

Neighbours Around the World

This page intentionally left blank

Neighbours Around the World: An International Look at the People Next Door

EDITED BY

LYNDA CHESHIRE

The University of Queensland, Australia



United Kingdom – North America – Japan – India – Malaysia – China

Emerald Publishing Limited
Howard House, Wagon Lane, Bingley BD16 1WA, UK

First edition 2022

Editorial matter and selection © 2022 Lynda Cheshire.
Published under exclusive licence by Emerald Publishing Limited.
Individual chapters © 2022 Emerald Publishing Limited.

Reprints and permissions service

Contact: permissions@emeraldinsight.com

No part of this book may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, transmitted in any form or by any means electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording or otherwise without either the prior written permission of the publisher or a licence permitting restricted copying issued in the UK by The Copyright Licensing Agency and in the USA by The Copyright Clearance Center. Any opinions expressed in the chapters are those of the authors. Whilst Emerald makes every effort to ensure the quality and accuracy of its content, Emerald makes no representation implied or otherwise, as to the chapters' suitability and application and disclaims any warranties, express or implied, to their use.

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

ISBN: 978-1-80043-370-0 (Print)

ISBN: 978-1-83909-476-7 (Online)

ISBN: 978-1-83909-478-1 (Epub)



ISOQAR
REGISTERED

Certificate Number 1985
ISO 14001

ISOQAR certified
Management System,
awarded to Emerald
for adherence to
Environmental
standard
ISO 14001:2004.



INVESTOR IN PEOPLE

Contents

List of Appendix, Tables and Figures	vii
About the Contributors	ix
Acknowledgements	xiii
Introduction. Neighbours Around the World: Introducing the People Next Door <i>Lynda Cheshire</i>	1
Chapter 1. The Changing Significance of Neighbouring: From Socialist to Post-socialist China <i>Zheng Wang</i>	19
Chapter 2. New Neighbours in New Urban Districts in Large Russian Cities: Constructing Scenarios of Neighbouring <i>Oksana Zaporozhets and Olga Brednikova</i>	37
Chapter 3. The Transformation of Interpersonal Neighbour Relations at High Speed: The Changing Neighbourhood of Tianzifang in Downtown Shanghai <i>Florence Padovani</i>	55
Chapter 4. Conflict Generated: The Reconfiguration of Neighbouring in Changing Neighbourhoods in Istanbul and Vienna <i>Dilruba Erkan and Michael Friesenecker</i>	73
Chapter 5. From Derelict Estates to a Mixed-tenure Neighbourhood: Social Housing Tenants' Experiences of Neighbouring in Peckham, London <i>Tatiana Moreira de Souza</i>	93

Chapter 6. Neighbours – More than Just Good Friends? Rethinking Neighbours in Contexts of Urban Multiculture <i>Sarah Neal</i>	111
Chapter 7. Between ‘Family’ and ‘Trailer Trash’: Neighbour Culture, Place, and Identity in Florida Mobile Homes <i>Margarethe Kusenbach</i>	129
Chapter 8. Neighbouring Narratives: Understanding Lived and Institutional Neighbourliness in Singapore’s Public Housing Estates <i>Anupama Nallari and Ate Poorthuis</i>	149
Chapter 9. Getting Along with the Neighbours? Neighbourliness, Unneighbourliness and Community in a London Suburb <i>Paul Watt</i>	169
Chapter 10. ‘A Village in the Middle of a City’: Neighbouring and Social Ties in a Public Housing Community in Inner Sydney, Australia <i>Alan Morris</i>	189
Chapter 11. Exploring Latent Neighbourliness: Does Turning Locally for Support in Major Challenges Matter and, If Not, Then What May? <i>Talja Blokland, Daniela Krüger, Robert Vief, Henrik Schultze, Valentin Regnault and Jule Benz</i>	207
Conclusion: Revisiting the Neighbours: An International Look at the People Next Door <i>Lynda Cheshire</i>	231

List of Appendix, Tables and Figures

Appendix

Appendix	Regression Tables	227
----------	-------------------	-----

Tables

Table 1.	In-group Latent Neighbouring in Traditional Courtyard and Work-Unit Settlements (in %)	26
Table 2.	Manifest Neighbouring in Traditional Courtyard and Work-Unit Neighbourhoods (in %)	27
Table 3.	Frequency of Reported Encounters with Neighbours ($n = 80$)	102
Table 4.	Trust in Neighbours to Help While Away ($n = 80$)	102

