

# »We didn't cross the border, the border crossed us«

## Movements and Struggles of Migration in and around Europe

March 25<sup>th</sup> 2006, Los Angeles. A multitude of migrants took over the streets and claimed their rights in this biggest demonstration ever seen in the history of the city. This was not an isolated event but rather the culmination of hundreds of other mobilizations taking place in every corner of the US. Millions were involved and they raised simple questions: Can you imagine the US without its migrant population? Can you imagine the impact on the US economy of a single-day strike of all migrant workers? The answer to both: No, you can't. But consider this: migrants are not recognized as citizens. They are discriminated in their access to social services. They are territorially, socially and economically segregated. They are haunted by racism and police brutality.

The situation in Europe may not be comparable to the US. The difference is made above all by different histories of migration. It is nevertheless worth to raise

of misery we need to understand one simple fact. The materiality of struggles and of social and political interventions *does* exist. Since these struggles and interventions do take place every day they call for our political and strategic articulation. These struggles and the potential they carry should not be simply considered in terms of a »special issue« on migration since what they show us exceeds the boundaries of any such narrow classification.

In recent years, the transformations of citizenship and precarization of labour constituted two strategic fields around which the left and the social movements in Europe organized their struggle against »neoliberalism«. In both of these fields, the movements and struggles of migration provide a crucial input in disentangling the radical political imagination from the impossible dream of a return to an alleged »golden age« of social

state citizenship and of the »fordist« compromise between labour and capital. At a first glance, migrants' condition (social and political stratification, frontiers within citizenship and precarization of labour) reveal the brutality of the transformations that have reshaped citizenship and labour relations in the last two decades. These transformations are partly a result of a successful capitalistic response to the struggles that in the 1960s and 1970s criticized so-

expressions of a complex cartography of struggles of migration. They reveal the intensity and the radical character of the challenges they pose. Let's recall these events:

### October 2005 – Challenge from »outside«.

Coordinated groups made of 200 to 500 refugees and migrants mainly from sub-Saharan African countries stormed the border-fences of the Spanish enclaves in Ceuta and Melilla. The response: death shootings and mass deportations to the desert by Spanish and Moroccan authorities as henchmen of the European migration regime. Migrants' demand to access the wealthy zones of Europe and to move freely caught public attention for several weeks.

### November 2005 – Challenge from »within«.

After the police hunted to death two young men, the suburbs of French cities, the *banlieues*, faced several weeks of intense uprisings. Young men from the suburbs, many of them sons and nephews of the migrants, who came to France after decolonisation and most of them French citizens, fought back the police night by night. The reaction from the authorities and the press in terms of the curfew and the state of emergency with reference to the colonial war laws in Algeria shows the impact of these young men's actions. These uprisings might not have the shape of the social movements as we know them but they surely are struggles against social and racist discrimination. Moreover, the uprisings challenged the republican order and national social state form and forced a holy alliance of governments and public debates in Europe in fear of the »crisis of integration«. Surely, »integration« represents different models of governance in different nation states as it may be connected to the French republican idea or to a culturalist concept of citizenship in Germany. The »challenge« is thus situated differently but nevertheless rooted in the very same condition. The discourse of integration silences the struggles of migration!

### December 2005 – Challenge from »in between«.

A huge migrant demonstration took place in Rome. More than 30.000 participants had clear demands: documents for all, stop deportations, closure of detention-camps and residence permits independent from labour-contracts! One week later, a similar action united 3.000 people in Athens where they demanded legalization. In Spain, an unprecedented mobilization all over the country and parallel to the legalization campaign, denounced the limits of the legalization campaign started by the Zapatero government. Similar events followed: carried by self-organisations of refugees and migrants or by manifold migration-related initiatives protests and campaigns for the right to stay and equality took place nearly every day all over Europe.

**Ceuta / Melilla – French suburbs – Rome / Athens / Spain:** these are just three current spotlights of confrontations and events, each of them rooted in their social realities and conflicts. Three peaks of an iceberg. The iceberg: a wide spectrum of social struggles, often without any political articulation, often necessarily hidden due to their illegal nature. These are the struggles that can not easily be represented politically by the traditional concepts of social conflicts. The lack of representational models becomes apparent with the widespread image of migrants as either perpetrators or victims of smuggling, trafficking or slavery. Yet, migration struggles challenge the ruling order and continuously change the societies of Europe.

»From outside, from within and in between«: We are convinced that the impact of these migration-related social and political struggles is deeply interconnected with the so-called European migration regime aimed not simply at keeping refugees and migrants out of Europe but especially at promoting a process of selective inclusion, also through illegalization, of the migrants. Migrants' struggles undermine, crisscross and attack this



the same questions in Europe. In fact, it is movements and struggles of migration that are raising these questions in Europe. We believe the answer on the both sides of the Atlantic to be the same.

