The struggle to belong
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The Intercultural Climate and Spaces
In the Multi-ethnic Neighborhoods of Los Angeles

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ABSTRACT

Globalization has ushered in a new era to reconsider the claims and concerns of multiculturalism in new light. As Appadurai (1990, 1991 and 1996) warns of the local tensions between people in global ethnoscapes, we observe with increasing anecdotal evidence that the social and cultural changes brought about by global immigration is met with silent resentment by the receiving societies. These different cultural milieus are manifested in the way everyday urban space is used and shared. As such, neighborhood spaces have inevitably become frontier grounds for multi-ethnic encounters that are capable of leading to either experiences of conflicts or conviviality. These new urban divisions once again re-center questions about the efficacy of social contact and interaction to combat new prejudices and fears (Allport 1954).

Building on the writings of Sandercock (1998 and 2003) and Amin (2002) who have grappled with questions of co-existence in and through urban space, this paper presents an ongoing empirical research to understand the socio-spatial dynamics of inter-ethnic relations in three multi-ethnic neighborhoods of Los Angeles. The discussion presented in this paper attempts to foreground the neighborhood as a social space borrowing Lefebvre's (1991) conceptualization of perceived-lived-conceived space. This paper also discusses the patterns and potentialities of neighborhood civic spaces such as the neighborhood park and neighborhood library as common grounds where productive everyday intercultural negotiations that are critical for mutual understandings between ethnicities can be nurtured.

Keywords: ethnoscapes, multi-ethnic neighborhoods, Los Angeles, intercultural negotiations, civic spaces,

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URBAN INTERCULTURALISM IN AND THROUGH GLOBAL ETHNOSCAPES

As one of the major gateways of immigration in the United States, Los Angeles stands at the crossroads of globalization. It is home to hundreds of nationalities and ethnicities and a foreign-born population of 35% in 2009 (American Community Survey 2005-09). Los Angeles is a global ethnoscape *a la* Appadurai (1990) of moving people cultures coming into contact with each other, seeking to coexist in and through the limits of the urban space. A city of multiplicities, the City of Angels appears to extol Israel Zangwill's virtues of a "melting pot" with its plethora of hybrid cultures and mixed marriages. Yet taken from another angle, Los Angeles undeniably was the site of the violent ethnically motivated riots in 1965 and 1992 and inter-ethnic relations remains an Achilles' heel for the city.

Appadurai (1990, 1991, 1996) in his discussion of the dimension of cultural globalization described as flows or imagined –scapes of peoples, ideas, media, technology and finance, he conceptualizes that the tension of cultural globalization lies in the struggle between cultural homogenization and cultural heterogenization. While Appadurai did not elaborate on the geography of struggle initially, Holston and Appadurai (1999:10) later discussions spatialized the dynamics of struggle in cities, where the "most intense points of implosion" intersect. In the city according to them is a meeting of the "politics of quality (in particular of difference)" and the "politics pf quantity (and of the anxieties of density)! " This incisive calling out of the implosive dynamics when difference (or the more euphemistic term of "diversity") intersects density were reiterated a decade later by Talen and Ellis (2009) in their discussion of the emerging research agendas in planning for the future of American urbanism. Anecdotally in America and in globalizing cities around the world, increasing acts of overt and covert hostilities against the expressions of new ethnic or religious diversity are witnessed such as protests against mosques construction (e.g. New York, Los Angeles, Switzerland and Germany), struggles over neighborhood territories and belongings (e.g. Los Angeles, Italy, Singapore) as well as experiences of subtler but more direct forms of prejudiced behaviors between people.

Living together in globalizing multi-ethnic environments is increasingly recognized as both a daily act of survival and an art of life. Dissatisfactions with the outcomes of multicultural policies and the ongoing abstract discourse of immigration integration and multicultural policies have impelled some scholars to search for tangible ways to understand and respond to exigencies arising from cities of difference (e.g. Fincher and Jacobs (1998), Sandercock (1998, 2003). The title of Sandercock (2000) paper *When Strangers become Neighbors: Managing Cities of Difference* succinctly articulates the challenging issue of negotiating the socio-spatial proximity of differences in the neighborhood.

