

9. Nov. 2015

von gast

in Flüchtlinge

Kommentare ( 1 )

## Beyond #refugeeswelcome: The Spectre of Racist Violence and Lessons from Refugee Resistance in Germany



This is the twelfth article in our series on refugees. For more information on the series, please click [here](#).

by Joshua Kwesi Aikins and Daniel Bendix

The text reframes the current debate about refugees in Germany by contrasting Germany's recent history of racist violence and limitations of asylum laws with the resistance and agency of refugee movements across Germany. Both provide an important lens to re-examine the simultaneous heralding of „welcome culture“, a sharp rise in arson attacks on asylum centres and the current legislative roll-back of refugee rights in Germany.

In bringing these perspectives together the text offers a corrective of both the current image of Germany as a welcoming champion of refugee rights and the problematic notion of refugees as objects of German policies and civil society „help“ rather than subjects with a long history of resistance in Germany.

### Refugees claiming their voice

In 2012, **several refugees in the city of Würzburg stitched up their mouths** to protest against the lack of response to their political demands. Four demands have been at the core of the reinvigorated refugee movement ever since: Germany should abolish all *Lager* (refugee detention centres), stop all deportations, abolish mandatory residence law (*Residenzpflicht*) and guarantee refugees the right to work and to study. This particular act sought to politicise a voicelessness that resulted from violent refusals to listen. It was a silence that still demands to be heard, an act that still demands to be read – it is one of many refugee actions are worth re-listening to in Germany's current climate of *Willkommenskultur* (literally „welcome culture“). This sentiment – partly decreed idea, partly popular sympathy – often seems much more concerned with the capacity of Germans to „welcome“ and „cope“ with the „influx“ and attendant „changes“ rather than refugees' perspectives and harrowing experiences – not just in faraway places, but in Germany as well. The refugee movements long-standing critique of German asylum law and the many discriminatory regulations and practices governing the legal limbo in which many asylum seekers have been finding themselves for years has gained visibility in recent years – yet in recent months, it has been eclipsed by self-referential majority concerns. This happens the very moment refugee's critique should be at the centre of current debates.

Refugees are welcome as silent objects in need of German competence and care – not as diverse subjects with rights that cannot be subjected to political expediency. The trope of the refugee fleeing remote barbarity and being in need of German saviours is ripe with colonial and orientalist overtones of a white European self defining itself in contrast to an inferiorised other. Germans of Color and Black People in Germany experience both sides of that

### SOCIAL MEDIA



### SUCHE

### TWITTER FEED

Ahmad Mansour über Ziele und Herausforderungen der Deradikalisierungsarbeit  
<https://t.co/brOKmKs6FR>  
 #Radikalisierung #Prävention  
 #Salafismus

about 8 hours ago from Twitter Web Client

Götz Nordbruch über "Religion im Unterricht und die Prävention salafistischer Einstellungen"  
<https://t.co/bt2CHoafnz> #Salafismus  
 18. Januar 2016, 8:46 from Twitter for Android

Today: Hakim Khatib on the #blasphemy laws in #Egypt and the case of Islam Al-Buhairi  
<https://t.co/1EJ2c9PG0h>  
 15. Januar 2016, 8:19 from TweetDeck

### TAGS

BELIEBT KOMMENTARE NEU

"Die Flüchtlinge", "die Rassisten" und "Wir" – zu den Ambivalenzen im aktuellen Flüchtlingsdiskurs

coin in everyday interactions: They are „welcomed“ as refugees, strangers offer food or clothes or hand them multi-language „refugee advice“ columns ripped from newspapers, and/or insult them for „invading the country“. There is an apparent need on both ends of the spectrum to have refugees conform to expectations – refugees as real people and their concerns remain hidden behind masks of projections. The resulting **speechlessness is reminiscent of the colonial mask** that colonisers forced onto the colonised to stop them from speaking out, from asserting their status as subjects, as humans.

The German refugee movement that was **reinvigorated by the suicide of Iranian refugee Mohammad Rahsepar in a Lager in early 2012** is particularly relevant to understand the current situation in Germany. Convinced that the master's tools – individualised recourse to the courts and bureaucratic labyrinths – will never dismantle the master's house, refugees from all over Germany defied mandatory residence law, mobilised across *Lager* and set out on a protest march from Southern Germany to the federal capital, insisting that they must be present and visible where decisions about their lives are being made. They occupied public spaces, **buildings**, embassies, churches, **trees** and **roofs** in Berlin, Munich, Hamburg and Hannover, **took to hunger strikes** etc. The protesters not only ripped off the masks that the German state (and society) forced them to wear, but also made themselves heard: People all over Germany (and beyond) were inspired by the protesters perseverance, creativity, and political lucidity.

