"The allure of diversity, creativity and space: Gentrification and multiculture in London and Berlin"

Sebastian Juhnke*

(*) Sebastian Juhnke, University of Manchester,
sebastian.juhnke@postgrad.manchester.ac.uk

1. Introduction

Dalston in London and Reuterkiez in Berlin are two socially mixed, ethnically diverse and gentrifying neighbourhoods that are argued to play an iconic role for creative and leisure time economies. They are home to an increasing number of artists' studios, galleries, co-working spaces, cafés and nightclubs, attracting visitors and would-be residents from beyond the boundaries of the city. Similarly, these places have come to represent certain forms of diversity and multiculture in national media and politics, illustrating for instance the commodification of difference through London's Olympic bid or so-called 'ethnic' restaurants and markets. Paradoxically, they are also seen to exemplify the alleged failure of multiculturalism, apparently evident in 'parallel societies', delinquent youth and, for example, the disintegration of the German educational system.

This paper builds on doctoral research which took place across these two neighbourhoods and involved in-depth interviews with predominantly white and middle class creative professionals. After briefly looking at how certain forms of difference are valued and how this relates to the respondent's self-understanding, this paper will discuss how a desire for diversity shapes everyday interactions, or rather the understanding of their absence. It will be argued that the allure of diversity contributes to certain expectations towards interactions with long-term residents and ethnic minority communities. As respondents recognise that there is only little interaction, their explanations for this lack of contact include stereotypical representations of immigrants as self-segregated and hostile.

2. Framework

A middle-class interest in difference and diversity is most prominently discussed in the gentrification literature. Here, the deployment of social and cultural capital is at the bottom of frequently contradictory and selective attitudes towards diversity in gentrifying neighbourhoods (Bridge, 2006; Butler and Robson, 2001; Benson and

Jackson, 2013). It is argued that investments in place, understood according to the concept of place-making as shaping subjectivities, equal "self-investments through which they generate a particular habitus that means that they can live in [the neighbourhood]. This habitus […] forms the basis of intra-class distinction" (Benson and Jackson, 2013: 14). A need for distinction has indeed been identified as key motivator for valuing diversity. For other parts of Hackney, May (1996) argues that the way that white gentrifiers make sense of place has to be understood in relation to the construction of race and national identity in a globalized world. With reference to Bourdieu (1984) he argues that an "interest in difference and otherness can also be understood as describing a project of cultural capital through which members of the middle class seek to display their liberal credentials and thus secure their class position" (May, 1996: 196). In this case, the contemporary inner city would be little more than a colourful backdrop against which a new urban lifestyle is played out. May warns that within the "politics of aestheticisation, (…) a celebration of difference can all too easily become simply a search for the 'exotic' and the different" (May, 1996: 205). In North London, Butler (2003) finds middle class gentrifiers that are attracted by an aura of inclusivity which distinguishes the area from more expensive and socially exclusive parts of London. However, he identifies a contradiction between the celebration of diversity and cohesion on the one hand, and living a life separated from the local 'community' on the other hand; for instance when respondents do not send their children to local schools. Similar findings concerning the exclusivity of middle-class social networks in mixed neighbourhoods have been made by Butler and Robson (2001) and Blokland and van Eijk (2010), among others.

Why can such contradictions be problematic? Zukin (2011) argues that the consumer tastes and lifestyles of the middle class are reflected in the changing meaning of authenticity, i.e. they are detached from historical meanings of space. Zukin argues that this aesthetic detachment in combination with the power of economic capital, changes neighbourhoods to the disadvantage of long term residents. "Overall the tastes of new, mobile, upper-income and highly educated residents – including editors, writers, and

bloggers – create a cultural climate where older, poorer residents feel unwelcome, if not downright threatened" (Zukin 2011: 229). Zukin's 'highly educated residents' are cultural mediators, a group frequently located at the beginning of gentrification processes. Similar to artists and the 'creative' professionals of this study, they take an active role in the representation of diverse neighbourhoods as desirable. Such groups, the creative class, are key to processes of urban renewal (Florida 2003, Peck 2005). It is for this particularity that they have been chosen for an investigation into the allure of diversity.

