

# »LOST IN EUROPE«



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## Racism through the eyes of refugees in Germany and Greece

Refugees fleeing their home countries head to Europe with the hope of finding democracy and human rights. Most of them arrive in Europe through crisis-ridden Greece. They have the hope to continue their journey towards the North of Europe. However, Greece often becomes a trap with no exit. They become prisoners of a country with a dysfunctional asylum system. In practice this means Illegalization, homelessness, hunger, exploitation and racist violence.

When hope remains the journey goes on. One of the preferred destinations of their odyssey through Europe is Germany – a country with a long tradition of immigration but also of horrible experiences of racism. The ones arriving there do not struggle anymore for their mere survival but for security, freedom and dignity and against their deportation. At the end of the day, the main question for refugees in Europe is: What makes us so different, that we cannot enjoy the same rights as you?



*Protest of Asylum  
seekers in Horst  
refugee camp  
STROUX FOTOS*

## GERMANY

Hoyerswerda, Rostock-Lichtenhagen, Mölln and Solingen... These cities became the tragic symbols of a wave of racist street violence following the German reunification in the 1990s. The fascist mobs threw Stones and petrol bombs at apartment blocks, houses and camps that housed asylum seekers and migrants. These attacks claimed numerous lives. In autumn 2011 Germany faced once more the ghost of racist extremism when the German authorities revealed that the Neonazi terror cell National Socialist Underground (NSU) murdered at least 10 people in the period 2000-2006 – most of them were from Turkey. However, people in need of international pro-

tection told us, that they suffer more from the massive institutional racism and incidents of everyday racism than from direct violence.

*»My name is Milad. I am from Afghanistan. In September 2009 I arrived in Greece, my first steps in Europe. I have been in Germany for 13 months. I made a long journey through Northern Europe. This is the first country that accepted my asylum claim.«*

*«My name is Newruz. I am 22 years old and have been in Germany for 10 years. I am Kurdish; fled from Turkey. I wanted to study, but now I have to work in order not to lose my residence permit in Germany.«*

## LIFE IN GERMANY

**MILAD:** »In the beginning I had many dreams. I thought I could do anything. But there are always problems. For one year I have been here and still I wait for my asylum interview. In my first days in Germany I wanted to buy something. I spoke English. The vender said: ‘German please!’ I replied again in English: ‘I cannot speak Deutsch.’ She said: ‘No German, no shopping!’ I went crazy. That was really a sad moment for me.«

**NEWRUZ:** »The first thing I saw in Germany was this refugee camp. I thought, OK, here we are also not welcome. You can go out to the city, but the doors are with iron bars. You have to say/ask if you want to leave and you have to return by a specific time. Also food is given at specific times. It’s like being in prison! At some point our asylum claim was rejected.

For 8 years we had a Duldung [status of being tolerated temporarily due to a deportation suspension]. For one month, always for one month. Gradually, it became clear to me that a Duldung means that I might not be here anymore tomorrow but deported, although I wanted to stay here. It was always like this: A little bit of hope and then none.«

**MILAD:** »Very often I have to go to the Ausländerbehörde [aliens department]. Now I really have problems with that. Every day I go there

in fear. They will deport me today; they will deport me tomorrow; they will arrest me now; they will put me into prison... The immigration officials see us like the enemy. We are so afraid that we cannot speak.«

**NEWRUZ:** »Also in school it was not easy for me. To live under constant fear makes it impossible to concentrate. You go to school but you think ‘why should I learn if tomorrow I might be gone?’ We lived in the same place. We went to the same school but we were poles apart. They had rights. They were born here. I had a Duldung. I had no rights at all here. I was not allowed to do anything else than to act on orders.«

**MILAD:** »In Germany they usually tell us that we have the same rights as German young people. It is not like that. They send us towards work not towards university. But we want to live here. If we would be real students, then we could do better things – for us, for this country, for these people. Nooooo, they don’t need that right now. So they don’t let us do what we are able to. Because we are refugees and this is their country.«

**NEWRUZ:** »The worst situation form me in Germany was the deportation. When my family was brutally separated by the state. By the law. Me, my mother and my siblings remained with the Duldung. Two years after that we

suddenly got permission to stay. We were shocked. In the letter from the aliens department they wrote: „You are integrated. You can stay, your mother is not! She isn't integrated.“

When we got the residence permit I thought: 'Yes, now I am also allowed to feel well – a little better.' But no. It wasn't like that. Things didn't become better with the residence permit.

