

The Making of “Super Diverse” Communities in Struggle? Contesting the *Class-Racism Nexus* in the Neoliberal City

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Berlin is, similar to many global cities, a site of multiple crises and struggles. Since the global financial crisis, speculative and footloose money-capital is looking for investment, specifically in the housing sector (Harvey 2010, 2012; Sassen 2014).

On the basis of our empirical analysis of two Berlin case studies, our paper wants to review the arguments made by Margit Mayer (2013) and Steven Vertovec (2012) on super-diverse cities and new alliances of struggle. Mayer highlights new forms of coalition building that are “bridging the gap between the ‘materially dispossessed’ and the ‘culturally disenfranchised’” with a view on Kotti & Co, among others. As members and organizers within this movement, we want to add an internal reflexive perspective on the specific logics, genealogies and cultures of resistance of these struggles. The paper will be based on militant research inside the field, narrative open-ended interviews, group-discussions, participant observation and discourse analysis from *communities in struggle*, as we work towards an understanding of the conditions and obstacles of building new alliances in super-diverse neoliberal cities.

The *first* case study that we want to discuss here emerged as a struggle in 2011 in a neighborhood of Berlin-Kreuzberg, around the metro-station Kottbusser Tor, called the “Kotti”. Living in this neighborhood are many poor, working class and unemployed people. The district is also shaped by several histories of migration, mainly from Turkey from the 1960s onwards. This super-diverse neighborhood is currently under the pressure of gentrification. More threatening to the neighborhood of the “Kotti” is the development of the rising rent-rate in social housing in Berlin. The group holds a square occupied since 2012 as an articulation of protest against the rising rents. In our *second* case study, we are unfolding the spatial and social politics, scopes and “cultures of resistance” of the group “Stop Evictions Berlin”. The group has been fighting since 2012 against evictions in the city and they are organized within the European Action Coalition, “Resisting Evictions Across Europe”. The Berlin-wide action and organizational group emerged in 2012 out of an informal neighborhood group, supporting one of the victims of evictions in Berlin, the German-Turkish Gülbol family, who decided to protest against the threat of being evicted from their home of 26 years by the new home owner.

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Our *research hypothesis* is that alliances and subjectivities act as active political agents in contention with macro-trends in the neoliberal diversified city. We will make our argument by analyzing, from a micro-analytical perspective, the data collected during the fieldwork and organizing process in locations in Berlin where there was a place-specific political need and occasion to overcome the limits of traditional urban political mobilizations. We will continue testing the argument by reconstructing contradictory developments within these new alliances. Through this reconstruction, we will assess the ways in which a “super-diversification” of social and political re-compositions within cities can produce new struggles, subjectivities, imaginations of solidarity and practices of commonalities, when and if new alliances, cultural modes of action, social relationships and political scopes are built. Furthermore, we will address how these social and political re-compositions concomitantly underlie a diversification of threats through transnational ties, global political developments, governance discourses, power-regimes and policies on the national and transnational scale.

First, we want to argue that these new struggles are constituted not only in terms of diversity, but in the light of overlapping histories of migration, labor and housing struggles, racism and social exclusion. We further discuss why these struggles can be framed as “new” both in relation to former urban conflict struggles for subcultural spaces as well as through migrant housing struggles in the 1980s in Berlin. The protagonists of these two struggles are presenting themselves as a community of diversity that rejects ethnicizing categories and political discourses of current governmental integration politics. They react and relate to these histories and are successful in creating new subjectivities in struggle, precisely because they constitute themselves as subjects of those histories of struggle and discrimination, while generating new political moments to overcome social and political borders inside the city.

Second, we build our theoretical concept of the class-racism-nexus through the production of an analytical context, which looks to examine these struggles and the resistance itself, along two trajectories of transformation: gentrification on the one side and an anti-migrant-neoracist discourse on the other. We will argue and demonstrate how these new struggles manage to bridge class-racist urban fragmentations and ideological right wing propositions that govern the urban and financial crisis. We are unfolding the theoretical nexus of class and racism with reference to John A. Powell who describes the, “influence and the interrelationship of race and class” (Powell 2007: 356). Additionally, through Powell we understand race and class not as categories but want to look at these as complex and intertwined power relations in specific historical settings. We use the term racism rather than race when speaking of these power relations.

We will unfold how this complex struggle for alliance building between urban outcasts (Wacquant 2008), members of a creative class (Florida 2002 as discussed in Novy, Colomb 2013), and academics and activists (those categories not to be understood as each exclusive, but overlapping social relationships) have established *strong ties of identification* with a *place* and built *trust* in one another. We further want to lay out how these actors are working to expand *weak ties* in order to create a “culture of resistance” (Nichols 2008: 847) and how new lines of separation such as nationality, religion or gender affect these alliances. Both case studies are symptomatic of the housing crises in Berlin. We will additionally contrast the cases along the question of what role space plays in successfully building strong and weak ties.

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