In the present case of Dalston and Reuterkiez, gentrification processes have direct consequences for the long-term residents of these 'ethnic' neighbourhoods. The 'ethnic' character or identity of a neighbourhood – either tied to a certain group or consisting of notions of ethnic diversity and multiculturalism – in combination with other factors such as quality and price of housing stock can be attractive to gentrifiers. When the identity of such super-diverse neighbourhoods is supported through regeneration programmes and city marketing, this not only aims at future residents, i.e. gentrifiers, but also at visitors and to sharpen the city's profile in a competition of Global Cities. Shaw et al. (2004) likewise argue that the success of 'ethnoscapes' like East London's Brick Lane may create serious difficulties for the local communities. Regarding the aestheticisation and promotion of inner-city streets as 'exotic landscapes of consumption' they point at the role of post-imperial sentiment for the racialised construction of multicultural consumerism. This is particularly important for my comparative approach between countries with different colonial and immigration histories. However, in the following the focus will be on the nexus of diversity and 'creativity'.

The commodification of ethnic diversity for the promotion of neighbourhoods stands in tradition with similar processes that evolved around art (Pratt, 2009; Harris, 2012). Hackworth and Rekers (2005) argue that the "relationship between ethnic packaging and gentrification is sometimes ambiguous, but it is increasingly the case that it (ethnic packaging) has the potential to function in a way that art has functioned in the past for

gentrifying communities — as a way to anchor bohemian culture for an outside community looking for something unlike the suburbs" (Hackworth and Rekers, 2005: 232). A few years on, the emphasis on art has shifted towards the use of 'creativity'. In this context, ethnic neighbourhoods get promoted as places of 'creativity' – because they offer difference and diversity to a degree that is desired by members of the middle class that work in ‚creative' professions (see above). This paper uses the lens of everyday multiculturalism to explore how creativity and ethnic diversity interact in the two field sites.

The everyday multiculturalism perspective focuses on an array of sites where difference meets: neighbourhoods, street markets, shopping streets, bodybuilding gymnasiums and schools, among others (see Wise and Velayutham 2009a). Exploring the accounts of middle class creatives regarding their everyday encounters with difference in multicultural neighbourhoods can also offer an important contribution to the everyday multiculturalism body of research which overwhelmingly focuses on contacts between different ethnic minority groups (for instance Baumann 1996, Clayton 2012, Semi et al. 2009, Sinha 2008, Wise 2009). When ethnic majority, i.e. white perspectives are taken into the picture, these accounts frequently stem from working class residents that comment on the change of their neighbourhoods through processes of migration (for instance Clayton 2008, Duruz 2009, Hudson et al. 2009, Nayak 2008). Research that offers insights into the encounters or desires of the white middle class is usually situated in the contexts of gentrification research (for instance Butler and Robson 2001, Butler 2003, May 1996; see above) or schooling (for instance Bridge 2006, Neil and Vincent 2013, Reay et al. 2007). It is the aim of this study to bring together research on gentrification, the middle class and 'creative' forms of work with the everyday multiculturalism perspective.

The doctoral research project that this paper is based on explores how 'creative' professionals in Hackney and Neukölln experience multiculturalism and living with difference, how this informs their understanding of multiculturalism, and how this is reflected in their creative work. When exploring these accounts it is crucial to bear in

mind that these are representations of living with difference, i.e. the accounts given have to be understood in the light of the respondent's position as middle class 'creatives' who habitually enjoy living in a diverse neighbourhood. Different to the accounts of the white working class presented in the aforementioned work, important differences are the class position of creatives (cultural capital, desire for diversity, similarity to researcher and resulting interview effects) and the fact that they have chosen to move into a diverse neighbourhood (opposed to white working class residents who experience a change of their neighbourhood because of incoming migration).