Figures

Fig. 1.	In-group Manifest Neighbouring in Commodity Housing Estates, $N = 393$	28
Fig. 2.	In-group Latent Neighbouring in Commodity Housing Estates, $N = 393$	29
Fig. 3.	In-group Manifest Neighbouring in Urban Villages, $N = 205$	30
Fig. 4.	In-group Latent Neighbouring in Urban Villages, $N = 205$	31
Fig. 5.	Putilkovo, Moscow	43
Fig. 6.	Parnas, St Petersburg	44
Fig. 7.	Map of Tianzifang, 2020	57
Fig. 8.	Tianzifang, 2005	61
Fig. 9.	Tianzifang in transformation, 2007	66
Fig. 10.	Tianzifang After Transformation, 2012	66
Fig. 11.	Overview of New-Urban Development Projects Surrounding Tarlabası	80
Fig. 12.	Overview of New-Urban Development Projects Surrounding Kretaviertel	81
Fig. 13.	Single-Wide Mobile Homes in a Typical Suburban Family Park	132

viii List of Appendix, Tables and Figures

Fig. 14.	Single-Wide Mobile Homes Next to Shuffleboard Courts in a Low-Income Senior Community	132
Fig. 15.	Five Unique Perspectives on Neighbourhood QoL	156
Fig. 16.	Typical Weekday and Weekend Daily Routine Charts for Participants in Perspectives 1 and 2	159
Fig. 17.	Millers Point.	192
Fig. 18.	Public Housing in Millers Point	192
Fig. 19.	Percentage of Forms of Ties for All Local Support Ties (2020)	217
Fig. 20.	Spatial Distribution of Face-to-Face Encounters	217
Fig. 21.	OLS Regression 'Latent Neighbourliness' With Local Support	218
Fig. 22.	OLS Regression 'Latent Neighbourliness' With Support by Neighbours	218
Fig. 23.	Scores 'Sure of Support' on Neighbourliness Items Per Neighbourhood	219

About the Contributors

Jule Benz is a Master's student at the Institute of Social Sciences at Humboldt-University zu Berlin and student assistant in the sub-project *The World Down My Street* (C04) of the Collaborative Research Centre Re-Figuration of Spaces (CRC 1265) funded by the German Research Foundation.

Talja Blokland is a Professor in Urban Sociology at Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin. She is Principal Investigator in the sub-project *The World Down My Street* (C04) of the Collaborative Research Centre Re-Figuration of Spaces (CRC 1265) funded by the German Research Foundation. She has held visiting positions at Yale University and worked at the University of Manchester and various Dutch universities. Her publications include *Urban Bonds* (2003, Polity), *Community as Urban Practice* (2017, Polity) and various articles on race and ethnicity in the city, poor neighbourhoods, urban violence, gentrification, the urban middle classes and neighbourhood relations and everyday interactions.

Olga Brednikova is a Sociologist and Leading Researcher at the Center for Independent Sociological Research and an Associate researcher at the Sociological Institute, Federal Center for Theoretical and Applied Sociology, Russian Academy of Sciences, St. Petersburg, Russia. Her research interests are in the fields of migration studies, studies of nation-state borders and borderlands, urban studies and neighbouring and the sociology of everyday life. She is an author of about 40 articles. She is a Co-editor of several books, including *Micro-urbanism. City in Details* (2014) and *Living in Two Worlds: Rethinking Transnationalism and Trans-locality* (2020).

Lynda Cheshire is a Sociologist and Head of School in the School of Social Science at the University of Queensland, Australia. Her research explores how people live and interact with one another in contemporary local communities; how structural and policy processes impact upon those communities and the relationships that play out within them; and the consequences of these changing social dynamics for well-being, feelings of attachment to home and place, conflict, social exclusion and cohesion. She has published her work extensively in *Urban Studies*, *Housing Studies* and other leading journals and is author of *Governing Rural Development* (2006, Ashgate) and co-editor of *Rural Governance: International Perspectives* (2007, Routledge).

Dilruba Erkan is a Ph.D. candidate at the University Paris 1. Panthéon - Sorbonne, France in urban geography and the University of Vienna in urban sociology. For her research, she uses both quantitative and qualitative methods to investigate the intricate relation between the social composition and transformation of the urban realm in a comparative manner. Her research interests include urban transformation, urban policy, gentrification, migration, transnationalism, and comparative urban research. Besides research, she is engaged in outreach and science communication, data, and theory visualizations.

Michael Friesenecker is currently a PhD candidate at the University of Vienna, Austria, and is interested in urban redevelopment policies, socio-spatial inequalities and gentrification.

Daniela Krüger is a PhD student in the Department of Urban and Regional Sociology at Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin and Research Associate in the sub-project *The World Down My Street* (C04) of the Collaborative Research Centre Re-Figuration of Spaces (CRC 1265) funded by the German Research Foundation. In her PhD, she asks how the state cares in the unequal city and relates care theory to urban sociology and medical frontline work.

