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Patterns of Reflective Solidarity and Migrant Resistance in Copenhagen and Berlin

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Abstract

Inspired by Jodi Dean's understanding of the reflective solidarity of strangers, this contribution explores forms of migrant solidarity and resistance in Copenhagen and Berlin. It investigates how 'hybrid' forms of solidarity emerged out of different circumstances in Trampoline House and the Oranienplatz refugee protest camp. The two selected cases are particularly interesting for exploring how models of contentious and non-contentious civil society mobilization and engagement cope with inequalities, disagreement and differences; how awareness of inequalities affects relations of solidarity between refugees and local activists as well as between groups of refugees. The analysis suggests that despite the substantial differences between the two cases, the groups involved in the research experienced similar challenges in overcoming inequalities and diversity. Arguably, the tensions and disagreements within groups can potentially develop into forms of reflective solidarity, aimed at reshaping the boundaries created by differences of race, class, ethnicity and gender.

Keywords

Political sociology, migrant solidarity, intersectional inequalities, refugee movement, Trampoline House, Oranienplatz.

Introduction

The article analyses the challenges that emerge during practices of solidarity in contexts involving citizens and non-citizens, local activists/supporters and migrants with different backgrounds, interests and concerns (Siim and Meret, 2018: 28-29). Our main research question is how solidarity is enacted by locals and migrants within different settings and locations, with particular focus on the activists' strategies and resilience (Mokre and Siim, 2018; Sauer and Siim, 2020). One crosscutting issue is how activists address (intersectional) differences and inequalities, particularly linked to

nationality, ethnicity, gender and sexuality, and how awareness (or lack of such) of inequalities influences these encounters and the relationships between activists/supporters and migrants (Doerr, 2019).

Our theoretical approach draws inspiration from critical citizenship and intersectional gender studies (Siim and Mokre, 2013). It suggests reactivating the concept of reflective solidarity proposed by Jodi Dean (1996), premised on the positive role played by differences and disagreements in generating concrete forms of communicative action and mutual understanding that can in turn contribute to recognizing and overcoming inequalities. We use reflective solidarity as an analytical lens to explore the challenges of creating solidarity amongst 'strangers', as formulated by Dean (1996: 28):

> If solidarity is not to be discarded as yet another exclusionary ideal, it will have to be conceived so as to take seriously the historical condition of value pluralism, the ever present potential of exclusion, the demands of accountability and the importance of critique. This suggests that the permanent risk of disagreement must itself provide a basis of solidarity.

Our methodological approach aims to investigate forms of solidarity based on the constitution of solidarity activism. The focus is on the challenging processes of 'doing' solidarity, and practicing resistance. Both empirical cases explore forms of solidarity dealing with disagreement and differences, which encourage those actively participating to rethink and renegotiate their roles, ideas and the boundaries of previously identified communities and identities.

The empirical focus is on migrant solidarity activism in the cities of Copenhagen and Berlin. Forms of civic engagement by citizens and migrants, within a context of restrictive immigration and integration politics, is investigated in the two cases. Copenhagen and Berlin are two metropolitan settings with diverse social, political and cultural environments and different historical experiences of migrant solidarity and activism. One case focuses on pro-migrant solidarity activism in Copenhagen initiated by local Danish activists while the other focuses on activism sparked by directly affected refugees in Berlin (Stierl 2019: 33-59). Both examples allow for reflections on practices of migrant solidarity and activism as well as on the challenges emerging from inequalities and diversity both between and within groups with different backgrounds and experiences. Our observations and interviews cover the years before and after the 2015 "long summer" of migration (Kasparek and Speer, 2015).

In scrutinizing the different dynamics of migrant solidarity in Copenhagen and Berlin, we look into the organization, framings, and interactions emerging from, and characterizing, these settings. The migrant solidarity activism practiced within Trampoline House in Copenhagen has the dual aim of providing migrants with a safe space and humanitarian support, as well as strategies to address differences and inequalities within and outside the House. The Berlin case investigates the self-organized refugee movement at Oranienplatz and addresses the challenges encountered by the refugee activists in overcoming internal inequalities and differences, while at the same time providing the temporary occupation of Oranienplatz with some continuity and recognition.

Rethinking solidarity - towards a reflective paradigm

In contemporary Europe, migration and intra-EU mobility have challenged established theories and inspired new understandings of solidarity, social justice, transnational citizenship and global democracy. Our theoretical approach aims to rethink the concept of solidarity in light of critical citizenship studies (Isin and Turner, 2007), social movement theories (della Porta 2013, 2018) and intersectional gender studies. The focus is on the intersection of differences and inequalities, such as between and within different groups of activists who (re-)negotiate the construction of the 'we' group (Dean, 1996) through questioning and disagreement. This enables all actors/individuals to contribute to the definition of the community of reference. This approach to reflective solidarity is concerned with patterns of inequality, mechanisms of marginalization and disempowerment, as well as with forms of control and power exerted by dominant groups.-We investigate the tensions emerging in acts of citizenship by locals and migrants, as well as in acts of resistance by migrant groups, to underline how migrants and local urban communities are challenged by inequalities of power and diversity along lines of gender, sexuality, race/ethnicity, and religion.

