

Lessons from the Struggles

A Collage

From the Struggles Collective

In 2012, migrant activists set in motion “a new era of protest” in Europe.¹ New protest movements emerged or were reinforced not only in Germany, but also in Austria, Switzerland, Hungary, Italy, France, the Netherlands, Belgium, and Sweden, as well as along the external borders of the EU.

Through different forms of self-organisation, refugees, asylum-seekers and non-citizens successfully struggled for a position in public discourse which could not be ignored any longer.² At the *kritnet* conference in spring 2014, at a time when some of the movements were facing critical challenges, we came together for a weekend of workshops to collectively look back at the crucial political interventions that materialised in the previous months of struggle. We discussed the commonalities and differences between the various local movements. Some of the questions we raised were: What events, injustices, and experiences gave rise to the local movements? What forms of organisation emerged? What kinds of alliances became possible and at what moments did conflicts appear? In order to think about future potentialities of the movements, we also started to reflect on their achievements up to that point. What changed due to the migrant protests? What turned out differently than anticipated? What could have been done differently and what fruitful modes of struggle can be further built upon?

¹ A call to join the Protest March project to Berlin http://www.refugeetentaction.net/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=42:a-call-to-join-the-protest-march-project-to-berlin-routes&catid=19:about&Itemid=161&lang=en

² We will mostly use the term ‘migrant activists’ in this collage, because some of the protesters make a strong point not adapting the label ‘refugee’. However, in the passages about specific protest groups that call their struggles ‘refugee struggle’ or ‘refugee strike’ we adapt the terms the protesters are using themselves.

This collage provides a brief overview of some of the recent migration struggles. Participants of the movements in Berlin, Munich, Vienna, Hamburg and Zurich were present at the workshop and proposed initial thoughts and preliminary responses to the questions posed above. We do not understand this collage as an all encompassing review of the struggles that occurred throughout Europe in the past years. Rather, we want to highlight and emphasise some of the crucial components of the protests as well as document the knowledges, statements and opinions that were pronounced during our workshop during the *kritnet* conference. We have, to that end, selected specific statements voiced by the five movements. These statements often are symptomatic of challenges and issues experienced in certain stages of the protests, and highlight crucial aspects of the movements. Both the re-published statements in the first part of the collage as well as the findings of our workshop in the second and third part should not be regarded as a comprehensive overview or as conclusive results, but instead as a product of collective exchanges.

In the months following the workshop, the movements developed further, sometimes changed direction or continued in different contexts. At the same time, various other struggles evolved and became seen and heard throughout and beyond Europe. In Berlin, the divisionary processes within the movement escalated and the occupied Oranienplatz became evicted. Some activists responded to the eviction by going on a hunger-strike and a five-day-long ‘tree-occupation’ or sought to reclaim the space by other means. Attempts to evict the remaining inhabitants of the squatted Gerhardt-Hauptmann school were counteracted, even when facing hundreds of police forces surrounding the school that turned Berlin-Kreuzberg into a site of exception and siege. Refugee activists occupied the Berlin TV Tower and the building of the *Confederation of German Trade Unions* (DGB). In Munich, the non-citizen struggle regrouped and activists squatted the *Federal Office for Migration and Refugees* (BAMF) in Nuremberg and were also part of or initiated the struggles in Berlin. In Hamburg, Lampedusa in Hamburg protesters continued to organise demonstrations, press conferences and other public events such as the *Lampedusa Emancipation Days* in October 2014. The Lampedusa activists have focussed their fight around demands for the right to work which, for example, have been voiced in the interview and photography project entitled *Lampedusa Professions*.³ In Vienna, refugee protesters moved into their own house which, for them, constitutes “a further symbol of our legitimate stay”.⁴ Regaining control over their own

³ <http://lampedusa-in-hamburg-professions.blogspot.de>

⁴ <http://refugeecampvienna.noblogs.org/post/2014/04/07/haus-fur-fluchtlinge-vom-protest-camp-vienna-gefunden-found-a-house-for-refugees-of-the-protest-camp-vienna/>

lives, and becoming independent from state institutions, the activists regard their new home as a space of self-determinacy where they can work towards overcoming the pain and trauma they experienced in the months of struggle and where they would be able to further organise collective projects. In Switzerland, the educational project of the *Autonomous School Zurich* (ASZ) remains politically engaged, for example in the broader movement against gentrification that organised a demonstration under the label “Who owns Zurich?” in June 2014. To the present day they struggle to create and maintain a space for ‘education without borders’ while still searching for a new school building.⁵

In summer 2014, the ‘March for Freedom’ from Strasbourg to Brussels sought to bring together the different struggles in Europe and beyond. In a general flyer, produced by the participants of the march, they stated:

“We are asylum seekers, refugees, undocumented migrants, migrants from many European countries, we are Europeans with a ‘migration background’, we are all those who have no full privilege of citizenship, but also citizens who share a common anger against the racist EU migration policy. We have a dream: Freedom of movement and of residence for all asylum seekers; Stop the Dublin trap and the obligatory residence in Lagers throughout Europe; Permanent documents without criteria (not depending on working contracts or individual state prosecution); Stop the imprisonment and deportation of migrants; Same working conditions for all; Same political, social and cultural rights for all: right to study and to work; Stop the European imperialist policies: no more free trade treaties and NATO wars; Abolish Frontex, Eurosur and other anti-migration policies and measures.”