Margarethe Kusenbach is a Professor of Sociology at the University of South Florida, USA. Her research interests include urban and community sociology, social psychology (identity and emotions), disasters and environment, as well as qualitative research methods. She has published widely and internationally on these topics. Over the past several years, her research has focussed on issues of home and belonging among mobile home residents and lifestyle migrants, while her current work investigates the intersection of street art and urban development in US and European cities.

Tatiana Moreira de Souza is a Lecturer in Planning at the University of Liverpool, UK. She holds a first degree in Architecture and Urbanism from the University of São Paulo, Brazil, a MSc in Urban Regeneration and a PhD in Planning Studies from University College London. Her research interests span the areas of housing, planning and urban regeneration, neighbourhoods and communities. Her current research focusses on residents' experiences of living in neighbourhoods undergoing change and their interactions with neighbours; the meaning of home for private renters; and the policies and regulations affecting rental housing, including short-term lets.

Alan Morris is a Professor of Sociology in the Institute for Public Policy and Governance at the University of Technology Sydney. His research interests include the impacts of housing tenure, gentrification and displacement and urban marginality. His most recent book is *The Private Rental Sector in Australia: Living With Uncertainty* (2021, co-authored with Hal Pawson and Kath Hulse). In 2019, his book, *Gentrification and Displacement: The Forced Relation of Public Housing Tenants in Inner-Sydney*, was published by Springer. His book on the impact of

housing tenure on older Australians, *The Australian Dream: Housing Experiences of Older Australians* (CSIRO Publishing), was published in 2016, and *A Practical Introduction to In-depth Interviewing* was published by SAGE in 2015.

Anupama Nallari is a Research Consultant with a PhD in Environmental Psychology from the Graduate Center, City University of New York. Her work lies at the intersections of children's health and well-being, urban poverty, cities and social justice.

Sarah Neal is a Professor of Sociology in the Department of Sociological Studies at the University of Sheffield, UK. She researches and writes in the fields of ethnicity, multicultural, rural and urban social life, community and place. Recent publications include *Friendship and Diversity, Class, Ethnicity and Social Relationships in the City* (2018, Palgrave, with C. Vincent and H. Iqbal) and *Lived Experiences of Multiculture: The New Spatial and Social Relations of Diversity* (2017, Routledge, with K. Bennett, A. Cochrane and G. Mohan). She is co-editor (with Karim Murji) of *Current Sociology* and an editorial board member of *Journal of Intercultural Studies* and *Ethnic and Racial Studies*.

Florence Padovani is a Social Scientist working on issues relating to urban planning and population mobility in China, with particular focus on Shanghai, Chongqing and Xi'an. She is interested in the way residents reclaim their common space after cities are transformed due to large energy infrastructure projects (such as the Three Gorges Dam project), economic development (as in Tianzifang) and heritage protection (like in Xi'an). She has undertaken more than two decades of intensive fieldwork in China. She is currently the Director of the Sino-French Research Centre in Social Sciences at Tsinghua University in Beijing.

Ate Poorthuis is an Assistant Professor of Big Data and Human-Environment Systems in the Department of Earth and Environmental Sciences at KU Leuven. His research explores the possibilities and limitations of big data through quantitative analysis and visualisation to better understand how our cities work.

Valentin Regnault is currently studying Social Sciences at Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin. He is working as a Student Assistant at the Department of Urban and Regional Sociology at Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin.

Henrik Schultze is a Postdoctoral Research Fellow in the Department of Urban and Regional Sociology at Humboldt-University Berlin and Research Associate in the sub-project *The World Down My Street* (C04) of the Collaborative Research Centre Re-Figuration of Spaces (CRC 1265) funded by the German Research Foundation. His research interests include social constructions of belonging, social inequalities and qualitative research methods.

Robert Vief is a PhD student in the Department of Urban and Regional Sociology at Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin and Research Associate in the sub-project *The*

World Down My Street (C04) of the Collaborative Research Centre Re-Figuration of Spaces (CRC 1265) funded by the German Research Foundation. His research interests include school and residential segregation, neighbourhood effects, the use of infrastructures within cities and quantitative and spatial research methods.

Zheng Wang is a Lecturer in the Department of Urban Studies and Planning at The University of Sheffield. His research interests include neighbourhoods, neighbourly relations and community engagement of rural migrants and the long-term social impacts of large-scale urban development projects in urban China. He obtained his PhD degree at the Bartlett School of Planning, University College London, and has been a winner of the RTPi Early Career Researcher Award. He has published in journals including *Antipode*, *Environment and Planning A*, *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research*, *Urban Geography*, *Population Space and Place* and *Urban Studies*.

