

20 Jahre (und noch kein) Rasthaus

Rasthaus – a house to rest

Twenty years ago, women and men from the city of Freiburg, witnessing the harsh conditions in which refugees live, had the original idea of creating a place to rest and simply be there and they named it Rasthaus.

The Rasthaus now is an important place for medical, legal and political support. That is very true. But for me it is much more.

At the Beginning the founders dreamed of a place where refugees can rest and meet people who do not deny their right to stay as mentioned in one of their first flyers in 1998.

I always took for granted the right just to be where i am and to go where i want to.

In Germany, i learned and understood it better. The day I put my bags in the first registration center in Karlsruhe, i quickly made a room for the new definition of asylum in my head. My plain being here was considered illegal!

Escaping and becoming a refugee means stress: the memories of home, not to know where to sleep at night, and where will I wake up the next day? The film of our friends dying of thirst and tiredness, one is not safe.

I know some people who almost drowned in the Mediterranean:

I know a Syrian boy who tells me how lucky he is to still be alive. He uses to light a cigarette and tells me how he almost drowned, when their boat capsized.

I know an Afghan girl who told me with an innocent smile how tired she was during her trip to Europe. She was so tired that she asked her mother to leave her behind and to let her die.

A new country means stress: one is disoriented, everything is new particularly the language. One smiles at all what people say to him.

Two weeks after my arrival in Karlsruhe I had to go to the Doctor by public Transport. The ticket automat was new for me, so i spent half an hour trying to ask for help, unfortunately nobody was ready to help me. People went away from me before I said the first word. A fellow Cameroonian refugee helped me finally but he bought me a ticket according to the lowest price not according to the VAG rules. I got a control after one stop and had to learn that 1,80-ticket which i bought is for kids and I should buy 2,30-ticket. Imagine my feelings at that moment, everybody looking at me. They collected my A4 ID pass and write 15€ to pay before 7 days.

The asylum procedure means stress: it takes long, I mean years, many years with a hostile treatment, a stressful camp live, uncertainty and a permanent fear of rejection and deportation.

I know a guy who is traumatized by the haunting images of is family being killed in the northern Nigeria. Last time he told me, Rouby you know «I am alone in this

world» but I feel different when i am in this area. I feel like Rasthaus is bigger than Freiburg.

For many years, we feel like drifted, we live under pressure and depression, in need of someone who is interested in our differences, who knows the value of giving me quarter meter of place to seat and breathe.

That is also why it was a good idea then and now, a place where we can rest. Eat, sleep, talk, be silent... a place where we become human again, a place where this natural self-understanding exists. A place just to be there.

Rasthaus instead of LEA

The people who started the Rasthaus group in 1998, had a particular house in view and that was the house 49, an old barracks building in Vauban. It used to be the canteen of the **Bezirkssammellager** which was similar to the LEA today: mashed potatoes, overcooked carrots, fear, control and repression against refugees.

The Rasthaus was also planned as a symbol against this kind of camp.

The LEA today or the BEA earlier was set up in 2015. Beforehand, there were many discussions going on. Freiburg agreed to establish a camp «for initial reception» (**Landeserstaufnahme**) but would not agree to allow refugees to stay in Freiburg after that.

There was a lot of critique to the already existing LEA in Karlsruhe, but the City of Freiburg promised a better LEA. City Councilers claimed, that they would care for better social and humanitarian standards in the Freiburg LEA.

But we sadly noticed that the LEA in Freiburg is a camp like all others and sometimes worse.

Remember I told you I was in the LEA in Karlsruhe and believe me it wasn't a good place to be, but at least we had the right to receive visitors. Last week, I went to the LEA in the Lörracher Str. 6. I wanted to motivate refugees to attend to our self-organisation meeting but I couldn't get in. It is not allowed. So i kept going around and circling the fence in front of the camp hoping to see someone passing by - and than i wave him my hand - imagine how long it takes! And how funny it can look.

I know many refugees from the LEA, who walk the whole night in the streets of Freiburg and only come back during day time to sleep - because of fear of the police coming during the night for deportations.

A young Guinean guy told me: you know, they took my fingerprint there in Italy and I am so scared.

In the LEA they put 3 people in a room of about 20 square meters – even if there are empty rooms.