Wise and Velayutham argue that the encounters of everyday multiculturalism "occur in ordinary spaces and situations in the ebb and flow of daily life" (2009b: 2). Even though the streets, shops, restaurants, markets and other public and parochial realms (Wessensdorf 2014) are ordinary spaces for respondents working and/or living in them, these also are contested places (gentrification), much talked about, symbolic places (popularity, hipness), places of cultural production ('creatives') and destinations (for tourists and city-dwellers). They are represented in discourses on difference and therefore far from being as ordinary as many other diverse neighbourhoods or suburbs[1]. Nevertheless, contact in such multi-ethnic spaces is frequently restricted to the commercial sphere (Radice 2009). Before looking at the configuration of everyday multiculturalism as manifest (or absent) in the encounters between 'creatives' and 'others' that embody diversity, the following section will take a closer look at the two field sites.

3. Setting the scene

Dalston occupies less than a square mile of the London Borough of Hackney, prominently placed in the East End of London. The nexus of ethnic, cultural and social diversity, and processes of gentrification can most prominently be observed around

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[1] Both Dalston and Reuterkiez are mentioned in travel guides, a number of blogs focus on them, and they are the backdrop for music videos, among other things.

Kingsland Road, the local high street. It constitutes a north-south axis connecting Dalston to the already gentrified areas of Stoke Newington in the North and Hoxton and Shoreditch in the South. The process of gentrification is reflected in shops and businesses, as well. One the one hand, Kingsland Road and it's side streets offer a selection of primarily Turkish, Kurdish and Afro-Caribbean restaurants and fast food outlets, supermarkets, charity shops, pawn brokers, betting shops, off-licenses, halal butchers, phone shops, clothes stores and pubs. On the other hand, there are an increasing number of more upmarket restaurants, cafés and bars, organic food stores, vintage boutiques, expensive fashion showrooms, art galleries and nightclubs. Dalston furthermore is home to a large number of artists and creative professionals that cluster in co-working spaces and several former large warehouse buildings that have been divided into studios.

A similar streetscape can be observed in Neukölln's Reuterkiez, a Berlin neighbourhood of similar size. Traditionally a working class and immigrant neighbourhood, its high street Kottbusser Damm features a large variety of institutions and shops, from language schools, a public bath and an art house cinema to supermarkets and discount shops, from telephone, internet and betting shops to Italian, Japanese and predominantly Turkish restaurants and kebab shops. The side streets extending into Reuterkiez feature an even bigger variety of businesses old and new, the latest additions being art galleries, record stores, artisan bakeries and co-working spaces, among others. This mix contributes to the neighbourhood's increasing popularity. The Guardian half-ironically praises Kreuzkölln's comparatively affordable and ""just-gritty enough" apartment blocks, (...) artfully scruffy cafés and bars, and hordes of hipsters" (Dyckhoff 2011).

Although the demographics are distinctively different in both areas - their ethnic composition varies due to Britain's and Germany's specific immigration histories -, similar developments can be observed. Among the populations of 15,000-19,000 there is a large share of non-white respectively migrant residents. However, over the course of the last five to ten years the percentage of white middle class residents increased, which is also reflected in the fact that both areas feature an above-average share of academic

qualifications. Many of those who moved to Hackney and Neukölln over the last couple of years are young adults working in the creative industries.

But who are these 'creatives', generally speaking? A closer look at a recent exhibition in Hackney helps to illustrate the social group this research is concerned with. The exhibition 'Dalston Screentests', shown at Dalston Superstore in spring 2014, displays a collection of "Dalston's most iconic creatives". Their job titles are, among others, party host, artist, broadcaster, event organizer, advertising creative and DJ. The eight portraits of white, although not necessarily British, women and men are lined up at one wall of the café, bar and party venue that is at the heart of Dalston's creative and gay community. The exhibition's description references screen tests created by Andy Warhol in his Factory between 1964 and 1966. This "cultural fabric of New York in the sixties" serves as a backdrop for the curators' understanding of Dalston as a creative hub:

> "Dalston has been an area infused with creativity due to its continuous support for art and music. Over the past ten years it's undeniable that this unique district of North-East London has unknowingly had the same Warholian effect on ostracised creatives in search for a home and an outlet for their eccentricities. Landmarks such as Dalston Superstore (…) championed the heritage of Dalston and understand its strength as a culturally mosaic community" (Lanji & Wickins 2014).