Paul Watt is a Professor of Urban Studies in the Department of Geography at Birkbeck, University of London, England. He has published widely on social housing, urban regeneration, neighbourhoods and community, gentrification, suburbanisation, homelessness, displacement and the 2012 London Olympic Games. His most recent book is *Estate Regeneration and Its Discontents: Public Housing, Place and Inequality in London* (Policy Press). He is an Editorial Board member of the following journals: *City* and *Housing and Society*.

Oksana Zaporozhets is currently a visiting researcher at the Leibniz Institute for Regional Geography in Leipzig. She previously worked as an Associate Professor at the Higher School of Economics in Russia and a Visiting Professor at the European Humanities University in Lithuania. Her current research projects focus on living in the city, including living in new urban areas, building neighbour relations, using new urban public spaces and creating urban imagery including graffiti and street art. She is co-editor of two books on the city life *Micro-urbanism: City in Details* (2014) and *Urban Networks: People, Technologies, Governance* (2021).

Acknowledgements

The idea for this edited collection was conceived during a session on neighbouring at the RC21 (Research Committee on Urban and Regional Development) conference in New Delhi, India, in mid-2019. Its preparation took place during most of 2020 and 2021 as the authors, like the rest of the world around them, were forced into bouts of COVID-19-induced home isolation, home schooling, online teaching and worries about their own health and that of their family. I am grateful to them all for their excellent scholarship on neighbours as an everyday and thus important – but sometimes overlooked – feature of urban residential living, their commitment to the project in challenging times and their patience with my editorial efforts. I am also deeply appreciative of the support and assistance of the Emerald editorial/production team and of Nichola Gale whose sharp editorial eye has improved the collection immensely. Finally, I would like to acknowledge all the research participants involved in each individual chapter who consented to their stories and experiences being documented so that we could better understand the phenomenon of the contemporary neighbour. This collection is dedicated to all the good neighbours around the world who make our neighbourhoods, streets and blocks a better place to live in small and large ways.

This page intentionally left blank

Introduction

Neighbours Around the World: Introducing the People Next Door

Lynda Cheshire

A Portrait of Neighbourly Life

The Second Commandment of the Bible entreats us to ‘love thy neighbour as thyself’. For Zygmund [Bauman \(2013, p. 77\)](#), this seems rather ludicrous:

Why should I do it? What good will it do me to feel the absurdity of the demand to love one’s neighbour – any neighbour, for the sole reason of being a neighbour?

Bauman’s questions are pertinent ones that guide the rationale of this edited collection. Who is this person whom we refer to as a neighbour and what is it about a neighbour that requires us to feel affection towards that person, regardless of their personal qualities or feelings towards us? Even for those whose lives are not governed by the precepts of the Bible (particularly in these contemporary times), the concept of the ‘good neighbour’ continues to loom large in public debates and popular culture. One of the longest-running Australian soap operas reminds viewers on a nightly basis that ‘neighbours should be there for one another’ ([Hatch & Trent, 1984](#)). In local government authorities around the United Kingdom, Good Neighbour Charters outline the importance of being a good neighbour and set behavioural standards to which neighbours should abide if they are to maintain harmonious relations. And around the world, over 46 countries (predominantly in Europe but also in Latin America, Africa and Asia) have signed up to Neighbours’ Day on the last Friday in May each year to strengthen the social bonds between neighbours within local communities.

Yet neighbours can be equally regarded as a source of nuisance and conflict. While fictional dramas advise us that ‘everybody needs good neighbours’ ([Hatch & Trent, 1984](#)), reality television shows such as *Neighbours From Hell* provide extreme reminders that good neighbours are simply a matter of luck.

Neighbours around the World: An International Look at the People Next Door, 1–17

Copyright © 2022 by Lynda Cheshire

Published under exclusive licence by Emerald Publishing Limited

doi:[10.1108/978-1-83909-476-720221001](https://doi.org/10.1108/978-1-83909-476-720221001)

In just the same way that we cannot choose our families, we cannot choose our neighbours, except, of course, in the most limited of scenarios. The likely misfortune of encountering neighbours from hell has stimulated a series of online support groups around the world that provide sympathy and advice to those who suffer the effects of a noisy, nosy, inconsiderate or aggressive neighbour. Similarly, local councils, the police, community legal centres, the courts and dispute resolution agencies provide guidance on how to manage low-level neighbour disputes over fences and trees in an attempt to prevent them from escalating into open conflict and residential misery.