Different bodies of literature inspire our approach. The concept of reflective solidarity fits our research interest, since it conceives of solidarity in terms of a process generated and continuously (re-)negotiated in a context of difference and multiple concrete particularities, rather than based on an ideal of pre-given agreement, shared views, and expectations. According to reflective solidarity, disagreements and differences provide the necessary basis for mutual connection and inclusive dialogue. Solidarity in this case relies on fundamental reciprocity and offers the possibility of

community among those who actively participate, while respecting and taking responsibility for their differences. From this angle, the challenge is to create solidarity by accepting others as 'one of us' (Rorty, 1989), not "like us", but on a collective, rather than individual, basis. It involves becoming aware of and creating, safe spaces, places and forms of communication to overcome inequalities and diversity between and within groups.

Another approach informing our understanding of solidarity is provided by critical citizenship studies. Baban and Rygiel's (2017) approach to pro-migrant solidarity is premised on rethinking hospitality by placing the emphasis on the rights of the guests , rather than the privileges of the host - a position inspired by French philosopher Jacques Derrida's (2006: 113-14) concept of 'unconditional hospitality'. However, our attention is centered on the political construction of solidarity, focusing on how different agencies, bodies, places and contexts generate and transform the character and form of solidarity. (Bauder, 2019; Bauder and Juffs, 2020). As David Featherstone (2012) aptly puts it: "rather than being ahistorical forms of identification, ways of articulating solidarity are always partial, limited and situated". We understand solidarity as a creative, transforming process, which can connect people and build ties in spite of (or rather as a result of) different backgrounds and experiences, sparking cooperation, relational bonds and trajectories.

In addition, we adopt a critical approach to rights as defined by the borders of the nation state community. With Engin Isin (2009: 383-4), we highlight forms of political subjectivity and enactment of "acts of citizenship" as central to the shaping of relational solidarity for both citizens and non-citizens, thus overcoming the boundaries of belonging and community defined by the territoriality of the nation state. Our study pays particular attention to agency and to the voices of the (non)-citizens - the migrant subalterns (Meret, 2019) - focusing on the challenges of 'doing solidarity' with local activists and supporters with access to citizenship rights and privileges. It explores the potential of 'transversal politics' to strengthen awareness and develop strategies to overcome relations of power and exclusion between different social groups (Sauer and Siim, 2020), such as between citizen/activists and refugee/activists.

Methods

Our methodological approach is an explorative analysis of two selected cases of migrant solidarity in metropolitan environments. The data include participatory observations, individual and group interviews, common discussions and document analysis gathered in relation to research activities conducted between 2014 and 2019 (Siim and Meret, 2018; Meret and Diener, 2018). One case explores the migrant solidarity practices and support at Trampoline House[1], a community space established by local citizens of the multicultural neighborhood of Nørrebro, Copenhagen, in 2010, for asylum seekers, refugees and residents. This case points to the potentials and challenges of practicing a hybrid variant of solidarity, which aims to bridge humanitarian support (legal counselling, labor integration, volunteer-driven educational and recreational activities) with transformative practices. The other case scrutinizes acts of resistance and solidarity initiated in 2012 by the refugee movement in "Oranienplatz" – a public square in Berlin's Kreuzberg district. This case is paradigmatic of the acts of citizenship and resistance of self-organized asylum seekers and refugees living in conditions of isolation, marginality and deprivation (see Bhimji, 2016).

The study of Trampoline House builds on document analysis of its website, explorative interviews with the founders and staff members, and semi-structured focus group interviews with selected groups of refugees. All were conducted between 2013 and 2019 (Siim and Meret, 2018). The House's civic engagement embodies a hybrid form of solidarity (della Porta and Steinhilper this volume), which combines the provision of practical support for migrants with transformative activism. The contentious forms of civic and grassroots activities, in which Trampoline House has been involved, include *The Center for Art and Migration, CAMP exhibitions* and *The Movement for the Future of Asylum Children*[2]. The latter triggered the *Citizens Proposal for the Future of Asylum Children*[3] - a campaign initiated by the founding members of the House and rejected asylum-seekers living in the "repatriation" camp at Sjælsmark.[4]

The study of the Oranienplatz refugee protest camp is based on multi-sited ethnographic participatory research that started in 2014 in the city of Hamburg, together with the activists of the self-organized refugee group Lampedusa in Hamburg (Meret and Diener, 2018; Meret, 2019). The Hamburg activities later involved interactions, visits and joint activities with the refugee movement in Berlin. The research aimed to map mobilization strategies, (mis-)alliances, repertoires, forms of solidarity-building and interactions with society, that were initiated by migrants and local networks

of activists. The data include participatory observations, ethnographic field notes, interviews and document material such as posters, leaflets and zines. The recording of migrant activists' memories, reflections and critical evaluations is still ongoing, and several quotes with the Oranienplatz refugee activists included here stem from recent interviews (2018, 2019), including footage recorded by the refugee activists in Berlin during the Covid-19 lockdown. This participatory approach responds to the refugee activists' conviction that stories, reflections and memories of past struggles at Oranienplatz and elsewhere need to be documented and passed on to younger generations of activists.