<http://freedomnotfrontex.noblogs.org/files/2014/04/English1.pdf>

The march and the protest actions in Brussels highlighted the possibilities for a collectivization of migration struggles and movements but were also accompanied by various challenges and internal contestations, highlighting the complex nature of large-scale political mobilisations in transnational contexts.

The migration struggles briefly illustrated in this collage continue to exist, even if in different form, and have often inspired or connected to other emergent struggles. They have set in motion various political processes and public discourses, some of which will be presented in the following section.

⁵ <http://www.wem-gehoert-zuerich.ch/> <http://www.bildung-fuer-alle.ch/artikel/schulhaus-gesucht>

Lessons from the Struggles

For this section of the collage we collected calls, statements and declarations that were published at critical moments in the protests in Berlin, Munich, Vienna, Hamburg and Zurich. They offer insights into the different movements and constitute context-specific reflections. We will introduce each struggle with a brief summary before turning to the original texts produced by the protest movements.

From Berlin

The Non-Citizen protest movement in Germany was triggered by the death of Mohammad Rahsepar who committed suicide in his room in a refugee camp in Würzburg on January 29, 2012. It was quite clear for his co-residents that the living conditions in the isolated camp had driven him to such desperate action. When they started a permanent demonstration and a hunger strike in the city centre of Würzburg,⁶ it was the beginning of one of the longest and most radical self-organised protests of refugees in Germany: “In March 2012 refugee protest camps began spreading throughout Germany.”⁷ In September 2012, refugee activists and supporters began a 600km protest march from Würzburg to Berlin, while, at the same time, a bus tour took place through western and northern Germany, visiting and protesting Germany’s many refugee camps.⁸

After their arrival in Berlin, the refugee activists founded a protest camp in the centre of the city at Oranienplatz.⁹ In the first months of the protest camp, various actions and campaigns were organised, including a 6,000 people strong demonstration to the German parliament (Bundestag). Right at the beginning of the protest, refugee activists occupied the Nigerian Embassy in Berlin to protest against deportation agreements with the German state. In December 2012, refugee activists and supporters squatted an empty school building to find shelter during the cold winter. However, Oranienplatz remained the political centre of the protest and people continued to stay there, even in the coldest

⁶ <http://gustreik.blogspot.eu>

⁷ <http://asylstrikeberlin.files.wordpress.com/2012/08/23-03-2013-demo-flyer-long-english.pdf>

⁸ <http://refugeecampvienna.noblogs.org/post/2014/04/07/haus-fur-fluchtlinge-vom-protest-camp-vienna-gefunden-found-a-house-for-refugees-of-the-protest-camp-vienna/>

⁹ The camp lasted more than one and a half year until the brutal eviction on 8 May 2014 <http://asylstrikeberlin.wordpress.com/2014/05/14/1-5-jahre-oranienplatz-1-5-years-oranienplatz/#more-4345>

of nights. In early 2013, a second bus tour visited refugee camps and cities in western and northern Germany to further mobilise and inform inhabitants.¹⁰

On the 23rd of March 2013 — the day of arrival of the second bus tour — another large demonstration occurred in Berlin, with more than 5,000 participants. The following part of the call for the “Refugees’ Revolution Demo” highlights the three central demands: Stop Deportation, Abolish Residenzpflicht and Close all Refugee Lager.

“[...] We will stay in the streets. We will continue to resist. We will not be silenced until our demands are met!

1. Stop Deportation!

Deportation is an outdated practice tracing back to the racist colonial era. According to the Geneva Convention on Refugees of the UNHCR, a refugee shall not be deported to a country where he or she faces a danger for life and freedom.

More than 15 000 refugees and migrants have died over the past two decades on the borders of the European Union, in detention and in the course of deportation. As the Refugee Resistance of the past year transpired, while the EU doublespeaks human rights, human beings were and are being murdered by Frontex. The rights of refugees are systematically ignored. The so called Dublin-System, an apparatus aiming to establish a Europe wide internal deportation system, ensures that the movement of refugees is completely under control of European authorities. How can we find protection if we are deported back to countries such as Italy, where we are forced into homelessness? Where there is no social benefit system? We have organized an action at the UNHCR to raise awareness of the Dublin-System and its terrible effects on the lives of refugees.