And yet we are repeatedly told that, in advanced Western late modern societies at least, neighbours are becoming far less relevant in our lives than they once were. We know fewer neighbours and know far less about them than we once did; we are less inclined to speak with them or socialise with them as we once were; and we are less reliant upon them for social support now that our lives are more affluent, mobile and privatised (Cockayne, 2012; Putnam, 2000). Instead, it seems that we like our privacy and we prefer to keep neighbours at a social and physical distance: on the doorstep or over the fence, even if this causes us to collectively lament that neighbours have now become strangers to us and that vulnerable groups such as the elderly are at greater risk when neighbours no longer look out for each other. Yet all is not lost. The good neighbour continues to lie latent in most of us – there when needed, in small or large emergencies, regardless of whether that emergency is a lost cat (Laurier, Whyte, & Buckner, 2002), a need to borrow tools (Cockayne, 2012) or an encroaching natural disaster (Cheshire, 2015).

Or a global pandemic. As we all began to draft this book, the world had retreated into home-bound isolation. Under COVID-19 restrictions, households were required to stay home, or close to home; vulnerable groups remained in self-imposed quarantine, sometimes for months on end; the task of meeting essential needs such as groceries, medication or childcare became more challenging; and our usual, extra-local sources of day-to-day social connections were cut off. While we sought to maintain those connections in online spaces, something emerged at the local level that was ostensibly new; something positive and promising that could help sustain us socially and materially through the long days of isolation.

From China to France, the United Kingdom, Italy, the United States and Australia, this new phenomenon was the mobilisation of neighbours reaching out to support and help one another in ways not previously experienced. In our own various states of home-bound isolation, and heavily reliant upon our screens for news of the outside world, we watched videos of residents in Rome being entertained by a serenading neighbour from his balcony (Horowitz, 2020) and we witnessed nightly cheers of support being shouted out to neighbours across apartment blocks in Wuhan, China ('Coronavirus: Tales of solidarity', 2020). For those who could venture out of their homes, if only for an hour, the placement of teddy bears in neighbours' windows in Oakland, California, turned a walk around the block into a bear hunt to help combat boredom among children (Harrington, 2020). And, in Australia, residents of Queensland recounted how COVID-19 had sparked their first real conversation with neighbours after years of living next door (Hartley, 2020).

At the same time, residents in the United Kingdom were urged to ‘please be a good neighbour’ (East Suffolk Council, 2020), recognising that the increased time spent at home would likely trigger neighbour tensions around issues such as noise. Meanwhile, police and councils in Australia and the United Kingdom reported an increase in the volume of calls to service hotlines made by vigilante neighbours reporting others for suspected breaches of social distancing restrictions (Bland, 2020; Cowie, 2020). While some viewed this third-party policing function as a form of responsible civic action to keep people safe, others – including those who, in colloquial terms, were ‘dobbed in’ by said neighbours – felt that it generated unnecessary suspicion and mistrust at a time when local social relations were so vitally important. In the United Kingdom, the debate circulated around the halls of British Parliament, with the Police Minister and Home Secretary encouraging Britons to report their neighbours for not complying with COVID-19 restrictions and the Prime Minister attempting to discourage what he saw as ‘sneak culture’ (Morrison, 2020).

This Introduction points to a range of contradictory experiences, narratives and social expectations around the people we call neighbours. Neighbours are people who enrich our lives when we know and like them (even if we cannot love them), but it is a social fact that we know them and need them less than we used to, and that we cannot guarantee they will be especially likeable or, indeed, care to like us. Yet, regardless of whether we know or like our neighbours, they are a persistent feature of our lives. They are a source of nightly entertainment in fictional and non-fictional forms as we settle down in front of the television. We continue to write about them, complain about them, celebrate them and talk about them. Their homes, and ours, emit the sights, sounds and smells of private domestic lives, sometimes causing offence and complaint (Stokoe, 2006). We seem willing to help them in times of crisis, even if we do not know them. And there seems to be a growing set of formalised codes and rules about how we should behave as neighbours if we are to maintain good relationships with each other.

For international readers, this portrait of neighbourly life – the searching for lost cats, the preservation of privacy, the over the fence conversations and the disputes over the nuisance of overhanging trees – might feel exclusionary in its implicitly Western orientation. Even those more familiar with these images, and the European, North American and Australian/New Zealand contexts from where they derive, might argue that they are also distinctly middle class in origin and say little about the role of neighbours for social groups whose lives are not characterised by mobility and affluence. This would be accurate. For all the talk about neighbours in the scholarly, fictional and popular press, there is remarkable consistency in the way neighbours are conceived in affluent Western terms that fails to capture the diversity of experiences, relations, expectations and interactions that people from other parts of the world have with their neighbours.