Amin (2002) discussion of the race disturbances in British suburbs in 2001 introduced the dimension of everyday negotiation of ethnic differences to the discourse of the living in the multicultural city. *Ethnicity and the multicultural city: living with diversity* (2002) emphasizes "everyday social contact and encounter" on the urban local

scale to reduce prejudice. Through his paper, he questioned the practical ethos of multiculturalism and purposefully shifted the discourse on immigration and diversity to "urban interculturalism." According to Amin (2002: 967),

> "The term 'intercultured' I used to stress cultural dialogue, to contrast with versions of multiculturalism that either stress cultural difference without resolving the problem of communication between cultures, or versions of cosmopolitanism that speculate on the gradual erosion of cultural difference through interethnic mixture and hybridization…My emphasis, in contrast, falls on everyday lived experiences and local negotiations of difference, on microcultures of place through which abstract rights and obligations, together with local structures and resources, meaningfully interact with distinctive individual and interpersonal experiences…It is intended to privilege everyday enactment as the central site of identity and attitude formation."

Interculturalism as the approach to integrate immigrants in Europe was made official as a strategic policy by the Council of Europe in May 2008. For the Council of Europe, intercultural dialogue is an "open and respectful exchange of views between individuals, groups with different ethnic, cultural, religious and linguistic background and heritage on the basis of mutual understanding and respect" Wood (2009) p.19. At the core of intercultural policy is the commitment to facilitate conditions that "create common ground, mutual understanding and empathy and shared aspirations" (p.23). Although not made explicit, many of these ideals draw upon the contact theory by social psychologists who propounds that intergroup contact has the ability to reduce prejudice between groups (Allport 1954, Pettigrew and Tropp 2005).

Interculturalism practiced as an everyday negotiation has found increasing resonance in empirical studies at the neighborhood level by sociologists, social geographers and planners, for example the writings of Sandercock (2003), Wise (2005), Smets (2006), Wood and Landry (2008), Mueller and Smets (2009), Wise and Velayutham (2009) and Kesten et al. (2011) in Europe, Australia and Canada. However as Wessel (2009:8) points out, the spatial environment and organization of intergroup relations usually gets overlooked in the study of relations. Neighborhood space more often than not forms the backdrop for the study of inter-ethnic relations rather than being thought of as an active element that shapes and influences negotiations and belongings Lefebvre (1991) and Clayton (2009).

The discussion presented in this paper attempts to foreground the neighborhood as a social space for analysis in two parts following Lefebvre's (1991) conceptualization of social space as perceived-lived-conceived[1]. The first part begins by assessing the

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[1] According to Lefebvre (1991: 413-14), **perceived** space refers to "empirically observable" use of space that is "described and analysed on a wide range of levels: in architecture, in city planning or 'urbanism' (a term borrowed from official pronouncement), in the actual design of routes and localities ('town and country planning'), in the organization of everyday life, and naturally, in urban reality." **Lived** space is defined as "space as directly lived through its associated images and symbols, and hence the space of

intercultural climate of the three multi-ethnic neighborhoods through the lens of the perceived and lived spaces of those who live and/or work in the neighborhoods. The second part examines the patterns and potentialities of the conceived civic spaces in the neighborhood e.g. neighborhood park and neighborhood library for opportunities of intercultural dialogue making and negotiations. Its underlying premise is that the everyday urban neighborhood is a "common ground" where different ethnicities have either chosen or found themselves with little choice but to seek ways to coexist and share. The urban neighborhood is thus a salient place to understand the perceived and lived routine negotiation of conflict and conviviality of those living in diversity in and through the conceived neighborhood spaces. Its ubiquity also serves as a practical scale for the application of urban plans and policies that can have impacts on encouraging and actually building places of social flourishing.

The thoughts presented in this paper represent a preliminary piecing together of multiple snapshots of my ongoing doctoral dissertation research of the socio-spatial dynamics of living in diversity and the role of civic spaces in three multi-ethnic neighborhoods of Los Angeles of intercultural understanding and belonging. The neighborhoods selected are of different income affluence in order to gather and access an understanding of the socio-spatial dynamics of multi-ethnic living in an income-segregated city of Los Angeles. The discussion below is based on twenty semi-structured interviews conducted with people of different ethnicities who live and work in the neighborhoods of Central Long Beach (low-income), Mid-Wilshire (middle/mixed income) and San Marino (high-income).