Although neither the curators nor any of the portrayed are among the respondents of this research, the self-concept of creatives and image of Dalston purveyed here shall serve as a first impression of the field site and some of the interviewees referred to in the following. The place Dalston here is intrinsically linked to creativity, both in the present and in the past, and is said to serve as a refuge for a diverse community of non-conformist creatives. Such narratives can be found in Reuterkiez - internationally more well-known as Northern Neukölln or Kreuzkölln -, as well. "What is striking about their application to Berlin is that they are increasingly delinked from local experiences and attached to a global movement, driven by an international creative class" (Holm 2013: 181).

Fieldwork for this research took place across London and Berlin between autumn 2013 and summer 2014. Fieldwork involved 48 in-depth interviews with predominantly white

and middle class creative professionals, as well as ethnographic observations in cafés, galleries, restaurants, co-working spaces, markets and the streetscape, in general. Respondents were found via social networks such as Twitter and art-specific websites, via personal or email and through snowballing. The sample consists of artists, designers, filmmakers, social entrepreneurs, bloggers, 'digital creatives', restaurant and gallery managers, DJs and advertisers, among others. The majority of respondents were white, university educated and in their early twenties to late thirties. They were living in Dalston or Reuterkiez for a few months up to several years, and most of them worked in the neighbourhoods, as well. Noteworthy, the majority of interviewees in London are British, whereas about half of the Berlin sample consists of Western Europeans or North Americans.

Respondents were asked about their initial attraction to the area, about their everyday life and experiences in a gentrifying multicultural neighbourhood, and about ethnic and social diversity in general. Furthermore, many interviews elaborated about the role of multicultural environments as inspirational spaces for 'creatives'. Access to the field proved to not be particularly difficult and being of a similar age and habitus, as well as being white, facilitated the generation of frank responses. This in particular is the case for questions regarding diversity, difference and multiculturalism: informants frequently assumed a shared social position with the researcher and included him in their distinctions between 'us' and 'them'.

4. Findings

The vast majority of respondents moved to their neighbourhoods from other parts of the city, from outside the city or from another country. Difference and diversity proved to not be the main or first attractions for many. When asked about what originally drew them to Dalston respectively Reuterkiez, the areas' diversity and multiculturalism are not among the responses given immediately. The prime reasons for incomers to settle in Dalston or Reuterkiez have been comparatively affordable rents and real estate prices.

Furthermore, artistic and creatives scenes, trendiness and having friends in these boroughs made them a point of arrival for many newcomers. Nevertheless, the notion of diversity is present throughout most accounts of residential choice. It must be assumed that diversity, although not named immediately, has been important for my sample's residential choices because they might not have moved to equally affordable but socially and ethnically homogeneous neighbourhoods of a similar city centre proximity. For that reason and to further the argument of this paper, in the following there will be a focus on accounts of diversity and its allure.

It is important to note that when the 'creative' professionals of this study articulate the allure that the diversity of Dalston or Reuterkiez has for them, this does not exclusively refer to ethnic or cultural diversity but includes linguistic and social diversity, as well. For instance Johannes, a DJ in his late thirties who has been living in his neighbourhood for seven years. He moved at a time when gentrification was not as pronounced yet:

> "It's just a different atmosphere here, you know? I like that. I like this quietness, not being hip, ordinary people. So a lot of welfare recipients, immigrants et cetera. You hear Turkish or Arab all day, I find that absolutely enjoyable."

Other respondents similarly describe the exciting atmosphere of places at the pioneer stage of gentrification. Edginess, vibrancy and sometimes dirtiness are words used to describe this moment in space and time.

With regard to the streetscapes and multicultural markets of Dalston and Reuterkiez, a sense of 'being elsewhere' frequently gets articulated; Mediterranean vibes, 'being in Turkey' or other 'exotic' parts of the world, or alternatively, 'encountering the world in one place'. However, not all forms of difference and diversity are valued equally. Instead, sometimes discourses and stereotypes about certain ethnic groups get reiterated, for instance the association of a predominantly black neighbourhood like London's Brixton with issues of crime and violence. For British artist Kate, also in her late thirties, Dalston is just diverse enough to not experience certain forms of difference as too threatening:

> "When I first came to London I did actually look at some places in Brixton, as well. And I just didn't like it at all. I just felt really threatened. Whereas in Dalston, the mixture of different ethnic groups and things I really liked and felt it was a really good energy to it and it felt very alive. (…) I mean I don't wanna say too much against Brixton cause it was literally I got off the train and thought 'oh no, I don't like this' and left again and came up to Dalston instead."