Our intent in this book is to change this popular imaginary and address this scholarly blind spot. Going back to the opening question of this Introduction we ask: who are these people whom we call neighbours in diverse places around the world? What is the cultural value of the neighbour in different social, political, cultural and urban contexts and how does its cultural value manifest in the

kinds of social norms and expectations that we attach to neighbours as a social category? Can we identify any commonalities in the way we conceive and relate to neighbours around the world, regardless of whether they are neighbours in a multicultural neighbourhood in London, a high-density public housing estate in Singapore, or a new residential district on the rapidly urbanising outskirts of Moscow? And what remains of our conceptual and empirical understanding of the neighbour when we step beyond our Western, middle-class paradigm and explore neighbours in greater social and spatial diversity?

Together, the authors in this edited collection set out to answer these questions through a series of case study analyses into neighbours around the world. Our answers are partial in that we are unable to look at every type of neighbourhood in every country. Inevitably, readers will see immediate and obvious omissions that cannot be rectified in a single book; most significantly in regions of Latin America, Africa and South Asia. But if our aim is to identify areas of synergy as well as diversity, we need to start in spaces where we know neighbours exist in abundance, and where researchers have already traced the dynamic social structural conditions of our lives that influence how we live and relate to neighbours. For this reason, we necessarily limit our analyses to urban rather than rural contexts. As consummate sites of social change and residential density, urban areas provide better insight than any other into the ways that our lives are changing and the degree to which these changes might be reflected in shifting perceptions of, and relationships with, the people next door.

The remainder of this Introduction establishes the necessary conceptual groundwork for the chapters that follow. Drawing on historical and contemporary sources, it traces the way neighbours have been conceptualised over time and the broad socio-structural transformations that are thought to have reshaped the way we conceive and relate to them. Somewhat inevitably, this overview replicates the conventional Western paradigm that we have already critiqued for its narrow and exclusionary social imaginary. Partly, this is simply indicative of the work that is out there. Beyond the research presented by the authors of this book, a multiplicity of perspectives on neighbours is difficult to find, often because of the hegemonic position of Western thought in mainstream social science (Connell, 2007), but also because, quite possibly, neighbours hold little social value in other parts of the world and thus little interest for social science research. In South Asia, for example, where relations between kin are paramount, neighbours have traditionally been a social category of little cultural value (Snell-Rood, 2015). But our conventional beginnings have also been a deliberate strategy for this collection so that we can critique, dismantle and reconstruct a new set of ideas and understandings about neighbours from around the world based on the insights derived from the contributing chapters.

Introducing Neighbours: The People Next Door

The answer to our question – who or what is a neighbour? – is strangely unremarkable, although this only adds to the enigma of neighbours as an object of study. According to Philip Abrams, ‘... [n]eighbours are quite simply people who

live near one another' (Bulmer, 1986, p. 18). They are the people who live down the street, across the road, along the hallway or over the fence. What characterises our relationships with neighbours and the ways we interact with them begins with little more than the proximity of our dwellings, the sharing of physical spaces or boundaries such as walls and fences, and the familiarity that builds over time through the daily observance of other people's lives playing out in homes and spaces within sight and sound of our own. But this is only the start of our analysis, for out of this residential nearness evolves a whole series of norms and expectations around the role of neighbours, the ways we interact with them and the kinds of relationships that we might establish with them. What these norms are, how they change over time and vary across different social, spatial and cultural settings, and how they manifest in distinct patterns of neighbouring behaviour are questions that render neighbours a fascinating topic of debate and interest.

Before addressing these questions, it is important to provide clarity around some of the fundamental concepts pertaining to neighbours. We have already identified neighbours as the people who live near us, and we figuratively refer to them in this book as the 'people who live next door'. More literally, however, neighbours are the people whose dwellings are within sufficient proximity to our own that our residential lives intertwine with theirs in a range of ways. This is a much more circumscribed definition of neighbours than is often used in scholarly texts or popular parlance, which conceive of neighbours as co-residents of a neighbourhood or members of one's local community. The narrowness of our focus in this book is intentional. While there has been extensive analysis of contemporary neighbourhoods and the forms of social cohesion, belonging, and conflict that might foster among co-residents of those neighbourhoods (see, for example, the collection by Watt & Smets, 2014), contemporary understandings of neighbours as the people who live next door are more limited and, increasingly, outdated. Their presence in our lives, even when they are strangers, compels us to pay them more attention than we have done previously.

