Bibliothek, and by Naaz, Hiba, and Fatima, three young women teachers from the *Vorreiter* group based in the library's side rooms. In both accounts of cultural and social competency, *knowing where you* are emerges as an important strategy. I have argued that culture can be understood as a way of understanding, committing to and knowing place, and that 'knowing where you are' can have the result of disrupting or inverting the ways in which culture is considered in 'a place like this'. For the library, knowing how to work as a sensitive cultural provider in the locality, taking the pressures and the potential of the locality seriously becomes a form of cultural competency. The legitimacy the library offers as a social space for the *Vorreiter* group and the teenage teachers shows how institutional settings are necessary platforms on which to build and make credible the individual forms of relationships which they also offer. The library provides a different kind of space for the teenage teachers and the younger children; it becomes a space of the possible, where it is possible to be a 'swot', to be ambitious, as well as to be uncertain and to ask for help. For the teenage teachers, 'knowing where you are' is a way of expressing the complex fields of tensions and expectations around their school, home and public lives, which are linked to where they are, and where they are perceived to be by others.

Knowing where you are can be used as a political strategy to fight against the prejudice invoked against the problem place, the *Brennpunkt Gebiet*. Understandings of cultural *competency* can thus be seen as intensely located in and sometimes limited by, place. Appreciating both the exigencies and potentials of place allows a sense of placed competency to develop, in which culture emerges as 'ordinary' (Williams 2001) - not without problems and limitations but at the same time meaningful and valuable.

 In the Bibliothek am Luisenbad, trying to adequately address peoples' needs and desires, 'taking part' in the locality as a valuable social and educational provider requires

the recognition of limitations and the negotiation of what is possible. For the teenagers, their acute awareness of how living in Wedding is positioned through forms of speech, expectations of educational attainments, and the role of the headscarf as a route to both respect and discrimination depicts an astute consideration of localised forms of competency. They identified academic achievement as an indirect form of defence; that through success at school, in working within recognised forms of competence they could 'prove themselves'. In their 'taking part' in the *Vorreiter* project, Naaz, Fatima and Hiba negotiate their own cultural and social competency as teachers within the demanding frame of the project's expectations on them to be social and academic examples. At the same time, their engaged participation as teachers serves to foreground the structural barriers to their future lives as potential professionals. In working as informal teachers in the *Vorreiter* project, working as examples of what is possible, these young women are performing roles which would be currently *impossible* for them to undertake professionally as teachers in mainstream Berlin schools.

In the interview, the teenage teachers express their capacity in terms of their expectations and hopes for their future and their role as cultural participants. In imagining their future participation in the world of work, Naaz and Fatima articulate narratives of ambition and determination, Fatima through identifying a career in medicine as her goal, and Naaz by outlining a narrative of self-realisation and independence in which her attainment of a professional role gives her respect; where people, in her words, 'accept me as I am', and provides her with concrete (financial) support (*eine Stütze*). In articulating the sense of capacity that writing gives to her, Hiba presents herself as an active maker, a person who has found the tools to help her negotiate the difficulties she faces in her everyday life. Writing has become an important part of her identity and self-presentation, and a way of articulating her voice.

This chapter has shown how competency can be understood as a form of negotiation and a work in progress. The words of Frau Körner, Naaz, Hiba and Fatima have shown how competence is a capacity for understanding how life 'here' is, and an awareness that having this capacity does not dissolve difficulty and contradictions. Young people's

experiences of placed understandings of culture and competency are folded into the ordinary (Das 2007), as well as the extra-ordinary, the point of crisis. In this chapter, culture emerges through everyday negotiations around what is possible locally, and in the ways in which competencies are perceived and realised. It paves the way for the conclusion of this thesis, in which I consider the complex and negotiated forms of public participation, sociality and capacity at work in the public library. I consider how these are effected through institutional and individual engagements which demand labour and personal risk and reveal vulnerabilities, and I reflect on the fragility of the institution to support engaged forms of sociality at a time when it is threatened by public austerity.

[i] Das, was hier auch vielleicht gut ist, dass es ein bisschen verwinkelt ist. Es erschliesst sich nicht alles sofort, also, wo ist denn die Lage, man ist auf der Badstraße und wenn man um die Ecke geht, hat man auf einmal einen ganz anderen Eindruck. Und dann hat man vielleicht von der Fassade einem Eindruck, und dann kommt man rein, und dann hat nochmal einen ganz anderen Eindruck, und das finde ich, das spiegelt für mich auch immer das wieder was es so von der Bevölkerung hier im Umfeld gibt. Es ist eben nicht sowas - ein Blick, eine Information, sondern es ist ein zweiter Blick vielleicht eine ganz andere Information, was man gar nicht gedacht hat und das ist auch immer, wenn Leute von weiterher zur Veranstaltung gekommen sind, wenn man Ihnen auch sagt, 'Ja und da drüben gibt es die Bildhauerwerkstatt und da ist das Tanztheater', wird da immer, 'Ach, das gibt es hier also auch?' Und 'Was für ein schönes Gebäude', als wäre das ein Widerspruch, dass es Kultur in diesem Raum gibt. Und dass es bedeutend ist. Nicht nur, da sind jetzt drei Studenten, die tanzen mal so ein bisschen nebenbei…

Aber die richtige…

Das ist ja auch so, ich denke - das ist dann auch dieses was manchmal so zu einer negativen Reaktion führt, mit Leuten, also, was wir schon manchmal ein bisschen satt haben - immer dieses Schubladen, also, wieso soll so etwas nicht hier sein? Oder, 'Ich habe gar nicht erwartet, dass es so eine Bibliothek hier gibt', wo man ja auch denkt, 'Ja, wie haben Sie sich denn eine Bibliothek am Brennpunkt vorgestellt?' Ja? Analphabeten, Bilderheftchen, oder so was auch immer?

Das es so Anspruchsvoll sein könnte -

Wie viele, die jetzt gar nicht in Bibliothek häufig so waren, 'Ach, Sie haben auch neue Bücher!' Aber da kommen wir dann wieder auf dieses - was ich so zu Anfang auch angesprochen habe zurück, wie kann man das plausibel machen, wie kann man dieses nach Aussen tragen?

Ja, diese Ernsthaftigkeit, daß man so ernstgenommen wird.

Ja, dass man auch wem auch gegenüber, also die Nutzer, die hierher kommen, die wissen ja schon wenn sie regelmässig kommen, was sie an der Bibliothek haben, also, für sie ist es dann schon 'was wert. Dieses Ewige dem Geldgeber, den Politikern, Kooperationspartnern immer wieder plausibel zu machen, ja, das ist eine Bibliothek, es ist eine freiwillige Einrichtung, aber trotzdem ist es nicht so, dass wir darauf verzichten können.

[ii] Dass Lehrer nur dahinkommen, mit den Kindern arbeiten, Ansprüche stellen und sich mal dann immer wundern, 'Warum kommt aus diesen Familien nichts zurück?' Sie wissen eigentlich gar nichts über die Realität der Kinder, ne?

[iii] das hier so viele Jugendlichen sind, hat also weder glaube ich mit unseren Medien zu tun, noch mit besonderen Programm, die wir hier machen, sondern einfach darf mit dass die Bibliothek für die Jugendliche das Wohn- und Arbeitszimmer ist, also einmal, wohnen einige Jugendliche in beengteren Verhältnisse, weil es hier schon eine soziale schwierige Situation [*we get interrupted briefly at this point*] Ok ähm, also, dass viel, halt, in beengten Verhältnisse wohnen, und dann die Situation so ist, dass sie sich hier mit ihren Freunden treffen, und hier arbeiten, ja? Und es ist auch so, dass gerade in manche muslimischen Familien, die Bibliothek gilt als eine geschützter Ort für Mädchen. Die Eltern, sie durchaus in die Bibliothek lassen, weil sie denken, da wird gelernt, das ist in Ordnung.

[iv] Das ist ja auch so, gerade als öffentliche Bibliothek, das hatten wir vorhin auch gesagt, dass man nicht zwangsläufig nur weil man dort angesiedelt ist auch Erfolg hat, müssen wir auch ein bisschen darüber wissen was passiert, damit Sie wissen, das müssen Sie anbieten, sonst machen Sie Dinge, die in einem

anderen Kontext sehr sinnvoll sein könnten, aber vielleicht an diesem Standort überhaupt nichts nutzen, ne?

Es muss passen, was da angeboten wird..

Ja, weil es in Grunde genommen nicht anders ist als ein Gemüseladen, ja? Es wird nicht von selber geben. [...] Man ist eben eine kleine Einheit, in einem kleinen Bereich einer Gemeinde, sozusagen, innerhalb einer grossen Stadt! Ne? Und da man muss man doch wissen, denk' ich, wo man ist, sonst wird man da auch nicht so wertgeschätzt.

