

BETWEEN BOHEMIA AND RESISTANCE: IMMIGRANTS' PUBS IN HAMBURG-GERMANY

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Abstract: In this paper, I will focus on the meaning of pubs as spaces of cultural memory, for the reproduction of political and cultural identities of immigrants and exiles of Turkish descent in Germany. Provided by the neoliberal changes in the 1980's in conjunction with processes of the "house squatting struggles" there have been transformations in cultural spaces. These transformations facilitated a kind of new political initiative in Hamburg's "Schanzenviertel" neighbourhood. This new emerging idea rested on the belief that new models of emancipative, i.e., non-representative forms of political praxis were necessary. At the same time, new alternative meeting places, such as pubs, that are run and visited mostly (but not exclusively) by regular immigrants and political exiles of Turkish descent were set up in the neighbourhood. The starting point of these developments was not merely political changes in Eastern Europe and the following collapse of many leftist organisations, but also the accompanying loss of spaces of political expression. Accordingly these pubs were created as spaces in which the immigrants share political, social and cultural experiences and reproduce collective immigrant identities. For this research, two pubs in Schanzenviertel, frequented mainly by immigrants of Turkish descent were chosen. As spaces in which cultural memory is expressed, I will examine the meaning of those pubs not

only for the re-production of the immigrants' cultural identities, but also for practicing their political identities. In doing so I will focus on the following questions: How do the immigrants express themselves through these politicised cultural spaces? How do they define their much defended emancipative politics and how do they shape their political praxis to expand their power for action? Considering that these spaces are places where collective memory is nurtured, and that memory is the place where belongingness is constructed, what are the ways in which collective identities are reproduced?

Keywords: Immigrants, Political, Culture, Hegemony, Space, Memory, Pubs

I. INTRODUCTION

Provided by the neo-liberal changes in the 1980's in conjunction with processes of the "house squatting struggles" there have been considerable transformations in cultural spaces. These changes facilitated a kind of new political initiative in Hamburg's Sternschanze commonly called as "Schanzenviertel" neighbourhood, a densely po-

pulated neighbourhood with its high proportion on immigrants, under class Germans, students and other socially disadvantaged people. This new emerging idea rested on the belief that new models of emancipative, i.e., non-representative forms of political praxis were necessary.

At the same time, new alternative meeting places, such as pubs, among others those that are run and visited mainly (but not exclusively) by regular immigrants and political exiles of Turkish descent were set up in the neighbourhood. The starting point of these developments was not merely political changes in Eastern Europe and the following collapse of many leftist organisations, but also the accompanying loss of spaces of political expression. Accordingly these pubs were created as spaces in which the immigrants share political, social and cultural experiences.

My aim in this paper is to discuss the role of the immigrants' pubs, for the immigrants and exiles in Germany. My primary focus is on the exploration of how immigrants construct their collective identity through the use of those pubs and how they express their motivation for critical engagement juggling between 'social drinking' and political cultural production - interpreted in its widest sense. This needs a discussion of the question whether the pubs in question, constitute a space where counter hegemonic discourses can be nurtured or are they merely sites of the bohemian live stile that rather obstructs a political engagement against hegemonic discourses as some argued.

II. HISTORICAL FRAME

In the history cafés have been always a space for cultural and social as well as political articulations. In

that sense they constituted an important place of democratic discourses. According to Thierry Paquot (2012) throughout the eventful 19th century many cafés, estaminets, taverns, cabarets, bistros and so on were places in which people gathered, discussed and assessed about social canon, reforms, and other public related social and political issues.

In the 19th century, during the mass migration of Germans to the United States Germans set up numerous saloons on the north side of Chicago. Most of them were run and frequented by Germans as the largest ethnic majority in the city at the time. Alone 115 of those saloons were located at the Madison Street, which drags four miles from business centre to the residential area. In addition to these "Daysaloons" located in the Business Centre of Chicago and visited by different customers there were "Neighbourhood Saloons" which had rather a practical and social function for the residents in the district (Ensslen, 1988).

