

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 AIGUL HAKIMOVA

Where: Social Center Rog, Ljubljana

A conversation with Hakimova by Marina Gržinić

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Interview with Aigul Hakimova, Ljubljana. Hakimova is a member of the activist groups Enough! (Dostje!), Invisible Workers of the World (IWW), and of the Social Center Rog (SC Rog). The interview was filmed in SC Rog, which is a symbol of autonomous culture and social revolt in Ljubljana. In 2006 (24 of March), a group of activists occupied the abandoned complex of former factory Rog (factory of bicycles) in the center of Ljubljana. After the occupation, the squatters founded an autonomous cultural, social and political production SC Rog. In 2013, during the 7th anniversary of the occupation of the factory, the activists wrote, that this anniversary is happening in the context of social dissent, uprisings, irreversible crisis of neoliberal mode of governance, in the context of the beginning of massive rethinking, resistance and searching for alternatives.

Marina Gržinić: So, the first question that arises is why we want to do the interview with you? It is not only because you are one of the key activist actors and really important in the sense of the history of Ljubljana and Slovenia, of making a difference, with opening the possibilities for a different living, not just in the sphere of culture but also in this social and political space, and also because you already in some videos, which I saw and we included them in some films, already in 2007, before this big crisis, before all this what is happening now, this total collapse of Slovenia, perfectly exactly exposed, that everything what was done in the sphere of culture, was at once turned into absolutely nothing; everything already in relation to the erased (izbrisani) and other parts of this society, which were not recognized as being part of this society. And precisely from this source, you exactly knew how to describe it, that all this “little” history is more and more slipping into this zero point, the point of complete collapse. So, that is why now I’m interested if you could give a certain evaluation of, what do you see, what was happening in this last twenty years of the Slovenian scene, where are we now?

Aigul Hakimova: I came to Slovenia in 2001 and because of a certain circumstances I immediately found myself inside of activist groups, and in this sense I also started to know myself. Because we are not born with certain convictions, about the ways we should live, ...but it is the environment that in a sense constraints you – it is not necessarily a constraint, but in the positive meaning of this word, -- to start to deal with some things which are overlooked, which the majority does not get, does not see. And if I look at the year 2013, that is, presently, I can say that things somehow got better, improved, they did not improve in the sense of political movements, which

would do something in this direction, but they improved because people were pushed to the margin, and we were witnessing this and last year, a certain spontaneous response, uprising of the majority of the people who were silent during the last ten years and did not react when various political groups and movements were warning us about problems of migration, neoliberal reforms, about problems of the erased people, women in society and the LGBT community. So I can say that the uprising,-- which this year has contributed a lot for reflection, especially for activists and all those who were very active in the last ten years, -- has as well formed a certain conclusion. We realized that we have been working in the right direction but at the same time we were not able to foresee that there exists a big part of Slovenia as society, but as well Europe and the world, which is as well on the side of those who want a better world. But there is a minus in all this, that this society which had enough pervasive uprisings, overlooked certain questions, which were always relevant, that is the question of the LGBT community, of erased people and especially the questions regarding migrations. Therefore, within the uprising, -- and this was discussed with other activists, -- at the present moment, we do not have the possibility to re-establish and work on issues, such as it is the centers for foreigners, asylum centers, problems of foreigners and asylum seekers and refugees. Because of all these austerity measures, that pressure everyone, each one of us is fighting for a proper survival, and the society which fights for itself does not have the empathy, does not have the time, to fight at the same time for everybody else. Because to fight for oneself is one thing, to fight for the most vulnerable, that is something more, something else. This was the most obvious after these six months of uprising, because we suddenly understood that we are not doing anything or practically very little in the direction of migration, in the direction of concrete migrations.

Marina Gržinić: My question would be, why do you think that this has been overlooked, it's clear, and I think that as long as it will not be placed in the center of these issues of uprisings, -because these three points are the key points,- I'd say, of the struggle, and through them you can demand good life for everybody, if you include positions of migrants, erased, I think that the erased people are first in this whole line, and then also LGBT. So why do you think this has been overlooked? Because I feel it for at least thirty years, each time in a different way, because I am a migrant, I came here from Croatia, but this cannot longer be compared with the erased people. They do not happen as an event, but were produced and became the basis for the whole constitution of the Slovenian society, on necrophilic and hostile foundations, so this is the way this nation got their sovereignty, therefore why all this? We had theory, from psychoanalysis, all these advanced theoretical thoughts, and so on. But how it happened that these issues were placed on the margin, so that as well, when it came to the uprising, which was based on activists who had very advanced political positions,-- you know what is going on, against whom you point your finger,-- how is it possible then, that all this is overlooked within the steps of the uprisings?