Germany does not have an asylum system; it has an effective deportation system. The EU justifies its policies by labelling refugees as illegal. Yet there is no legal way for them to enter Europe. People are not illegal, they are made illegal by the racialized ideals of colonial ideologies. While European passport holders may move freely, others are denied this same right. When Germany signs special treaties with international corporations, ensuring access to natural resources in the countries of refugees. The status quo is a

¹⁰ <http://refugeesrevolution.blogspot.de>

continuation of colonial practices, where unequal power relations result in exploitation. Such practices lead to economic circumstances that force people from their homes. Which is the terrifying and true answer to the question: Why does the State differentiate between economic and political refugees?

2. Abolish Residenzpflicht!

The law prevents refugees from moving freely by employing monetary sanctions and jail sentences for leaving the 'Landkreis', or the region where we are registered.

This law is as well part of the German colonial legacy. It was invented by imperialist invaders to control and oppress the people of occupied lands. The German Federal Republic is the only (former) colonial state to continue this law. This law demonstrates the isolation of refugees and constrains their freedom of movement although, according to §13 of the UN's Universal Declaration of Human Rights "every human being shall be able to exercise the right for unlimited freedom of movement." The European DUBLIN 2 and German Residenzpflicht regulations, for instance, have the same ideology. The national state borders in Europe exist only for refugees. These regulations underlie the same racist ideology: some individuals should not be allowed to choose where to live. The 'Asylausweis' we are asked to hold does not provide us with basic rights, but in contrary functions as a tool to limit and control our movement within German territory.

But there's no limit to our movement! We, as the striking refugees, do not accept Residenzpflicht! We have broken this law, and we will keep on breaking it!

3. Close all Refugee Lager!

German institutions force refugees to live in Lager, where we are being isolated from access to social, health and infrastructural services and have faced Neonazi attacks. The lager system is a prison system which we are resisting with our protest on the streets!

Lagers are often located in the middle of nowhere. No one sees us, we cannot see anyone. No one hears us, we cannot hear anyone. No one talks to us, we cannot talk to anyone! We are invisible. The German authorities intentionally isolate us from society!

We are put in Lagers until further notice — which can last years. We spend long hours lying in our beds. There is nothing to do, nowhere to go, no work, no dreams, no hope. The Lager is a prison where we face our reality and destiny without any chance to work except for a 1€-Job, which we are being forced to do — this is slavery!! These conditions make it impossible to lead anything close to an ordinary life. People obtain psychological problems, become sick and aggressive, often begin to sell or get addicted to drugs. This is why many decide to end their lives as it is also the case during our protest starting last year. Being killed by the German asylum and deportation system!

Refugee women, together with their kids, often suffer in lagers. Especially in places where power hierarchies exist, violent attacks and harassment are happening more frequently. As women are subject to racist and sexist suppression, it is irresponsible to strengthen their suppression by forcing them into lagers. Many women are confronted by men convinced that the refugee women are vulnerable, for them any time they want, which is again the reason why refugee women face disrespectful offers and discrimination by men. These violent conditions are encouraged by the German Lager system.

We are humans, we are not animals! We have the right to receive asylum! Human Rights! We are not criminals! We, the striking refugees from the Protestcamp at Oranienplatz in Berlin, have shown that our resistance on the street is possible and ongoing. Despite of our fears, the permanent control and repression by the state, we are keeping our protest because we are serious with our demands. It's an ongoing fight and we will stay!

We are not victims, we are fighters! Break the silence, break isolation!”

<http://asylstrikeberlin.files.wordpress.com/2012/08/23-03-2013-demo-flyer-long-english.pdf>

From Munich

Soon after the arrival of the protest march in Berlin, in October 2012, a group of refugee activists — including the Action Circle of the Independent Non-Citizen Struggle — left the camp at Oranienplatz. They started a hunger-strike

in front of the Brandenburg Gate, and were able to enforce a meeting with politicians at the Bundestag.¹¹ After the hunger-strike, some members of this action circle went back to Bavaria to re-organise the refugee protest there. They published the much debated essay *On The Position of ‘Asylum-seekers’ and Asylum-seekers’ Struggle in modern societies* and prepared the Refugee Struggle Congress in Munich at the beginning of March 2013.¹² An insight into their Non-Citizen theory is provided by the first statement from the Munich protest tent that was erected there in April 2013:

“We are those human beings who have suffered from wars, sanctions, colonisation, occupations, repressions and poverty due to the geographical regions we were, out of coincidence, born in. We have managed to leave those places and have arrived here. Here, the place that people call ‘safe countries’. ‘Safe countries’, which have created those wars, colonisation, poverty and all of the other terror which we experienced in our places of birth. Safe countries, which in the moment that our feet touch their sacred soil, call us ‘asylum-seekers’. Asylum-seekers, or those human beings that are not allowed to work or study, who are forced to live in isolated camps, waiting for police to come to their rooms with deportation notices (in the past 2 days only — 23rd and 24th of April — around 100 asylum-seekers in Baden Württemberg and Nordrhein-Westfalen were deported to Belgrade). The human beings who are breathing in society but are not living are like ghosts; it becomes impossible to see them anymore. The ‘asylum-seeker’ label was put on us by these governments that set the discriminatory laws. A label which makes others think of us as poor people who can’t even do the easiest of tasks.