Man muss wirklich Teil von dem Ort sein…

Ja man muss Teil sein und kann man nur wenn man teilhat, und nicht nur wenn man sagt, 'Ja, ich bin hier und ihr könnt kommen.' Das reicht, glaub' ich, nicht wirklich.

[v] Also, ich denke, wenn man sich selber nicht sichtbar macht, dann nutzt das andere wenig. Gerade in Gebieten, wo es nicht selbstverständlich ist Bibliothek zu benutzten. Wenn wir nur an dem Standort wären, wenn wir nur aufmachen, zumachen, gäbe es halt nur die Möglichkeit die Medien auszuleihen, das würde sogar heute nicht reichen, und ich denke, dass es auch in dieser Situation, eine gegenseitige Achtung und Respekt aufzugucken, was macht ein anderer in dem Gebiet und wie geht der mit den Schwierigkeiten um, nicht so, dass man an einem Ort arbeitet und man weiß gar nicht was passiert.

[vi] das sprengt jegliche andere Beschäftigung, weil es gibt die Computer, dann soll vorgelesen werden, dann das ganze Normale, was in einer Bibliothek abläuft…

[vii] da sind Schüler und Studenten, die Hausaufgabenbetreuung geben, zweimal die Woche, das machen wir schon in anderen Räume, ausserhalb der Bibliothek, in unseren Veranstaltungsräume, weil das würde die Bibliothek nicht mehr hergeben.

[viii] die Kinder sehen, aha, da gibt es ja ältere, die wirklich was lernen, die auch jetzt Abitur machen, die was erreichen, die sich interessieren, wirklich für die Sache interessieren, die lesen, und das ist halt ein Vorbild was sie in ihren Familien oder bei den Eltern also nicht haben- aber das sie da bei großen Brüdern, großen Schwestern, und dann eben große Motivation haben, zu lernen, und das auch so zu machen. In der Schule wirkt man oft, wenn man lernt, als Streber, oder wird man unterdrückt, und da sehen sie, aha, die wollen Ingenieur werden, die wollen Lehrer werden und Arzt werden, die wollen - ich kann auch was werden -das ist uns wichtig, dass es diese Vorbilder bei den Jugendlichen selbst gibt und das die Jugendlichen selbst auch die Verantwortung übernehmen und nicht immer wir, als weiße Deutsche, sage ich mal, ihnen sagen was gut für sie ist...

[ix] Naaz: dadurch hat sich auch mein Deutsch verbessert. Ich konnte, mein Deutschrechtschreibung war nicht so gut, seitdem ich bei dem Medienhof war, da gab es eine Katrin, und sie hat mir immer gholfen, mit Rechtschreibung Englisch, und wirklich, wer zum Medienhof geht und das ernst nimmt mit der Schule, seine Noten verbessert in Deutsch, weil in Wedding sprechen nicht alle so am besten Deutsch…

Hiba: 'ey Alta…´

Naaz: und dieses 'Alta' - 'digga´…

Katherine: 'Alta', ja! Man bildet eigentlich keine richtigen Sätze -

Naaz: Und manchmal fehlt das Verb – Artikel, und das finde ich schade und das hat sich verbessert bei mir. Ich lese auch viel und deswegen hat sich mein Deutsch sehr viel

verbessert, meine Rechtschreibung, Grammatik, es war immer schön in den Medienhof zu gehen, es hat immer Spaß gemacht...

[x] Zum Beispiel, mein Englischlehrer, als ich angefangen habe, mit dieser Ausbildung als Dolmetscherin, hatte sich gewundert, und meinte ja, ich hatte am Anfang gedacht, dass Sie es nicht schaffen, das Probejahr, man hatte immer ein halbes Jahr, ob man es schafft oder nicht, und ich war voll geschockt, also, schockiert, weil ein Lehrer sagte zu mir: ich hätte es nicht erwartet, dass Sie es schaffen. Da meinte ich zu ihr: ja, sie bräuchte keine Vorurteile zu haben-

[xi] Katherine: Ja, also, ich habe das Gefühl, das ihr im alltäglichen Leben sich öfters verteidigen müsst, also....

Naaz: Es liegt auch am Vorurteil, ehrlich gesagt, es liegt am Vorurteil....

Fatima: Aber verteidigen? Nicht direkt verteidigen, finde ich, man muss zum Beispiel was erreichen, um zu zeigen, das man was wert ist. Das ist verteidigen bei uns. Zum Beispiel in der Schule bei mir...

Katherine: Dass es auch einen Druck gibt. Ich meine auch im Allgemein – man steht auf, man denkt: *ja ich muss* - das ist dann ziemlich viel auf die Schultern....

Naaz: Wirklich. Das ist eine Last, wirklich.

Fatima: Ja, die Schule zum Beispiel, die Schule ist auch einen Druck für mich, ich versuche immer gute Noten zu bekommen, und, ja, warum denn, auch indirekt um zu zeigen, ich bin *auch* gut, ihr könnt nicht immer die Deutschen bevorzugen, oder...

Naaz: Ja, weil ich einen Kopftuch trage, und lang angezogen bin, es heißt nicht, ich bin dumm oder ungebildet...

[xii] Die Mädchen wollen auch 'raus, die wollen selbständig sein und unabhängig sein, [...] deshalb haben wir auch 70-80% Mädchen und die Jungs glauben andereseits, dass die soweieso die tollsten sind, die müssen gar nicht lernen – die haben ihre Stellung schon, [...] und werden sowieso später bedient [...] Deswegen ist es bei den Mädchen eine noch größere Sozialkompetenz ausgeprägt, und es tut unserem Projekt gut, dass zwei Drittel Mädchen sind – es ist alles sehr friedlich, ja.

[xiii] Naaz: Ich will nebenbei – ich will nicht wie die Stars sein, wenn ich eine Karriere habe, will ich keine Kinder haben... Es ist bei mir nicht so.

Katherine: Die Stars?

Naaz: Wie Angelina Jolie.

Katherine: Ach so...

Naaz: Ich will eigentlich erstmal die Schule fertig machen, und eine Stützte haben, so einen Standpunkt, wie jetzt arbeiten und ein richtiges Gehalt – ich will nicht so einen Billigjob haben- wie eine Friseurin, den jeder machen kann. Ich will einen Job haben, der angesehen ist, den Leute respektieren und mich auch. So, mich annehmen, wie ich bin. [...] ich will nicht von Hartz IV leben.

[xiv] Hiba: Entweder nach London, weil es ja ziemlich kulturfreundlich ist, sagen wir mal so... oder -

Katherine: Kultur – in welchen Sinn, meinst du?

Hiba:	Ich habe London gegooglet, ich habe geforscht [laughter] ich wollte wissen, welche Rechte eine Frau, die einen Kopftuch tragt, hat -
Katherine:	Ok, das hast du gegooglelt…
Hiba:	Auf jeden Fall, das fand ich schon wichtig, und ich habe gesehen, zum Beispiel in Deutschland, dürfen wir nicht Beamter werden, richtige Personen, wir sind nur so die Schicht, die untere Schicht – und in London dürften wir Polizistin werden, mit Kopftuch, wir dürften -
Katherine:	Unterrichten, darf man…
Hiba:	Wir dürften jeder sein, guck mal, das ist schon krass, Deutschland ist für viele, Kultur angeblich und so, aber in London, ich habe noch nie gehört von irgendwas richtigem von London, und dann sagen die, ja, du kannst Kopftuch tragen, du wirst akkzeptiert, weil hier, hier wirst du auf der Straße 'runtergemacht, wegen deiner Sprache, wegen deiner Aussehen, allgemein wegen dem Kopftuch –
Naaz:	Ja, es ist extrem –
[xv] Fatima:	Ich finde es ist nicht direkt, wie sie uns fertig machen - sondern vom Innern…
Naaz:	Und die Blicke…
Fatima:	Zum Beispiel, wenn ich jetzt so 'rumlaufe, ich erkenne das oft mit den Blicken, auf jeden Fall, aber es stört mich nicht. Also, wenn ich zufrieden mit mir bin, wenn ich andere…
Naaz:	Ja, ist mir egal.
Fatima:	Aber, was mich stört ist, dass sie indirekt sagen, du hast es nicht verdient, du kannst keine Lehrerin werden, du kannst hier keine Ärtztin werden, mit Kopftuch, meine ich.
Katherine:	Du bist nicht ernst genommen…
Naaz:	Die machen uns einfach lächerlich!
Fatima:	Genau, dass wir nicht ernst genommen werden, das finde ich nicht gut.