ASSESSING THE INTERCULTURAL CLIMATE IN LOS ANGELES'S NEIGHBORHOODS
Central Long Beach: Low-income and Dense

The Central Long Beach neighborhood along East Anaheim Street (between Long Beach Boulevard and Orizaba Avenue on the east-west axis and Pacific Coastal Highway and 7th Street in the north-south direction) is made up of three major groups: 55 percent Latinos (mix of Americans and immigrants from Mexico and Central America such as El Salvador, Guatemala and Honduras), 21 percent Indo-China Asians (majority Cambodian immigrants, Thais and Vietnamese) and 14 percent African Americans (2000 US Census data). Its household median income at $20,330 is half of Los Angeles County (US Census 2000) and it is 80 percent renter-occupied low-income neighborhood. Spatially, housing in the neighborhood is a mix of rental apartment blocks and single-family homes that are subdivided into several apartments and living conditions are dense. According to a community organizer, the average density is about five to six people to a room and the neighborhood is *perceived* as mixed, albeit with areas that

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'inhabitants' and 'users'… It overlays physical space, making symbolic use of its objects" Lefebvre (1991: 39). On **conceived** space, he describes it as the "conceptualized space, the space of scientists, planners, urbanists…--all of whom identify what is lived and what is perceived with what is conceived" Lefebvre (1991: 38).

some residents would identify as mostly Mexicans, mostly Blacks or a mix of Asians and Mexicans.

The inter-ethnic relations in this neighborhood have a history of violence that is shaped by the phases of migration. Prior to the 1950s and 60s, the neighborhood was demographically White Anglos. Subsequently, the African Americans settled in the neighborhood, followed by Latinos in the 1970s through 2000 and the Cambodians coming as refugees from the Killing Fields genocide arrived in the late 1970s through 1990s. Over a few interviews with several long-time Cambodians respondents and community organizers of other ethnicities, they would recall the times from the early 1980s through 1990s where this neighborhood was a "war zone." Literally, funerals of victims killed in crossfire between Latino and Cambodian gangs fighting over territories would occur every week. Bullying, racial slurs, beating and street shooting were commonly experienced. A Mexican American youth I interviewed recalled how when he was very young, he was beaten up by Asians and was angry at the violence for many years. Relations between Latinos and Asians have eased over the last decade. However, it seems that the tension between African Americans and Latinos has remained. According to an African-American lady who has grown up in the neighborhood,

> *"To be honest, I really don't keep my eyes on the Cambodian people and Asian people coz' they are really not in conflict of the international racial part we have going on in our building, in our surrounding areas. It is majority Mexicans and Blacks. The Cambodian people and Asians, you know, they keep to themselves."*

Although the tense inter-ethnic relationship has subsided slowly since 2000 as a result of interventions of various kinds through the school, police patrol, and neighborhood outreach by the city as well as the changing nature of gangs, race and ethnicity continue to be a contested issue in the *lived* spaces of the neighborhood. Its sensitivity in this multi-ethnic neighborhood of multiple belongings was tested in the last decade by a new proposal to create a one-mile long strip of East Anaheim Street neighborhood as Cambodia Town by a group of Cambodian businessmen. The fear of a backlash from other ethnic groups, especially the Latino businesses operating in the neighborhood placed the plans in limbo for seven years. The plans were finally approved by the City of Long Beach in 2007 subject to the support of businesses for a business improvement district Chan (2011).

From the preliminary findings, the relations between neighbors of different ethnicities in this neighborhood are casual with "hi-bye contact" and limited in range to those living next door or in the same apartment block. Language ability can be one significant barrier to communicate with someone of a different ethnicity as expressed by a Cambodian lady in her fifties. However, the problem of limited relations seems to run deeper and very much pervades the lived culture of the neighborhood. As one young African-American man replied when he was asked the question of whether it is difficult to get to know neighbors in the area said,

"It can be. Sometimes they are really stiff about exactly who they are going to socialize with. I notice there are a lot times when I try to socialize with people, their attitude is 'You are policeman? Are you a policeman?' is kind of like, whoa, I am just some guy who lives in the neighborhood….As far as meeting people around here, it is kind of normal in a way that, you know, certain people like to stick to just their own people and the ghettos are kind of like that coz this part of town is rather ghetto, so the ghetto that is just the way it goes, people just stick to their own….racial and people they are familiar with…they are not so much into meeting new people."

According to the Mexican youth and Cambodian lady I interviewed, the neighbors they talk to, recreate with and are friends with are Latinos and Cambodians respectively. In fact, the interviews suggest that the different ethnicities have different routine spaces in the neighborhood and thus there is a general lack of intercultural negotiations even though they live in close proximity. A response by a young African-American lady to the question of whether it is difficult to get to know your neighbors surmises the lived space of the neighborhood well,

"Not really, everyone speaks to each other… you know I have been living here for over many years now, so everyone knows each other, you know, when all is said and done, they stay put with their kind and they stick with their kind."