We are Non-Citizens.

Today we came to the streets to shout, that in a first step, we want to choose our own name. We believe we are non-citizens, non-citizens who get excluded from accessing the rights a citizen, has in this society. From all the basic rights of human beings,

¹¹ http://www.refugeentaction.net/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=273:the-action-circle-of-the-independent-non-citizen-struggle-break-up-announcement&catid=2&Itemid=133&lang=en

¹² http://www.refugeentaction.net/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=208:on-the-position-of-asylum-seekers-and-asylum-seekers-struggles-in-modern-societies&catid=2&Itemid=132&lang=de,

we non-citizens, only have a place to sleep, food packages to eat, nightmares of deportations and living in fear and terror.

Today we came to the streets of Munich, building a non-citizens' resistance tent to announce that we don't accept this discrimination. To change the situation, we just need the will of struggle of all aware non-citizens. A struggle that believes in non-citizens becoming citizens, regardless of gender, language, nationality or culture. It's any non-citizen's right to make this happen. Non-citizens have to get organized — and this organizing has to be: for ourselves by ourselves.

To those non-citizens who can hear us: becoming citizens is our right, even if the German government and citizens think we aren't worth enough. We say: we are!

Let's gather and fight to get our rights and become citizens!"

http://www.refugeetentaction.net/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=221:the-first-statement-of-the-non-citizens-from-the-munich-protest-tent&catid=2&Itemid=133&lang=en

After the Congress in March 2013, the non-citizen activists erected a protest tent in Munich. They also went on a tour to several cities in Bavaria “to create an independent network of Non-Citizens”.¹³ One outcome of this mobilisation was the occupation of the Rindermarkt in the centre of Munich. On the 22nd of June 2013, 89 non-citizens started a hunger-strike. Their critique and the claims underlying their struggle were pronounced in the call for the demonstration:

“I rebel, therefore I exist.

After more than fifteen months of our frustration and anger, as marginalized people, erupting; as those who citizen-based societies have forgotten and passed over — here we are.

We are those asylum-seekers who, within the capitalist societies of European countries, position ourselves as non-citizens. Non-citizens who live in inequality to citizens, who live somewhere outside of Europe's citizen-based societies. Citizens, who because of their citizen-position and nothing else, enjoy all the basic rights, such as the right to work, the right to education, to freedom of

¹³ http://www.refugeetentaction.net/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=273:the-action-circle-of-the-independent-non-citizen-struggle-break-up-announcement&catid=2&Itemid=133&lang=en

movement, and the right to choose one's place of residence freely. We, non-citizens, are deprived of these fundamental rights, and hollow claims to upholding 'human rights' and slogans by the so-called 'democratic' governments of Europe don't hold true for us. They are non-existent for us because we are not citizens who fit into the ridiculous 'human rights' discourse, as fellow people who 'belong'. In order to transform our survival into actual living, in order to become 'human' and have the same rights as other humans, we must move from the position of non-citizens and become citizens.

Everything started after the suicide of one of us non-citizens in an asylum-seeker camp. The anger of this state-lead murder materialized in the first non-citizen resistance tent on one of the streets of this alienated 21st century consumer society. This anger spread to 7 cities, as 7 resistance tents erupted, while the government didn't change a thing and our room mates, one after the other, kept committing suicide in camps, more and more murders by the hand of the state.

And yet, our belief in just one alternative — struggle and strong resistance in front of discriminatory laws — was growing and growing like a flame in our chest. After 6 months of resistance on the streets, including the Protest March to Berlin, our voices passed imaginary borders and echoed in surrounding geographies; now Vienna, Amsterdam and Den Haag were raging.

With all this, we keep receiving news about non-citizen suicides, daily deportations, and understand that no basic changes of laws, producing this 'Other' — as the main policy of the European governments, and specially Germany — have occurred.

Today we are surprised. We are surprised that governments, relying on structural oppression by laws and police forces as their tools, think that the capacity of human beings in the 21st century of accepting oppression has no limit, has no end. They should know that, that which has no end is our will for changing this situation and that we understand resistance, as the only way to preserve our humanity.

We don't want to be afraid of deportation nightmares during the night any more; when we wake up in the morning, we don't want to find ourselves within the walls of the most isolated camps. When we take our steps on these streets, just as any other person in this

society, we refuse to face the oppression of ‘Residenzpflicht’. [...]”