The person in charge in the aliens department told me: „That was it with school. You have to go to work now. You are not allowed to get social welfare, otherwise you will not get your residence permit. You don't have any rights here!“ I became very angry. Why did this woman think she had the right to tell me such a thing? Who gave her this right? In fact I had wanted to study in university, but I didn't say anything. There are people sitting in front of you and you think they have all the power. I have to keep my mouth shut. I have to do whatever they command me to do.«

**MILAD:** »For me, the most difficult thing is that I got sick in Europe. In Iran, Afghanistan, Pakistan I was always healthy. I was never really sick. Now I take a lot of trauma tablets. Otherwise I cannot sleep; I cannot live. I didn't need that before. When I was first in the reception camp in Germany, I was so sick that I couldn't breathe. The doctors said it wasn't real Asthma. In my case it resulted from this crap situation. So much stress and so much pressure. Then you get these trauma-diseases. It doesn't come from the body but from the mind. For weeks I couldn't go out. If I went out I couldn't breathe. I always had to take a plastic bag and breathe into it.«

## RACISM

**NEWRUZ:** »I still don't feel good here. But I didn't feel good in Turkey either. I didn't belong there. Here I still have this feeling. Here I don't get the opportunity and there they took it away from me from the very first moment of my birth.«

**MILAD:** »Due to the fact that I am a refugee I cannot go from one city to another – due to the Residenzpflicht [obligation to stay within a radius of 30km close to your official residence as assigned by the authorities]. I sometimes feel as if I was in a country that is only 30km big. Because I am not allowed to go beyond.«



*After the attack in Rostock-Lichtenhagen* STROUX FOTOS

**NEWRUZ:** »There shouldn't be the Residenzpflicht anymore. There should be no obligation to stay in refugee camps. These are racist laws. Despite the fact is that one should help a refugee. There is this stupid Geneva Convention; there is a human rights convention, so implement them at last! You cannot just throw somebody who is looking for protection here into a camp, forbid him to work, oblige him to stay within 30km radius and feed him with food packets. The people who came here are not even allowed to decide what they want to eat. Persecuted people are anyway traumatised. What really helps them is to do something for themselves. If you take even that away from them, nothing remains.

In Germany it's like that: You can apply for asylum, you get a place to stay even if it is only in a camp, but you won't be homeless. You also get food. Even though it is only food packets, you won't go hungry. Because I get food and a shelter, this doesn't imply that I have to shut up and wait for my deportation. There are people who manage to avoid their deportation for more than 20 years. In this situation you cannot sleep at night even though you have a bed. You have to be awake and watch the cars that pass by; if it's the cops





*Residenzpflicht. Caught up in a radius of 30km: A young refugee at the gate of Horst refugee camp* STROUX FOTOS

who want to come for you. This also makes you mentally sick.«

**MILAD:** »Compared to Germany... In Greece I feared for my life. When I first arrived in Athens I went to Attiki Square<sup>1</sup> where all the Afghans met. There I heard people afraid of staying in that square. They said there are people who are against refugees. It can happen at any point in time. They don't want foreigners. They beat refugees, like really, with sticks. From then on I always stayed home. However, we had to go out sometimes – but always in big fear of people and of the police. For this reason we were also always afraid of becoming homeless. If you don't have money, you sleep on the streets and eat from the garbage. No normal person can endure that. You become crazy. I was also afraid of the prisons. In Greece I spent most of the time in prison. Three or four times. We are refugees, we travel without papers, but this doesn't mean that we are criminals!«