[xvi] Hiba: Wie sollst du, oder wie wirst du von der Umgebung respektiert werden – wenn du dich selber nicht respektierst, mit dem Kopftuch? Man sagt, das Kopftuch ist für dich wie Respekt - das schafft Respekt in Ghettoes, wie in Wedding. Weil ich kenne leider viele Mädchen in Wedding, die es tragen um zu sagen, ja ich muss das tragen, obwohl es nichts mit muss zu tun hat. Wenn du wirklich überzeugt bist…

Katherine: Man muss entscheiden…

Hiba: Genau, wenn du überzeugt bist, von dem was du vom Glauben weißt, dann tust du es gerne. Weil, guck mal, ok, ich bin nicht die beste Gläubige oder, die, die fest überzeugt ist, und ich weiß, dass es Gott gibt, ich weiß, das es ein Leben nach dem Tod geben wird, und ich hoffe, ich werde einer der guten Menschen später sein, und ich versuche mich zu ändern im guten Bereich, nicht so zum Negativen werden, und ich versuche auch, meine Zunge zu hüten, ich versuche auch nicht zu auffällig zu sein, aber irgendwann, da

gibt es einfach Tage an denen du einfach die Menschen sozusagen irgendwie anschreien würdest, weil du - man versteht einander nicht. Nicht wirklich. Und man möchte einfach mal sagen, was man fühlt, was man denkt, und man wird einfach [*in dismissive tone*], 'nee, die ist Kopftuch, nee'

Katherine: Ja, die hat keine opinion, die hat keine Meinung…

Hiba: Keine Meinung…. Ihre Eltern zwingen sie -

Katherine: Keine Stimme….

Hiba: Genau, die wird irgendwann verheiratet sein, sowas….

Katherine: Sie ist dann ein bisschen unsichtbar –

Hiba: Genau. Die existiert für die Menschen nicht.

xvii Ich holte meine Schulsachen raus, und versuchte mich, mit den Mathehausaufgaben abzulenken. Natürlich verstand ich nichts, als die Tür aufgerissen wurde und mein Stiefvater in meinem Zimmer stand, stand ich auf. Ich zitterte am ganzen Körper. Ich versuchte Luft zu holen, aber es fiel mir schwer. Er kam auf mich zu und zerrte mich an den Harren. Er zog mich in den Keller, wo er mich meistens schlägt. ('Zuhause, ein Knast!')

xviii Und ich wollte einfach auf dieses Thema häusliche Gewalt einfach so aufmerksam machen, weil es nicht nur so ein Thema ist, so - also häusliche Gewalt: schön. Ja? Wen interessiert's? Ich wollte den Menschen vorhalten, es gibt noch Menschen, die ihre Kinder schlagen, die ihre Frau schlagen, und ihre Mutter schlagen, ihre Familie schlagen, und dafür setzte ich mich sozusagen mit dieser Geschichte einfach ein.

xix Die Frau, die mir das Geschenk geben wollte für den ersten Platz- die hatte fast geweint, die meinte 'es hat mich total berührt', und die hat mich gefragt, ob ich selber von meiner Eltern geschlagen wurde - ich musste lachen!

xx Hiba: Ich muss einfach, jetzt hier fällt mir ein, hier wenn ich diesen Raum so sehe, ok, für euch ist es vielleicht nicht so, für mich ist es so wie eingesperrt…

Katherine: In diesem Raum? In diesem Garten?

Hiba: Ich fühle mich eingesperrt, - ich weiß nicht, ich fühle mich wie im Wald, grün…

Katherine: Und es fängt sofort an, diese Verbindungen –

Hiba: Ich glaube in meinem Kopf habe ich jetzt wieder eine neue Geschichte! [laughter]

Naaz: Also, sie schreibt immer.

xxi Hiba: Ich weiß nicht, ich fühle mich einfach, mit Schreiben fühle ich mich irgendwie anders, ich fühle mich nicht so minderwertig, wie die denken. Mit Kopftuch und so, ich finde es einfach, das Schreiben ist so für mich, wie Musik ist für andere, vielleicht ist es eine Zeit wo ich… Wenn ich schreibe, wissen meine Geschwister, ok Hiba ist jetzt woanders, ich bin nie ansprechbar, wenn ich schreibe. [...] Ich gehe meistens in der Moschee, immer Samstags, und da treffe ich Mädchen, die sehr religiös sind, und sehr freundlich und sehr offen sind, und Fatima ist eine von denen und – ich weiß nicht, vielleicht wegen denen habe ich sozusagen einen kleinen Anschub von Mut bekommen, das einfach zu machen, weil Schreiben, wirklich, ich sage das zu mir fünfzigtausandmal, Schreiben ist das Wichstigste für mich

geworden. Ohne Schreiben kann ich mir kein sinnvolles Leben mehr vorstellen.   Weil Schreiben ist, wie so einen Ausweg für mich, so eine Lösung. Vom ganzen Stress, vom . . .

xxii Mein Pass ist Deutsch. Ok? Mein Blut ist Palästinenisch, aber mein Herz schlägt für Libanon. So würde ich es erklären. Aber mein Herz schlägt auch für Deutschland einerseits und für einen anderen Teil schlägt es auch für Palästina und Libanon. Aber würde jemand mich fragen: 'was bist du?' Ich würde sagen: 'Ich bin Deutsch, ich habe einen deutschen Pass, aber ich bin Palästinenserin, aus dem Libanon.'   Dann würden die fragen: 'wie?' Dann sage ich einfach, 'Ich bin Deutsche - aber wenn ich mich in der U-Bahn setze würde sich niemand neben mich setzen.'

Conclusions

The public library forms a universally recognisable public space, yet is one into which diverse registers of locality emerge. I began this thesis with the idea of the public library providing a 'window' on urban place, and the interrelationship of the public library with the locality in which it is situated has been traced throughout this thesis. However, working with the metaphor of the window does not mean that ideas of place and locality can be 'read off' from the library and straightforwardly rendered. Ideas of locality are simultaneously entangled with indexes and demarcations of belonging and exclusion, traces of colonialism and global proximities, and in sites where the library abuts intense social need, locality becomes a troubled and occasionally limiting label. I argued that through carrying out ethnographic fieldwork in the libraries which sought to 'pay attention' to place, a more discursive consideration of the relationship between the library and its locality could be developed.

The window metaphor may however, be understood as providing a 'first sight' onto a place, a starting point from which to set out a consideration of the three field sites: Thornton Heath library in Croydon, south London, and the Schiller Bibliothek and the Bibliothek am Luisenbad in Wedding, Berlin. In Chapter One I used maps and statistics as a way of considering how Thornton Heath and Wedding are conceptualised as problematic places in both social and spatial terms, and considered the 'problem place' as itself difficult to conceptualise and to write about (Bourdieu 2009: 3). Aware of the problematic assertions of fixity and completeness conveyed through mapped and statistical forms of categorisation (Massey 2009: 107), I developed a conceptualiation of the urban 'edge' as a way of both expanding on and loosening up spatialised descriptions of place. In considering how social and spatial cues are worked out around the library, I moved from representational categories of space to a consideration of the ways in which everyday life around the libraries manifests spatialised practices (Lefebvre 1991). I opened out the idea of the edge, analysing the historical, spatial and statistical manifestations of edges in the fieldwork areas as a way of conceptualising the

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complexity of place and forming a 'route in to' fieldwork in these places - situating the field sites within a frame of emergent connectivity (Marcus 1998: 83).

During my research I went deep inside the library, accessing its interior and sometimes private spaces, locations from where I tried to 'listen' and not only to see (Back 2013), paying close attention to the routine and under-estimated moments in the institution's daily life. In participating in the everyday life in the library, I started to appreciate the forms of locality which emerge in this space as multiple and shifting, and the library as a site of claims around multiple forms of need and expectation. This is discussed in Chapter Three through the tension between the library's foundational 'openness' and its targeted approaches to groups of people considered vulnerable, 'hard to reach' or under-represented in the library (Roach and Morrison 1998; Muddiman 2000; Newman 2007). Multiplicity in the library is most obviously recognised through multiculturalism, and this chapter reveals the library's strategies of trying to 'open out' the institution to a diverse public of visible ethnic and racial minorities, with the tensions, compromises and mis-readings that this provokes (Puwar 2004; Ahmed, 2012).

Another key, yet taken for granted form of multiplicity in the public library is that of the range of ages present. From small children learning to read and speak together to elderly women seeking forms of purposeful exchange and interaction; this 'bookending' of youth and age (with the middle years less well represented) in one public institution is highly unusual. At the same time, institutionalised processes of differentiation between and among these groups can be observed. The provision of specific activities or specific collections of material aimed at certain participants and audiences is revealing about the ways in which the library works with its multiple publics through processes of separation and categorisation.

Throughout the thesis, I have drawn attention to the ways in which in the multiple forms of multiplicity in the library may be seen as a spectrum of needs, capacities and fragilities, and have argued how these must be considered alongside and understood as implicated within localised understandings of racial and ethnic difference and of social needs. Maintaining a public openness towards multiplicity demands forms of labour

which take place on both official and lived registers: the fulfilment of targets and the accumulation of data about the people in the library from numerical calculations and the collection of feedback, and the daily negotiations of social contact, which can be understood as individualised acts of labour and capacity by both library staff and library users. I have argued that the recognition and work demanded by this spectrum of multicultural life in an institution makes it an inherently uncertain space of negotiation which is rendered more uncertain and above all, fragile by state cutbacks to public funding.