<http://www.refugeetentaction.net/index.php?limitstart=24&lang=de>

From Vienna

Similarly to the refugee march from Würzburg to Berlin, refugees and asylum-seekers in Austria marched from Traiskirchen to Vienna on November 24, 2012. This was only the beginning of numerous public actions, demonstrations, press conferences, and the opening of a protest camp in the Sigmund Freud Park (Vienna) by which the protesting refugees visualised the harrowing conditions under which they were living and the rights they were being denied. The protesters gathering in Vienna had originally been accommodated in refugee camps all over Austria.

Throughout the protest, the refugee activists formulated three main sets of demands, some of them very specific and others more general, focusing on access to the labour market and legal residence. In one of their earliest press releases (on November 26, 2012), the activists declared their first demands as follows:

“We are refugees who have arrived in Austria to seek asylum to build a new life here. Our countries are devastated with war, military aggression, social backwardness and poverty because of the colonialist politics. We have come from Pakistan, Afghanistan, Somalia, Nigeria, Gambia, Syria, Kurdistan, Iran, Chechnya etc. and now we are stuck here in the refugee camp Traiskirchen. In this camp, we have expected to get help and support from Austria, but what we have seen here, was, that the Austrian state didn’t show us that we are welcome here. We are staying in refugee camps facing bad conditions.

We, the refugees from Traiskirchen now raise our voices and demand our rights. We demand from the authorities the following improvements:

1. The translators which are being used during the asylum cases must all be replaced with new ones. These translators have been working here for a very long time, and they are making jokes about people. They translate deliberately wrong and because of that many people got bad court procedures, negative verdicts and interviews.

2. After getting two negatives from the court, the court asks us to pay court and lawyer fees that amount 220,- and in case someone does not pay this amount, he is taken to prison. This is unacceptable because we are not criminals, we are just not allowed to work as asylum seekers. We demand that we don't have to pay for court or lawyer fees any more.
3. Deportations must all be stopped. People must be able to stay here or go to another country.
4. We demand more translators for doctor visits, especially translators of the Urdu language.
5. Generally we demand more doctors for refugees.
6. There are many transfers to backward areas in Austria's countryside. This must stop. Because these are small areas where is no legal advice, shopping possibility, which practically means isolation where refugees cannot get help when they need.
7. Inside the camp, german language courses and practical work courses must be opened. And for the german language school, we need translators.
8. Children of the families staying in the camp must attend an ordinary school with local children.
9. Food must be much healthier and nutritious. The refugees have to be able to cook for themselves or to take the food to their rooms.
10. There must be proper and good clothes and shoes available for all seasons.
11. The working conditions and the amount that is paid for cleaning and cooking is not enough and must be improved.
12. Travel tickets for 3 times a week must be provided, so that everyone can get to know the country, the people and their living, and their own legal situation and asylum process.
13. We need a barber in the camp for men and women.
14. Pocket money in the amount of 40,- per month is absolutely not enough and must be increased.

15. We need real and proper sanitary articles. We need also such articles as nailcutters or mirrors, because there are no mirrors in bathrooms(!).
16. In the refugee camp, we are isolated from the rest of the world because there is no internet access and no television. We need both to stay in contact with our families and friends. We live in the 21st century but we don't have access to modern media and forms of communication. We demand free internet access in the camps and satellite TV receivers to get informations about the world.

We demand these basic rights from the Austrian government, the European Union and for all refugees worldwide.

We call on the Austrian government to fulfil its responsibilities towards the refugees.

We will continue our actions until our voices are being heard and our demands fulfilled.

Freedom of movement for all refugees!

We will rise!"

<http://refugeecampvienna.noblogs.org/post/2012/11/26/refugee-demands-24th-nov-2012/>

From Hamburg

It was the beginning of 2013 when the *North Africa Emergency Provisions* (ENA) that had provided for refugee accommodation in Italy ended and accommodations were closed. Refugees started to live on the streets and were sent out of the country by Italian authorities. As a consequence several thousand refugees left Italy, trying to find new prospects in different European countries. About 300 people came to Hamburg, in the midst of winter, where they found shelter in accommodations for homeless people. However, when the so called winter emergency program (Winternotprogramm) of the city of Hamburg ended, they had to leave these shelters, too. Having met in accommodations for homeless people, they gathered as a group and started collective actions to fight for their right to stay and to call for the responsibility of Hamburg authorities, e.g. by marching to the Town Hall and demonstrating inside the

building, or through their attempt to build a tent as a common place to stay, which was, however, prohibited by the police.

Nevertheless, the members of the Lampedusa in Hamburg group were allowed to establish a 'protest tent' near the Hamburg main train station. They expressed the key demands for their protest, for example, in their 2nd Declaration and Call for Serious Conversations to the Assembly and the Mayor of Hamburg on May 20th, 2013:

“In the view of our disastrous situation and of the ignorance towards our plight and our agony, we direct our demand for a face to face dialogue to the deputies of the city of Hamburg in order to find solutions.

First of all some background information which is known but nevertheless ignored.