Mid-Wilshire: Mixed income and Porous

Mid-Wilshire is a large area between Downtown Los Angeles and the well-heeled Westside neighborhoods including West Hollywood, Beverly Hills, Brentwood and Santa Monica. The study area is a small slice of Mid-Wilshire, a 2-mile long and 1.5-mile wide area between Vermont Avenue and Arden Boulevard on the East-West axis and Melrose Avenue and 6th Street on the North-South direction. It is located closer to Downtown and falls within two adjoining zipcodes. The households represented in the study area varies quickly from households with median income of about $21,500 near Downtown LA to households with $1 million dollars towards the west (2000 US Census). This income spread is reflected in the types of housing and living conditions in the study area, ranging from subdivided dense multi-family housing (most likely renter-occupied) to medium-rise condominiums mixed with single-story Californian bungalows, and eventually to large stately homes of Victorian and Spanish architecture lined with mature trees.

Taken as a whole, the study area has an even mix of White Anglos, Latinos (from Mexico and Central America) and Asians (mostly Koreans). However, they are not evenly spread. White Anglos living in the area are concentrated in the western part where single-family houses are located and their presence as an ethnic group in the neighborhood has been longer than the Latinos and Asians who make up the marjority of the 60 percent of foreign-born in the area. According to the librarian who has worked in the neighborhood for a decade, many of the single-family homes were replaced by

condominiums in the late 1990s during the housing market boom in Los Angeles and that has resulted in the neighborhood becoming more affordable, dense and ethnically diverse. These physical and demographic shifts have driven the residents of the single-family homes to become very involved in homeowners' or neighborhood association in preserving and protecting the *lived* spaces of the neighborhood from the onslaught of mid-rise condominiums. In fact at the nearby Larchmont Village (a typical main street America), serious efforts are taken by the business association to maintain its quaintness and to minimize chain retail outlets from setting up shops. Within the study boundaries of this neighborhood, including the Larchmont business association, the *perceived* space of the neighborhood is divided into multiple neighborhood associations with distinctive boundaries in addition to parts of Koreatown and Little Bangladesh.

From the interviews with Koreans, White Anglos and Latinos living, working or visiting the area, the inter-ethnic relations seem to be polite and amongst those interviewed, there are no memorable experiences of racism. However, one White lady who has worked in the neighborhood for 16 years said the following when I asked if race or ethnicity an issue in this neighborhood,

> *"I think that there is very very few African American people here…In Larchmont recently in one of the homes, there was a home burglary. Actually I don't think they got in but the cameras captured the individuals. The two individuals were African American men in their twenties and then there was some crime on the Boulevard recently and there was photos of an African American man….and so I say amongst owners of businesses on the Boulevard, if they see an African American man in their twenties, they are likely to look him over very carefully and be very suspicious because of recent crimes and because of general society's stereotypes about African American men in their twenties……there is the most amount of tension (in this neighborhood)… The diversification of this area is African-American challenged."*

While there does not seem to have any overt form of inter-ethnic racism, there is also very few hints of intercultural exchange through conversations. The Mexican lady and Korean ladies I interviewed, three of whom are immigrants living in the United States for at least 15 years repeatedly mentioned throughout the interviews that their command of English is limited and it is much easier to limit their contact to "hi-bye" in the neighborhood with people of different ethnicity. However, the interviews also suggest that minimal contact and exchange is established between neighbors of even the same ethnic groups within their apartment block. This pattern of interaction seems to be slightly different from the experience of neighborly relations according to a White young nanny who has worked and lived in the neighborhood for 1.5 years where White families in large single-family houses are located. She replies,

"People know their next-door neighbors. They kind of like a watch-out community, you know your neighbors…I know some of them, like next door and across the street and within the first couple of houses of mine."

Preliminary findings from this neighborhood shows that the inter-ethnic relations are not tense like in Central Long Beach but generally contact is passive between ethnicities represented in the area. In fact the interviews suggest very much like Central Long Beach that the different ethnicities have different perceived and lived geographies. The White Anglos interviewed frequent Larchmont Boulevard as their social space, the Koreans interviewed did not even mention Larchmont but only Koreatown, while the Latina interviewed mentioned neither places, does not think she lives in the neighborhood (even though she lives only about 1 mile away) but uses the park and the library in the study area frequently.

San Marino: Affluent and Exclusive enclave

The City of San Marino is a small affluent enclave of over three thousand households that prides itself in its high education standards, property values and the distinction it makes between residents and non-residents. Made up of large single-family homes and luxurious mansions, its median household income is about $120,000 in 2000 (three times higher than LA county). San Marino is located about 12 miles east from Downtown Los Angeles and shares its borders on the east and south with large suburban Chinese enclaves of San Gabriel and Alhambra. Since the 1980s, San Marino's population is slowly shifting to a majority Chinese population from Taiwan and Hong Kong and dipped below 50 percent in 2000. A concentration of Chinese families is located along its southeastern corner of San Marino near the elementary school. There is also an increase in Latino families in the neighborhood and currently the proportion is about 5 percent.