## DISCUSSING GERMANY AND GREECE

*»I am Hagen Kopp from Hanau, Germany. I am in the initiative "No one is Illegal," but also transnationally active in "no borders," networking with initiatives at the external borders of the EU, against the externalisation of the border regime, against migration control policy and struggling for global freedom of movement.«*

*»My name is Christos Roubanis. I am active in the network and campaign "ΠΟΤΕ ΞΑΝΔΑ" [Never Again]. In the context of a collectivity I feel human and I overcome loneliness and fear against the violence of power. I have 10 years' experience in the movement. I believe that collective action is the only hope of resistance. And in this sense the only source of optimism. Because we need it.«*

**HAGEN:** »When I heard of the pogroms in the squares of Athens, to tell the truth, I quickly felt reminded of the situation here in Germany at the end of the 80s, beginning of the 90s, when we also faced massive attacks on asylum seekers and migrants camps and homes. Exactly in this period of change and crisis with the re-unification of East and West Germany, people were looking for a scapegoat. From above, the ruling side, but also from below, from the population, refugees and migrants became a target. They were massively attacked by mobs of Neo-Nazis but also by the 'regular' population during the incidents of Hoyerswerda, Rostock, Mölln and Solingen.«

**CHRISTOS:** »The Law is not protecting migrants and refugees. They have no individual rights. They don't live in a democracy. Anyone can beat and humiliate them and they cannot go anywhere. The migrants are left alone on the streets. In former times they had some jobs. Due to the economic crisis people are in despair and feel hopeless. They are easily brainwashed by fascist propaganda. For this reason we have more attacks now – mostly fascist attacks against defenceless people.«

**HAGEN:** »Also Germany was, at that time, in a specific process of change. There was interplay between “programme” and “pogrom”: of institutional racism of the state from above and societal racism from below (the attacks). Since the end of the 80s migration policy has tightened up, which was expressed in the sudden increase of deportations, more police raids - in general more repressive measures. 1992 is the year with the largest cuts in refugees’ rights with the factual abolition of the right to asylum. All countries around Germany were declared as safe-third-countries<sup>2</sup> thus already starting the externalisation of the asylum issue. Another important measure: The first readmission agreement in 1993 with Romania. That is important because Roma and Romanian citizens were in that time the main targets of racist attacks, i.e. in Rostock-Lichtenhagen.

In that period people had no access to shelter and a human asylum procedure. This was refused to them. They were actually exhibited and exposed in public places where they were crowded together and where they had to camp. They became targets of the aggressions.

These places might be a parallel to Athens today. Due to Dublin II people are trapped in Greece and cannot go to the countries they want. In some way they are also crowded together in public places. They are highly visible and, thus, also become targets of racist violence.«

**CHRISTOS:** »First of all, Greek immigration policy at first sight has no goals. Because what do we actually want? The immigrants to leave? If we want this we should let them. They feel trapped. Everybody I know wants to leave. Not only do we not give them asylum as we are obliged to by international law, but we don’t even let them make an asylum claim. So, actually we want them here! That would be the conclusion.«

Certainly what we know is that the Dublin II Regulation requires Greece to keep them imprisoned here. We signed this because we were forced to do so by the patrons’ forces within the EU, those who rule the roost - particularly the Germans. This is the reality. Immigration policy is completely subordinated, primarily to the interests of the forces who are the decision-makers, and we have the migrants here on the streets.«

**HAGEN:** »Externalisation impulses by the government started in that period; the attempt to push it into the EU-level. There we are at Frontex. At that time they laid the foundation for the safe-third-country rule, let’s say the outsourcing of border controls or of the “problem”. This became more effective in the following years with the eastern European expansion of the EU when the new member states had to commit themselves to the Schengen Treaty, meaning a militarisation of the borders in the East in order to already intercept migrants there. And where we are today, to already stop people in Northern Africa or Ukraine in order to keep existent poverty in the European periphery or even better in the global south. Greece today is also in a way an externalisation of this whole conflict to the external borders of the EU. The responsibility is here in the states of the European core.«