We are victims of the war in Libya and victims of the European refugee policies. When the NATO started to bomb Libya in 2011 our lives were over. We lost everything we had. We were brought to the Mediterranean coast, put in a boat and sent to sea. We lived in refugee camps in Italia, until Italian government closed all camps early this year and told us to leave the country heading north. We were granted permission to stay according to humanitarian protection. At the same time we are refused our resulting right. Italy failed to implement the documented protection and the other nations of the European Union are not willing to.

Today, we are living on the street in those countries that are fighting wars in the name of human rights. It was not our intention to come to Europe. We were forced to do it. All of us have been working in Libya, on the African continent and have been taking care of our families and communities with our income. The NATO- war destroyed everything. Many people were dying in Libya and the Mediterranean Sea. We survivors in Europe have no more choice. We are here and we will stay. No European country can evade the responsibility. We will not to be played with any more by the European policy. We demand the facts to be recognized and thus we demand the full recognition of our rights as refugees.

Until now we experienced that there is no will for a solution. On the contrary, it is tried to make us invisible, to singularize us and to put us in impoverishment.

It will be for everybody understandable, that we can't endure this in silence.

In Hamburg our situation is that for now exactly four weeks we are living on the streets, without access to medical care, without access to the job market, without access to the education system and without any material basics. Our physical and psychological integrity is getting worse day by day. When the city of Hamburg closed the accommodation for homeless people *Pik As* exactly one month ago, on 15th of April 2013 and when they took us with busses to the city, when they put us on the street, weren't the persons responsible knowing that they would cause problems? We were told that the only thing we would get is a ticket back to Italy. We think that the social and economical situation in Italy and other southern European countries is well known and that there is no possibility for livelihood for us. If it would be possible, we wouldn't be here.

So we put the question again in the room, what should be achieved, if we get a document of humanitarian protection but at the same time every possibility to survive is denied? What could somebody do, whose basics are all taken away? Should we go begging or should we become criminals? It is a very dangerous situation, we were pushed into. The forced living on the streets causes large damage on us and even the whole city, because it inevitably generates problems and conflicts in the neighborhoods and districts. Hamburg is a very rich city and the wealth is not at last taken from our continent. We are not coming as beggars we come in full knowledge of the relationships that brought us here against our will. No one can escape of the responsibility and just ignore us. The problems need a solution and our rights need to be recognized. The first step and our first demand to the political representatives of the city is a roof over our heads. The access to the job market links to this, so that we can provide ourselves. Access to health care and education should also be self-evident.

We haven't survived the war against Libya to be now dying on the street. We seriously call all parties and institutions to immediately get in direct contact with us, to find solutions. Our homelessness allows no delay.”

<http://lampedusa-in-hh.bplaced.net/wordpress/2-erklarung-an-die-politik-und-die-offentlichkeit-lampedusa-in-hamburg-ii/?lang=en#more-30>

From Zurich

After a three week church occupation in Zurich in 2009, some non-citizen activists of the *No One Is Illegal* movement decided to continue their protest in a different form. With the support of squatters and other migrant activists, they built up a space for ‘education without borders’: A place where they could meet in order to resist social marginalisation; where they could learn from each other, raise their voices and become visible; where they could organise their resistance against the more and more repressive and racist politics and practices of state agencies; and where another world without borders could be envisioned by experimenting with new forms of solidarity and everyday practices of co-operation.

This was the beginning of the *Autonomous School Zurich* (ASZ) and the association *Bildung für Alle* (BfA), an emancipatory educational project organised by migrants, sans-papiers, asylum-seekers as well as locals.

Without a legal and stable place to be, the activists had to move from one squat to another, eleven times until today. In spring 2013 the school activists were evicted from a building that the authorities of the city are about to turn into a new ‘palace’ of the police ministry. The school activists found a new place in an empty office of a Swiss bank. Despite the numerous displacements during the last five years, the school has been growing and growing. Today, there are more than 200 people participating in different courses and actions every day.

The school offers German language courses free of charge, publishes its own newspaper and organises a range of public events, such as theatre plays, film screenings, art exhibitions, and concerts.

ASZ is organised around certain common principles:

“A humane Life for All: We are opposed to the currently dominant socio-political and economic structures. We aspire to a society that offers humane existence to all regardless of their social and geographical origins, gender and sexual orientation. We support the unlimited right of movement for all and a world without borders.

Emancipation instead of Integration: The ASZ is an emancipatory project, where we want to develop independent and critical thinking and action. In collective work we concern practically and theoretically all forms of oppression, racism and discrimination. We refuse the term of integration. For us it is not about getting people

to adapt the culture and the language of a country — instead we want to facilitate the exchange and the understanding between all the people. Opposed to only humanitarian projects we are also critical. We support the basic idea of solidarity, on which such projects are based. Yet we think that those projects, if political critique and action are missing, reproduce the capitalistic status in the end. Likewise, we criticise multiculturalism. It tends to portray each person as a representative of a homogenous ‘national’ culture and thus conceals the structures of power. We also refuse the exotification of the stranger and an interest on people solely based on lifestyles like clothing, music and food.