Beyond these rather problematic understandings, other comments in favour of diversity have frequently been made with regard to the availability of 'ethnic' food and retail opportunities such as grocery shops, markets and barbers. A significant number of creative professionals of this study have furthermore named the diversity of Dalston and Reuterkiez as inspiring for their creative work. A multicultural environment is experienced as a 'creative fertile soil' that stimulates creative work and personality development. However, upon enquiry, informants have frequently been short of examples. However, they regularly exerted notions of authenticity, colourfulness and grittiness; for instance Jacob, an art curator in his early twenties:

> "Something that we find sort of nice about people who are not into that [art] world, something genuine or authentic. I think that artists like people, well at least I do, ordinary people who have, you know, working class, who have quite ordinary jobs. We look for ugly things, we look for places where people aren't looking, I guess."

This 'ugliness' of run-down, gentrifying neighbourhoods, the 'authenticity' ascribed to working class people, and the 'otherness' of different, non-white residents are experienced through fabrics, language, music and food, among other things. All of these characteristics of Dalston and Reuterkiez, independent from whether they are perceived or true, are crucial for the allure that gentrifying multicultural neighbourhoods have for 'creative' professionals.

When respondents describe why they prefer to live in a multicultural neighbourhood, talking about diversity also becomes a way of speaking about oneself and to present oneself as open-minded, curious and alternative - something that could be described as a presentation of cultural capital or metropolitan habitus (Butler 2003). For instance, respondents argue that a multicultural neighbourhood makes them feel more comfortable, offers more things to discover, to experience and to learn about the world.

As one respondent puts it: "I couldn't live in an area where everybody is like me". Another respondent feel less judged upon than he would in a non-diverse neighbourhood, for instance regarding his way of dressing ("If the bar is lowered, people are less judgemental.") He expresses this sense of 'being ignored' as relieving and mentions that living among poor communities has helped him in times when he was dependent on welfare himself. Such attempts to distinguish oneself from peers can be problematic because they employ superficial attributes of the 'other' to 'diversify' the own position of being white and middle class. Being partly rooted in needs of self-representation and distinction, the desire for diversity then also informs everyday interactions in the neighbourhood.

In accordance with the finding of Butler (2003), many respondents of this study report a lack of interaction. They speak of parallel societies, that immigrants have their own infrastructures and that there are few connections between long-term residents and newcomers. Whereas many respondents in Dalston accept this lack of interaction as given, natural or inevitable ("People hunt in packs."), 'creatives' in Berlin are more disappointed about little interaction in the neighbourhood. As a result, they often try to realise their desire for difference or metropolitan habitus by charging ordinary encounters in the everyday with symbolic meaning. These interactions might be overemphasized and have meaning attached to them exactly because there is not much contact otherwise. For instance, a number of respondents lament that the 'Turkish or Arab' residents of Reuterkiez do not attend their spaces such as art galleries or food outlets. As the 'creative' side of the neighbourhood is perceived to not be desired by ethnic communities, the kind of ordinary everyday encounters that are charged with meaning can only take place in spaces of the 'other', for instance on the multicultural market, in 'ethnic' restaurants or grocery shops.

One example for such an attempt is presented by Steven, an artist in his early 40s. At the time of the interview he had been living in Neukölln for about one year. He tells me that he is generally disappointed about the divide between, as he puts it, Western culture and

Middle Eastern culture in Neukölln. He seems determined to overcome this divide when he uses his local Turkish market:

> "And even I try to engage with people in the markets, who own the markets and I can come up with many reasons why none of the males at the market would wanna talk to me, either they don't think I'm Muslim or they think I'm gay or they think this or that. I mean I can only assume those things. But I try to be friendly and engaged and just be in a nice way and I still get resistance after two years. I've been coming there, like today I went there and I'd say 'Have a nice day' and they were just reluctant to respond, I find that strange."