In situating my research in an institution that is assumed to be highly legible and rather quotidian, I have been attentive to the less obvious forms of sharing and participation at work in the library, showing how these become locally inflected and 'worked out'. In each of the chapters I have paid attention to elements of participation - understandings of 'reading', 'listening' and 'being together' through which I have made visible an account of what the public library makes possible. In seeing the library as a 'space of the possible', this is not to pursue a romantic view of the library as social salve, but to see constraint and possibility as implicated within each other in the institution and in its locality. Responses to place which seek to recognise both its limits and potential have emerged through those tactics of the librarians and young users of 'taking place seriously' and 'knowing where you are', discussed in Chapter Six.

Throughout the thesis, I have conceptualised the public library as a deeply meaningful location from which to consider contemporary public social life. As well as the connections between the library and their locality, the institutional form of the library itself can be understood as a site of tension and negotiation, offering nuanced and often highly personalised forms of intervention. In each of the chapters, through the careful incorporation and discussion of fieldwork material I have conveyed how these forms of participation may be considered as demanding significant amounts of work and different processes of investment, both from members of the public in the library, and from members of library staff. The library institution emerges as also a threatened and

fragile site, responding to claims around its necessity and utility and to demands for the social value of the library to be demonstrated; to be accounted for.

These starting reflections speak back to the concerns of the research questions which framed the fieldwork in London and Berlin, and show how the chapters have responded to the ideas of place and urban life, diverse publics and participation which unfold within the public libraries and resonated between the sites. In these conclusions, I go on to make three claims for this research and the work of the thesis.

The first relates to the library as a space of accounting in a context of constrained and declining budgets. I argue that librarians use narrative forms of telling alongside quantitative demonstrations of value in order to try to present the worth of the library. I reflect on how this thesis has made visible both official registers of accounting – the acute awareness of and dependence on numbers as a way of presenting the library, as well as the informal and practiced ways in which librarians demonstrate their 'accounting for' what happens in the library space. My second claim or concern relates to the forms of public sociality that this research has shown to emerge through and be supported by the library. The public library is a space which allows a range of different levels of engagement and participation; these can be fleeting, but the library is also open to deeply sustained and sustaining forms of sociality. I argue that the different registers of sociality at work in the library reposition and expand some of the key arguments about public sociality I explored in my introduction. I conclude with a reflection on a field note, which discusses a return visit to Thornton Heath library after its running had been outsourced to private company. I reflect on the palpable changes undergone by the library, and consider the temporality of fieldwork. I then open out a broader discussion about the contemporary library as occupying a highly uncertain terrain in a time of change and argue for the potential of ethnography as a way of producing an alternative form of accounting for value and meaning in public libraries, and public life.

A space of accounting

> I'm sitting at the counter, and I know - there's my pile of circulars which I should really be reading, and there is someone who needs to be served, and then in comes 'Frau XY', who just wants to talk about everything under the sun, and I...!
>
> [*She comes to a stop, laughs and makes a face.*]
>
> I'm just under too much time pressure for that. But perhaps I'm making that pressure myself, because perhaps the task I do for this woman is much more important than to quickly get through the queue or to read about some statistics, yes? [...] But how can I justify to my funder that this is a 'requested demand'? [*ein abgefragter Bedarf*]i
>
> (Frau Hoffmann, Schiller Bibliothek, July 2012)

Frau Hoffmann's words get to the heart of the tension in trying to show what is at stake in the public library. How can she convince her funder of the necessity to recognise the small yet vital ways in which social contact takes place in the library? Public libraries create unquantifiable spaces of social interaction, they provide points of contact and orientation for people, but these are not, and cannot be officially registered, either as 'needs' or 'outcomes'.

In both Berlin and London, budgetary pressures are made manifest in the pressure to demonstrate the value of the public library through processes of counting and accounting for, and narratives of achieving efficiency and reaching beneficiaries, specifically those who are made particularly visible by institutional targets - those who are particularly vulnerable or under-represented. In the early part of the thesis, I considered the tools used in libraries to demonstrate their work, and relatedly, their worth. As Chapter Two argued, the successful fulfilment of targets and the completion and submission of reports to funders are vital for the continuation of library funding. The libraries must 'show', through membership and borrowing numbers, through engagement with partner organisations and other forms of outreach work, that they are successfully and efficiently delivering a good value service.

Throughout the thesis I have been concerned with trying to evoke the less tangible moments, points at which the capacity and the potential of the library is shown in ways

that cannot be officially registered. There is no space to acount for or to record the extension of compassion and tolerance on a daily basis; the writing of letters for people, the overlooking of minor infringements of the rules, and the daily negotiations and expressions of sociality at work in the library space. I have shown that the library has a wider capacity for creating and curating opportunities for everyday acts of being and doing together which are themselves important and sustaining. However, libraries find these difficult to register and thus find the social aspects of what they are able to achieve difficult to justify. How can they demonstrate that in 'going beyond' the official performance of their role, they are also creating additional capacity? In exploring these questions, I contribute to the ways sociologists have conceptualised social value (e.g. Skeggs 2014), arguing that the official registers of value do not have the capacity to 'show' the library as an important space of sociality and care.

Issues of how to pay attention to value and capacity in the library are reflected in my approach to fieldwork as a way of *evoking* what is happening in the library, a negotiation aware of the incommensurability of representation (Tyler 1988). I came to understand ethnography as a deeply invested process; that observation could not be possible without participation. In participating in group activities, speaking with a range of people, and attending meetings and events, I have been able to foreground aspects of library life which are under-acknowledged, or hard to perceive from the 'public' view of the library. I considered how my role as ethnographer echoed the everyday work of the librarians as, through what Frau Körner called the 'art of looking', they sought to understand what is happening in the constantly shifting space. In the library, observation is an applied practice; through 'reading' the library space the librarians perceive and negotiate conflict, and infer need and interest, incorporating their perceptions into their daily engagement with people in the public space.

By showing the value of the library through recognising and evoking the activities, encounters and exchanges that I saw happen there; in making visible the value of these interactions, and what they show about the library, lies the political aim of the thesis. Through a careful account of the social life of the public library, I see one of the core

aims of the thesis to be that of 'making visible', an evocation of what escape these registers. I do not wish to suggest that I have rendered the library 'transparent'; that my research has comprehensively assessed both the capacity and the limitations of the library. This 'showing' is partial and moreover, is not only made possible through a frame of visibility. Throughout the thesis I also draw attention to the sonic and the temporal, registering the shifting spatial arrangements and picking up resonances of atmosphere, and the mood in the space as also revealing institutional capacity, limitation and potential.

I have portrayed a series of episodes in the daily life of the library through which I have been able to 'show' how the issues, concerns and tensions within the public space emerge in different forms. I reflect on the small moments of social contact that the public library makes possible but which might escape the official indicators of need and success, target and outcome. 'Tuning in' to these different elements can be understood as 'listening to the library'.

Episodes in the life of the library

Just as Thornton Heath library re-vamped and extended its offer of events as a way of providing a 'hook' for people to be in the library, I found that attending a range of these highly differentiated groups and regular activities was a way of establishing a coherent foothold within the flux and flow of the everyday life of the library. Participating in activities helped me to target my attendance and made me less self-conscious of 'hanging around'. The potential of the group to offer a highly legitimate form of sociality was also recognised by participants in these regularly scheduled sessions. Each of the substantive chapters is 'placed' within one of the fieldwork libraries, and takes one particular regular activity offered by that library as its focus. Although constituted of multiple weeks of participation, these chapters can be understood as marking an 'episode' in the life of the library, where I 'tune in' to the perspective offered by that activity and consider the ways in which its location within the library influences its scope and potential. At the same time, I continue to pay attention to the floating exigencies

and the rhythms of the daily to and fro as they emerge through these episodes of organised activity.

These episodes structured the thesis, with each chapter considering participation in one particular group activity during fieldwork. Chapter Four discussed the children's reading aloud session (*Vorlesen)* in the Schiller Bibliothek in terms of the work of mediated and negotiated speaking together. The noisy group demands forbearance from library staff and users as well as deep commitment from its volunteer readers, who attend each of the weekly sessions. I used the term '*vermitteln'* to evoke the highly mediated ways in which communicative processes are worked out and worked at in the space of the reading group. *Vermitteln* also opens out the wider significance of communicative acts in the reading aloud activity group, which can be regarded as an instance of 'everyday multilingualism' (Harris 2006: 115), a mundane example of an important capacity to negotiate multiple expressions within a high stakes territory. Through a close up discussion of the verbal and non-verbal acts of participation in the reading group, I show that these small signs can be expanded out to the contextual situation of local debates around language and education, in which understandings of class and race are refracted through a politics of language learning and children's preparedness to enter school.

