How can people live together, with ever more diverse characteristics, in the world’s rapidly expanding cities? The UN estimates a doubling of world urban population by 2050. Meanwhile, global migration flows show profound diversification of migrants’ nationality, ethnicity, language, gender balance, age, human capital and legal status. Everywhere, migrants with complex ‘new diversity’ traits dwell in cities alongside people from previous, ‘old diversity’ waves. The dynamics of diversification – despite their increasing ubiquity – remain seriously under-researched. We know little about how people in diversifying urban settings create new patterns of coexistence, or how and why they might tend toward conflict.

This project’s core research question is: In public spaces compared across cities, what accounts for similarities and differences in social and spatial patterns that arise under conditions of diversification, when new diversity-meets-old diversity? The project entails comparative, inter-disciplinary, multi-method research in three contexts of super-diversity: New York (a classic city of immigration with new global migrant flows in a broadly supportive political context), Singapore (dominated by racial-cultural politics, and wholly dependent on new, highly restricted migrants), and Johannesburg (emerging from Apartheid with tensions around unregulated new, pan-African migrant flows). Spanning anthropology and human geography to research the changing nature of diversity and its socio-spatial patterns, strategic methods entail ‘conceiving’ (exploring how old and new diversities are locally understood), ‘observing’ (producing ethnographies of interaction) and ‘visualizing’ (using photographs, film and innovative data mapping).

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