Migrant Solidarity Projects, Copenhagen

Since 2001, Denmark has witnessed growing anti-immigration concerns and a gradual mainstreaming of stricter anti-immigration and integration policies and discourses. This escalated in particular under the liberal and conservative minority governments supported by the Danish Peoples' Party in the years 2001-2011 and 2015-2019 (Siim and Meret, 2016). As a response to this restrictive turn, migrant solidarity in civil society has proliferated, resulting in a wide range of projects and initiatives, all highly heterogeneous with regard to their constituencies, overall strategies and action repertoires. The most prominent groups and networks include SOS Racism Denmark, the Friendly Neighbors (*Venligboerne*), Refugees Welcome, the Common Initiative against Racism (*Fællesinitiativet imod Racismen*) and Trampoline House (Siim and Meret, 2018).

Amongst these, Trampoline House represents a remarkable example of hybrid forms of solidarity.[5] The house project is a community space, established in 2010, which over ten years has developed forms of solidarity premised on accommodating diversity among local Danish organizers, refugees and asylum-seekers. The multiple initiatives emerging in and from the House have contributed to mitigating the differences between the initiators of the House, refugees and local supporters making use of the facilities provided.

From the interviews with Trampoline House staff-members and users, two objectives emerge. One main priority is to offer practical counselling and knowledge to migrants to counter isolation within the asylum centers and to assist migrants in becoming part of Danish society. The other objective is to create a space for learning the social norms and skills that enable migrants to 'survive' outside the security provided by the house in a world characterized by growing anti-immigration sentiments

and aggressive immigration policies. The purpose is "to reach out to people living in isolation in the camps," and to give them tools to help them "navigate and take decisions concerning their lives that can improve their conditions". Supporting refugees "along the arduous pattern established by the integration process," requires developing skills and knowledge about the Danish labor market, Danish "culture" and Danish bureaucracy.[6]

The House is a self-governing institution with a board of directors, a paid staff and a large group of interns and volunteers, supported by public and private funding, through events and donations. The aim is to create a "safe" space where House visitors and members feel welcome, where they can participate on equal terms in the organization of daily activities; where Danish 'natives' can interact with and learn from asylum seekers and refugees; and where asylum-seekers learn how Danish society and institutions work.

The founders of the House emphasize[7] that the project cannot "stand alone", but must interact with local communities and municipalities in order to exist and relate to society in the longer-term. This issue became pressing in 2015-16, when the House –due to the shift of government from social democratic to liberal/conservative - lost financial support from the state and had to rely on private funding and donations. This led to engagement in new activities such as acting as a consultant to private and public agencies on issues concerning asylum and refugee integration in the labor market. The need to develop new practical strategies to survive financially influenced the external relations of the House and created greater economic insecurity. In addition, solidarity projects targeting refugees with status came to play a stronger role, compared to activities addressing the conditions of the rejected asylum seekers, and those awaiting the outcome of their asylum application. This shift of strategy accentuated the differences among the users of the House, especially between people with and without papers.

The community 'micro-cosmos' and the 'inside-outside' divide

Recent interviews (2019) highlight the growing tension along the inside and the outside divide. The inside presents the community with room for solidarity practices aimed at overcoming diversities, while at the same time preparing the users for the hostilities of the world outside. On the one hand, Trampoline House is portrayed as a homey, safe and physically welcoming place, where refugees with different backgrounds and social status can relax, be themselves, feeling at home as members

of the community-house. On the other hand, tensions between the inside and outside are growing, also within the communities of refugees - in particular among migrants with and without status.

The physical environment of the house attests to the users' ambition to create an environment that evokes feelings of safety, intimacy and comfort, by reflecting the different subjectivities and identities living in the House using objects that symbolically represent different parts of the world:

> The reason why Trampoline House looks like it does -you see, such an esthetically eclectic, a little worn-out style, but also very cozy and welcoming: to avoid the feeling of coming into a space which is 100% designed…we have [put together] a sofa from Iran and lamps from Ikea, with stuff donated to the House. All people that come to the house must find something they feel they have a personal attachment to; at the same time we also need to find something that is completely foreign to us, than what we are used to…the esthetics thus shape the rule of the game for the social interactions [within the House]. This is something that we have brought with us from our background [as artists].'… Because there are very different people in the Trampoline House …people from the political right, and people from the extreme right and left wing, there are LGBTQ people, as well as homophobes, there are anti-racists, as well as racists. There are people with very different political orientation and positions as regards to the privileges they enjoy... there are always differences of one kind or another who meet on a daily basis, and …which the House as a social space and platform needs to negotiate with.[8]

The uniqueness of the House interior strives to reflect the multiple beliefs, experiences and backgrounds of a heterogenous migrant community. This prompts users to reflect on how space and place affect and reflect these relationships, and how practicing and encouraging dialogue instead of antagonism can prevent conflicts and barriers from arising. Several things in the House serve to mirror and display the diversity of backgrounds, faith, political identifications, and worldviews of the users. At the same time, it signals the prospect of finding shared positions. In addition, it also aims to make the native Danes in the House aware of their privileged status and condition, "re-programming" them to resist discrimination and racism:

> I am at Trampoline House [also] for my own sake… [it is a place] where I can get rid of my white privileges. If I only were to be out there –as I use to say- surrounded by Danes full-time jobs, children and private property, these inequalities would be invisible to me and the racist side of me would flourish. Therefore, it is within the House where I daily get re-programmed, where I am reminded of my white privileges and prompted to realize why I have them and at the expense of whom.[9]