Held in the basement community room, the knitting group at Thornton Heath library occupies an interstitial space less visible to the 'public' area of the library upstairs. In Chapter Five I reflect on the knitting group as a space of sharing, in which both the social vulnerability of its participants and the institutional awkwardness around manifestations of care was revealed. The purposeful sociality which knitting enables - the highly particular forms of 'doing' and 'being' together - generated a level of participation that was experienced by the knitters as more legitimite than that offered by 'just' being in the library. I went on to discuss how the material and tactile aspects of knitting created a space for sharing – both the skills and knowledge of knitting, as well as highly personal stories of global and familial connectivity, making the room a 'diaspora space (Brah 1996: 209). In 'telling stories' I highlight the communicative aspect of the diasporic space, reflecting on how participants wove highly personal accounts of their fragility and

connectivity into their knitting and which were made visible in the ways they participated in the group.

Chapter Six considered the *Vorreiter* group, a twice-weekly peer-led homework support group tucked away in side rooms at the Bibliothek am Luisenbad. Considering the local 'site effects' (Bourdieu 1999) around the library, the discussion returned to the idea of the mutuality of conceptions of the library's capacity and its location. By pairing evocations of under-estimation and competency from the perspective of the librarian, Frau Körner and those of Hiba, Naaz and Fatima, three of the young *Vorreiter* teachers, the chapter charted a discussion around forms of competency. Frau Körner described the strategies the Bibliothek am Luisenbad employs to both counteract perceptions of it being out of place in the area, and to increase its capacity through developing partnership work with other institutions. The teenage teachers reflected on the ways in which their educational capacity was both highlighted by their involvement in the homework project and under-estimated through perceptions of their social position, based on their appearance. They expressed an acute awareness of their location and like Frau Körner, framed their current and future as active social participants in terms of 'being taken seriously'.

A complex public

In thinking about the library as a complex public, I return to consider the questions I posed at the start of the thesis. What kind of a public is the public library? How is a sense of public life, encounter and participation enacted in the daily life of the library? And what does the public library offer as a negotiated form of living and being together?

The library's public openness, and its capacity to offer a space in which the fleeting and spontaneous encounter across forms of social difference means that it fits into many of the framings of public life which I discussed at the start of the thesis. For instance, the library can indeed be understood as a 'micropublic', a place of the 'prosaic negotiations' (Amin 2002), of everyday social life. I suggest that considering these understandings of public life through the library as a highly particular and negotiated form of public space,

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however, allows them to be reconsidered and even expanded on in the context of the library, and I outline these below.

The library demands engaged forms of work

The library may be understood as a 'site that combines pleasure with the skill of negotiating difference' (Amin 2006: 1019), but to this I would add that negotiating difference in the library demands not only skill, but also sustained and engaged forms of social labour and practice. In each of the thesis chapters, I pay attention to the substantial work which is bourne by everyday practices of social competency within the public library. The library must work to make itself to make a serious cultural institution locally; investing itself in a place and in the life of that place. Library members of staff must work to 'know where they are' offering a service which makes sense locally. Significant amounts of work – preparation, collaboration and emotional labour - are invested in the daily scheduled activities in the library, managed through the involvement and intervention from library members of staff, as well as volunteers and teachers from outside of the libraries. The public library curates a setting in which small moments of casual sociality occur every day, but even these everyday social moments are supported by an institutional setting in which they are intensively curated, managed and negotiated by library users and its staff.

The library is a space of friction and openness

The openness of the library, a place into which 'anyone' might enter, could well be understood as making it a site of 'commonplace diversity' (Wessendorf 2013). However, as I have shown in Chapter Three and throughout the thesis more broadly, diversity in the library is anything *but* commonplace; diversity is 'worked at' in highly intentional and institutionalised ways. Diversity is sought after and regulated – it becomes a highly notated form of institutional relevance and effectiveness, highlighted in reports and outcomes, and a site of acute institutional uncertainty about how to recognise and to negotiate forms of diversity. While the library can be understood as an 'unsteady social

space' (Amin 2002: 969) this unsteadiness is held within a highly regulated institutional framework.

The daily encounter with the unknown quantity of the public requires personal investment and energy from the library staff; the 'openness' of the institution operates sometimes at the very limits of the staff's capacity. In the daily work of 'reading' people, librarians attempt to tactfully engage with their needs, demonstrating forms of social competency which are gained through experience. It also requires engaged forms of participation from users as they share the library space in highly negotiated ways, taking small risks of social contact in a safe space.

The library is a conduit to forms of social capacity

The library is a site in which both the friction and capacity of daily public life is negotiated. In this way, the library can be understood as a place in which the 'rub' of daily life is made visible (Watson 2006: 2); it is a site of non-committal and fleeting encounters. However, as I have shown it is also a place in which sustained and sustaining forms of social contact are gradually built up by engagements and interventions from members of library staff and library users. The library is a place in which claims of public participation are practiced in everyday ways, every day.

Each of the episodes in these chapters may be seen as conduits to broader themes: the social work of public participation; forms of individual and institutional capacity, and the multiplicity of daily life in the public library. The scheduled activities themselves may also be seen as conduits - within the highly intentional activity of the group, whether this is knitting, reading aloud together or supporting children's homework, a space is created for the expression of additional forms of social participation and communication to emerge. The provision of and participation in the groups is a way of reflecting on and experiencing the relationship between institutional and individual forms of capacity. In providing institutionally legitimate forms of participation, space is made for individual frailties and competencies to emerge.

The library offers a unique social space

In evoking the physical location of the activities as part of the wider discussion of the use of space in the library, I have shown an inter-relationship between spatial and social practice. The use of interstitial or less visible spaces for the scheduled sessions points to the necessity of highly differentiated spaces for the library to carry out different forms of social and educational activities. The importance of these almost hidden or private spaces also demonstrates that the work of the library not always immediately visible or publically obvious. The public work of the library requires considerable work behind the scenes. However, the institutional space and commitment of the library is needed, even if this remains in the background, in order for social space to emerge.

Ethnographic time

During the fieldwork, all three of the libraries were experiencing change of some kind. The librarians at the Schiller Bibliothek were anticipating the building of the new and improved library adjacent to their current building and in the meanwhile, working within a frame of uncertainty about when, and even if, the build would actually begin, and trying to manage users' expectations accordingly. Both the Schiller Bibliothek and the Bibliothek am Luisenbad were working with the implications of the new self-issue machines, the *Bezirk*-wide introduction of which provoked institutional and public friction. At Thornton Heath library, change was represented through the threat of library cuts and the outsourcing of the borough's library service as an immanent and inevitable conclusion to a protracted and controversial consultation and procurement process, but around which there was deep uncertainty as to what form this would take. These changes, while present at the time of fieldwork, are perhaps easier to see in hindsight. In the following discussion I reflect on a moment of return to Thornton Heath library in which the effects of change were thrown into relief by my return, and which had an impact on my understanding of ethnographic time in my fieldwork (Fabian 2002). I reflect on the implications of the temporality of fieldwork and close with a

consideration of the contemporary public library as occupying a highly uncertain terrain in a time of change.

In early November 2013, while drafting Chapter Five, I went back to Thornton Heath library, hoping to re-visit the knitting group, the focus of that chapter. I took along a new piece of knitting, hoping to join in again once more, and to speak with the people whose words were included in the chapter, perhaps even to ask for their reflections on my account of the group. My visit came weeks after the running of public libraries in Croydon had been contracted out to John Laing Integrated Services, an infrastructural company, on 1 October. Then, just over two weeks later, on 18 October, the libraries were sold on again to an even larger construction and infrastructural company, Carillion. The possibility of privatisation had hung over the period of field work in Thornton Heath library, and was a cause of quiet disquiet, often made palpable through forms of uneasy joking. In Chapter Two, I related a conversation with Trish, one of the librarians, in which I mentioned my imminent departure for Berlin and she replied, 'we'll leave you a note!' She seemed to be implying that I would outlast the library in some way – either that on my return, there might be no one left to talk to or that the library itself would have disappeared. While the scenario imagined by Trish did not quite come to pass, my return visit was a powerful demonstration of the changes the library had gone through since my fieldwork.

> When I arrive I see Chantelle on the reception desk, wearing a purple and white striped blouse, a uniform like the kind worn by cashiers in banks. She recognises me and we chat. 'How are things here?' I ask.   'Well, you probably know, we got taken over.' She tugs at the front of her shirt – 'we've got to wear these uniforms now. We've got WiFi now, and we've got new computers, a new computer system, and a new photocopier, so that's ok, and the rest' - she makes a face. I ask, 'has anything changed much, I mean, like, day to day?' 'Not really apart from everyone getting moved around – it's just me, Kay and Stephen here now.' I ask, 'is Gemma still here?' 'No, she moved to the main office.' 'And Sarah?' 'Oh, she had a baby! She left a few months ago – she's had a lovely baby boy.'