This demographic shift over the years has created an undercurrent of angst amongst the White Anglos, especially the elderly who see the neighborhood becoming more diverse in age and ethnicity and finding a shrinking common social space, both in their lived and perceived spaces. Anecdotal evidence has revealed that differing attitudes over property maintenance, different aesthetic preferences e.g. for trees and culture of education have fueled the undercurrent of passive hostility between the two major ethnic groups. A White Anglo male who has lived in San Marino for thirty years said the following when asked if he knew of any expressions of hostility or friction between the White Anglos and the Chinese,

"It is hard to say, I mean… Not that I have heard… I mean I have heard people saying, the older San Marinos usually isn't quite as happy about that. I am not sure…I think is because…I don't know…I mean the older San Marino residents grew up when it was primarily white. They do see the change. I have heard that people have made racist comments about it but not that I have heard from anybody. But friends would say things like that and I don't know how true that is

or widespread it was but I wouldn't doubt it. But I really don't know about that. If it is widespread I would have heard about it….I mean if people are saying anything, they are saying under their breath."

From the perspective of the Chinese resident who has lived there for fifteen years and has witnessed some of the tensions in the neighborhood between the Whites and Asians,

> *"When I came here I was disgusted….Some of the Chinese by the time I came here in the late 80s and early 90s, they have been here for twenty years. But they were not treated equally… so the Chinese move in and Taiwanese move in to the San Marino area and then what happens is that because of that there is a white exodus like around middle school. A lot of white would go to private schools for two reasons. Number one: Because there are too many Asians. Socially they don't want their kids to mix with Asians and then number two is because the schools with so many Asians, it is too competitive."*

From the interviews with White respondents, they were very careful in their response to the questions of inter-ethnic hostility and friction, possibly responding to my Asian ethnicity and hence not wanting to sound myopic or racist. The White Anglo respondents all noted that they know of Chinese neighbors living across the street or a few doors away but none of them have any personal contact with these new neighbors, only knowing their ethnicity and their profession. During the interviews, it was also conveyed that the Chinese are often not seen around and about their house and tend to keep to themselves. The young Anglo I interviewed shares with me the reasons for a lack of contact,

> *"It was harder to maintain friendships for Chinese who have recently come over here that were my age where they have been living in China for 12 or 13 years….. Racism had played absolutely no part as least when I was growing up and from what I saw. The only thing was there was a big cultural difference. It was harder for people to relate to each other and find that common ground. But I mean like nobody went out of their way to be openly racist to other people. There may be cases of that coz' I am sure that creeps into any community but I would say with a lot of parents that wasn't an issue."*

Unlike Central Long Beach where ethnic differences are openly expressed, the tension between the two major ethnic groups in San Marino seems covert and kept under control. Polite face-to-face relations are maintained as suggested by the respondents' mention of their contact experiences with Chinese. From the interviews, it seems that while the socio-spatial worlds converge in common concerns of property values and education, their ways on how these concerns should be addressed appear to diverge. Thus beneath the veneer of polite acknowledgement, lies two disparate social

worlds or what Cantle (2005) calls "parallel lives." Although there are events like the Mid-Autumn Harvest Festival gala dinner that the Chinese Club of San Marino organizes yearly where Chinese members will invite their Caucasian business or social circle to attend, these intercultural moments according to the interviewees are rare and brief. They do not substantively engage or challenge the daily social tensions that exist. For families with children, the intercultural engagement is possibly more frequent and substantive as the common ground of children's education, welfare and school activities act as a wider bridge and incentive to connect and reconnect across cultural boundaries.

CONCEIVED SPACES OF CIVIC ENGAGEMENT: NOTES FROM THE FIELD

Living with diversity can reconfigure the way we perceive and share our neighborhood spaces. Feelings of fear and anxiety are invoked in the presence of a stranger foreigner who displays habits, behaviors that are culturally different according to Kristeva (1991) and Sandercock (2003). A recent meta-analysis by intergroup contact scholars Pettigrew and Tropp (2005: 767) found that "studies have shown repeatedly that contact can reduce feelings of threat and anxiety about future cross-group interactions. Thus, more positive contact outcomes can be achieved to the extent that anxiety is reduced." They went on to discuss how Allport's criteria of equal status and pursuit of common goals as conditions for productive contact are in fact not necessary to produce positive outcomes as previously assumed. However, repeated contact in unproductive circumstances can also result in greater negative friction. As Amin (2002: 969) reminds, "contact is a necessary but not sufficient condition for multicultural understanding" and that "habitual contact in itself, is no guarantor of cultural exchange." In fact, there is the possibility that group animosities and identities can become entrenched "through repetitions of gender, class, race, and ethnic practices."