Aigul Hakimova: This seems to me a very good question, because the specifics of the uprisings 2012-2013, was in some way a homogenization of society, which is a Slovenian society, and within the anti-capitalist bloc a few attempts were made, as well as events that have criticized nationalism within this uprising. In short, people came together in a way as a nation, and it seems that within this, they captured the emancipatory potential of their uprising. Besides certain steps made by the anti-capitalist bloc in discursive terms, there was no particularly pronounced diversification of this movement. The uprising was concentrated on getting rid of the

previous government, and then the groups were formed, who have decided to start working on its own agenda, on the basis of these uprisings, which I think is legitimate in terms of representative democracy, but it was problematic from the perspective of all those, who wanted changes in such a way, that they would not demand changes for themselves, which would come from above, but were willing and hopefully still are willing to do so, in order to build a different world, as Zapatistas used to say, "Another world is possible." Not because you would now demand the change of the government, and adapt, write an agenda and become part of one and the same democratic system, which represents itself only through parliamentary parties, but you would start to work on small areas, experiment and start to spread ways of engagements, and in this way create something new, which would be particularly good for the marginalized parts of society.

Nevertheless, I would say that it is a positive side to this uprising, – that I as a migrant, as a girl who does not have Slovenian citizenship and neither do my family, and this is so with all the people who do not officially belong to this nation, in this bureaucratic sense, – that we have been an equal part of the uprising, this was great. When we talk, for example, about identity politics, first you are a migrant, then a worker and perhaps somebody else, -- within the uprisings, this line was blurred, which is what I liked. During the uprisings you have been the insurgent, it did not matter whether you're from Maribor, Ljubljana, Koper, if you are a factory worker or you have a little better job, whether you're a student or unemployed. This was the moment of the event, when the event takes you over, very open and equal. But it is true that the problem of those others, or of those that the EU wants to present as such, as others, is precisely to marginalize them twice; first by the capitalist organization of labour and secondly by the national legislation.

We were talking in the Social Center Rog on issues of Europe and the European citizenship that was very interesting. The idea of European citizenship seems to be very open. We are trying to have open borders, freedom of movement for the majority of the population within the EU, but at the same time this national context is no less important regarding the European Union. So if you want to be a citizen of the EU as such, as a larger formation, which should have blurred borders, first you have to be however a citizen of one of the nation states. So, am I European? No, I'm not. First I'm a citizen of Slovenia, "Slovenian" and then I'm a member of the European Community. And here are these restrictions. But to tell you the truth,– besides of all these problems posed by the European Union, with its more or less economic projects, the so-called European fiscal policy,– for me as a migrant, as a woman from "third" countries, is much easier to live, this part is now significantly better. Three years ago, if I wanted to travel to the Balkans, I needed a transit visa of that country, but now I do not need any more documents. In short, borders are becoming less stiff also for people, but on the one hand...

Marina Gržinić: But, is this true, that the borders are becoming less stiff? I think the borders are less an obstacle for certain groups, but the most striking is that Africans or someone who comes from Africa is in a completely different position. If you are not a politician today, you cannot come from Africa, you cannot easily submit papers and say, now I want to travel. If you are male, if you have a certain age, and if you want, let's say, come and find a job in Europe, this is impossible. You can come as an asylum seeker, and then you go through the most repressive policies. This "clash", it seems to me, it gave to some groups certain possibilities, but the price of that is, that

one whole continent is literally excluded, marginalized, discriminated, literally ejected out of Europe, and I think that also in Russia, which is not part of the EU, the situation is not better, not easier. The question that arises is, how can we perceive this historically, what does it mean, what are our views on this? What this means, because capitalism always works that way, that it gives some possibilities after struggles are won, because nothing is given, everything is fought for, but on the other side of the class line, which is defined differently today, these others remain others.

Aigul Hakimova: For migrants, who are already inside, things are much easier. Now I speak very pragmatically, starting from my own experience, but it is true that this fortress, "Fortress Europe" has its own (maybe this term is a little too harsh) fascist borders, that EU established. Within the Social Center Rog, we had the movement of asylum seekers and the movement was called "The World for Everyone," not only for all but for everyone, and those were young men from Africa, Russia, Ukraine, Kazakhstan, who rebelled against the EU regime, which is regulating external borders and at the same time "regulates" anybody who has somehow managed to cross this border inside. First of all, when you come to the border, they don't let you pass, you have to humiliate yourself, in some cases you will be brutally beaten or even killed. Then, once you get inside, you become part of a very repressive system and this repressive system is institutionalized. This means that they do not allow you to be free, and you are immediately caught up in their systems. What is that the EU fears and is ready to accept the mechanisms of exclusion of people, deportation, and removal? In Slovenia, the detention center for foreigners used to be called "Center for Removal of Foreigners." The contracts that the European governments used to sign, allow only one thing by now, and that is suffering, which lasts from five to ten years. Therefore one does not have any possibilities to succeed in this society, to join the environment and voluntarily assimilate, integrate, for these people only the term "European integration" exists. Those young men drew attention to the problems of asylum center in Ljubljana; they were talking about a regime that was very similar to a regime of a concentration camp.