Trish comes over, wearing a remembrance poppy clipped behind her name badge. I say that I've come to go to the knitting group and if Sarah's not running it now, how is it working? 'Oh, is that today? It's kind of, they do it themselves,' says Chantelle. 'Down in the, what's it called, the community room. I think they did it up here once or twice…' her voice tails off. 'Shame it's fizzled out, really', says Trish. 'We need a community champion to, well, champion it!' Chantelle gives a wan smile.

A woman with a lanyard round her neck comes over. 'I'm from AGE UK', she says 'are you doing your knitting group today? We've got a market going on today and no-one's come by, but I thought if you could send a few of your knitters over, that would be great.' Chantelle and Trish direct her down to the community room.

I go downstairs and see Kay, also clad in purple, in the children's library. I head to the community room, and find the door locked. I go back to the children's library and say hello to Kay and ask her how things are going. There are just three small children playing on the computers at the side of the room. 'I'm going off to university in September,' she says, 'going to do a Masters on Scottish history – it's my passion.' Shauna then appears in the doorway, saying she is here for knitting. Kay goes to unlock the door of the community room for her, saying, 'I hope some more people come this time, and you're not sitting here on your own!'

The room looks a bit of a mess – the chairs are unstacked and spread around haphazardly, the tables have been flipped down and pushed to the side, and the window has been blacked out in an improvised way. Kay hastily shunts a folded table out from the side, and flips up the table top, dragging it out over a children's play mat. Shauna and I pull some wheelie chairs up to the table, and Kay brings over a blue plastic box with wool and some knitting magazines in it.

Shauna takes the books and things out of the box and spreads them out over the table, as they were always arranged in the previous sessions, then she and I get out our knitting. She's working on a beautiful dark blue cardigan for a small child, with an intricate cabled pattern. We use her knitting projects to gauge how long the group has been going and how long it has been since I was last there. 'I remember you knitting the baby blanket for your daughter,' I say. 'Oh that!' she exclaims. 'That was so long ago!' 'How is the baby?' I ask. 'Oh she's lovely; she's chatting, very lovely'.

Shauna talked more about how the group had developed, 'There was Amanda and Fiona, and there were some others who came regularly, but then Margaret

got annoyed because people weren't taking it seriously, and she stopped coming. There was a woman who would crochet, and another would sew. We were a good group', she says, 'with different cultures. I wanted for us to do more together, to make trips and do more things, but people just stopped coming.'

The field notes contain cues to a very different situation in the library – the purple uniforms, the rotation and disappearance of several key members of staff. The most obvious sign of change as it appeared to me at that moment as it marked my reason for returning, was that of the knitting group, which has declined, almost disappeared. The group appears to have faded away since Sarah, the librarian who took responsibility for it, has left. Returning after an absence, it was unclear to what extent these differences and disappearances were bound up with the larger and abrupt structural changes the library had undergone, and I will reflect more on the implications of the library outsourcing later in the conclusion. For now, I focus on the way in which the group continued to be referred to as a marker and reference point *as if* it existed in the way it did before, even while the situation is now apparently so very different, struck me as a very 'telling' moment in the situation.

The group continues to be featured on the library website and, at the time of my visit, was listed on an events flier visible on the reception desk. My impulse to 'return' to the group, my assumption that *of course* it must still be happening, and that I can continue to profit from its existence in soliciting further material and feedback from participants, can be seen as the first instance of this. The second is seen in the representative from the outside agency, who knows about the knitting group and sees it as a potentially useful resource for her market, which is lacking customers. The librarians, Chantelle and Trish, while alluding to the group's dwindling in their conversation with me, then 'go along with' the performance of referring to the group *as if* it is still running, sending the woman from AGE UK down to the community room, which, when I go there later, I find locked and in disarray. The continued 'trace' of the group can be seen most obviously in the continued attendance of Shauna, one of the most talented knitters in the group. Her, it seems occasionally solitary, observance of the knitting group's schedule is

poignantly revealed by Kay's comment, 'I hope you're not going to be sitting there on your own.' Shauna explains the decline of the group as people 'not taking it seriously' anymore but demonstrates her own serious commitment to the group by continuing to attend, and hoping that others will join her.

I felt exhausted after this visit and rather gloomy - both about the 'fizzling out' of the knitting group and about the implications these huge shifts in the library might have for my research. Could I write about something that was no longer there? Moreover, my perhaps optimistic framing of the knitting group as a space of sharing, social contact and mutual support seemed naïve in the face of its disappearance. I started to fear that my research belonged to a past time, and that it was no longer 'relevant' to what seemed, on the face of my brief return to the library, to be the current situation in the library.

This return visit, this 'valedictory revisit' (Burawoy 2003: 672), for all the disquiet it provoked in me, serves as a useful reflection on the nature of time in the research process and forms an epilogue to the fieldwork experience. The notes reiterate the placed nature of time in the field; time 'then' is swiftly superseded by other moments; conditions change and people move on. In highlighting a moment of swift, abrupt and acute change, the notes emphasise the time in which I was in the library as *itself* a very particular time, where the impact of Thornton Heath's library refurbishment was still 'fresh' and the proposed re-organisation and privatisation of Croydon's library service, while perceived as a very real threat, had not yet become a reality. The fieldwork may then be seen as marking a particular moment, which made it possible for me to see the library in the way that I have. The research may be seen as taking place in a particular moment, a moment of abeyance in which the privatisation was threatened but not yet enacted.

My return to the library, my attempt to reignite my participation made this moment visible and exposed me to the change which I had perhaps anticipated but not yet experienced. This brief re-encounter with the fieldsite provoked acute discomfort and uncertainty for me – I was unsure of the implications of this moment for my work. At the same time, in acknowledging this uneasiness, I see it as part of thinking and working

ethnographically, which is often uneasy and incomplete, and always a gesture towards, rather than a resolution. Throughout my research, I have considered what the daily fleeting moments and regular episodes in the library can show about the library. With this in mind, in the final part of the conclusion I reflect on how this moment of return works as a starting point for some closing thoughts about the public library as a fragile place.

A fragile public

If the knitting group as experienced in Chapter Five highlights the networks and sustenance offered by the group and carved out of an institutional gap in the library's basement, then this return to the library makes a political point about what the library is and is not able to do in the circumstances around it. It becomes possible to see the institution's capacity is both fragile and highly contingent on the capacity of individuals. If the continuity is broken by people 'moving on' or 'being moved on', the fragility underlining the previously well-established routine is revealed.

In thinking about my return to the library, in which I gradually realise how far the knitting group has dwindled, I am not only considering the disappearance of the knitting group. This episode can be understood as a 'telling moment', a moment laden with implications for the wider situation of the library as a public institution and the transformation of the public library into an outsourced public. Outsourced twice in quick succession, the Croydon library service had undergone rapid and fundamental change in its structure at the time of my return. At the same time, the scenario in which Trish and the other librarians 'leave me a note' has not come to pass, the library is still there. While the shift in management and the deeper structural implications of the outsourcing is not immediately obvious, there are material signs of these changes in the librarians' uniforms, the presence of new technologies and the high turnover of staff, including Sarah who led the knitting group, as well as the imminent departure of Kay. The librarians' attempt to convey that the knitting group is still happening may be understood as a sign of an uneasy continuity in the face of this change.

What are the implications of this brief moment? The processes of change motivated by the search for financial 'good value', forced by austerity cost-cutting measures, which has been made most obvious in Thornton Heath library reflects back to the questions of value, accounting and fragility which have emerged throughout the thesis. While my brief visit early on in the life of the outsourced library came at a time when it was perhaps too early to tell the effects of the multiple takeovers, it does prompts the question, what happens to public life when it is privatised?

As I have discussed throughout the thesis, the library is a vulnerable public; highly obvious and intentional, yet difficult to account for; a vital part of daily life to some people, yet invisible to others. I have discussed how the value of the public library can be considered as emerging both through its official forms of accounting and monitoring as well as by understanding it as a place of shifting and negotiated points of social contact and encounters, explorations between the familiar and the unpredictable, uncomfortable moments and tacit and spoken forms of sharing and connection. Both these methods of accounting for the library are implicated in each other, and both are necessary in trying to convey what is at stake in the library. However, in a situation of abrupt and fundamental change, the library has to be made accountable in the most pragmatic of ways, oriented towards bottom lines and maximum (financial) value, while other forms of value are discounted.

What does rapid change mean in the library, a place where incremental knowledge of its public and their needs and desires is gathered through daily practices of observing and sharing knowledge, and through tactful interventions on the part of individuals? What is the capacity of the library staff, when twice in a month, they are taken over by a large profit-making corporation? What skill and capacity is lost when engaged and highly experienced librarians decide that they can no longer work in the library service, and turn their mind to alternative roles, committing themselves to parenthood, like Sarah, or returning to study, as in the case of Kay. As Frau Körner says in Chapter Three - if staff are under strain as a result of cuts and threatened by job losses, they are less able to convey a positive commitment to the public they encounter. If staff are exhausted from

covering for staff shortages and disenchanted about the future of their jobs, perhaps they are unlikely to volunteer to take on the knitting group in the basement community room. What happens when the *Beständigkeit* of the library, its steady constancy, is threatened?