The activities of Trampoline House express forms of hybrid solidarity activism in the sense that they combine humanitarian support with empowering practices aimed at proactively dealing with inequality and diversity. This also points to the House's precarious situation as a microcosm of diversity, as well as being a potential space for co-existence across these boundaries by means of a daily practiced interaction and dialogue that promotes forms of reflective solidarity activism. The House project aims to act as a "good example" by creating a "positive model" for the outside[10] and at the same time stimulate processes of active citizenship, democratic participation and learning to overcome differences. The normative intentions contrast with the inequalities within the House as well as with the constraints and inequalities experienced by refugees and asylum-seekers in the world outside.

Creating solidarity - collaborative projects and grassroots movements

In relation to the outside world, the House aims to raise awareness among the Danish public about the structural differences, inequalities and power structures defining the relations between asylum seekers/refugees and Danish citizens. It wants to inform the Danish public about the "living conditions in the camps", mobilize people to demand their closure and establish a more humane approach to asylum accommodation.

The House project strives to create and promote equal relations through collaborative projects with individuals and groups in society who support migrant solidarity. One concerns the idea of the House as a "permanent art project" aimed at creating a space where disadvantaged individuals feel that they are as worthy as everybody else.[11] Another concerns creating solidarity movements *Folkebevægelsen for Asylbørns Fremtid* [the Peoples' Movement for the Future of Asylum Children] and of the *Citizens' Initiative in Support of the Children of Sjælsmark.* Additionally, the House also drives the 'Center for Art and Migration Politics' (CAMP), which refers to "the refugee camp, the asylum center and to the detention center".[12]

CAMP intends to address the intersection of art and politically engaged action by articulating a critical response to the mainstream migration and asylum politics that triggered the founding of the House project. It is a radical-utopian artistic vision aimed at using art to "increase insight into the life situations of displaced and migrant persons, and to … discuss factors that cause displacement

and migration", and stimulate "new visions for a more inclusive and equitable migration, refugee, and asylum policy.[13]

> 'CAMP …contributes to shaping social and political change through arts and curatorial praxis. It is something we literally grasp. Trampoline House has attempted to shape a physical space where the rules of the game for interaction are different, we have created this space and we strive daily to shape a space where all are equal, despite our unequal situations, our unequal opportunities; a space that can negotiate differences across religious, ethnic backgrounds, political beliefs and legal status.

CAMP is an example of the political mobilization of solidarity networks, engaging migrants, activists and supporters through art exhibitions inside and outside of the House. It visually displays processes of discrimination, exploitation, racism, privileges and power abuse to influence the viewer, including schoolchildren and students participating in the House guided tours.

Another collaborative project initiated by Trampoline House is the *Peoples' Movement for the Future of Asylum Children* and the *Citizens' Initiative in Support of the Children of Sjælsmark,* - broad citizen initiatives aimed at mobilizing public support for the resettlement of rejected asylum families with children outside the repatriation/deportation center of Sjælsmark.

> the citizens' movement started because more and more families would come [to Trampoline House] explaining that the living conditions [at Sjælsmark] were unbearable and the children getting sick. Instead of discussing the issue, it is Trampoline House's role to say: ok, and how can we together make people understand this is a problem and to mobilize the public opinion around this? This is how we, together with the concerned families of the children and a long list of children's right organizations, initiated the people's movement for the future of children asylum seeker.[14]

The Ombudsman's criticism of the harsh conditions in Sjælsmark[15], particularly the fact that families are not allowed to cook meals in their own rooms, inspired public protests against the situation in Sjælsmark, particularly concerning the health and psychological wellbeing of the children. This stimulated Trampoline House and other solidarity groups and organizations to initiate the Peoples' Movement for the Future of Asylum Children (Siim and Meret, 2018). The activities included mobilization through social and traditional media, street-level demonstration and, in December 2018, the launching of a Citizen Initiative demanding the closure of Sjælsmark.[16]

The organizers frame the Peoples Movement and the Citizens' Initiative as models emerging from participatory practice and democratic deliberation that links the act of solidarity to art as political engagement.[17] From this perspective, the mobilization of the public to acts of solidarity requires similar commitment and skill to that needed for conceptualizing, organizing and promoting an art exhibition, such as mediators planning the procedures and spaces for an exhibition. This understanding of acts of solidarity is not limited to militant political activism, but aims to overcome differences and create new understandings and communicative practices through projects involving diverse groups of people engaged in music, culture and the arts.

The founding and evolution of Trampoline House in Copenhagen tells a story of hybrid solidarity with a dual purpose: firstly, to build a safe space for migrants and refugees to proactively address differences and inequalities, while simultaneously working to improve their humanitarian status by providing legal and practical assistance. The analysis demonstrates the potentials and barriers to overcoming divisions and inequalities among groups of refugees, asylum-seekers, and local supporters. Our observations illustrate the constraints of practicing reflective solidarity within a limited space, in an organization founded and run by local Danish supporters. It also highlights the challenges of attempting to address different refugee groups and the public within an increasingly migration-hostile political climate.

