

MIGRATION, SEX, HISTORY: AFRICA/EUROPE

A Research into Labor, Theory, Activism and Migration from Africa into Europe in the 21st Century. (Why is Africa cursed in Europe?)

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INTERVIEW WITH GIN MÜLLER

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Gin Müller is an artist, performer, dramaturge and activist. Active in the REFUGEE PROTEST CAMP MOVEMENT IN AUSTRIA.

ONE YEAR OF THE REFUGEE PROTEST CAMP MOVEMENT IN AUSTRIA

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Marina: You are one of the persons who actually activate in many levels, very importantly in this movement, and the question that is posed is how you see this one year and what is actually in this present moment the perspective of this movement, where we are, what is to think?

Gin: On the one hand I think that it is a big step further for Vienna, a Refugee Protest Camp Movement that began here one year ago, also from my personal experience, what I saw before in Vienna, within the antiracist scene and organizations of different migrant groups; I think it was a big step further because it was really for the first time that it was such a big self-organization movement as the Refugee Protest Movement. I have never seen actually before here in Vienna. And at the beginning of the movement actually I didn't think it will go on that long, at the beginning I had more a feeling that it will be more a march to Vienna and then soon it will be over, and then usually in Vienna, in Austria, there is not some kind of, not a lot of big motivations of the activists, usually the protests don't go that long because people are, we are, don't invest so much time on activism; but here the feeling was very different because right from the beginning the feeling was quite different, there was a lot of energy, also it was really new for the scene what happened. Never before in Austria there was a church that was squatted by the refugees, and I think in a catholic country like Austria, from the confrontational level, this was a big step. Because also through the church, through that step, from camp to church, this brought a bigger political discussion because Austria is also a very catholic country and also very influenced by the catholic church; also by catholic party, ÖVP party; also for this it made a confrontational level much more explicit, to go inside of the church and question this also on a level of society.

I think that the movement by itself so far didn't reach a lot, of course you can see it from different perspectives that it did, it put a lot of different discourse, so that people also started to discuss about a different issues, like for example work or also

Schengen, the Dublin II issues; but on the other hand I totally understand also, the depression of the refugees right now, that that say actually we didn't achieve anything, or maybe it was even more dangerous to participate in a process like this in a Refugee Protest Movement, and maybe they could achieve more for themselves if they wouldn't be part of the Refugee Protest Movement.

I would also make a separation between really political refugees in the movement and the once who were just part of the movement, and I think it's also a sign that the movement gets smaller and smaller because in the beginning they were like 200, and then in the church it was still 80 to 100 people, and now they are only 25 or 30 people left; I think that all the refugees here in Europe, and also here in Vienna, have to take a decision how far will they go with their struggle, and for everyone is a very personal and political decision, if its then not easier to try to go away in another country and try to struggle somewhere else.

THE PERSPECTIVE: WHAT SHOULD BE DONE IN AUSTRIA, IN EUROPE?

Marina: What is possible to be done or should be done or has to be done in the future in Austria and in Europe?

Gin: I think I see this actually as a very long process that we have to fight for, because in the 90s when it started actually with refugee and antiracist activism, actually the laws were not that bad as they are right now, and still we didn't achieve anything, the laws got worse and worse, and stricter and stricter Europe wide, but already at this point it was clear, that migration will be a topic of the whole century for Europe, because you cannot actually stop the refugees coming to Europe, because as soon as you put borders, also Schengen, and the Fortress Europe, also refugees will always find, not only in Europe, but worldwide ways to pass. Because if you have to leave you don't usually do this on your purpose, or if you do it on purpose, you really have a will to leave your country, and I think people have to leave their country, or want to leave their country are also very creative people finding ways to the place where they can improve their living.

But I think also within the struggles, or when all the struggles worldwide will get bigger and bigger, maybe this whole process, of how we defined the world with borders; ok this is the First world, the northern states, that try to be exclusive or just let people in who they need this will not work out anymore, because it is also with climate change or whatsoever, how the capitalist world functions at the moment it will come to an end, because it does not function, it's just too many people, so I think the system will change, if it's going to be more in a way of revolution or just a slow way I don't know.