This is not a plea to keep the libraries frozen in time, shielded from any kind of change. But in thinking about the post-outsourced library as a space of uncertainty and fear, I argue that it takes time to see and to know the value and practices of the library. It takes time for a new offer to embed itself into a locality, it takes time for relationships to be established with other local institutions with whom the library can co-operate, and for the institution to be recognised as a local actor. Processes of rapid change, motivated by forcing a bottom line onto the library, push to the side the gradual accumulation of social practice and forms of knowing worked out daily in the institution.

In arguing for the importance of attentiveness to non-financialised understandings of value I consider this a way of thinking about public and institutional life at a time when public institutions are under so much pressure to account for themselves *as if they were* profit-making concerns. A sense of attentiveness to the everyday life of the public library shows a way of generating an empirically rich examination of public life at a moment when both understandings of everyday living together and the institutions which support this are surrounded by acute precariousness.

ⁱ Ich sitzte dann an der Theke, ich weiß genau, hier sitzt noch mein Stapel Umläufe, die ich eigentlich noch lesen möchte, da ist jemand, der bedient werden möchte, und dann kommt Frau XY und möchte nur mal eigentlich nur über [Gott und] die Welt reden… und ich! [*makes a face*] Dafür bin ich wirklich unter Zeitdruck. Und den mache ich vielleicht wirklich selber, nämlich vielleicht ist diese Aufgabe, die ich dieser Frau erfülle viel wichtiger als schnell die Schlange abzuarbeiten oder irgendwelche Statistiken zu lesen, ja? [...] Und wie kann ich es rechtfertigen vor meinem Geldgeber, dass das ein abgefragter Bedarf ist?

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Appendices

Appendix 1: London information sheet

Placing the Public Library

Public libraries as sites of everyday encounters in London & Berlin

This project looks at the local public library as a special kind of public space. It aims to explore the significance of the library both to its locality, and as part of wider understandings of place.

The project is ethnographic, a method which includes periods of participant observation during which informal conversations may develop, as well as unstructured interviews.

Material gathered through this method will be incorporated into a PhD thesis, and may eventually be published in another form. Those interviewed will be given the opportunity to read the transcript of their own interview, and may also read the completed thesis.

Anonymity will be given to all participants, unless participants specifically request otherwise. Participants also have the discretion not to participate, or to withdraw from the project at any time.

I can be contacted via this e-mail address: k.a.robinson@lse.ac.uk

Many thanks for your interest and participation in this project.

Katherine Robinson

Katherine Robinson, PhD Student, LSE Cities Programme, (Department of Sociology)
London School of Economics and Political Science, Houghton Street, London WC2A 2AE

Appendix 2: Berlin information sheet

Placing the Public Library
Öffentliche Bibliotheken als Orte alltäglicher Begegnung
in London und Berlin

Dieses Projekt versteht die Stadtteilbibliothek als einen besonderen öffentlichen Ort. Ziel ist es, die Bedeutung der Bibliothek zu erforschen; die Verbindungen zwischen der Bibliothek und deren Lokalität zu erkennen, und diese Verbindungen und Verhälltnisse in einem größeren Kontext zu untersuchen.

In diesem Projekt wird die ethnographische Methode angewandt, das bedeutet, daβ die Daten durch alltägliche Beobachtungen, informelle Gespräche, als auch unstrukturierte Interviews gesammelt werden.

Das Material, das durch diese Methode gesammelt wird, ist Teil einer Doktorarbeit, und könnte letzendlich auch in einer anderen Form veröffentlicht werden.

TeilnehmerInnen in Interviews und Gesprächen haben die Chance, das Tonprotokoll Ihres eigenen Interviews durchzulesen, und können auch gerne die abgeschlossene Arbeit lesen.

Anonymität wird allen TeilnehmerInnen gegeben, auβer sie wünschen, bei ihren richtigen Namen genannt zu werden. TeilnehmerInnen haben auch die Entscheidungsfreiheit, sich jederzeit von dem Projekt zurückzuziehen.

Für weitere Infos, Fragen und so weiter, bin ich unter der folgenden e-mail Addresse erreichbar: k.a.robinson@lse.ac.uk

Ich bedanke mich ganz herzlich für Ihre Interesse und Teilnahme in diesem Projekt.

Katherine Robinson

Katherine Robinson, Doktorkandidatin, LSE Cities Programme (Soziologie Fakultät)
London School of Economics and Political Science, Houghton Street, London WC2A 2AE

Appendix 3: Letter regarding cuts to funding in Mitte libraries

Juli 2012

Sehr geehrte Leserinnen und Leser,

unsere Bibliotheken im Bezirk Mitte müssen ihren Etat für Ankäufe von Büchern, CDs, DVDs – schlicht allen Medien, die Sie bei uns so gerne ausleihen, in diesem Jahr stark einschränken. Der Bezirk Mitte befindet sich leider in einer dramatischen finanziellen Notlage.

Alle Bereiche hatten einen Beitrag zu leisten.Wir konnten mit viel Kraft und Einsatz abwenden, dass die Kürzungen im Bereich Bibliotheken noch höher ausfielen. Am Ende verloren wir 97.000 € bei unseren Ankaufsmitteln für die Medienbeschaffung.

Bei den Verhandlungen fühlten wir uns auch durch Sie, liebe Leserinnen und Leser, immer unterstützt.

Dafür danken wir Ihnen!

Auch in den nächsten Haushaltsberatungen werden wir uns für den Etat der Bibliotheken stark machen und alles daran setzen, dass das Niveau unserer Häuser erhalten bleibt – für unsere großen und kleinen Leser, die vielen Jugendlichen, die uns besuchen, die Besucherinnen und Besucher der vielen Veranstaltungen in den Bibliotheken - kurzum für Sie!

Für das ganze Team der Stadtbibliothek Mitte

[…]

Translation:

Dear Readers,

this year our libraries in Berlin Mitte must greatly reduce their budget for the purchase of books, CDs, DVDs – in short, all the items that you so enjoy borrowing from us. Mitte Bezirk is unfortunately in a situation of dramatic financial need.   All departments must do their bit.

After a great deal of strength and commitment we were able to prevent the cuts to the library department from being even higher. In the end we lost € 97,000 from the media purchasing budget.

During the negotiations we always felt that we were supported by you, our dear readers. For this, we thank you!

In the next budget meetings we will continue to fight for the library budget and put all our efforts into maintaining standards in all of our libraries, for our large and small readers, the many young people who visit us, those who come to the many events in the libraries, in short, for you! [...]

Appendix 4: Volunteering Agreement

Bezirksamt Mitte von Berlin   1

Abt. Weiterbildung, Kultur, Umwelt und Naturschutz

Amt für Weiterbildung und Kultur

Bezirksamt Mitte von Berlin, 13341 Berlin (Postanschrift)

Frau
Katherine Robinson

Dienstgebäude:

Mittelpunktsbibliothek

„Bruno-Lösche"

Perleberger Str. 33

10559 Berlin

Öffnungszeiten:

Geschäftszeichen	Bearbeiter/in	Zimmer	Telefon	**9018- 33022**	Datum
BiKu3 Ausb	**Frau xxxx**		intern		**12.04.2012**
Bei Antwort bitte angeben			Telefax	**9018- 33010**	
			E-Mail	**ausbildung@stb-mitte.de**	

Vereinbarung

Zwischen   Frau Katherine Robinson

wohnhaft   xxxxxxxxxxxxx

und dem   Bezirksamt Mitte von Berlin

Amt für Weiterbildung, Kultur, Umwelt und Naturschutz Fachbereich Bibliotheken wird Folgendes vereinbart:

Frau Robinson wird gestattet, sich vom   xxxxx   bis   xxxxxxxxx

in jeder Arbeitswoche zu ihrer fachlichen Information in den Bibliotheken der Stadtbibliothek Mitte im Rahmen der Arbeiten zu ihrer   xxxxxxxxxxxx(Dr.arbeit, Dipl.arbeit od Ä.) aufzuhalten.

2. Die Zulassung wird im ausschließlichen Interesse der Frau Robinson gestattet. Verpflichtungen für das Bezirksamt Mitte von Berlin Amt für Weiterbildung und Kultur Fachbereich Bibliotheken ergeben sich hieraus nicht.; durch die Zulassung wird insbesondere kein Arbeitsverhältnis zum Land Berlin begründet. Es wird auch kein Anspruch auf Übernahme in ein Arbeitsverhältnis zum Land Berlin erworben. Ferner besteht während des unter 1. genannten Zeitraums kein Anspruch auf einen Unterhaltszuschuss bzw. eine Entschädigung oder Erholungsurlaub.