Steven describes this reaction as "a kind of tolerance" and "a benign hostility". As an explanation he draws on stereotypical understandings of Muslims as showing little interest in non-Muslims or being homophobic. The words he uses to describe this lack of interaction are interesting: 'they' show 'resistance' and are 'reluctant'. His culturalized explanations for this disappointment of everyday encounters find expression ever more clearly:

> "In my opinion I find very few people who are friendlier with me in this Mid-Eastern culture, even though I'm friendly with them. Maybe it's just their culture to not be friendly with people outside of it."

Another everyday encounter is presented by Lena, a dancer in her early thirties. She illustrates the reason for a general lack of contact with her neighbours of Turkish origin, using an encounter between her and their youngest daughter. When the teenage girl seemed to have forgotten her keys and waited for her mother on the stairs, she refused Lena's invite to wait inside and remained in the 'cold and uncomfortable staircase', eating crisps. The respondent speak about a lack of openness to get in contact and laughs about the fact that the girl ate crisps. In this episode, the respondent again presents herself as helping and open, and criticises the 'other' for not wanting to interact. Furthermore, her judgmental joke about the crisps, based on an assumption that I share certain values in regard to food, picks up on clichés of migrants feeding their children poorly.

5. Conclusion

The diversity of Dalston and Reuterkiez, two gentrifying multicultural neighbourhoods in London and Berlin, has an allure for gentrifiers, 'creatives' and visitors. A diverse population, as well as 'ethnic' restaurants and markets are as typical for these two areas as are independent coffee shops, art galleries and co-working spaces. Although competing with notions of poverty, crime and problems around immigration and integration, here, diversity and 'creativity' are intrinsically linked with each other in public discourse and the self-understanding of 'creative' professionals. This demographic is also wanted by local policy makers in both Hackney and Neukölln, boroughs that actively stimulate 'creative' scenes, which together with diversity define the local self-image. Furthermore, 'creative' professionals are sometimes involved in processes of representation of diversity and such self-images through their work, for example in art, design or fashion.

It has been shown that respondents in both cities claim to value an amalgamation of ethnic, cultural and social diversity. However, differentiations between more desirable and less desirable forms of diversity or difference take place, as illustrated with the preference of Dalston over Brixton. The informants of this study express a preference for 'edgy' and 'gritty' spaces. The long-term residents of Hackney and Neukölln at the other end of the social spectrum are associated with such descriptions: immigrants, the working class and welfare recipients. Together with an 'exotic' atmosphere of 'being in a different part of the world', this creates an environment that many respondents describe as relieving, enjoyable and inspiring for their creative work, which relies on perceived notions of ‚authenticity'. In the presentation of such accounts, diversity and 'creativity' are used together as a way of speaking about oneself and of representing oneself as tolerant and curious. It has been shown that this also informs expectations towards other residents who embody the desired forms of difference and diversity, and how interaction with them is shaped.

Confirming findings from existing research about little to no interaction between middle class gentrifiers and long-term residents, a focus has been laid on respondents'

understanding of *why* there is little to no interaction. Again, it is important to highlight that such understandings are informed by a sense of disappointment about not being able to realise their metropolitan habitus, nether in own circles (art galleries) nor the public realm (markets). Explanations that have been given for a lack of contact are marked by a fraternisation with the researcher. Such explanations invoke rather stereotypical and culturalised ideas of ethnic minority communities as self-segregated, at times backwards and hostile, and as lacking interest in and openness towards 'creatives'. At the same time, the self-representation of respondents stresses their own openness and curiosity. It has been found that such accounts are more commonly to be found in Berlin compared to London, where a lack of interaction frequently gets associated with a natural tendency to remain in groups. A reason for this dissonance is suspected to be found in different immigration histories and states of multiculturalism.

These explanations for a lack of contact and interaction not only draw on stereotypical and culturalized explanations but also mask the role of class in struggles over space and belonging. This is particularly problematic for neighbourhoods like Dalston and Reuterkiez, where gentrification goes hand in hand with displacement, and that become understood not only as problematic and sites of the failure of multiculturalism but increasingly also as places of conviviality and a working multiculturalism.

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