## REACTION OF THE STATE ON INCREASED RACIST VIOLENCE

**CHRISTOS:** »The reaction of the police is provocative. Many times we reported specific incidents and they remain indifferent. I remember one time I showed to a police officer someone running after an immigrant with a knife. I said to him: ‘What are you doing, run!’ He tells me: ‘Mind your own business please! Leave!’ The police are continuously indifferent I would say – in order not to say something worse - to all these criminal attacks. We have reason to believe they know each other. That the Golden Dawn has its own people within the police. We see them sometimes chatting like old friends. I think the crisis is still ahead of us, we have not seen the bottom of the barrel and what is happening is alarming.«

**HAGEN:** »There was the attempt to continue with exclusion through this institutional racism. In that time the new Asylbewerberleistungsgesetz [(Social) Welfare Law for asylum-seekers] was introduced. A racist act of its own which is still in operation today. This law provides refugees with benefits far below the official subsistence level, with benefits in kind or with money and shelter. As far as I remember, the enforcement to live in refugee

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Racism through the eyes  
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camps was decided upon in its form in combination with the welfare law for asylum seekers. Everybody had to be in new refugee camps, in container camps in old barracks. There they wanted to pound them all in and mark them. A special regime to register, control and exclude them.

This is as a matter of fact the attempt to move everything in a certain direction through this racism from above and to say: 'In this form we will solve this issue from now on: constitutionally, democratically, with laws, with deportations, with legal means we kick the people out we don't want here.' From the side of the state there was a great interest to push people back and at the same time cut down their rights. In this mixture of agitation and law, of programme and pogrom, the pogroms had a function.

This interplay operated very effectively and with very bad consequences for many years. It was rightly named the stigma regime at that time: to concentrate specific people in one place where they are easy to become targets, and create a negative atmosphere which makes clear that these people should if anything be allowed to stay only for a short period here. Then there was the discourse about "economic refugees" and „Scheinasylanten“ [pseudo-asylum seekers], concepts of that time that

were used to say that these people have no entitlement to be here; that they have to be deported as soon as possible.

Then the deportation rate rose extremely. There was a real impulse to control in such a way, to confront them immediately with deportation or to push them into illegality. That was an attempt to render it impossible for people to stay legally; in a way that they themselves prefer to fight their way through Europe as *sans-papiers*. This then led to an extreme increase in numbers of *sans-papiers* in Europe.«

**CHRISTOS:** »Who will implement the new law on xenophobia?<sup>3</sup> Even in the parliament officials say things for which they should be held accountable before the court. Karantzaferis [*president of the right-wing populist party LAOS*] said openly that Hitler had done well with the Jews. Who is to hold him to account for that?

But the most important thing for me and a lot of other people is the symbolism. The people who were supporting the Junta and the dictatorship, people who have repeatedly expressed agreement with the Holocaust, these are the people who are in the government today and the rest of the state is tolerating them. I am not afraid of them, but of the state which tolerates them.«



Patras: Life in hope to leave Greece STROUX FOTOS



## GREECE

Racist violence in Athens has increased over the last two or three years, reaching alarming proportions in 2011. The economic crisis has worsened the situation. The NGO Doctors of the World has counted nationwide 550 incidents of racist violence in the past two years only among their own patients. In the majority of these cases police officers have been attacking migrants and refugees. However, the authorities register only very few of them and even less reach the Greek courts.<sup>4</sup> Today, migrants and asylum seekers speak of virtual no-go areas in Athens after dark because of fear of attacks by vigilante groups.