These cafes had been very important for the social activities of the German-American Workers and their families but more importantly they played an essential role in the construction and growth of the workers movement in Chicago. According to Wedemeyer in '*.. certain historical situations pubs ... played a significant role. A close historical analysis would, highly likely show, that there is no significant political movement without appropriate regular pub meetings*' (1990: 31).

III. MEMORY, HEGEMONY AND SPACE

According to Jan Assmann (2001) remembering is the connection to the past . Relation to the past needs cultural memory. That is, past is a reconstruction

through memory. Social memory is not only a concrete time and space but at the same time a material identity. Thus construction of migrant identities leans on memories. Memory needs space as the figures of remembering always lean on a tangible time and space. Spatial frames of remembering can be a house, a village, a city or a geographical area. This creates feelings of 'home' for those who are far away.

Common memory belongs to a group with spatial boundaries. Therefore spatiality is indispensable for the act of memory that holds on the work of reconstruction. Accordingly immigrants' pubs as cultural sites are constructed through remembering. Remembering is an act of emotional relation that is consciously constructed with the past. The culture of remembering is closely related to the memory that gives a group its spirit. In that sense pubs as spaces of cultural memory, aid to create the collective "us" among immigrants.

Hegemony, a concept introduced by Antonio Gramsci, seldom can be maintained by a class alone, it needs a broad support. Yet this is not done through enforcement, but by means of a societal authority which includes the subaltern into the central structures and institutions. The subaltern in turn supports the power and the social authority of the dominating rule. In this way they are offered the elements of consent. As hegemony needs hearts and minds of the individuals, the ideological struggle for hegemony finds place on the site of popular culture. Accordingly counter hegemonic resistance requires active engagement on the cultural terrain. For Gramsci resistance cannot be only about conceptual analysis or the way of how a certain groups organise daily live, but rather it ought to offer all members the time and space to search for different ways of politics, and different forms of work and life (Gramsci, 1995).

Thus this paper is concerned with the meaning of immigrant pubs as spaces of cultural memory, for the enunciation of political and cultural resistance against hegemonic discourses. This entails a look at the ways in which those pubs are utilised for social and cultural articulations by the immigrants and exiles of Turkish descent in Hamburg.

I am arguing that these pubs provide in cultural, political but also in social terms a space for a counter hegemonic praxis. The very existence of those pubs subverts the cultural hegemony of the majority society. The presence of them reinforces immigrant collectivity, which is critical for the counter hegemonic praxis.

Moreover these pubs constitute a gap that can be seen as the third space between bohemia and political cultural engagement or activism. The third space stands for the definition of diaspora identities, being not a synthesis between two but something new that emerges out of the amalgamation of different identifications. It is '*the third space which enables other positions to emerge*' (Bhabha, 1990 : 211). In that sense pubs as location represent a hybrid space between the private and the public sphere. This is utilised by the immigrants as location of cultural translation.

Pubs also represent a third space in a cultural sense. Here, immigrants re-create their social and political subjectivity, beyond the public space. Further pubs symbolize a third space as they provide an in-between space between 'home' and 'host' country. Through memory, they are culturally constructed territories to the past – to 'homeland' if you like. In those pubs time and space are compressed through memory, a space between past and present and between there and here.

It is this contextual positioning within culturally marked space that enables agency (Hall, 1995). Positioning understood here in Stuart Hall's terms as cultural expression that disrupts hegemonic imposition of culture and identity, which suggest incommensurable dichotomies. Positioning is possible through collective experiences and interpretations acquired in the course of critical reconstructions of cultural political processes using time and place of the pub.

IV. METHODOLOGY

This article is supported by empirical data collected in two pubs during a time period of two years in Hamburg between 1999 and 2001. For ethical reasons I call these pubs "Pub X" and "Pub Y" throughout the paper. Mainly two methods were used: participant observation, focus groups interviews. In all, three focus group interviews were conducted.

Focus group interviews as a method was chosen for two reasons: Firstly, there were already small homogeneous groups of people who were regular visitors of the two pubs in question. And secondly, I assumed that these methods would enable me not only the collection of individual and collective opinions, but also it would lead to the transformation (change) of the objects of the investigation through the participants as agents. That means that the participants of the focus groups discussions were expected to reflect about their motivation to visit the pubs and possibly encouraged to act. Through this method would '*... underlying opinions updated, spontaneous reactions provoked, approaches become visible in the process of the discussion*' (Fredrichs, 1985 : 246).