You always have a person who controls you, these "capos" live and work together in the same room where you sleep, you live, cook and feed your children... the center regime is such that you have to get up at a certain hour and return to the center at a certain hour, if not, you won't enter it any more.

Inside the asylum center is a closed section with bars where people can be detained up to four months. First is a physical detention, a secluded residence, and then it is the endless procedures that lasts for years and years without a chance to earn some money, to work and sustain yourself.

So one is that there is a widespread ban on citizens from the "third world" to enter this area, and this is particularly true for Africa's countries and for all the countries of the former Soviet Union. A young man, unmarried, who does not have any property and does not have a steady income, has no chance to gain at least a two-week visa to stay in the EU, even if his guarantor has lived in the EU, even if you have relatives who already have a permanent residence. They are strict because the EU is afraid that people will remain.

On the other hand, actually this is very hypocritical. As the State limits, segregates, even more, filters the kind of migrants the State wants in this country: educated, that

would fast adapt to the circumstances. What are these circumstances? Such that you are willing to work 6 days, 8 to 12 hours a day, you're quiet, not thinking with your head, submissive to the capitalist authority rules and willing to follow all this.

If you are such, then yeah, maybe, you stay, but if you do not want to obey all that then the capitalist system employs severe national bureaucracy, racist, discriminatory, or even worse, procedures, and you are no longer desirable. Freedom of thought, freedom of mobility, insurrection, class struggle, ...when migrants struggle they do not struggle on behalf of one segment of the population but fight for better working conditions for all, and this is the most wonderful thing. Because migrants are exposed to greater exploitation, they are very fragile and in certain cases and at the same time, because they are so exploited, they have the power to resist. This is why worldwide including the U.S. and Europe, we hear about strong immigrant struggles, uprisings that result in pushing, shifting of the understanding of the boundaries of democracy as such.

It is very hypocritical, the concept adopted by the EU'citizens – which is very populist, and that people like to mention, in particularly politics, and has been adopted by Slovenia as well, this is the so-called strategy for economic migration. It envisages that by 2050, Slovenia needs a certain number of workers to keep its economy to a level of a self-sustainability at least within the limits of its human resource and, of course, it will open up the border for migrant workers that will be working for the then elderly population. Very hypocritical, I want you but I want you under my own terms only. However, if you do not accept my terms then you will be part of the Schengen's border repression. This is well reflected in all of these Spanish cities such as Melilla that are all fenced, or when we analyze all these centers for foreigners that are all being constructed on the other side of the Schengen zone. This is the externalization of the Schengen borders. The European Union says that it is easier to control migration flows within the EU with building centers for foreigners in the territory outside the Schengen borders in Ukraine, Morocco, North African countries. Thus, the EU has people filtered in an easier way. There it will abandon 10 000 people, while 10 000 will be taken. What will happen to the 10 000 abandoned ones, is not part of the EU interest. This is this hypocrisy that is lost within the European bureaucracy. Those who point to such hypocrisy are workers, people without documents, the erased (izbrisani), because they feel this situation in their daily lives. This happens everyday.

I'm sorry to say that when we passed through the experience of engagement with the invisible workers of the world, we had been completely exhausted. On the other hand, we had finally in a very pragmatic way on our proper bodies understood what it means to be a migrant worker without rights (that are zero) and manipulated by the employers. The workers are without possibilities for integration and without any opportunity to try a different life.

Thus migrants who are as well precarious workers and do not have at all the papers, have a status that is radically different from anyone else. You do not have permanent employment. This is the limit of the class struggle. Otherwise, it seems to me that recently if somebody hears we are talking about class struggle, one thinks about something that happened in the 19th century or in the early 20th century. One does not perceive that this is part of our current everyday life. That's why I like it in

Europe, as it is here alive the issue of precarious workers who do not have any conditions to accumulate rights that derive from the traditional working class. This is us. Those in the Social Center Rog, almost a 90% of us, who work for 10 years already and have not accumulated a single allowances for our retirement or the like.

Marina Gržinić: What do you think it should be done? Given that you have been so precisely describing the situation. In a very palpable way, as it seems that it is framework inside which centers all these problems. What after, you have been experienced, defined, re-articulated, not alone but together with others, has to be done? What else is possible to be done? Everything is clear. What is still available, what will you do? As far as we are concerned, the protesters, what is still possible to be done?