*»My name is Nasim. I am from Afghanistan. I have been in Greece for 8 years. I applied for asylum and waited many years for an answer. During the last legalization campaign in Greece I got the green card – a temporary residence permit for migrants. I have finished school here and was accepted to*

*university. Now I have to choose between the studies and the survival rules. I have to work to get my insurance stamps, otherwise I lose my papers.«*

*»My name is Adam. I am Sudanese from Darfur. I have been in Greece since 2004. I am an asylum seeker and live here with a Red Card (temporary residence permit for asylum seekers) and still waiting for my interview. I am the father of one daughter and I am currently jobless. I have decided to stay in Greece.«*

*»I am Abdul Karim and I am from Eritrea. I have lived in Greece for two and a half years. I was living homeless for more than one year; first on a mountain in Igoumenitsa, then on the streets in Patras. I was trying to leave Greece and find protection in another European country. Then I applied for asylum. Today I am still unemployed and homeless.«*

### LIFE IN GREECE

**NASIM:** »From the beginning it was difficult in Greece. I faced a lot of institutional racism because I had no papers. I was in prison for the mere act of illegal entry to Greek territory for more than 1 1/2 years. Then I had a huge legal problem because I only had the prison release paper. With this paper I couldn't find a job. I had no right to rent a flat in my name. Still I wasn't illegal.«

**ABDUL-K.:** »There is no one to help us here. I did everything to arrive here from my country. In the end I have nothing. I feel very, very sad! I lost my future, my life, my money and I am far from my family. I hope one day everything will change. I live with this hope all the time. One day I will arrive. Now I am homeless. I do not have any place. Life is very, very, very... it is very bad. It isn't worth anything.«

**ADAMS:** »I am afraid of tomorrow; the economic situation. They say foreigners are responsible for that. In Greece a black person is a foreigner. This is the first thing. Since colour is black, you are foreigner. It's difficult because

we cannot change our colour, but they can change their mind, in the end maybe. Because our colour is our colour.«

### RACISM

**NASIM:** »It is difficult in my neighbourhood because there is the Golden Dawn [Greek fascist group and party] and this limits your mobility very much and the time when you can walk outside. I am very careful. When I walk and it is a little late at night, then I am always ready to run. I'm very cautious. I look around. Especially in the area where I live, usually in the evening I take a bus to go home which is more secure, or when it is really late I take a taxi. Even during the day I don't enter narrow streets in this region. That is to say, it is a red zone and you hesitate to go there.«

**ABDUL-K.:** »The police... All the time run away, run away! Our life here is, like the animal's life. For example in Patra, some months before we lived in the old trains. Now they took them away and we sleep in the old factory. All night we think the police are coming and we run away and come back... This is like an



*Racists attack again a mosq nearby Attiki Square in Athens STROUX FOTOS*

animal's life. We all live afraid. Back, run away, come back. Until when?«

**ADAMS:** »Personally, I faced a serious problem in September on my way to work. There were five persons. They shouted at me: "I am talking to you, fucking black! What are you doing in Greece?" Then they attacked me without any reason. I was shouting. I tried to get help but there was no help, of course.«

## FEAR

**NASIM:** »When there is blind violence it doesn't need more than being different to be attacked. Everybody has to be careful and protect themselves.

There is no other protection; there is no justice or judiciary. For example, some days ago the police officers of the St. Panteleimon case were sentenced by the court.<sup>5</sup> It seems they received the lowest sentence. So many years have passed by. What will the people do who were attacked in 2004 if the responsible officers have their court case today? You cannot trust a system working this way. We need the rule that whoever is committing a hate crime against the other has to be handed over to the courts.«

**ADAMS:** »I tried to find help from police who were near during the attack. I told them

about it and I am sure they could hear me shouting. I gave them some description of the people who beat me. While I was telling this to the police, the offenders returned. So I told the police this is the car and these are the criminals. The police told me 'OK, you can go to the police station and make an official report.' They did nothing else.«

**ABDUL-K.:** »The police! Like you see. We are all afraid of the police. Every time you feel it in your heart. They say: "Your paper, your paper, your paper." For example like me: I have the Red Card. Even though I have the Red Card I am afraid until now of the police. It is worth nothing. If they see you they will take the Red Card from you. If they take the Red Card you cannot do anything except look at them.«