The interviews were conducted in the pub X outside working hours. Firstly because of its practicality of the venue and secondly because of the assumption that a familiar space would enable a relaxed atmosphere and that would have a positive impact on the discussion. The interview participants belonged already to groups, which define themselves as political active and which knew each other privately. The participants visited the Pub X or Pub Y in average 2-3 evenings in a week.

The focus groups consisted of six participants; three men and three women between the ages of 28 – 34 years. The discussions took each between one and one and half hours. However, the main part of the data consists of participant observation. That offered tools and framework for a further exploration of the construction of the setting. Throughout the fieldwork field notes were kept irregularly. These notes consist of personal reflections on my own activities and analytical understandings of my observations in the field.

In that context I regard it as important to mention that my motivation to conduct a research about immigrant pubs is based on my own relation to the pubs in question. From 1995 to 2001 I have been a regular visitor of these pubs. For me as a second generation immigrant those pubs represented important cultural spaces for recreation but above all for meeting up friends and like-minded people, with whom I could exchange ideas, information, have political discussions and speak in my native language. Therefore my relation to this topic is rather subjective and partial. Hence, within this context my own praxis that is led by positive experiences flew into the analysis. But this is considered in a way as necessary. Nevertheless, the data that is used for this paper is extracted from the focus group interviews where considered as suitable.

V. THE PERSONAL IS POLITICAL

Pubs are spaces in which the public and the political are merged. For the visitors they provide a way of linking then and now reproducing and transforming the political culture through memory. At times pubs in question represent the sole social public space, for the immigrants in which they experience abolition from alienation. As we know alienation is a result of the fragmentation of an individual in different exclusionary identities such as woman, mother, student, worker, Turkish, German, etc. This has an existential feature for the immigrants in Germany, as in those pubs they are 'among themselves' and not forced to take up other identities which are imposed upon them by the majority German society. Therefore the actors experience the pubs as a place where cultural and emotional reproduction through memory found place without restrictions. It is also the space where they can take up positions tentatively – positions which are close to their own lifeworld (*Lebenswelt*) experiences. As one of the participants expressed: "I need people. What kind of people? They must have a similar background that is, they must be leftist activists today or in the past" (*W:108*).

Besides emotional and cultural needs also social and at times material needs of the individual are being taken care of by the collective.

"In the course of my participant observation many times I witnessed among the visitors support and help to each other. Not only material support, for example, financial aid for those in need or providing furniture for the new flat or offering a place to stay but also assistance in immigration formalities or companionship in loss of a family member, etc".

This was the foundation of the solidarity onto which the political praxis was built. Precisely this solidarity for which time and space of the pubs was used filled the gap between bohème and activism. Solidarity which rested upon collective experiences and interpretations was possible among others through memory. Thus pubs as third spaces enable a simultaneous coming and going in a borderland zone between different modes of action.

Nonetheless, at times, the close link between the personal and political is seen as a source of conflict. But interestingly also in this case the pubs with their opportunity of social drinking are seen as the place for the solution of the conflicts in a relaxing atmosphere. For the actors the pubs symbolise a kind of abstraction from the daily life (*Alltagsr cktheit*) in a familiar environment, with well known rituals, which play an important role for the life of immigrants. A participant stated:

"And often conflicts, which emerge in political engagement, can be solved in companion of a glass wine with two or three people anyhow. Pubs also provide this convenience. But there is a disadvantage – each of you will approve this – that is that the mingling can become a problem. Sometimes the mingling of political engagement and personal issues above all conflicts in relationship bubble up, which to deal with is very difficult. These problems however can rather be solved in pubs than in institutions" (*A: 64*).

As we know a counter hegemonic praxis needs to connect to the conditions of the people. The link of the own lifeworld to the overall and vice versa, as everyday exercise of political thinking and praxis ought not to be despised. This has to do with common sense in Gramsci's terms. The hegemony implements itself through the common sense into the life of the people.