Acts of Solidarity and Resistance in Oranienplatz, Berlin

The Oranienplatz refugee movement in Berlin arose from the mobilization of asylum seekers in January 2012, sparked by the suicide of the 28-year old Mohammad Rahsepar, who lived in an asylum center in Wurzburg, Bavaria. The tragic event triggered a reaction in the refugees in other German asylum centers and the mobilization soon spread[18]. A caravan of people moved out from several asylum camps, marching more than 600 km towards Berlin (Stierl 2019: 36-38). The purpose was to protest against the conditions of isolation, invisibility and lack of basic rights characterizing the German asylum regime.

Within a month or so, the refugee activists obtained support from several German groups and networks. These included antifascist, anti-racist and pro-migrant groups, networks and NGOs such as the 'Kein Mensch Ist Illegal' (no one is illegal), Pro Asyl, and the *Karawane für die Rechte der*

Flüchtlinge und MigrantInnen (Caravan for the rights of refugees and migrants). The refugee activists arrived in Berlin with five core demands to the government (International Refugee Center, 2015: 149):

> Our demands are and will remain "the abolition of Lagers and Residenzpflicht, the stopping of all deportations, permanent right to stay, and the right to work, to education and to a self-determined habitation as well as the right to freedom of movement. We demand to be treated and respected as human beings. We demand our human rights!

In October 2012, they occupied the public square at Oranienplatz, in the district of Kreuzberg. These first phases of the mobilization were not unproblematic; several disagreements surfaced within the original group about how and where to obtain visibility, solidarity and support to their protest. Oranienplatz turned out to be a suitable location for establishing a space of refugee solidarity and of political resistance and activism against institutionalized marginalization and the policing of asylum seekers.

In Oranienplatz, the refugee migrants received support from sympathetic residents and from local groups and collectives[19]. These local organisations made their infrastructure available and shared their experience with the squatter movement (Novy and Colomb, 2013), related urban struggles, and district mobilizations against urban gentrification. This provided the Oranienplatz occupants with forms of direct neighborhood solidarity (also material), which was indispensable for the establishment and continuation of the refugee protest camp. Many of the German activists who were deeply involved in the activities of Oranienplatz came from the well-established and extensive German anti-racist and pro-migrant leftwing (Monforte, 2014). Several of these organizations had experience with earlier refugee mobilizations, such as the Caravan group and *The Voice Refugee Forum*. However, the Oranienplatz occupation also attracted (younger generations of) local supporters without previous connections to, or experience with, anti-racist and pro-migrant organizations. This made Oranienplatz a sociability and solidarity space (Fontanari, 2017) gathering people with very diverse backgrounds, ages and experiences. Thus, Oranienplatz displayed many of the challenges in "doing" reflective solidarity in a highly differentiated setting.

Oranienplatz as a site of solidarity and resistance (2012-2014)

Oranienplatz became a new home for many refugee activists, albeit a deprived, hectic and disorganized one. Since the number of people asking for a place to stay in the camp increased from

month to month, the activists also occupied (in December 2012) the empty Gerhart-Hauptmann School, an empty public building at Ohlauer Strasse, about 2 km away.

The refugee activists describe Oranienplatz as the stronghold of their political resistance[20]: the space and place where the movement learned to organize, communicate, and develop politically and strategically. Oranienplatz was the spot to meet, discuss, and fight with the local activists and supporters. In the period from October 2012 to April 2014, it accommodated more than 250 refugees. A large circus tent (which became the symbol of the Berlin refugee struggle) was set up together with smaller tents to provide infrastructure and shelters for the permanent occupants. Daily activities were planned around a few main work groups: finance, legal, media and cooking. At the weekly plenum meeting, participants shared ideas, thoughts and considerations about present activities, opinions about personal concerns, and plans for the future. Forms of political subjectivities and awareness thrived, albeit the activism path was not always clear-cut, linear and unproblematic:[21]

> When I arrived at Oranienplatz I had three days of complete confusion, …. I simply did not know which way to pursue. I decided for myself, and joined the kitchen group and from there I could observe how the political activity developed … At that time we had different groups: financial, media, legal, lawyer. People met up to hear from all of these groups. So many things. But for me, I know how to cook. If I do not understand what is going on, I prefer not to talk. If I want to know then I have first to understand what it is about. But I am keen on the political stuff. You know I became a political activist at the same time I broke the German laws and marched from Hanover to Berlin…There I was activist. But when I arrived at OP, you know, I was confused.

Disagreements and conflicts arose during the meetings and some developed into animated discussions, at times degenerating into fights. These emphasized the co-existence of divergent points of view among individuals, groups with very different backgrounds, and between refugees and local activists. Besides, the conflicts displayed the fatigue and the growing frustration accumulated by the refugees after living for many years in a state of continuous precariousness and deprivation. Several of the conflicts were eventually resolved, often in the long-term triggering the formation of closer ties across a diversity of backgrounds, convictions and political ideas. Yet at times asymmetries of power and privilege also strengthened divergences, making them insurmountable, for instance, between refugee and local activists: “arrived with own ideas …but nobody really opened up at the meetings”, “they [the German activists] give you a name, and an

identity; they say when you are activist, or not, they let you speak with the journalists, they find you a lawyer you have to keep, even if you do not like him. You know, in this way our voice remains incomplete".[22]