Moving on, and following Kusenbach (2006), the forms of behaviour that we engage in as neighbours and the relationships that are engendered through them are referred to as neighbouring. Kusenbach defines neighbouring as a 'normative set of interactive practices' (2006, p. 282), thereby drawing attention to the way these modes of interaction are governed by socially sanctioned rules and expectations around how neighbours should behave towards one another. In general, there is a broad expectation that neighbouring should manifest itself in positive ways. When this occurs, we conceive of those neighbours and their behaviour as neighbourly, while our relationships with them are guided by neighbourliness. Defined by Abrams as 'a positive and committed relationship constructed between neighbours' (Bulmer, 1986, p. 21), neighbourliness is underpinned by latent values or favourable dispositions towards neighbours as intrinsically valuable and manifest in overt expressions of social intercourse such as visiting neighbours, friendly greetings, mutual support and the provision of aid (Mann, 1954).

In her ethnography of neighbourhood ties in a low-income area of Rotterdam in the Netherlands, Blokland (2003) provides a finely grained typology of neighbour relations according to the level of attachment residents hold towards

neighbours as an abstract social category or as individuals. For those who relate to neighbours simply because they are neighbours and who see virtue in engaging in small acts of reciprocity but otherwise refrain from socialising with each other, their neighbourly relationships are transaction oriented. Nevertheless, attachments can form when those transactions are imbued with a sense of goodwill towards neighbours, when neighbourliness is valued and when it reveals itself through street-level (but not necessarily home-based) forms of neighbour sociality. This is distinct from neighbours who are friends, rather than simply those with whom we are friendly. Blokland terms these kinds of relationships ‘bonds’ (2003), but she notes that they arise not simply because people are neighbours but from other forms of connection or affect. Finally, there are neighbour relations that are merely ‘interdependent’: absent in every way except for the fact that neighbours live next door to one another and thus their presence cannot be completely ignored.

The intriguing feature of neighbouring is that it simply refers to the modes of action and interaction that neighbours engage in with one another. As such, there is nothing inherent in these forms of interaction to suggest they should be imbued with positive dispositions, or foster attachments or bonds, or invoke gestures of friendliness and sociability. But there is something about the neighbour role that attaches to it a set of expectations pertaining towards more virtuous forms of disposition and social intercourse, at least in the kinds of affluent Western contexts we have so far been discussing. Going back to Kusenbach, neighbouring is a ‘*normative* [emphasis added] set of interactive practices’ (2006, p. 282), and it is these norms that induce us to link neighbouring to neighbourliness based on the existence of a (usually) unwritten, (often) unspoken, but nevertheless compelling set of rules around the ways neighbours should behave.

More than 30 years ago, Philip Abrams (Bulmer, 1986) observed that good neighbours are friendly and helpful, but that they also respect others’ privacy by maintaining social distance in the face of proximity. In trying to make sense of these potentially competing imperatives, Abrams drily noted that ‘...[N]eighbouring ... seems to be a type of interaction constituted in a rather enigmatic three-dimensional space’ (1986, p. 31). Each of the dimensions has already been alluded to in the discussion so far, but it is worth taking a closer look at the composite features of a good neighbour. The first requirement of neighbours is that they should be friendly – not necessarily to the degree of Blokland’s neighbour bonds, although this is clearly not inconceivable. Rather, it is anticipated that neighbours should engage in polite sociality by exchanging friendly greetings when they encounter one another. Kusenbach (2006) suggests that, at a minimum, neighbours are required to show friendly recognition of one another as a polite way of demonstrating that one can at least identify one’s neighbours, even if they are not known by name and neither party has any desire to stop and chat.

Next comes helpfulness: a latent disposition that Crow, Allan, and Summers describe as ‘being there when needed’ (2002, p. 127), but which also involves the provision of favours that vary in size and levels of obligation depending on the type of relationship one has with that neighbour. In times past (as Cockayne (2012) has vividly described), absolute poverty induced neighbours to

share food and domestic items, contribute towards the cost of a funeral if a grieving neighbour could not cover it alone, care for each other's children and provide emotional support and advice. Nowadays, requests to borrow money from a neighbour would mostly be viewed as inappropriate and likely met with refusal, especially if the only source of interaction with that neighbour has so far been a friendly wave as one leaves the house each morning. And even a request to borrow the metaphorical cup of sugar or other food item might be regarded as unusual among neighbours whose relationships resemble [Blokland's \(2003\)](#) interdependencies and transactions.