Living instead of Talking: Through ASZ we create a space for community and exchange of knowledge that enables self-empowerment, expressions of own voices and creativity. We want to live a social ideal, in which everyone can breathe free and live without racism, sexism, discrimination and competition.

Education for self-determination! Education with the ASZ is more than the pure learning of a subject. Together we work on a critical understanding of political, economical and social states. With the aim to change those states and to put fate in our own hands. In this spirit we see ourselves in the tradition of critical and emancipatory education. We want to work with an participate, dialogic, and action based method. Knowledge isn’t the monopoly of the moderators. The courses are learning processes for the participants and moderators alike. We try to blur the differences, so that the roles can be fluidly interchanged. Education in the ASZ is without hierarchy. There may be differences in functions and knowledge isn’t spread equally, nevertheless, we deal with each other on the same level.”

http://dl.dropboxusercontent.com/u/6980359/Grundsatzpapier%20Homepage/Grundsatzpapier_EN.pdf

Problems and Challenges: Internal and External

At the kritnet workshop, after a brief presentation of all represented struggles, we came together to discuss the ‘internal’ and ‘external’ problems and challenges that activists had to face in their protest movements. We sought to create

a space in which we could learn from one another by openly exchanging our experiences of difficult situations. This section summarises the main points that emerged in this process. While there was a separation between ‘internal’ and ‘external’ problems/challenges there were, of course, several overlaps so that a clear division cannot be maintained. For reasons of clarity, we have, nonetheless, retained the division.

‘Internal’ Problems and Challenges

Subjectivity of Protests/Protestors: An important discussion revolved around the question of ‘subjectivity’ and ‘positionality’, the role of migrant activists and those with a secured residency status. It is of crucial importance to understand and be aware of the difference between those whose lives are immediately threatened (e.g. by deportation) if their political demands fail to materialise and those who may ‘only’ lose a political campaign. Nonetheless, struggles should be inclusive. Especially the ‘Citizen-Non-Citizen’ approach, but also all other struggles had continuously posed questions such as these: ‘who is struggling’, ‘who is the ‘we’ in the struggle’, ‘what is the meaning of solidarity and the role of citizen-activists’, ‘what are the power dynamics within the struggles’, ‘who has a voice in the struggle, who is heard and who is seen’, ‘what does ‘support’ constitute and when does support turn into paternalism’?

Political Demands: How should political campaigns voice their demands? Is it advisable to have short-term, ‘practical’ goals, such as the abolition of voucher systems and food packages or long-term, ‘idealistic/radical’ goals, such as the abolition of deportation, the closure of detention centres, and collective regularisation?

Different strategies/demands amongst struggles: How do we deal with the differences that exist in the different struggles that have emerged in Germany and Europe? Especially the different approaches employed by the Oranienplatz struggle in Berlin and Lampedusa in Hamburg were extensively discussed. Even if we do not have the same legal/political demands, can we find some common ground, a common purpose and collective demands to unite the diverse struggles? There was wide agreement that there were larger issues at stake, such as economic exploitation and racism that accompany all the different struggles and that could function as cohesive force, bringing the struggles together.

Spreading the struggle and keeping it alive: The number of protesting refugees is small with regard to the thousands of asylum-seekers and refugees living in Germany. This is why it is so important for the struggle to be spread by

informing more and more people. But how can people in 'Lager' be reached? How should the relationship with the media be? How do we deal with the open end and the (usually) long duration of the struggle? How can we work against decreasing solidarity?

Domination/hegemony within struggles: How do we deal with the hegemony within and amongst ourselves? How can we avoid the emergence of hegemonic/dominant structures within the struggles and a centralisation of authority? Several examples were discussed in which certain people/groups acted in an authoritative manner, establishing hierarchies within the group. Some mentioned individuals who would take up most of the time in plenaries while others discussed male dominance in the groups, the role of those in charge of the donated money/resources, and the hegemony of language, where some could not participate due to the dominant use of certain languages. There was wide agreement that inner democracy is needed, that the process of the struggle has to be egalitarian.

'External' Problems and Challenges

External Actors: Various 'external' actors have sought to influence the different struggles or appropriate them. Protest groups from Hamburg and Vienna report of their difficulties with the Church. In the case of Lampedusa in Hamburg, the pastor began to speak for the movement and negotiated with the Senate on their behalf although many disagreed with that approach. How does one deal with these external actors, such as Church, political parties, NGOs, the Media, who at times try to speak on one's behalf, and take away the voice of the struggling subjects? How does one respond to those who try to appropriate the struggle and turn it into something else (e.g. those who claim that it is a humanitarian issue, not a political fight)?

Systemic issues: Much of the discussion revolved around systemic issues that, in one way or another affect the particular movements. These systemic issues include capitalist exploitation, racism, and sovereign states/borders.