The discussion of the intercultural climate in the three Los Angeles's neighborhoods in the previous section illustrates that the atmosphere of threat and anxiety between ethnicities living in proximity to each other varies and that habitual contact has its limit in reducing threat and anxiety. In Central Long Beach neighborhood, feelings of threat of territorial loss, of anxiety over safety and over language barriers have resulted in overt expressions of conflict between ethnic groups. In Mid-Wilshire, the foreign presence of African-Americans in a predominantly White part of town has resurfaced historical anxieties. Further, the rapid cultural changes that accompanied demographic change have made the neighborhood associations in Mid-Wilshire actively protectionist in maintaining the symbolic lived space of the neighborhood. In San Marino, the feelings of passive threat and anxiety seem to pervade the relationship between the White Anglos and Asians as the two groups diverge on their values over common concerns of education and property.

The effect of this sense of fear and anxiety may explain the findings by Robert Putnam (2007) that ethnic diversity reduces trust, social capital and solidarity in American neighborhoods and "people living in ethnically diverse settings appear to 'hunker down'- that is pull in like a turtle" (Putnam 2007: 149). What my fieldwork

interviews seem to suggest is that repeated "hi-bye" cursory social contact is inadequate in actively removing prejudices and bridging cultural divides. In fact as shown in the example of Central Long Beach, these insidious feelings of threat and anxiety which in turn reinforce prejudices between different ethnic groups through isolation has continued to exist and relations as a result are fragile.

These patterns of relations and behavior to diversity signal the need to understand the role and opportunities present (or lack thereof) in and through conceived civic spaces in multi-ethnic neighborhoods for everyday intercultural negotiations that can help in reducing feelings of threat and anxiety between people of different ethnicities (Sennett 1970, 1974). Commenting on public spaces, Amin (2002: 967) writes,

> "Diversity is thought to be negotiated in the city's public spaces. The depressing reality, however, is that in contemporary life, urban public spaces are often territorialized by particular groups (and therefore steeped in surveillance) or they are spaces of transit with very little contact between strangers. The city's public spaces are not natural servants of multicultural engagement…In the hands of urban planners and designers, the public domain is all too easily reduced to improvements to public spaces, with modest achievements in race and ethnic relations."

Amin's words carry a bold honesty about the current nature of many public spaces today. His words are especially relevant in an increasingly fragmented, privatized and isolated society that automobile dependent Los Angeles is an example par excellence. As issues of belonging, identity formation and maintenance of social well-being are increasingly tied to local places as a result of globalization (Gupta and Ferguson (1997), spaces of "local liveability" (to use Amin's words) including the role played by civic spaces crafted by the city for social learning, recreation and gathering are critical to the undertaking of intercultural negotiations.

Through my fieldwork, this point is further emphasized by evidence that although the neighborhoods are neither gated per se in the physical sense nor overtly exclusionary based on interviews, observations and census research, each neighborhood is divided by lines of multiple lines of ethnicity, income/class and/or housing density. Further, the interviews also indicated that there is an infrequent crossing of paths with regards to routine spaces between the different ethnicities, especially in Central Long Beach and Mid-Wilshire. In other words, these neighborhoods when given a closer look are subdivided socio-spatially and there is certainly an element of territoriality (Altman and Chemers (1980) in the three neighborhoods and this suggest a need to reconsider the salience of creating physical "common grounds" in multi-ethnic neighborhoods!

In this paper, I will discuss the existing patterns of interaction and the potentialities of two conceived civic spaces in each neighborhood, i.e. neighborhood park and library based on preliminary interviews and participant observation.

Neighborhood Parks

The parks in the three neighborhoods conceived as the only few public spaces that are open, free and accessible to all ethnicities. The parks are used by all the major ethnic groups represented in the neighborhood throughout the day and in the parks (Douglas MacArthur Park in Central Long Beach, Robert Burns Park in Mid-Wilshire and Lacy Park in San Marino) are regarded by most as a resource in an open space scarce Los Angeles, albeit to different degrees and for different reasons. Safety was often cited as a key issue in the low and middle-income neighborhoods in deciding whether or not they would use the park, while safety did not come up as a concern from San Marino residents. The preliminary patterns seem to indicate that neighborhood parks are mostly used by youths and families with young children. Of the different types of spaces in the parks, playgrounds seem to be of greatest potential as opportunity spaces for intercultural negotiations, especially if it is read as a safe space for children. Children through their play with each other become icebreakers for adults. However, the barriers to social interaction between adults beyond visual acknowledgement are recognizably high. Further research is required to establish why.