## The Spectre of the 90s

Rather than this resistance and the clearly articulated demands of refugees, the history of racist, anti-refugee violence which came to head in the recently reunified Germany of the early nineties provides an important reference point for current debate: Increasing arson attacks on asylum centres and racist pogroms such as Rostock-Lichtenhagen, **where hundreds of right-wing extremists attacked Mecklenburg Pommerania's central asylum shelter, cheered on by about 3000 onlookers**, where cited as important justification for claims that Germany had „reached capacity“ and needed to change its asylum law. The resulting „asylum compromise“ legislation severely restricted German asylum law through the introduction of the concept of „safe countries“. This enables Germany to send refugees who passed through ostensibly „safe countries“ on their way to Germany back to claim asylum in the first „safe country“ they entered on their route. Racist violence euphemised as „concerns of the citizenry“ had paid off – and does so still and again:

We witness an unprecedented roll-back of anti-migrant policies in Germany, particularly against Roma people from the Balkans fleeing persistent racist discrimination, and people escaping poverty: Several countries are deemed safe countries of origin, *Lager* control is reinforced, incarceration and deportations facilitated, and asylum rules are made even stricter. A sharp rise in arson attacks on asylum centres this year occasions sombre warnings about the need to ensure that the „mood“ of the population must not be soured by „overtasking“ the citizenry. Perfidiously, political parties across the spectrum, media, and large spectra of society, also **demand deportations and worsening of living conditions for all migrants not considered 'proper' refugees in the name of Germany's „welcome culture“ for 'real' asylum seekers**. In both the smouldering remains of burned asylum homes and the political manoeuvres that follow, the spectre of the 90s looms large: 104 attacks against asylum homes have been registered this year – four times as many as last year, and November and December are still to come. Crimes against asylum homes, which include the incitement of racial hatred have risen to more than 637 – more than three times higher than last year. A first batch of legislation to tighten German asylum law was passed in July,

Ich bin Paris! Ich bin Muslim! Ich bin Nato? Die offene Gesellschaft und ihre Feinde nach dem 13. November.

Hilfspaket für deutsche Medien – Annäherungen an unser Bild vom Pleite-Griechen

Der Dschihad der Auslandskämpfer: Ausdruck einer Subkultur

Terroristen oder Bürgerkriegsflüchtlinge? Was wir gegen diese Verwechslung tun müssen

## KATEGORIEN

Außenpolitik (64)

Bürgerkriege (24)

Cyber Security (52)

Demokratisierung (14)

Drohnen (15)

Flüchtlinge (17)

Humanitäre Interventionen (15)

Innere Sicherheit (32)

Interviews (10)

Katastrophen (4)

Konferenz (29)

Militär (31)

Pandemien (2)

Podcast (7)

Popkultur (22)

Raketenabwehr (1)

Sanktionen (8)

Security Culture (27)

Sicherheits-Kommunikation (15)

Sicherheitskultur (237)

Sozialwissenschaft Online (71)

Stellenangebote (55)

Strategie (12)

Terrorismus (60)

Theorie (5)

Umwelt (1)

followed by another set of restrictive changes in October. A cabinet agreement on further measures was hailed by Horst Seehofer, head of coalition member party CSU as „**harshest measures ever to limit the intake of refugees in Germany**„.

## A History of Resistance

Against this backdrop, the activities of self-organised refugees in Germany since the 1990s offer an instructive history of resistance. Part of a larger context of immigrant and minorised struggles against racism in post-War Germany (e.g. **the Ford strike**), refugees have asserted their rights again and again. Self-organisations such as the Refugee Initiative Brandenburg brought their critique of isolation and human rights violations in German asylum homes to international attention. Other refugee organisations such as The Voice, Karawane and Refugee Emancipation have developed strategies to reach out to refugees and invite them to join a political struggle for human rights and against planned marginalisation, de-skilling and denial of health care in German asylum homes.

Resistance has included solidarity action in which discriminatory practices of provisioning refugees have been undermined: Using refugees „cash cards“ which would only buy a predefined set of goods at specific branches of expensive grocery chains, activists organised solidarity shopping events where citizens would buy their groceries with refugees' cards and give them the money, thus fighting against paternalism and stigmatisation. This resulted in states like Berlin ending the practice and reverting to cash payments.

In many ways, the above mentioned rise in coordinated refugee action since 2012 rests on this longer tradition of self-organisations. They address the full gamut of the refugee experience: From the reasons to flee, including Western and German arms sales to repressive regimes, volatile regions and war zones, to the large and small dehumanisations of the Lager system and everyday as well as institutional racism in Germany. They organise skill sharing, language courses and internet connectivity in asylum homes, speak out against racism in district, state and federal refugee policies and invite people with and without refugee status to join in direct action on all of the above. By asserting the importance of self-representation and self-organisation, refugees were able to confront, critique and sidestep the isolation in which they were kept by design.

## Only non-demanding refugees welcome

In May of this year, Angela Davis visited Berlin and made clear that she considered the refugee movement „**the movement of the 21st century**„. While the refugee protests had managed to gain access to mainstream media over the years and to shift the discourse on migration, asylum and refugees slightly, this was swept away in the wake of German societies' responses to past months' migration. Thousands of Germans offered their support to newly arrived migrants and Germany is widely considered the welcoming champion. Even Germany's leading tabloid Bild started a campaign „We help – #refugeeswelcome“ – wearing this slogan had hitherto been reserved for the radical left and could easily get you in trouble with either the police or right wing agitators.