Politicians of Freiburg: Please show us the great social and humanitarian standards you promised to care for! I cannot see them.

From my research, the Rasthaus initially was meant for all these people that I told you their stories. It was thought big with a hostel, a café, workshops...Not just for legal help, but a real place to rest save - a Rasthaus.

There should be all the possibilities that are missing in the lives of most of us, and these can never arise on the grey concrete surface in front of the LEA: a safe place to be free and to develop.

A Rasthaus against an in-humanitarian policy

The Rasthaus was from the very beginning a utopia of coexistence and solidarity. It was a symbol of resistance to policies of camps, food parcels and deportation. Resistance to a policy that had abolished the basic right to asylum in Germany in early 1993.

And this symbol against the policies of closure and isolation is now more important than ever.

Today, politicians are competing who makes the most terrible laws. Interior minister Seehofer has just presented a so-called «master plan» - 23 pages, which can be summarized in a few German keywords:

Entrechtung, Kontrolle, Abschreckung, Abschiebung

Where the Master plan talks of integration, all that matters is better controls on whether refugees take part in integration courses - and penalties if they do not. And not a single word about how society can foster the participation of refugees.

Often you can already see in the wording, what is meant: Seehofer wants - quote - "eine konsequente Prüfung des **Wegfalls** der Schutzberechtigung "a consistent examination of the **omission** of the protection entitlement".

So he does not want to consistently check whether people have the right to asylum. He just wants to consistently check whether it is possible to deport them.

Seehofer's so-called master plan is nothing more than a bureaucratization of barbarism!

At the same time, the CSU right-wing populist Dobrindt speaks of an anti-deportation industry - referring to institutions such as the Rasthaus. Anti-deportation industry - that sounds like a lucrative industry where money-hungry lawyers and ruthless gangsters are making big bucks.

Anyone who knows the Rasthaus knows how absurd this picture is. For 20 years people have been fighting for the rights of refugees here without any payment.

The activists and supporters of the Rasthaus give their time, their strength and their money - for a society that excludes no one and deports nobody into misery.

This is not an anti-deportation **industry** - but an anti-deportation **movement!**

What really exists in my opinion is a **deportation industry**: -

Over the hill-politicians like Dobrindt and Seehofer produce fear and hatred - just to win voters for the elections.

Camp organizers like European Homecare are running refugee camps, where they imprison refugees until they can be deported - a business that makes literally a profit of hundreds of millions.

More millions are spent on policemen performing racial profiling in broad daylight, and ripping people out of bed for deportation in the middle of the night.

Regierungspräsidien, BAMF and Ausländerbehörden form a giant bureaucracy apparatus to intimidate and incapacitate refugees and get rid of them as quick as possible.

And so we respond to Dobrindt: You are the deportation industry - but the Rasthaus is the grain of sand in your gear!

I think, it's no coincidence that Dobrindt is talking about an anti-deportation industry right now. This is just one part of a campaign that wants to villainise and criminalize humanitarian and political work.

Thus, the civil disobedience of the refugees in Ellwangen is portrayed as criminal and violent. And the legitimate struggle for better living conditions and against the deportation industry leads to social condemnation or even jail.

And politicians of all European countries are now trying to criminalize and make impossible the work of Sea Rescuers in the Mediterranean.

So even the most natural thing that people in need are to be saved from drowning is complicated and criminalized.

Thus, the engagement in the Rasthaus is not just a dedication for the refugees. It is also a struggle for a society in which political and humanitarian commitment is possible and recognized. A society that does not allow itself to be forced on its topics by the yelling of the racists. A society that does not divide people according to skin colors and passports. A society that values humanity more than profit.

The fight of the Rasthaus is not only a fight for refugees - it is a fight for all of us!

The Minirasthaus – a different world

In this hostile political atmosphere the Rasthaus is more important for us than ever.

There are many groups who are so crucial for the lives of refugees:

SAGA is the most visited part of Rasthaus by refugees. A friend told me that he had no money for a lawyer and the social workers of the camp could not help him. So he found his 1st solution in his asylum procedure from SAGA's appeal.