Douglas MacArthur Park in Central Long Beach (1.5 hectares), according to a long-term Cambodian resident community organizer is regarded as a "very, very important because this neighborhood is very crowded." Although used by the major groups, activities in the park appears to be ethnically-oriented, for example, Latino youths play soccer in the fields, African-American youths play basketball at the courts, Cambodian youths are not seen in the park at all except for the Cambodian children in the children's playground. From the interviews conducted with Cambodians, the park is perceived as a space that is not safe, given the history of gang violence targeted at Asians. This fact is reinforced recently in January 2011 when a police officer was shot by two African-American gang members while patrolling in his car along the periphery of the park. This recent incident has stopped an African American young lady I interviewed from bringing her children to the park, which used to be a place of regular recreation for her children. In general, there are hardly any signs of social interaction between groups in the park, except for an occasional sighting of young children of different ethnicities playing with each other, while their parents watch on without interacting with each other. Overall the nature of social contact at MacArthur Park is largely visual recognition. I think this is a result of the lack of a sense of safety as well as language barrier faced by residents who live in the area.

In comparison, *Robert Burns Park* (1 hectare) a small but well-maintained park in Mid-Wilshire has more signs of intercultural contact and opportunities. The well-designed playground and park is lauded for its safety and attracts parents from other neighborhoods to drive from another part of town to use this space. Children of different ethnicities play with each other freely and are seen frequently sharing food and toys with newfound friends. Some parents would even allow other kids to join them as they play with their own. Children would apparently ask their parents to bring them to this park for recreation so that they could play with other children. However, during my visits to the park, I do not see adults chatting with each other even though their kids

might be playing together. This would be the case even though this park attracts a lot of long-term regulars who recognize each other visually.

Lacy Park in San Marino (13 hectares) is a symbolic space of belonging for the local residents who are proud of it but do not use the park. During the weekends, non-residents have to pay $4 USD to gain entry as well as during special events e.g. the Independence day fireworks held at the park, differentiating who is a resident and who is not. The park's tennis courts are cited by the five resident respondents as a feature that stood out about the park. Apart from the playground, where one sees people of different ethnicities mixing and sharing resources, the pattern of use in the other areas of the large park is usually with friends or individually. The large size of this park allows for visitors to have private and personal recreation and as such discourages most forms of social contact with strangers, even though it feels safe to do so.

Neighborhood Libraries

Apart from its core mission of education and learning, libraries in all three locations function as the place of community organizing and meetings. Neighborhood clubs and city services (e.g. census, community policing workshops) hold their meetings and consultation there. It is also a space where programs, whether after-school homework help (Central Long Beach) or crafts program for young kids (Mid-Wilshire) or brain aerobics for the elderly (San Marino) are organized and run for the public. The three libraries are also valued as a technology center for free services of internet access. During my visits to these libraries, different ethnicities are represented in the library space. Its quiet environment, neutrality, safety and emphasis on learning make libraries in these urban neighborhoods possess many productive qualities that as civic spaces of inter(active) opportunities between ethnicities, although the program of engagement would need to be made intentional (Amin 2002, Chan 2011).

Neutrality: This is a value that stands out as particularly critical by the neighborhood in Central Long Beach that faces the most overt form of ethnic tension. According to the community organizer who has been a longtime resident of the neighborhood when asked how important is the library to this multi-ethnic neighborhood, he replied that the library is a "neutral place" not belonging to any group and a fully public space where people have fair access to use it for the amount of time it is open, whether poor or rich, there is no discrimination. The neutrality of the library is a value recognized by the community as well at Central Long Beach as evident that only once since the opening at its current location in 2007 according to the librarian was it the target of gang territory marking graffiti. The value of neutrality is a quality that Bollens (2006) who writes on divided cities and Wood and Landry (2008) have highlighted as critical for good intercultural spaces.

Safety: The neighborhood libraries in Central Long Beach, Mid-Wilshire and San Marino are valued for their safety. In Central Long Beach due to the tight living conditions for most, parents often bring their children to the library after school as a place to rest and recreate. This library is particularly known for its visitors who would stay from 3pm (after school hours) to its closing time at 7pm because of the lack of

space at home and access to help with homework according to the librarian who I interviewed. In Mid-Wilshire, according to the librarian, the library is widely interpreted by the community as a safe place because of the unwritten rule that the library is neutral a safe place where one should leave their disagreements outside. The librarian even illustrated that on one occasion, a Hispanic man came running into the library to ask the library to call the police as he felt that his life was under threat. In San Marino, the library is regarded by residents as a safe place as many would leave their children there after school and pick their children up when the library closes at 9pm.