We believe that the colonial mask mentioned above is being put back on the refugee through the charity dimension of the *Willkommenskultur* hype: It „**prevents her/him from revealing those truths, which the white master wants to turn away,**‘ **‘keep at distance' at the margins, invisible and ,quiet'„.** Politically vocal and active people without German citizenship or residence permit are uncomfortable for people who want to stay in control and power.

Versicherheitlichung (22)

Visualisierung (6)


Whistleblowing (8)

WikiLeaks (17)

WMD (10)

Zivilgesellschaft (65)

## BLOGROLL


 [Arbeitskreis soziale Bewegungen](#)

 [Augen geradaus](#)

 [Dan Drezner](#)

 [Dart-Throwing Chimp](#)

 [David Campbell](#)

 [de.hypotheses.org](#)

 [Demokratieforschung Göttingen](#)

 [Duck Of Minerva](#)

 [Future and Politics](#)

[Hylaeon Flow](#)

 [Internet und Politik](#)

 [IR Blog](#)

 [Just Security Blog](#)

 [justsecurity.org](#)

 [Killer Apps](#)


 [Kings Of War](#)

[MPC Journal – Muslim Politics and Culture](#)

 [netzpolitik.org](#)

[percepticon](#)

 [shabka.org](#)

 [Terrorismus in Deutschland](#)

 [theorieblog.de](#)

 [Verfassungsblog](#)

 [Vom Bohren harter Bretter](#)

 [whistleblower-net.de](#)

## ARCHIV

Wähle den Monat

Rather than thanking Germany for its supposed generosity, the refugee movement in Germany has not tired to point out the past and present interconnectedness of prosperity and peace in Germany with poverty and war in other parts of the world: It **scandalizes neocolonial resource extraction from the Global South and weapon exports, and generally calls for resistance against nationalist, racist, capitalist border regimes**. It is uncomfortable for German majority society to be faced with people as (political) subjects who frame their demands from a postcolonial perspective, who speak out against rampant racism across German society, and who refuse to differentiate between socio-economic and political refugees by pointing out that economic questions are also political.

### **Conclusion: From Help to Solidarity**

Which path Germany will follow might depend on which experiences become a reference point in current debates: The looming spectre of the 1990s or the history of refugee resistance. Past and present experiences of refugees in Germany as well as the clear demands of their self-organisations need to be injected into *Willkommenskultur* (welcome culture) by those who decide to „help“ and elect to actually listen to refugees. They have long made clear what The Voice **activist Rex Osa has reiterated in a recent interview**: What refugees demand is that the notion of „help“ needs to include support for self-organisations of refugees and requires a double perspective: It is important to look at both reasons for people to flee and the racism they experience in Germany. In doing so, the status quo of self-congratulatory paternalistic help can be transcended towards a dialogical, political solidarity.

**Joshua Kwesi Aikins and Daniel Bendix**, PhD are researchers in the Department of „Development and Postcolonial Studies“ at University of Kassel.

Daniel has been active in supporting the refugee movement in Berlin since 2012, and co-edited the **PERIPHERIE special issue „Dis-Placement: Flüchtlinge zwischen Orten“**. He is an active member of **Glokal e.V.**

Kwesi is an active member of the **Initiative of Black People in Germany**, has been a supporter of refugee struggles in Brandenburg in the early 2000s and in Berlin since 2012. He coordinated **a parallel report on racism in Germany** to the United Nations Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination.

 Tags: colonialism, racism, refugee movement, refugees, solidarity, violence, Willkommenskultur

[« What is that Syrian about the Syrian war? »](#)

[Stellenanzeigen Oktober »](#)

## **Trackbacks/Pingbacks**

1. **Beyond #refugeeswelcome: The Spectre of Racist Violence and Lessons from Refugee Resistance in Germany | News of Berlin Refugee Movement – from inside** - 11. Nov. 2015

[...] This essay traces the current debate about refugees in Germany by contrasting Germany's recent history of racist violence and limitations of asylum laws with the resistance and agency of refugee movements across Germany. The

essay 'welcome culture' towards refugees, increase in the arson attacks on Lager, and the tightening of the asylum-policies in provoking ways....'It is important to look at both reasons for people to flee and the racism they experience in Germany. In doing so, the status quo of self-congratulatory paternalistic help can be transcended towards a dialogical, political solidarity' Link: Beyond #refugeeswelcome: The Spectre of Racist Violence and Lessons from Refugee Resistance in Germa... [...]

## Einen Kommentar hinterlassen

Name

Email

Webseite

Kommentar

Wählen Sie alle Bilder mit Straßenschildern aus.



Soll die Herausforderung einfacher sein? Nutzungsbedingungen

Benachrichtige mich über nachfolgende Kommentare per E-Mail.



Dieses Werk bzw. Inhalt steht unter einer Creative Commons Namensnennung-NichtKommerziell-KeineBearbeitung 3.0 Unported Lizenz.

Über diese Lizenz hinausgehende Erlaubnisse können Sie unter [redaktion@sicherheitspolitik-blog.de](mailto:redaktion@sicherheitspolitik-blog.de) erhalten

Impressum & Datenschutz |