**Movements and struggles of migration** have been and continue to be a political challenge for the left and for the social movements in Europe. We, the Frassanito Network, a transnational network made up of collectives working all over Europe within the movements and the struggles of migration, are convinced that migration should not be perceived as one among many political concerns/issues. We do not claim that migrants should be seen as the new political or even »revolutionary« subject. Far from it! What we do claim is a point of view, a perspective that enables us to think and act differently – in a much more productive way about the issues at stake in the discussion, actions and crisis of the left in Europe.

To assume migration as a point of view means to take distance from any political discourse on migration informed by paternalism and pietism. Migration, as we see it, needs to be considered as a social movement and we need to take into account the social protagonism of migration. We need to look at the manifold ways in which migration movements and struggles confront and challenge the reality of domination and exploitation. We must look not only at exclusion from citizenship, but also at practices of citizenship that take place even under the condition of illegality. We must look at behaviours, desires, imagination and the individual and collective projects that crisscross the movements of migration. Instead of pointing at a glorious new protagonist or a migrants' world

social state and fordism, racism and sexism. They revealed and attacked the nightmare of factory discipline and social domination hidden beneath the rhetoric dream of »integration« on the other. But *above* all these transformations are the answer to the anti-colonial struggles and migratory movements of millions of women and men who globalized the world against the attempts of capital and empires to enclose global population in nation-states.

Social and political stratification, frontiers within citizenship and precarization of labour as migrants' conditions reflect what Etienne Balibar called the rise of a *new apartheid* in Europe. You can trace it in every European city; you can see it in the conditions of territorial, social and economic segregation most migrants live in. Yet, migrants have experienced the violence of these transformations not just in this predictable but also in a very peculiar manner. If we view the current transformation from the point of view of movements and struggles of migration, we can see something different: migrants' everyday practices are attempts to open up the borders of citizenship, win new spaces of freedom and equality, establish new transnational social spaces that link Europe to the whole world, and claim and affirm the right to mobility against the reality of labour and existential precarity. Let us repeat it: the struggles of migration are manifold and heterogeneous and as such they need to be examined at the level of everyday life where they do not necessarily take the shape of open political and social struggles.

In the last months some significant and symbolic events have taken place that we propose to read as

migration management. We want to state it very clearly: the European migration regime is facing a deep crisis. This can be seen through the events we recalled above. Ceuta and Melilla show the impossibility of »sealing off« the external European borders. The uprisings in the *banlieues* reveal a crisis of integration that, while it must be understood in its French peculiarity, finds precise echoes in other European countries that historically developed different models of migrants' integration. Finally, the struggles for legalization indicate, with a strong southern European peculiarity, the extreme difficulty of managing migration according to frameworks inherited from the past (e.g. »quota system«). This situation opens up new chances for struggle and for imagining new positive responses to the challenges posed by migration in Europe. But in order to grasp the specific dangers connected to what we have termed the crisis of the European migration regime, we must be aware of the emerging institutional tendencies. Let's sketch some of these tendencies following the lines indicated by the events in Ceuta and Melilla as well as by the struggles for legalization. Recent developments of the situation in the French *banlieues* point at a very different problem. We will address each briefly.

The European response to the pressure exercised by migrants at the Southern and Eastern borders of the EU consists in the process of externalization of the EU border regime. »Neighbouring« countries as Morocco, Libya, Mauritania, the former Yugoslavian countries and Ukraine are increasingly involved in controlling European borders and in »managing« migration. Migrants are compelled to take migration routes that are longer and more dangerous. For example, Sub-Saharan migrants are pushed from Morocco south to Mauritania from where they attempt to reach the Canary Islands. In the last six months, this resulted in over 1.000 deaths in the Ocean. The externalization of the border regime includes the externalization of detention centres against which we struggled and continue to struggle all over Europe. The »external« camps anticipate a new flexible model of migration management. There is a general tendency to ban the possibility of legalization from the European space and instead produce a much more selective and hierarchical models of recruitment of migrants, such as the British »points system«, that range from the so-called »highly-qualified« migrants to the programs for seasonal labourers. What is bound to remain a key feature of this model is the chaining of labour contract and residence permit. As a result this structural link radically limits the social and spatial mobility of migrants and it facilitates the process of a plurality and hierarchy of statuses among migrants. In this light, externalization needs to be understood as a response to migrants' struggles for legalization in Europe.