Therefore the common sense is the centre of the struggles for hegemony. A radical break of the hegemony is only possible with a renewal of the common sense; this in turn has to be applied to peoples' necessities, desires and real conditions (Gramsci, 1995).

The release from everyday restrictions allows visitors to envisage subjective functions and hands on anticipation, without the fear of sanctions. Accordingly pubs contribute more to the politisation process of some people than political discussions, as some may assume.

"Political participation can unfold itself in spaces in which not always the whole existence is at risk, which is always the case in work area. It does not come out of the blue that all relevant movements of participation in recent times are not oriented at the work place but in residential area in which the opportunity is given to work with conflict risks step by step" (Wedemeyer, 1990 : 117). That is, a political praxis emerges out of the life context of the individuals but also remains reconnected to it.

VI. PUBLIC SPACE VERSUS PRIVATE SPACE?

In her article about feminist city Antje Eickhoff (1998) states that the division of lifeworld in private and public is based on a dualistic concept to define space and society. Accordingly, "streets, places, parks, businesses, civil services and places of cultural and political events are described as public spaces. (...) As private space count above all dwelling, within it particularly places of retreat; toilettes and sleeping room" (Eickhoff, 1998 : 14).

Loading of public space with a positive or negative symbolic meaning goes along with the concrete possibility of appropriation of such spaces. That means structuring spaces through own action and therewith making

them accessible for oneself. The material as well as the symbolic appropriation of space is dependent on economic, social and cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1991).

Applied to the pubs in concern that means; the appropriation of pubs as a third space is possible through a collective memory that entails a certain kind of shared social and cultural capital, economic capital seems to be as secondary relevant in that case. The pubs as the third space thus become places of invention and of transformational encounters – a dynamic in-between space that is imbued with political praxis. A participant stated:

"(...) Because precisely this neighbourhood has become an amusement district (...) some people lose their way into this pub. This is because, when strangers come in this neighbourhood they assumes they can go to any pub, (...)but actually they mean to go in the surrounding bars. They enter this pub accidentally and see that here is a totally different atmosphere" (A: 253).

The assignment of a public space, the control and its transformation produces a symbiosis of vision and power. Perhaps therefore pubs are the primary target for those in power in political unruly times. For this Wedemeyer provides an illustrative example: "Between 1986 and 1987 a movement of tenants emerged against the demolition and renewal of their houses. The people of the district met in a pub of the neighbourhood. Before touching a single rented house the housing association demolished the pub at the first place" (1990 : 110).

According to Wedemeyer in pubs people seek to secure their own individuality. They have the function of a subcultural sanctuary. Pubs into which people 'risk' to enter, which they can call their 'home' and which they allocate to own milieu convey spatial identification and belongingness (1990). As one of the focus group interview participants expressed:

(...) It is a shelter for personal but also –if necessary– for political problems (...) (A: Z: 329). But also a public space that offers anybody accessibility and therefore people cannot be excluded so easily (C: 319).

Another participant:

"(...) A pub must be a piece of home". (W: 116).

Pubs symbolise the scope of application of one's own lifeworld as well as that of a whole 'culture' in public sphere. As a result despite the acceptance as public space the identification of certain groups with the pubs as a social and physical space can lead to exclusion of other groups or individuals.

"(...) Actually a pub is a public space ..." (C: 289).

Another participant continues:

"(...) .. and I notice precisely here, for instance when there are visitors at the weekend, who come from other neighbourhoods and who lost their way into this pub as waitress I think "so what are you doing here, you are not welcome" and the visitors also notices that he/she is somehow out of place here" (B: 215).

Thus the participants experience a challenge between their vision of that a pub is open for all and their desire 'this pub belongs to us'. Accordingly they are inclined to exclude visitors whom they allocate to other political or social milieu and who do not have a local reference. At this point the contradiction becomes apparent; namely the attempts of the participants to transform a public space into a private one and herewith personalise the political. This would turn the earlier mentioned prominent slogan upside down; in that case not the 'personal is political' but 'political become personal'.