I think that refugee movements are in this a big part of pressure also with other movements connected, because soon when people are part of the political system, want to be part of the political system and try to demand this also in ways of refugee protests and growing protests also ant capitalist protest, and then this will have in one way an effect, I don't know how many dramas it needs more, because also Lampedusa was last time, that it cannot work this way anymore, and also if we look at Northern America-Mexico, the border regime there, like always, I think it's getting more and more absurd to see how many people is dying on the borders, and to see

how we keep on living, because I think, also in Europe, we know that also the style, this comfort that we are living needs, at least 8 worlds that we don't have, so changing the system means also changing position in this perspective, and actually I think the next step after will be of course the wave of migrants continuously demand here, and I see also that actually Europeans are leaving also Europe, because they think ok maybe it's also better to go to Latin America, ...also from a working perspective, I think there will be more changes.

Tjaša: You mentioned the question of common articulation of the movement between different groups, so what kind of perspectives do you see that are opening in this direction, let's say, especially I'm interested in the possibilities that queer movement opened in possible articulation with migrant movements, and in this concrete situation of the Refugee Protest Camp Movement, so what can you comment in this respect, about this possibility of intersectionality which is I think the main question, how can we articulate our struggle taking in consideration all the time, all this aspects, let's say, the question of race, gender, class, ...

Gin: All this fights, antiracist fight, feminist fight, queer fight, and also anti-capitalist fight, they are always, they should be always fought together, because when I think about a queer utopia, it's also about changing capitalist system, I think queer utopia cannot function without changing the capitalist system, and the same thing is related also to the antiracist discourse, because we do not accept that people all over the world don't have equal chances to live, and the goal they want it is combined with anti-capitalist fight, the antiracism fight now also considering the antiracist movement and queer movement, I think this needs also still a lot of time, I think it's just starting that this courses get more and more together, but also from my experience I can say they are much more together already that they were 15 years ago, 20 years ago, also from my activist experience. It's more to bring this queer discourse, this western discourse into the refugee movement for example, it's not easy and I also question myself, because queer is very western style, the white thing in a way, and I have a feeling that this works better sometimes just working together and accepting each other respectfully, and the things also get in without have to talk about this so much, because in a refugee movement it was more working really respecting each other and the refugees saw that sometimes more than 80% of the supporters were women and from this 80% another 80% were lesbians, and if they didn't check it from the first moment it just took time but somehow they realized. But it was also not necessary to talk about this, of course there were questions, it is absurd that this is not a topic or whatever, but I think, there are ways to talk, also like being trans, I think there are ways to deal with it, I mean somebody mentioned in front of them, you know he is a guy now, and then one came to me and said: "I heard you are a guy now. Welcome", and I heard this history of India, the family which wanted to have a boy and then suddenly the night the girl became a boy and if they need this myth to accept other gender queer perspectives I think its ok, I don't need the western queer discourse to explain why I'm doing this.

DECOLONIZING GENDER

Tjaša: What about the de-coloniality of gender, there is also the space opening completely outside this western discourse...

Gin: Yes of course, in India they know more about this *hijra* for example, so that's more the point to combine, with Indian mythology for example or whatever...

Tjasa: and in Latin America or Yoruba in Nigeria...

Gin: So yes. I have a feeling that this is slowly, and I also could not say that all from the Refugee Protest Camp Movement are anti-capitalists, they also want their iPhone, of course, and so it's not about that we have to purify ourselves in all our intersectionality. I think it's more all the time thinking of how to create solidarity and have a respectful political level to deal with, and this is always a very critical point how to build up actually a collective, if you have a vision of intersectionality then also one of the first questions is how to work in a collective from my point of view, and this is never easy, because this is not only about having right opinions about the topic, but it's really about how to deal with each other.

EUROPE, FRONTEX, EUROSUR

Marina: So the question is from your point of view, how you see this Fortress Europe, this Europe, in relation to Eurosur, Frontex,...what 's going on in former Eastern Europe, in Croatia, in all this ex- Yugoslav countries that had a future but now it seems they are in the middle age?

[text]

Eurosur means European border surveillance system and it is the new Frontex, European Union's borders protection agency that uses high technology to coordinate activities on the EU's external borders.