In contrast to refugee-led movements in other parts of Germany (contemporary to Oranienplatz), the people at Oranienplatz had diverse biographies, experiences and worldviews, and lived packed together in a relatively narrow space under insecure conditions. This triggered divergences and conflicts, yet it also enhanced opportunities for interchange, dialogue, mutual acceptance and responsible orientation to relationship. One illustrative example is the arrival of a new group of refugees at Oranienplatz around February 2013, mostly Sub-Saharan male refugees, who had escaped the Libyan civil war via the island of Lampedusa (Meret and Blumensaat Rasmussen 2014) and then had moved on from Italy to Germany. A refugee activist remembers that first meeting:[23]

> The people came from Lampedusa. You know, people [at Oranienplatz] arrived just like this. They didn't know what to do. All they had in their mind was to work, work… [I told them] "Brothers welcome to Oranienplatz" and I brought them in the circus tent. [I said] "Look at what Germans are doing to us… we sleep in the streets, brothers. Look where we are living. My brothers here we do not give work, here we are still fighting!

The new group of refugees had papers from Italy, which did not entitle them to find work and to stay in another European country. The different claims caused conflicts between the original occupants of Oranienplatz - the Berlin Refugee Movement, which focused on the German asylum laws - and the new group called Lampedusa in Berlin, which focused on the right to work and the abolition of the Dublin regulations. However, these issues would in fact complement rather than –as later often described - weaken the set of demands advanced by the Oranienplatz movement. They added to the original demands a multi-scaled approach to the refugee struggle, encompassing national, European and transnational demands. According to the memories of the refugee activists[24], the Lampedusa group, after their arrival in Berlin, followed a similar path of political awareness, participation, growing activism and solidarity, despite the divergences between the two groups. Local activists, who started to take sides with one group or the other, strengthened these divisions. It was not until the activists had to negotiate the future of Oranienplatz with the Berlin Senate and the Friedrichshain-Kreuzberg district authorities that differences became insurmountable and could be used to split the group from within. A lot was at stake, since the authorities aimed at achieving an agreement to evict the camp at all costs. The authorities thus distinguished between

'good' cooperative and 'bad' resilient activists, soon to be removed from the negotiators' table.[25] As described by a refugee activist (Movement, 2015: 64):

> 8 April 2014, the day on which Oranienplatz was evicted, is the sad climax in the destruction of our protest movement. Oranienplatz an international symbol of resistance was destroyed. (…) This destruction was possible because of a split within our movement. The split had become increasingly visible since the summer of 2013 and reached a boiling point in the three-months long negotiations with Berlin's Senate in early 2014. The Senate actively incited and provoked the destruction. It is ridiculous to speak of a peaceful and voluntary eviction of the park. Before and during the eviction the police and some refugees threatened, attacked and injured refugees and supporters.

The German supporters were accused of instrumentalizing and radicalizing some of the refugee activists who were labelled "agitators" and "hardliners" (Movement, 2015: 65). This approach played on a scenario portraying refugees, "who longed for humanitarian aid and a place to sleep", as having been incited by radical and aggressive German protesters pursuing their own political agenda. This was the framing used by the chief negotiator, social democrat Dilek Kolat (SPD), when suggesting that only a small minority of the refugees at Oranienplatz supported the terms of the Berlin Senate's offer. This meant implicitly separating the 'good' and 'willing' from the 'undeserving' and more radical.

A few months later (June 2014), the police threatened the residents at the squatted Gerhart-Hauptmann School with eviction. This happened while several of them were participating in the international March for Freedom, walking 500 km from Strasbourg to Brussels. Many of the people living within the school decided to leave, while a group remaining in the building faced removal. The action involved more than a thousand police officers, triggering a reaction from the local Kreuzberg residents, who stood by the protesters and criticized the authorities for the criminalization of the refugees within the school. A banner with the slogan: "You can't evict a movement" was raised on the school rooftop, foreseeing the rise of a pro-migrant activism that found new allies and solidarity forms among advocacy groups, but also among civil society that was coming to understand the motivations behind their demands.

Women's Space is Everywhere, also at Oranienplatz

In Oranienplatz the acts of political resistance and of solidarity necessarily overlapped. The very space occupied by the migrants prompted the conditions and opportunities to discuss proposals, face

disagreement and elaborate strategies of collective protest activity. Daily proximity and meetings enhanced forms of human and political relationships through face-to-face interactions, which were also characterized by conflict. The disruption of this place shrank the spaces available for practicing reflective solidarity, for mutual exchanges, and the elaboration of communicative strategies across diversities.

Different backgrounds and experiences, and the unequal relations of power and privilege between the refugee/activists and the citizens/activists, created difficulties in achieving unity in solidarity and diversity, as well as issues of solidarity and recognition in relation to questions of gender and sexuality. Gender, gender minorities and queering are often silenced problems, which need to be debated, understood and better implemented within refugee movements' praxis and their claims to equal rights and recognition. Oranienplatz activist Nadiye Ünsal (2015) observed:

> The prevailing (dis)privilege categories 'refugees' and 'supporters' do not reflect the intersectional power structures – the nexus of class, race, gender and other power relations – that affect the people interacting as the movement. They prevent us from dealing with the internal power relations and alliances in the movement. These categories... foster sexism in the 'refugee' movement in Berlin. … I think that we have lost mutual trust and solidarity, because we ignored these power relations that caused division, frustration and desolidarization. … Collective self-critique and learning from it on the ground of our (political) experience should enable us to bond politically and foster our solidarity to become a critical (movement) community.