**The struggle against the externalization and the flexible migration management must become a strategic task for the social movements in Europe.** We could frame this struggle in terms of political communication. The externalization of the European border regime fosters a kind of a global apartheid that delineates new imperial relation between the EU and its »peripheries«. We therefore need to intensify the relations between movements within and beyond the European borders. The »Bamako call« for a Euro-African joint day of action is an example. At the same time, we need to recognize the new flexible model of



migration management in terms of a control machine that produces hierarchies and differences within Europe. These in turn shape the European citizenship in the making and the composition of the living labour. This control machine makes the conquest of a common ground of struggle and of social cooperation ever more difficult. Whether concerning an undocumented or a migrant with full citizen rights, a refugee or a so-called second generation migrant, migrants' legal status remain precarious. It is this precarity, in combination with racism and sexism that sets the frontiers to the political communication.

Recent developments in France offer a good example here. In recent weeks, a rebellious multitude in action against precarity occupied the streets of France and opened a common ground of struggle. The continuity between this movement and the uprising in the *banlieues* could be observed by the huge participation in the demonstrations of young people with migrant background. The concept of multitude which we use to define the actual composition of living labour, showed its double character in France. Multitude points to the richness of a living labour that made multiplicity and mobility into founding traits of its composition. Yet, multitude also shows the intensity of the conflicts intrinsic to this composition, racism being one of these. In case of recent events in France, these conflicts resulted in a total lack of communication and at times even acts of »war« between different sections of the movement.

The participation to the demonstrations of people with immigrant background that is of people that are relegated to the status of second-class citizens, indicates the intensity of the challenge social movements and the left are facing in France. This is not a challenge to defend a social model but rather a challenge to invent through

these struggles a new social model. The elimination of the internal hierarchies that grew out of various sorts of integration policies and migratory regimes are the basis for the emergence of this new social model. We are convinced that this is the challenge we are confronted with in Europe today. Movements and struggles of migration are key to every attempt to politically address this challenge because they point to the tension between practices of mobility as potential foundations of a new mode of social cooperation and a capitalist system of domination / exploitation based on selective inclusion via mobile borders and hierarchies. The institutional project of a new European constitution is blocked by its internal limits and contradictions. After the referendums in France and the Netherlands last year, we dare say that we have a dream. We dream for the movements and struggles of migration to become the perspective from which to conceive, imagine and construct, through struggles and a constant reinvention of practices of cooperation and political communication, a new European space of freedom and equality.

During these days we will be in Athens, participating in workshops, assemblies and informal meetings both within the official programme of the ESF and in the autonomous spaces. We are interested in discussing and networking with migrant's self-organised groups, initiatives that fight racism and support migrants. We wish to establish a link with the manifold groups and experiences that are developing around the issue of precarity within the process of the Euromayday. But most importantly, we need to take

decisions concerning further steps for mobilization at the European level. On January 31<sup>st</sup> 2004 and on April 2<sup>nd</sup> 2005, we held the first and the second European day of action on migration. These were important dates for deepening of our networking process and putting the issue of migration at the centre of the agenda of social movements in Europe. We think it is possible to imagine a further step in our action this year. We think it is time to start a discussion about a large European demonstration to be held in Brussels in the second half of 2006. A demonstration that would echo and amplify the march of Los Angeles on this side of the globe. A demonstration that will give us a constituent moment of the new kind of European space we are struggling for.

From our point of view, we propose a couple of slogans that are radical and that at the same time allow for a wide participation: the freedom of movements, the right to stay; a Europe-wide legalization for all undocumented living in Europe, the closure of all detention centres in Europe and the neighbouring countries, and the uncoupling of the residence permit from the labour contract.

These are just ideas. We expect to discuss and deepen them together in Athens.

The Frassanito Network, May 2006

#### Transnational websites for transnational struggles:

- <http://noborder.org>
- against the global border- and migration regime
- <http://nolager.org>
- against camps and detentions, inside and outside EU
- <http://thistuesday.org>
- logs on migration, labor, transnational organizing
- <http://transitmigration.org/migmap>
- virtual cartography of european migration policies

#### THE FRASSANITO NETWORK

Tavolo Migranti, Italy · Collettivo Noborder Napoli, Italy · Act Up Paris, France · NoBorders London, Britain · indymedia estrecho / madiq, Spain · Network for social support to immigrants and refugees, Greece · Kanak Attak, Germany · no one is illegal-amplitude, Germany · Association for Legalisation, Germany

In cooperation with medico international.

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The name of the Frassanito Network has been taken from a place in Puglia, in the south of Italy, where a »NoBorder« camp was held in summer 2003. During seven days we have organized many debates and workshops, but also some actions, most notably an action against a detention center close to Bari (Bari Palese). This action created conditions which allowed some migrants to escape. After the camp, we decided to build a very loose network, sharing a common approach: We consider migration as a social movement and see the role struggles of migration as crucial for the further development of the entire global movement.