Learning: Education and learning is the core mission of libraries. All three libraries have collections in the major languages spoken in the neighborhood. The library in Central Long Beach is well-known for its largest collection of Khmer books in the United States alongside Spanish and English books. Homework helpers and staff speak Spanish, Tagalog, Khmer and English. In San Marino, the library has a good selection of Chinese, Spanish and English books, while in Mid-Wilshire, the library has collections in Korean, Spanish and English. These libraries also celebrate major ethnic festivals by putting up displays and information about them such as Martin Luther King Day, Cinco de Mayo, Chinese New Year as well as cultural arts and crafts program. Added together, libraries with their emphasis on community and learning about cultures, technology and more, provide a natural starting space in and through which to establish engagement opportunities between people of different ethnicities.

GOING FORWARD: EMERGING THEMES

Multi-ethnic neighborhoods are microcosms of the socio-spatial dynamics of global ethnoscapes making. Based on preliminary fieldwork in the three neighborhoods of Los Angeles–Central Long Beach, Mid-Wilshire and San Marino, the neighborly relations between people, especially those of different ethnicities seem to be limited to casual "hi-bye" contact. In the perceived and lived spaces of the two neighborhoods (low-income Central Long Beach and high-income San Marino), there are signs of undercurrents of discomfort, threat and anxiety between different ethnicities. The level of friction seems to be lower in the mixed-income neighborhood of Mid-Wilshire, where the socio-spatial worlds of residents from different ethnicities seem to not overlap as much on an everyday level or with regards to core cultural values. From a broad overview, the empirical evidence thus far suggests that issues of territoriality, belonging and cultural common grounds are key themes that pertain to the perceived and lived spaces of multi-ethnic neighborhoods. These issues may lie at the tipping point between a nonchalant climate and a vibrant intercultural climate of dialogue, exchange or relationship building within neighborhoods.

With regards to the opportunities in and through the "conceived" civic spaces for intercultural contact and exchange, the environment of parks is less conducive interaction. Contact is limited to visual acknowledgement and the element of ambiguity that open park spaces have, can engender a sense of insecurity and anxiety that may act against opening up to strangers. However when users feel safe and in control, mixing,

contact and the willingness to be more open to others becomes possible as seen in the example of Robert Burns Park at Mid-Wilshire. In comparison, neighborhood libraries have a lot more qualities that make them favorable places for active intercultural engagement. They are safe, neutral and emphasize learning, and imbued with an unspoken central cultural value of sharing space and common resources. The neighborhood library is also recognized as a space that belongs to the community and it is a civic space that is open and accessed by different ethnicities in all three neighborhoods. However at status quo, the library is a space of passive learning and individual enrichment and does not necessary result or encourage in substantive contact and interaction.

Given that intercultural dialogues and exchange require an individual or group to cross boundaries and be vulnerable in doing so, the qualities of safety and neutrality are important for that purpose. In addition, crossing boundaries require resources and help. In this regard, good intercultural spaces need to be crafted with conditions that trigger and encourage dialogue that leads to mutual understanding. According to Amin's (2002: 970), transformational intercultural spaces should offer opportunities to individuals "to break out of fixed relations and fixed notions, and through this, to learn to become different through new patterns of social interaction." This act of "cultural transgression" or "displacement" needs to be intentionally and explicitly worked into the programming, for example through multiethnic common ventures such as community gardens, community centers, and neighborhood-watch schemes. The qualities of good intercultural spaces need to exhibit simultaneous values of neutrality and intentionality (Chan 2011).

A lot more grounds remain to be explored. This paper has been helpful in clarifying some thoughts based on preliminary data and highlighting the areas that require deeper research thought. Going forward, this research will continue to study the kinds of social contact between different ethnicities taking place in the civic spaces of multi-ethnic neighborhoods and the different forms of intercultural negotiations that are possible in and through these spaces. In addition to conceived civic spaces such as parks and libraries, this research plans to study what other types of routine neighborhood spaces are conducive to intercultural negotiations that can build mutual understanding and bridge divides. From these patterns of interaction and contact opportunities, this research ultimately hopes to identify the socio-spatial arrangements that can create attractive "common grounds" where productive outcomes of relationship-building between neighbors of different ethnicities are possible.

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