The fact that the occupants at Oranienplatz were not only predominately men, but mostly straight, contributed to preventing an open discussion of issues pertaining to internal gender power-relations and intra-gender, solidarity based alliances. As one of the prominent female refugee activists at Oranienplatz recollects,[26] it was only after a fight during one of the assembly meetings in the tent, which involved her directly, that she started to gain recognition and acceptance from the male refugee activists. She later became one of the most respected and trusted spokespeople of the Oranienplatz camp travelling around Germany (and Europe) to mobilize other refugees. However, this did not resolve the movement's internal issues with gender and particularly LGBTQ rights/ representation. Nonetheless, it is worth noting that the Berlin refugee movement triggered the creation of the International Women's Space in 2012, during the occupation of Oranienplatz and the Gerhart-Hauptmann School. The activities of the group included helping women out of isolation and oppression in a common fight against all forms of sexism, racism and gender-based violence. As stated in the organization webpage (IWS 2020):

> We organize politically to defend ourselves against the issues and attacks that we as women are facing: as refugee women, as migrant women and as non-migrant women. Sexism, racism, the violence of the asylum system and migration policies influence our lives. Our learning and our self-education is part of our emancipatory struggle. In our group, we stand in solidarity with each other and we support each other on an everyday basis.

The International Women's Space[27] also connects (sometimes with membership overlaps) with another pre-existing and visible feminist anti-racist group in Berlin, Women in Exile[28]. This is an initiative by refugee women launched in Brandenburg in 2002. The group is highly active and has for years campaigned and mobilized for abolishing all Lagers/asylum camps in Germany under the slogans "No Lager for Women! Abolish all Lagers!" and "Refugee Women (let's) get loud (*Flüchtningsfrauen werden laut*). Thanks to the activism of these women's groups and activists, the activist men at Oranienplatz often had to confront directly issues of gender, sexuality and queer identities, and diaspora. The positions advanced by the IWS challenge patriarchal behaviors and sexism, including the reproduction of the role of refugee-masculinity. The work and words of the IWS also traveled geographically within and outside Germany. For instance, members of the group participated in the Hamburg International Refugee Conference held at Kampnagel Theatre in 2016, organized by Lampedusa in Hamburg and its supporters. On the first day of the Conference under the slogan 'women's space is everywhere', the IWS women, and most female and LGBT participants, unexpectedly occupied the theatre central stage to protest the marginalization of their workshop, their role and their migrant activism. The issue undoubtedly encouraged greater visibility and thorough discussion within the movement in order to address the intersections of multiple diversities (in particular gender, sexuality, religion, ethnicity) and forms of solidarity enabling female and LGBTQ migrants to take part in the construction of the movement's "we".

The Oranienplatz experience represents a powerful model of 'doing' and practicing reflective solidarity and resistance in the difficult and precarious conditions offered by an occupied protest camp. Despite the eviction in 2014, it still symbolizes the refugee movement's empowerment, making the construction of solidarity between and among refugee-activists and local-activists possible, albeit also arduous and fragile (Steinhilfer and Acer 2019). The experience lasted less than two years but significantly affected the lives and minds of the many people who directly experienced it, gathered around the square, or learnt about it when it was over. Oranienplatz was a laboratory of reflective solidarity in practice that triggered an extensive number of resourceful

initiatives, and contributed to the launching of national and transnational networks and activities (for instance the March for Freedom and the Refugee No Fear Tour). It illustrates that refugee mobilizations moved on despite the internal fragmentation, the disagreements and external pressure from the authorities. Yet, the movement also had to deal with internal conflicts and divisions that were, and still are, difficult to articulate and overcome. The short timespan did not allow the activists to explore and resolve the disagreements that emerged within the movement at Oranienplatz, aptly used by the authorities to divide them. Arguably, the failed negotiations and the police eviction prevented the activists from capitalizing fully on the transformative potential of their activities, and to appreciate the efforts of reciprocity and the forms of reflective solidarity elaborated and practiced at Oranienplatz.

Conclusion

This article has analyzed forms of migrant solidarity and activism, exploring the challenges of practicing hybrid solidarity and refugee self-organized activism. Our theoretical approach encourages the rediscovery of the concept of reflective solidarity that combined with intersectionality and critical citizenship studies can contribute to understanding both the potentials and barriers of creating safe spaces in which to practice solidarity with strangers and learn to live together in diversity. The analytical lens explores the endeavors among refugees and local activists in Copenhagen and Berlin to overcome the inside and outside tensions, which emerge from multiple differences and inequalities.

