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Institutional Racisms

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Translated by Ben Grafton-Wunsch

The state constitutes the nation. It controls, it turns away, punishes, deports and feels in the right: through international agreements, Third Country Regulations or brotherhoods in arms. It is your true friend and helper, for "the boat is full". The boat, which became the people's metaphor for the nation in the early 90's, privileges you and yours. Austrians, Germans, and French first of all. Who else? You personally have nothing against "foreigners", know a few yourself, find them likeable and like to eat Greek. It's a frequent saying: everyone according to his/her needs. Everyone where she/he belongs. Yet I is always equivalent to we, for "We are the people", and the individual good person ("I as a German") and structural racism/ nationalism/ anti-semitism are by no means opposites. Rather, the model of a national democracy lies founded in their relationship, as it is increasingly asserting itself, also in places where until recently other laws were valid, such as in France. There the right of the soil/land, - i.e. the place one is born counts as the determining criteria for citizenship - is increasingly restricted by the right of blood and heredity in accordance with the German model.

Therefore, under institutional racism is to be understood the restrictiveness of the national ordinary raison with the state racism

of the EUropean migration regime. To the latter belong the tightening or more or less abolition of the Right of Asylum (in Germany in 1993); the rigorous application of the legally unclearly defined remand pending deportation, which is landed on somebody whose residence status is no longer conceived as legal, as a punishment for their lack of compulsory keenness to leave; and the hunt, conducted under the euphemism "interior security", on those persons already socially, medially and politically ethnisized and illegalised. The everyday and state racism condition and "fertilise" each other, as was to be clearly observed in the official reactions to the pogroms of recent years - the victims are always seen as perpetrators, or at least as a problem, see Hoyerswerda, Rostock, Mölln, Solingen, Mannheim, Oberwart, Lübeck among many others.

For the political practice and the artistic practice to be discussed here, it is not easy to thematise these constellations. The speaker positions alone, as on the one hand critical towards the state, yet on the other hand themselves a privileged part of the national collective, easily lead to patronising advocate attitudes towards those who don't belong to it. There is a need to distinguish between good-willed but ineffective informing, and concrete, helpful actions, just as between a public confrontation with the ruling migration regime and the cultural exploitation of personal experiences of suffering.

Krenn/Ressler set their sights in their work on an interlocking of informing and intervention. The posters on the cube in front of the Viennese Opera House show a typical Viennese facade, as is also to be seen on many of the houses in the immediate surroundings. Only this facade is the facade of a Viennese police prison which is above all designated for prisoners on remand pending deportation. Specially for the tourist strollers (and not

only for them) the aesthetisized reflection of the city is broken: the city is not here for everyone. "Not far from here" state racism is being executed and everyone should know it. What is interesting about this work is that, as an intervention in the city space, it was allowed to stand at this site at all for six weeks. With regard to the city bureaucracy, art was used as the argument by the artists, in order in the end to place a political message. In relation to current art and political discussion this is a recommendable strategy. During the six weeks friendly and aggressive comments (ripping down the posters, for example) were added to the cube. As an artistic strategy it involves a confrontational and participatory model in which, in contrast to political information stands, the people could make statements on the texts on the cube and some were also interviewed, but no continued discussion with them took place.

Accompanying material on the conditions in the jails for remand pending deportation was in the exhibition room of WUK. Documented were hunger strikes, self-killings as the last way-out in the face of deportation, as well as the deployment of emetics by the police against alleged dealers (in order to force the vomiting of the allegedly swallowed substance). This let's one know the atmosphere in these jails, apart from the unreasonable daily demands, that is, of a remand pending deportation (a futile waiting until deportation).

In spite of its madness state racism certainly shows consistency. Mind you it is only the most visible part of the complex "racism and anti-Semitism". It allows and provides for the Germans as well the oppositional "us against it" mentality. The everyday social racisms are much less obvious, yet felt all the harder by those affected by them. In the staring in the underground just as in the forced smiles at the "sweet" children. Only not too many of them.

In the multicultural advertising, which wants to portray the different "cultures" next to each other and in so doing shows an old man, orientalised as a Turk, next to a young punk. Everyone has to try to recognise differences, not only the Germans, seems to be its message. Or in the comparison of a blond German woman with a dog (she's lonely and thus needs an animal) and a woman, characterised as Turkish, with five black-haired children (over-population, you know!) In numerous cases the racist misery only shows itself when with well-intentioned romanticisation rears its head. Social racisms are not to be delegated by or for Germans onto "others", but are first of all to be located in and with oneself. Talking of Austrians: "Austrians, you are Germans!", sang Laibach 10 years ago and they were right. Does that need further explanation? The "German(ic)s"/"Deu(i)tschen" still function in Austria as protection against, and delegation of, its own blame for anti-Semitism and Shoa.

NO HUMAN BEING IS ILLEGAL!

[from: Oliver Ressler / Martin Krenn, *Institutionelle Rassismen*, 1998
http://www.t0.or.at/institutional_racism]