[Cockayne \(2012\)](#) advises that borrowing tools might still be acceptable today, but otherwise the sorts of helpfulness we can expect from a neighbour are light in obligation – feeding a pet or watering plants while the neighbour is away; holding a spare key for them, just in case; and being observant of elderly neighbours or of strangers who loiter around the neighbourhood. [Litwak and Szelenyi \(1969, p. 470\)](#) suggest that many of these services are legitimately the 'province of neighbours' because neighbours are best placed to offer assistance in instances where a quick reaction is required (as in an emergency); when the trigger for neighbour help relates to a common territory (as would be the case in a natural disaster); and where everyday observation is needed, such as the kind provided by neighbours in a Neighbourhood Watch scheme. To receive this kind of neighbourly aid, three conditions need to be in place. The first (as [Laurier et al. \(2002\)](#) demonstrate) is an implicit understanding that neighbours can approach each other in times of need, even if they do not know each other outside of that particular situation. Second, and also drawing on [Laurier et al. \(2002\)](#), is an unspoken consensus that residents can turn to a neighbour for assistance (rather than a family member or a friend) precisely 'because of a neighbour's obligation *as a neighbour* [emphasis added]' (2002, p. 365). But the third condition places contingencies on the reliability of neighbourly help: neighbours are willing to help one another because they expect that help will be reciprocated by that neighbour; indeed, any neighbour. Reciprocity provides the glue for ongoing neighbourly aid.

The final dimension of good neighbouring risks contradicting the first two, and this is what makes neighbouring such a potentially fraught practice. Along with being friendly and helpful, neighbours are also expected to respect each other's privacy, which suggests that limits should be placed on the level of friendliness and helpfulness neighbours offer each other. Taking too much interest in a neighbour's affairs, keeping an eye out too closely on their comings and goings and being ever present in the desire to offer help risk tipping the balance towards over-neighbouring or, worse, getting a reputation as a 'nosy' neighbour. The need for neighbours to respect each other's private lives emanates from two broad features of residential life. The first is the way home is now conceived as the consummate site for the preservation of our privacy and the expression of self and sociality. Authors such as [Saunders and Williams \(1988\)](#) describe a pervasive culture of privatism, or home-centredness in the way we understand and experience the home, such that our identities are constructed and expressed through the choices we make around the neighbourhoods we live in, and through home design and décor. According to [Putnam \(2000\)](#), the inclination of current generations

of Americans to engage in home-bound socialising with friends rather than civic forms of engagement in local clubs and society is indicative of a general malaise of American civic society.

For those fortunate to have one, then, a home is a haven – a retreat from the outside world – and its sanctity needs to be protected. The lengths that more affluent home dwellers will go to in order to preserve the physical boundaries of their homes can be seen in the high walls or fences, electric gates and closed-circuit television cameras erected to deter would-be burglars, door-to-door salespeople, roaming cats or over-friendly neighbours. But even in the absence of such fortification, neighbours erect symbolic boundaries between their properties that send coded messages to one another about the need to preserve each other's privacy.

This brings us to the second feature of residential life: that of physical proximity between neighbouring dwellings and the need to sustain the privacy of our private domestic life from those who are close enough to see glimpses of it but are not members of our family or friendship network. As already noted, the people next door often know more about our lives than we care to consider, even if they do not know us by name. They learn about our routines as we come and go; they interpret the social messages we emit about our status through the maintenance and presentation of our homes to the outside world; they learn to recognise family members and frequent visitors; and they are likely to hear the sounds of our music, our appliances, our arguments and even (as [Stokoe \(2006\)](#) reminds us) our most intimate encounters, as noise inadvertently transmits through walls and out of windows. But good neighbours rarely reveal how much they know about us. Instead, they are expected to display a degree of tolerance and inattentiveness to the parts of our private domestic lives that we unavoidably reveal to them by virtue of the close proximity of their homes to ours. In return for this performance of disinterest, good neighbours also take care not to expose neighbours to the intimate features of their own private lives any more than they can avoid. Neighbours can only pretend not to have seen or heard so much.

While we have witnessed the rise of Good Neighbour Agreements in recent decades (particularly in the social housing sector and as part of covenant agreements for new apartments or estates), it is still the case that the norms and expectations of good neighbours are infrequently codified, no matter how normatively powerful they might be. Neighbouring, says [Stokoe \(2006, p. 2.2\)](#)

functions quietly and goes unexplicated when the order of the relationship is respected and maintained: it is only when breaches occur that people start to articulate the otherwise unspoken norms of social life.

The negative side of neighbouring – what we might call unneighbourliness – appears to be a common phenomenon if media reports, council hotline calls, websites, blogs and other forms of public 'neighbour talk' are to be believed. 'Long-running dispute between neighbours ends with one of them being charged with murder' reads one recent Australian news report ([Percy, 2019](#)), while across the globe in the United Kingdom, 'Woman, 40, battered her neighbour to death