## PUBLIC DISCOURSE AND RACISM

**ABDUL-K.:** »The people they say like this: "From the immigration. The economic problem is from the immigration." They say: "Take all the immigrants out of Greece. Will be fine the economy." Some people in Greece are nice and some of them is very bad - like everywhere. People in Greece some of them they do not know, it is the first time they see the immigra-





*"Racists beat me up last night inside the abandoned building where I am sleeping in."* STROUX FOTOS

tion people. Because of that it is impossible to speak about all the people. But about the government we can be speaking. The government could find some solution for the people. Give the papers, open the door... «

**NASIM:** »In multicultural Athens they still talk about "black people", "muslims", they speak about "strange people". I believe that the society has understood that there are different people living in the city but institutionally the authorities, the media, all this affects very much how the situation is presented.

Since being in Greece I have lived in the same area, nearby Attiki Square. I have very good relations with the people of my neighbourhood. I see them. I say hallo. Nevertheless, I see that the TV is creating stereotypes even about the Greeks themselves. Now what they do concerning migrants or the other is another serious issue. The way they present them is something awful. The person who is not afraid during the day, in the night asks himself: "Maybe I am afraid and I don't notice?"

They made them afraid. They have convinced them to say: "Oh. These people are dangerous!" Only with this logic things could become like that. The fact of St. Panteleimo-

nas has such a situation. Nobody believes and it is inconceivable that all this happens in front of the police station. Or that 10 people have closed down the neighbourhood, excluding all the neighbours while the municipality, the prefecture and others remain silent. This silence means: 'Yes, I agree with you.' They allow neighbourhoods to become inaccessible with 10 people ruling it. This all developed, came into existence and functions today not only with the tolerance of the authorities but also with their support. So today we have the situation as it is.«

## HOPES AND WISHES

**NASIM:** »We have to accept the reality that in multicultural Athens we migrants also exist as citizens and as human beings in this society. We participate in life in all aspects. I want to be recognized, I want my rights to be recognized, my presence and my existence here. I have to exist!«

**ABDUL-K.:** »I hope to leave Greece. I hope to live like everyone, to be accepted by the people and to live like them and with them.«

**ADAMS:** »I wish peace and democracy for my country and I wish the asylum system in Gree-

ce to become more just. Give people more rights. Finally, I wish to be in good communication with the people I have met in Greece always.«

**NEWRUZ:** »My dream is that one day all human beings will be treated the same. That law is not different: For some people good, for others bad.«

**MILAD:** »It doesn't matter who is from Afghanistan, Pakistan, Africa, Australia or Europe. We can all use this earth together. What is that supposed to mean: "You are a refugee. You have no papers."? It doesn't mean that we are not human beings! We also want something good. If I could change something, then I would fight for solidarity. That is my wish!«

<sup>1</sup>Both Attiki Square and St. Panteleimonas Square, working class neighbourhoods in central Athens with numerous immigrant families, have become since 2008 a target for racist attacks. The so-called "concerned citizens" together with members of the extreme right are patrolling and even occupying both squares since two years. The squares used to be lively meeting points but today they are no-go areas for migrants.

<sup>2</sup>The safe-third-country policy requires an asylum seeker passing through a safe third country before arriving in Germany to be denied asylum and sent back to the first safe country. Safe countries include all EU Member States, Norway, and Switzerland.

<sup>3</sup>On December 6, the government proposed a draft measure to tighten Greek laws on speech that incites hatred, discrimination, or violence.

<sup>4</sup>In 2008 and 2009 there were four hate crime trials each year and in 2010 only three. In December 2004 a group of police officers raided a house where Afghan refugees were living nearby Attiki Square and St. Panteleimon Chru. They assaulted some of the Afghans and arrested two. Allegedly they tortured them in the cellar of the police station.

<sup>5</sup>The court case was on December 19, 2011. The two convicted officers were sentenced 10 ½ years prison, but they were released after suspension was granted. The court had already converted the penalty to a misdemeanor.

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