Dealing with Authorities: In the different struggles/cities (local) authorities have made offers, such as individual regularisations. When some within the struggle accepted these offers, the struggle as a whole was weakened.

Control/Surveillance/Suppression/Marginalisation of Migrant Activists: Many of the migrant activists have experienced some form of control/surveillance/profiling that seeks to intimidate or criminalise (e.g. racist

police identity controls in Hamburg). A recent tactic seems to be to cast migrant activists as ‘smugglers’ (e.g. in Vienna and elsewhere). Also, the authorities tried to give the impression that the most vocal and active asylum-seekers/refugees get deported the quickest. How should one act in these moments of oppression?

Different political/legal situations in different EU countries: Different political and legal situations within the EU make it difficult to build up international struggles as immediate problems might be quite different (e.g. ‘Residenzpflicht’ in Germany).

Strategies and Forms of Organisation

Starting out with the problems and challenges that protesting migrant activists have been and still are facing, we collected strategies and forms of organisation that were developed to respond to these challenges. They form an assemblage of past experiences as well as new ideas for future directions of struggle.

The strategies to be developed were located in the following fields:

How to develop demands: It is of great importance to make demands very clear. This may mean a very specific demand like a specific law to be put into practice (e.g. §23 AufenthG which allows a collective residence permit). However, there are specific challenges connected to the fact that often people in one protest find themselves in different situations and positions and may therefore make different demands. It might be helpful to combine different demands and to strengthen the conclusion that ‘we are all affected by the same problem’. One should keep the big picture in mind — after all, struggles for ‘the right to have rights’¹⁴ are struggles ‘against the system’ and are therefore ambitious and long-term projects.

Structures/unity: A major goal is to develop structures that allow for the formulation of common decisions. How can different legal positions and, consequently, different demands be handled? How can unity in a struggle be ensured?

Deportations: The migrant struggles that were represented in the workshop take place in a context where (many) activists can be deported at any time. To deal with this risk, workshops on how to prevent deportations could be organised. Furthermore, one should try to stay in touch with those being deported. This may on the one hand be a fruitful source of information for the

¹⁴ Arendt, Hannah (1951): *The Origins of Totalitarianism*. San Diego. 296.

continued protest, and it may, on the other hand, help the deported person to receive support in coming back to the protest.

Publicity: An important strategy is to make the protesters' situation public and thus correct the dominant picture that is painted by the authorities, e.g. by organising meetings, actions, press conferences, press releases. In order to use the public to show what the protest is really about one could organise media trainings where activists are taught how to give interviews etc. When these (public) spaces of protest are separated from the spaces of housing, the protest might be carried out more independently (e.g. because political activities will not be mixed up with humanitarian aid being given).

Networks: People in struggle often search for networks and co-operations that could support and strengthen their struggle by making it more visible and by amplifying their voices. Such a co-operation might, for example, be established with trade unions. Moreover, it is important to foster 'internal networks' — e.g. taking time to talk to each other and to other refugees in order to clarify the political context and sensitise people of its specific implications.

Time frame / Liminality: As much as the struggles for the right to have rights are long-term projects they have to deal with short-term issues, too. Since the protests depend on many different, unpredictable factors (like police activities etc.), it is important to remain flexible, to mobilise quickly and to develop short-term strategies that are situational reactions to what is currently going on.

Knowledge production: Activist knowledge should be collected, shared and used as much as possible. It develops in practice and can be an important resource for future protests or future phases in one and the same protest. Moreover, a protest itself can be a means of education both for activists/participants and the public — one very practical example being autonomous schools. In terms of analysing and learning from struggles, a remaining question is how to speak about refugee struggles without categorising in dominant ways.

To be Continued. . .

This collage is not complete in any way. It is a fragmentary summary of vivid discussions and a great number of questions that emerged during the workshop. Many of these questions remained unanswered but started important conversations and thought processes. In its incompleteness this collage mirrors the process of exchange and discussion that has only been started in the kritnet

workshop as well as in other contexts and that is going to be continued over the months and years to come. The struggles, as well as their exchanges, discussions, co-operations, and common analyses by protesters in different cities are in themselves ongoing conversations.

Listening to the many different struggles means learning in its most practical form: from personal and collective experiences gained on the street, in protest camps, in direct challenges to an unjust border and asylum regime. Listening to and learning from those who refuse to accept the violent conditions imposed on them is inspiring and eye-opening. This process of listening and learning will be continued with the continuation, spread and intensification of struggles. Many more stories of struggle will soon be added to this growing collage.

Autor_innen

This collage includes texts that have been published during the migration struggles in Berlin, Munich, Vienna, Hamburg and Zurich. It is a result of the common reflections at the Migration Struggles Track of the Kritnet Conference in Munich from February 28 to March 2, 2014. Responsible for the textualisation and for the selection of the text passages are Birgit Neufert, Helge Schwiertz and Maurice Stierl.

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