I know a guy who proudly told me « ich habe hier in Rasthaus meine erste Wörter auf Deutsch gelernt, es war echt geil, ich war immer langweilig und wusste nicht was zu tun. Jemanden hat mir über kostenlose **Deutschkurse** in Rasthaus erzählt und bin

ich hier sofort gekommen, habe ein Stundenplan bekommen und habe Deutschsprache angefangen zu lernen».

Another friend of me was very sick, unfortunately she doesn't have a health insurance and nobody wanted to take her treatment in charge, then I told her about **Medinetz** and she was amazed to know that there are such people committed for refugees.

Aktion Bleiberecht this is a place where we can change something politically. I discovered Aktion Bleiberecht on 13th January this year, when they supported migrants from Togo to say "no to dictatorship" in my country and since then I have been very attentive to their actions to make things better.

And - to quote the Refugee Activist Rex Osa - "the happiest moment of a refugee is when he is in a protest!"

Freiburger Forum Aktiv gegen Ausgrenzung is what the name says: activ against social exclusion of all kinds.

It's a network for discussing and connecting different struggles, but they mainly fight against the deportation of Roma, one of the most vulnerable and discriminated groups in Europe.

All this Groups are part of the Rasthaus. And the Rasthaus itself is well located, here on the **Grethergelände**. For me it is a different world. A friend who used to pay me visit in the Radio told me that people here look at her differently than those on the train station. Refugees can cook and eat at the Strandcafé. We can raise Our Voices in Radio Dreyeckland, and if we need more place for meetings, we can also ask at Rosa Hilfe, Feministisches Zentrum or at the Kita - or we can just sit here in this wonderfull yard without anyone complaining or frowning at us.

It is a small part of the dream of a bigger Rasthaus already

No save house without a save city

But the vision is still bigger- «Rasthaus is bigger than Freiburg », this is how my friend feels but also what it should be like.

There has been visions of a bigger Rasthaus in the last years: There where for example plans to get the old DGB-Haus, the house of the workers union for a Rasthaus.

Before the city decided to set up the LEA , people from Rasthaus, the Mietshäuser syndicate and others introduced an alternative plan for the site of the old **police academy**, where today the LEA is located. It was once again a dream, a bigger dream: a whole neighbourhood in the city. Cheap apartments for people with and without refugee background living together instead of isolation, neighborhood solidarity instead of control and surveillance, living in houses instead of camps.

In 2002 15.000 people in Freiburg prevented a Nazi march, and the City of Freiburg proudly portrayed itself as "offene Stadt", an "open city".

But just a few weeks later, in October 2002, the city council rejected by a large majority the request to buy "house 49" with the Mietshäusersyndikat for a Rasthaus.

Counselors said, this would be a "lawless space" ein "rechtsfreier Raum". And they would act illegally when they accept this.

But when the law is wrong we need this "lawless spaces" - not just a house, but the whole city!

Even in a big Rasthaus the walls can not protect us if the police invades and take us away. The walls can lock us up if we can not go out because we do not know what is going on out there.

A Rasthaus is important, but it must be in a safe city. **Safer cities** already exist - in the United States, in the United Kingdom and many other European cities. These are cities that refuse to cooperate with federal authorities when they try to expel people.

Cities that stand against an inhuman refugee policy, and use their political possibilities to protect the inhabitants of their city.

A Solidarity City is a City that provides affordable housing to everybody - independent of the legal status. A City where the unions call for strike if people are exploited. A City, where the doctors do not ask you who you are before treating you when you are sick. A city where all children can go to school, without asking for their residence permit. A City, where the Council is brave enough to sell houses for a real Rasthaus!

What is right?

Remember Ellwangen: on the 3rd Mai between 3 and 4 o'clock in the morning, hundreds of police officers came in the camp after refugees had prevented a deportation. They kicked in all doors at the same time, intimidated those who asked questions. A helicopter flew over the camp. That is what refugees later described as "civil war atmosphere". This time again the German government and the media spoke of a "lawless space" meaning the refugees not the police.

If the law allows to drag people out of bed to be deported in the middle of the night...

If the law punishes people who try to save the lives of people in the Mediterranean sea...

If the law denies refugees the basic rights of safety, freedom of movement and political participation...

If the law imprisons refugees, and declares humans as "illegal" ...

Then we really need more "lawless spaces" like the Rasthaus.

Make Freiburg, make Germany, make the whole world a Rasthaus!!!