Aigul Hakimova: Some protesters for example have a recipe, and this recipe is very simple, you establish political party, you try would it be better party than the others. Regarding migrations, we were at the festival Transforma. We talked we have to re-open the issue of migration, to mobilize, to start working on alternative economies, such as co-operatives. In fact we have to make alliances; we have to travel a lot, to learn, to somehow be part of a larger movement, not of a political party, or a syndicalist union, but part of simple social movements from below, *grassroots movement*. Some countries have a very strong tradition in this regard. It is also necessary to experiment, to go a little over the border that lies ahead, to cross the limit. The future of the EU in the light of what is currently happening is open for battles. Over uprisings, struggle, people will come up with better rights. Otherwise, we will be a Babylon, in terms many love to use it, as some people will always remain at the margins, and we will witness to the constant cyclical reproduction of the capitalist elite, but without this interface.

Marina Gržinić: Finally, I'm interested in the place where we are filming the interview and this is the Social Center Rog. We are here intentionally, deliberately. When the Social Center Rog was constituted it accounted for a difference as well toward the center Metelkova that has an important role in the 1990s. The assemblies, the actions and topics generated here have opened up some other options. Many different issues have been raised here for the first time, many actions were carried out, and since 2000 SC Rog has been a response to global capitalism. So what is the situation today, what's happening? What is with the group of people, which was very strong, what is it with the projects? What you do and will do in the future?

Aigul Hakimova: SC Rog is a very good example of the way how from the outside is capitalism functioning. After the disintegration of Yugoslavia, when factories collapsed, and private property has become a sacred cow, people has decided to take some things into their own hands. They have pointed their finger on this society based on private property and the City Municipality of Ljubljana. In short, it is the question regarding the city. This is a political issue. I live in this city. This city is my city. I live in this town and I want to be a part of this town. I want to influence things in this city. I want to have things in this town that I can afford. The last 20 years we have a situation that every young family that lives in this town has no private property, and cannot afford anything. I want to go out at night, but I cannot afford it because it is beyond my capabilities, or is beyond my physical or even mental abilities. Why there are no free spaces, where everybody can practically come to create without having a director that will safeguarded the situation from above, with conceiving a one-year

plan and inviting certain people who will be working on this project, they will be paid, but everyone else will have to look elsewhere for funds to have a chance to collaborate in the project.

Currently in Rog are quite active groups, although producing significantly less than before. People are exhausted; you have to invest a lot of energy to get the basic infrastructure, electricity, computer, space. The Municipality of Ljubljana again had a debate on Rog. The Municipality of Ljubljana wants to regulate this area. A beautiful white Ljubljana wants to have here again a center, there will be parking areas, and this will be it. Of course it will be open; they say they will have a library for the locals. But it is clear that the idea is wrong; because once this will be regulated it will have a very different form of organization. This will be from the top down. All groups now operating are working in a horizontal manner, through assemblies, talks, they are free .. when none of you is under pressure you have better ideas ... but this won't be a case anymore. Though the city press hard, the city wants to have their own space and have its own interests. We have to fight and we will keep fighting for this place to be accessible as long as possible for everyone. We simply have to resist.

Private property is a sacred cow; there are lobbies that do not allow any opportunity for young people to have a roof over their head. We, the generation of migrants will not inherit anything, we will not inherit any capital from our parents because they live elsewhere and even if we remunerate their capital in the local money here, it is worth nothing. We therefore have no other option but to fight for the common good. Through such a struggle we can get something that would be a common good for all. This does not mean that we will be squatting houses and that we want to live without paying. No! But we want to point out that there is a lot of empty apartments, which are empty and that rents are high. We want fair distributions of assets and wealth.

So each of this campaign will be targeting at those who have hardships with spaces, homeless people, or those who are detained in psychiatric hospitals and want to come out and live a life again. Ljubljana has these programs, but they are absolutely insufficient.

We have to fight to open up the spaces where all of these ideas could be realized. The project Exit (Izhod) was linked to psychiatric patients who were freed and they wanted to have another life, in an open society. There was a problem for them to have an apartment for independent living. Our generation will have not even a pension, nor an own apartments. Let alone our children. The current generation receives from time to time help, subsidies, from their parents that they had accumulated in former Yugoslavia, but for us this want be a case.

How will our children live? We do not have the opportunity to accumulate as our parents did in the past. So there is no other choice but to open new forms of struggle, or to reopen the old ones, to fight, to work on the issues of the common good, an equal distribution of wealth and on alternative economy. We have to work on the establishment of cooperatives or some other forms that do not have as the main format of organization profit but another goal.