The study of Trampoline House in Copenhagen illustrates how the assemblage of humanitarian and reflective solidarity can evolve and co-exist. It suggests that reflective solidarity, premised on creating safe spaces where strangers meet, can encourage a proactive dealing with differences and inequalities. In addition, it points towards the potential of art and culture to create radical visions premised on common understandings – for example, around humanitarian issues such as the rights of children and families in asylum and ‘repatriation’ centers - fostering forms of migrant solidarity mobilizations across different groups. At the same time, the analysis points to the difficulties and constraints of this dual form of migrant solidarity in overcoming racism, sexism, and homophobia among the users of the House. Finally, it demonstrates the political limits of practicing solidarity by creating reciprocity in relations between the founders and users of the House in a context affected by the increasingly restrictive Danish immigration regime.[29]

The case of Oranienplatz qualifies as the creation of a 'space of hope' (Harvey 2000; Novy & Colomb 2013) where migrant and citizen activists are prompted by the precariousness of living together to build stronger ties and networks, striving to form political and socially robust structures. This grassroots mobilization of asylum seekers in the German camps ended as a highly politicized and contentious place in Berlin: the effects of the failed negotiations and of the police eviction display the precarity, uncertainty and temporary experience of such practices of 'doing' reflective solidarity under highly adverse conditions. The Oranienplatz case thus shows both the potentials and the major challenges met by the refugee-led movement whose legacies and memories, deprived of a space, continue to live on with the activists.

To summarize, our analysis points to the multiple challenges and huge potentials involved in performing, negotiating and practicing reflective forms of solidarity across differences and disagreements often deemed to be insurmountable. Arguably, both cases, albeit in different ways, contribute to new knowledge about activists' multiple and daily struggles to recognize and overcome the intersectional differences and power inequalities between and within marginalized groups and their supporters. The strategy of Trampoline House proved to be remarkably resilient in its ability to combine humanitarianism and reflective solidarity, while relying mainly on the engagement and organizational structure provided by the local Danish activists. This contrasts with the more vulnerable and temporary strategies undertaken by the self-organized movement in Oranienplatz that lacked access to a permanent space in which to practice reflective solidarity, and was highly dependent on the material support of various local groups and organisations. The lessons from both cases confirm that solidarity does not emerge in deterministic ways from people with similar conditions or who share common claims. Nor is solidarity 'automatically' triggered by either humanitarian or normative social justice ideals. Practicing reflective solidarity is a constant exercise and, arguably, we can learn from the achievements and the failures experienced at Oranienplatz and Trampoline House.

Notes

[1] https://www.trampolinehouse.dk/ [Accessed: 2nd July 2020].
[2] https://www.asylboernsfremtid.dk/ [Accessed: 2nd July 2020].
[3] https://www.asylboernsfremtid.dk/borgerforslag [Accessed: 2nd July 2020].
[4] https://www.facebook.com/Rejected-souls-of-DenmarkEurope-222564811413741/ [Accessed: 2 July 2020].

[5] The house project dates back to a series of workshops in 2008 titled "Asylum Dialogue Tank" (ADT) with young artists, students and asylum-seekers. The present directors, painter Morten Göll and artist/curator Tone Olaf Nielsen, were two of the driving forces in the establishment of the house (cf. Siim and Meret, forthcoming).
[6] Interview with one of the founders, 27 January 2015.
[7] Interview with a second founder. 17 June 2016.
[8] Interview with one of the founders. 27 January 2015.
[9] Interview with one of the founders. 27 January 2015.
[10] Interview with a second founder. 17 June 2016.
[11] Interview with a second founder. 27 January 2019.
[12] CAMP was established in 2015 by curators Tone Olaf Nielsen and Frederikke Hansen with an exhibition space within Trampoline House: http://campcph.org/about-camp [Accessed: 30th April 2019].
[13] Interview with Tone O. Nielsen. 8 February 2019.
[14] Interview with Tone O. Nielsen. 8 February 2019.
[15] Sjælsmark repatriation center, originally a military facility, was established in 2014 as one of the two camps for rejected asylum seekers (the other being Kærshovedgaard), currently hosting about 400 people, mostly families with children. The Danish Prison and Probation Service (*Kriminalforsorgen*) runs both deportation camps.
[16] The proposal reached the 50.000 signatures necessary for a parliamentary debate in May 2018: https://www.borgerforslag.dk/se-og-stoet-forslag/?Id=FT-02060 [Accessed: 2nd July 2020].
[17] Interview with Tone O. Nielsen. 8 February 2019.
[18] https://archiv.labournet.de/diskussion/wipo/migration/wuerzburgsoli.html [Accessed: 2 July 2020].
[19] https://www.facebook.com/pg/solidarity.asylumseekers.berlin/videos/ [Accessed: 2 July 2020].
[20] Interview with female refugee activist. September 1, 2018.
[21] Interview with male refugee activist. 17 May 2020.
[22] Interview, male refugee activist. 17 May 2020.
[23] Interview with male refugee activist. 17 May 2020.
[24] Group discussions recorded in Hamburg. 12 and 13 October 2019.
[25] Interview with female refugee activist. 17 May 2020.
[26] Group discussions recorded in Berlin. 2 September 2018.
[27] https://iwspace.de/ [Accessed: 2nd July 2020]
[28] https://www.women-in-exile.net/ [Accessed: 2nd July 2020]
[29] After the parliamentary elections, June 2019 a Social Democratic minority government took over power and promised to move the families with children out of Sjælsmark, but rejected demands to let the families live outside the repatriation camp and to allow children attend Danish public schools.

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