"When a new pub opens up, it is being checked, accordingly some people go more often and others don't. The decisive point is if they feel comfortable or not in that pub. Immigrants feel here comfortable, because the pub

owner himself is an immigrant and here is a corresponding music and accordingly that draws certain people to this pub, and that is the way how it happens" (C: 294).

Obviously, those pubs are cultivated and secured as an environment belonging to one's own that represents not only a material space but also a space marked with symbolic meaning and collective memory. This is linked to the changes caused by the developing gentrification process in the neighbourhood. This however shows that a social critical engagement rises with increasing local identification.

The pubs in question are considered as an exception in the neighbourhood which kept their peculiarity as 'political pub' and mock the gentrification processes in the neighbourhood. According to Bourdieu (1998) this emphasized presentation of appropriated space means a form of challenging display of power. The power in turn establishes and performs itself among others in appropriated space. This happens in a very subtle way. Applied to the immigrant pubs it means that the local as well as cultural hegemony of the majority society is challenged through the very existence of those pubs.

VII. NEOLIBERAL ISOLATION VERSUS COLLECTIVITY

Neoliberalism according to Bourdieu is a '*social philosophy*' which in the name of '*personal responsibility*' (1999 : 11) destroys everything that stands on the way of the '*logic of a pure market economy*' (Bourdieu, 1998 : 3). As a consequence communalities and collective structures based on the protection of privileges and rights such as trade unions, cooperatives etc., are dismantled through alleged strengthening of individual competences and individual rewards. As a conse-

quence of these developments people are more and more isolated in their living or working environment.

In view of these developments spaces of collective communication becomes more important than ever. As mentioned earlier the pubs in question represent a space of social, cultural and political articulation through collectivity. In fact this collective articulation is the soil of what gives those pubs their spirit. Through the collectivity of the actors the contradictions in the society become visible on the one hand. And on the other hand it increases the awareness about that changes and power is only possible through collective action of the subaltern.

(...) For me is the daily routine... I experience it contradictory, because sexism and racism plays always an important role at work, at the university, during shopping or elsewhere, and then here we pick up ... the theoretical backing, the exchange...in so far can this be seen as a training for resistance, which we have to practice somehow daily... (A: 687).

In that sense the pubs constitute for the actors not only a collective sanctuary toward racist and sexist assaults but also a base from where they can act or from where they can get backing. It can be said that those pubs provide the space for the construction of a collective subject. Thus those pubs are spaces of social solidarity and cultural continuity. They stay alive with the passion of the visitors. It is these emotions through which the past is constructed and connected to the present to re-create the memory (see Assmann, 2001).

(...) Common interests and shared experiences are important. I think that it is not a coincidence that this pub is visited mostly by immigrants. I personally never thought to go to a German pub, because I feel out of place there and this is repulsive or I don't feel welcome in those pubs. There happens no interaction (D: 161).

For Gramsci (1995), in struggle for hegemony the subjects are dependent on the collectivity, because this is the base for changes. The solidarity of the collectivity of a group is not only based on the pure political, but it comes directly from the experiences of the subject in their life-worlds. This reflects upon their political views and activities. Therewith they resist one of the most important elements of neo-liberalism, namely the isolation of people through dissociation of solidarity structures.

VIII. CONCLUSION

The conversations of the participants as frequent visitors of the two pubs are pervaded of personal things, which are but not that personal, because in the substance they are similar and thus collective and herewith political. The exchange of experiences, the common interests and the discussion of agendas is facilitated through a solid foundation of shared cultural memories. Language and comprehension can rely on many common metaphors. These kinds of places of sociability that are free from the chains of everyday life constitute a fertile soil for developing counter hegemonic actions.

The existence of pubs marked as 'political' challenge the cultural hegemony of the majority society. At the same time the existence of a culturally profound symbolic pub is a visible seizure of public space. The appropriation of public space in turn is of key importance and is a sign of power.

Though pubs are not intrinsically political or even principally resistant facilities, rather they have an affirmative function. In them prevalent models of culture are reproduced. But in this space of cultural reproduction is a kind of 'political potential', which in

certain situation step suddenly to the forefront. However, the driving force for political actions can always be the social conditions and the specifically affected social groups. The activities in those pubs are dependent on political and social conjunctures.

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