The control center of Eurosur is a big office with no windows. A map of Europe on a giant screen dominates the room at the EU's Frontex border protection agency in Warsaw. A number of small red dots are circulating on the map. "Every dot means that the system has registered fresh data," explained Michael Juritsch, Eurosur's project coordinator. Here at Frontex, they speak of "incidents." A red dot can mean that smugglers have been detected, or that a boat with refugees coming from Africa has been sighted.

Gin: Actually I'm very pessimistic about Europe, if I see it realistically, at least at the moment and they are all connected to this point of that I see that the time is running out in a way, because at the moment I have a feeling that Europe pretends that it cannot act in another way, and its only to build up border and stricter regime, of border control...

Marina: I must say that I agree with you, Europe is dead.

Gin: and also the problem is this fear about religions, and all this "abnormalities" because

on the one hand for the Eastern European countries there is always this vision of to get to the EU and then this vision of that it may be part of this Western European family or whatever, which is anyway absurd, and of course we have to leave communism behind us, ..of course I can understand also this perspective, I never lived in communism in Eastern European countries; on the other hand, at the moment I

have more a feeling, ok, there is this First World Europe still, this Western Europe, and Eastern Europe, since it's still economically more behind, it's more a backyard, where is also better to leave the refugees coming from Russia, we leave them to them and we don't care in what conditions they are living in Bulgaria, maybe we fight a little bit about Ukraine, that they don't come too *Russianized* or whatever...

On the other hand with my activist heart I don't want to be all the time so pessimistic otherwise I wouldn't fight, because I still believe that some things get better or change, or the hope that at least there is growing different perspectives or global visions, also that you can have through internet or whatever, that there are also other possibilities of Revolution or whatever, haha, I don't know...but actually I'm quite pessimistic..

EUROPE IS A DEAD POLITICAL PROJECT

Tjaša: In relation to Black positions like Philomena Essed, Grada Kilomba, Araba Evelyn Johnston-Arthur, they are all criticizing the antiracist struggle, addressing how the concept of whiteness is not questioned, and I'm asking you was this debate opened within the Refugee Protest Camp Movement, or how do you work on this question of what does it mean to be white, about how the concept of whiteness is constructed and functioning now within the European space, what can you comment on this?

Gin: I have to say that from my point of view this critical point was all the time in a way present in a refugee movement and it was also a lot of time questioned, not all the time, but also through Marissa (Lobo), Araba (Johnston-Arthur), and people also inside of the movement, it was questioned, and I think if everybody accepted this as a topic I don't know, or could deal with it, because I think also the ways we are dealing with it are different because, some people always want to be so much in front in the plenary that even if they are criticized, 'please you are the white majority maybe you don't talk all the time', they just don't accept it in their altruism or whatever. But basically all the press conferences or statements in the public are not done by the white supporters, but by the refugees. I think this was also a big step further, and I think that changed also a lot in the last years, because I remember still this antiracist struggles, where it was of course like this that also me and other white activists were talking for the refugees, working together was still more separated, so I could say anyway there could have been much more discussions, or clearly, but it was a topic.

Marina: I think it's the right way that the Black community is saying, it is true all this good will from those white sides, but it's also from their side they are saying we have enough, doesn't matter how it's the good will we are always actually that object or that place, that is part of the interpretation. We are always in this process that somebody is making an interpretation of us while we never get this position of to be actually those who

are by themselves making the interpretation.

Gin: Yes, I think we have to be much more critical, and I experienced it also with my activist work within the last year, also in all the connections I made also at the moment for example, I got through the last year more and more friends migrants, basically I'm not that much with Austrians anymore, and I think it's very important to make this step, to step out of your safe circle, that you have as being the majority

Austrian here, and really work with different groups, and migrants also from different communities working together, and also to get a different perspective, and for me personally it opened especially really being in this position to continuously work with different groups, and open much bigger space, and also a bigger space in reflecting also my myself criticism in a way, because I think it's the same thing in a way also with gender. In my 20s I somehow realized that I'm working 80% with men, why? So this just happened, because I was socialized like this and then I thought anyway I work better with men, and sometimes with women, but how did this come? And then for me it was important to change this also, it was also from the punk scene, autonomous scene, very manly like, but it was like being on the cool side, and to change this it means that you have to step beyond to change your own borders also, of what this means, and this is the next step, and I think also to leave Europe, as a European is also a very necessary step, to step out from the place you are coming from...