3. Die Tätigkeit unterliegt nicht der gesetzlichen Versicherungspflicht, ein Anrecht auf einen gesetzlichen Unfallschutz besteht nicht. Frau Robinson muss für ihre soziale Sicherheit selbst Sorge tragen, sofern ein derartiger Schutz nicht bereits anderweitig gewährleistet ist.

4. Das Bezirksamt Mitte von Berlin Amt für Weiterbildung und Kultur Fachbereich Bibliotheken hat für Frau Robinson keine Haftpflichtversicherung abgeschlossen, Sie ist auf die für sie danach in Betrachtkommende Schadenersatz- und Regressverpflichtung hingewiesen worden. Ihr ist bekannt, dass sie sich im eigenen Interesse auf ihre Kosten gegen eine derartige Inanspruchnahme bei einer privaten Haftpflichtversicherung versichern lassen muss.

Über die durch die Tätigkeit bekannt gewordenen Angelegenheiten, deren Geheimhaltung der Natur nach erforderlich ist oder durch Gesetz oder dienstliche Anordnung ausdrücklich vorgeschrieben wurde, ist Verschwiegenheit zu wahren, auch nach Beendigung der unter 1. genannten Zeit.

 (Praktikantin)   (Bibliotheksleitung/Ausbildungsleitung)

Appendix 5: Visits to Thornton Heath library

2011 – 2012

Date	AM/PM	Duration	Notes
Monday 13 June	PM	2.15	Observation
Wednesday 22 June	AM	2.15	Observation
Friday 24 June	AM	1.30	Observation
Monday 11 July	PM	1.30	Observation
Tuesday 12 July	AM	1.30	Observation
Friday 15 July	PM	1.45	Observation
Monday 18 July	PM	2	Observation
Wednesday 20 July	AM	.30	Observation
Wednesday 27 July	PM	2	Observation
Wed. 10 August	PM	1.45	Observation
Friday 12 August	AM	.45	Introduction
Mon 5 September	PM	1.15	Observation
Tues 13 September	AM	1.35	Observation
Weds 14 September	AM	1.30	Using computer
Friday 16 September	AM	1	Observation

Wed 21 September	PM	1.30	Observation
Monday 3 October	PM	1.30	Interview: Stephen
Friday 7 October	PM	1.30	Interview: Kay
Saturday 8 October	PM	1.45	Crime reading group
Tuesday 18 October	AM	2.20	Observation
Monday 24 October	AM	1.05	Observation
Saturday 29 October	PM	1.20	Observation
Wed 2 November	AM	1. 20	Observation
Sat 5 November	PM	2	Crime reading group
Friday 11 November	AM	1.50	Knitting group
Mon 14 November	AM & PM	30 mins in total	Interview follow up
Mon 21 November	PM	1.20	Observation
Friday 25 November	AM	3.30	Interview: Sarah & Marja Knitting group
Friday 2 December	AM	2	Over 60s group
Sat 3 December	PM	2.25	Crime reading group
Friday 9 December	AM	1.30	Knitting group

Friday 16 December	AM	2	Over 60s group
Sat 17 December	PM	1.30	Interview: Charlotte
Tue 20 December	AM	3.30	Interviews: Chantelle & Gemma
Friday 6 January	AM	3	Knitting group
Tuesday 10 January	PM	2.30	Homework help
Friday 13 January	PM	1.30	Interview: Asha
Saturday 14 January	AM	2	Library Advisory Group
Tuesday 17 January	PM	1.30	Interview: Rosie
Friday 20 January	AM	2	Knitting group
Tuesday 24 January	PM	1	Observation
Saturday 28 January	AM-PM	5.30	Black interest reading group Crime reading group
Monday 30 January	AM	2	Interview: Alison
Tuesday 31 January	AM	2	Rhyme Time
Friday 3 February	AM	2	Knitting group
Tuesday 7 February	PM	45 mins	Goodbye

2013

Date	AM/ PM	Duration	Notes
Saturday 15 June	AM	3	Local history talk
Wednesday 10 July	PM	2	Interview: Kay
Friday 8 November	AM	2.30	Knitting group

Appendix 6: Visits to Berlin libraries

2012

Date	Location	Duration	Notes
Monday 27 February	Schiller	.30	Observing
Tuesday 20 March	Schiller	1.30	Vorlesen
Wed 21 March	Luisenbad	1	Observing
Friday 23 March	Luisenbad	2. 45	Observing
Wed 28 March	Schiller	.30	Introduction
Monday 2 April	Schiller	2	Homework help
Wednesday 4 April	Luisenbad	1.30	Observing
Thursday 5 April	Luisenbad	.30	Introduction
Tuesday 10 April	Schiller	1	Interview: Frau Hoffmann
Monday 16 April	Luisenbad	2	Interview: Frau Körner
Wednesday 18 April	Luisenbad	1.45	Kita Visit
Thursday 19 April	Schiller	1	Observing
Friday 20 April	Die Brücke	2	AG Jugendliche
Wed 25 April	W. Grundschule	3	Bildungsalon

Thursday 26 April	Schiller	3.30	Homework help
Thursday 3 May	PG Stiftung	2.30	Aktiver Zentren
Friday 4 May	Luisenbad	3	Arabic evening
Saturday 5 May	Bruno Losche	1	Observation
Monday 7 May	Schiller	1.30	Observation
Wednesday 9 May	Luisenbad	2	Interview: Frau Birke
Tuesday 15 May	Schiller	1.30	Observation
Wednesday 16 May	Soldinerstraße	1.30	QM Interview
Wednesday 16 May	Luisenbad	1	Observation
Tuesday 22 May	Schiller	1.30	Observation
Thursday 24 May	Schul-Bibliothek	2.30	Conversations
Friday 25 May	Schiller	1	Homework help
Tuesday 29 May	Luisenbad	3.30	Eltern Akademie
Wednesday 30 May	Luisenbad	3	Eltern Akademie
Wednesday 13 June	Luisenbad	1.30	Bücher Bus
Thursday 14 June	Luisenbad	1.30	Vorlesen
Tuesday 19 June	Schiller	2	Vorlesen
Wednesday 20 June	Schiller	2.30	Team Besprechung

Tuesday 26 June	Luisenbad	1.45	Observation
Wednesday 27 June	Schiller	1.30	RFID Start
Wednesday 4 July	Luisenbad	2	RFID Meeting
Friday 6 July	Schiller	1	Observation
Saturday 7 July	Philipp-Schaeffer	1	Observation
Saturday 7 July	Luisenbad	1.30	Observation
Tuesday 10 July	Luisenbad	2	Observation
Wednesday 11 July	Schiller	.45	Observation
Thursday 12 July	Philipp-Schaeffer	3	Interview: Frau Diele
Tuesday 17 July	Luisenbad	2	Interview: Frau Körner
Thursday 19 July	Schiller	1.30	Bürgeramt
Friday 20 July	Town Hall	2	Integrationsforum
Tuesday 24 July	Schiller	2	Interview: Frau Hoffmann
Friday 27 July	Schiller	2	Workshop
Tuesday 31 July	Town Hall	3	Leitungsrunde
Friday 3 August	Medienhof	2	Interview: Herr Bauer

Tuesday 7 August	Town Hall	1	Interview: Herr Schmidt
Wednesday 8 August	Chestnutt_Niess	2	Interview: Robert Niess
Tuesday 14 August	Schiller	.45	Observation
Tuesday 21 August	Schiller	2	Vorlesen
Friday 31 August	Schiller	3.45	Kiezralleye
Tues 4 September	Schiller	1.30	Vorlesen
Tues 4 September	Luisenbad	2.45	Vorlesen
Wed 5 September	Luisenbad	2	Lesecafe
Thurs 6 September	Rudolf-Wissel Schule Luisenbad	9	School open day Reading – Hatice Akyun
Friday 7 September	Luisenbad	5	Vorreiter Reading - Hasan Ozdemir
Tues 11 September	Schiller	1.15	Vorlesen
Wed 12 September	Luisenbad	2	Vorreiter
Thurs 13 September	Volkshochschule	2.30	Public Meeting
Wed 26 September	Luisenbad	3.30	Vorreiter Reading – Rajinder

			Singh
Friday 28 September	Schiller	.45	Goodbye
Sat 29 September	Luisenbad	2.15	Interview: Vorreiter Goodbye

2013

Date	Location	Duration	Notes
Tues 3 September	Schiller	1.30	Interview: Frau Hoffmann
Tues 3 September	Schiller	1.30	Vorlesen
Tues 3 September	Café Simit	2	Interview: Vorlesen volunteers
Wed 4 September	Luisenbad	2	Vorreiter
Thurs 5 September	Brunnenstraße QM	3	Interview: Frau Diestel
Friday 6 September	Prenzlauerberg	2	Interview: Claudia Medienhof