

Alternative Voices on Integration

in Austria, France, Germany, the Netherlands and the UK



Edited by Liz Fekete with Naima Bouteldja and Nina Mühe

Published by the Institute of Race Relations

Published by the Institute of Race Relations
2-6 Leeke Street, London WC1X 9HS
Web: www.irr.org.uk
Email: info@irr.org.uk
Tel: 44 (0) 20 7837 0041

The Alternative Voices on Integration project is part of the European Race Audit of the Institute of Race Relations. Funded by the Network of European Foundations (European Programme on Integration and Migration), it aims to draw attention to innovative new projects that challenge racism, break down stereotypes and effect change.

Institute of Race Relations 2010

ISBN 978-0-85001-071-8



Liz Fekete is Executive Director of the Institute of Race Relations and head of the European Race Audit.



Naima Bouteldja, a French journalist based in London, is a Research Fellow at the European Muslim Centre at Exeter University.



Nina Mühe is a cultural anthropologist and academic associate at the European University Viadrina in Frankfurt/Oder, Germany. She was the researcher on 'Muslims in Berlin' for the 'At Home in Europe Project' of the Open Society Institute.

Our thanks to the following IRR staff members and ERA volunteers for their help in compiling this report: Harmit Athwal, Jenny Bourne, Nora El Massioui, Mutlu Ergün, Chandra Frank, Filiz Keküllüoglu and Frances Webber.

Cover photo: Robin Virgin
Designed and printed by Upstream Ltd (TU) A worker's cooperative
020 7207 1560 www.upstream.coop

Alternative Voices on Integration

in Austria, France, Germany, the Netherlands and the UK

***‘The problem of integration lies in the
interpretation of integration itself.’***

A. Sivanandan, Director, Institute of Race Relations

**INSTITUTE OF
RACE
RELATIONS**

NEF
NETWORK OF EUROPEAN FOUNDATIONS

Epim
European Programme
for Integration
and Migration

INTRODUCTION

Nguyen Tan Manh



Over the last few years, the debate on integration has ceased to be a two-way process based on dialogue, consultation and mutual respect. The daily diet served up by many politicians and much of our media is one that stigmatises minorities and blames them for failing to integrate. The media are most likely to portray minorities as holding on to alien customs that threaten Europe's Enlightenment values, and depict 'immigrants' as choosing to self-segregate in parallel societies. If you listen only to the politicians and the press, you may even come to believe that the biggest threat to the EU today – as well as to the 'national identity' of its member states – lies in immigration and cultural diversity.

But what happens if we throw away the newspapers and stop attending to the politicians? What happens if we listen to other voices, particularly the voices of those who are the butt of the 'blame game' in the integration debate?

In 2009, the IRR's European Race Audit (ERA) started its journey of identifying the alternative voices on integration, in Austria, Germany, France, the UK and the Netherlands. We wanted to hear from the most vulnerable groups in society, those who felt most keenly the impact of the stereotypes promoted by integration and 'national identity' debates. We quickly realised that these voices were being denied the megaphone of the national press, and that they needed a platform from which to air their views. This report brings together the interviews and news stories we compiled since the project began. Its primary aim is to bring the voices of the most marginalised – refugees, asylum seekers, migrant workers and second-and third-generation 'immigrants' from a Muslim background – to a wider hearing.

But recording the perspectives of grassroots organisations also led us to investigate further the issues that alternative voices throw up. Hence, in order to contextualise the interviews and contributions made by grassroots organisations, each country-section starts with a summary of the major developments in the country under review from January 2009-April 2010. The organisations we spoke to feel passionately that the real barriers to integration are being obscured by the top-down approach of the current debate. The politicians and the media would have us believe that the EU is at the vanguard of the fight against discrimination and that Europe is the cradle of human rights. But when investigation starts from the real and not the ideal, it forces us to confront a string of facts far removed from this flattering and valorising picture of superior European values and a democratic, open and tolerant way of life.

The truth is that this is a Europe where racial justice is rarely talked about, let alone addressed. Integration is endlessly discussed as a problem of 'minority cultures', even as structural discrimination, in employment, education and in the marginalised inner cities and banlieues, grows. We have strong anti-discrimination laws, we are told. But the fact that the official anti-discrimination bureaux are losing the trust of the very people they are meant to serve, is denied.

This is a Europe where National Action Plans Against Racism, promised after the 2001 UN Durban World Conference against racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia, and related intolerance, have been abandoned (in some countries, such as Austria, they were never even put in



Robin Virgin



place). The promotion of cultural stereotypes about Muslims and the media fixation with the veil are leading to the racialisation of the category 'Muslim', even as racism is treated as a thing of the past. As the racist discourse of the extreme Right reaches new heights, anti-racism is treated as though it were a dirty word and anti-racist organisations sidelined.

In this hostile climate, racial violence – against Jews, Muslims, Roma, refugees, against black people – is growing, yet many police forces have not even come to first base when it comes to recording and responding to racial violence. This report documents compelling evidence of institutionalised racism in the police, but this is not being addressed in countries where even the basic step of creating an independent police complaints authority has not been taken.

This is a Europe which seems impervious to the high social cost of excluding young second-and third-generation black and Muslim Europeans from poorer backgrounds from the debates that concern them. It is surely time to consider the lasting impact of policies that marginalise, exclude, criminalise and, ultimately, alienate youngsters. We document here the erosion of citizenship rights (and without citizenship there can be no integration), growing religious discrimination (young Muslim women are particularly vulnerable to anti-veil laws), racism within the criminal justice system, the growth of racial and religious profiling in policing, the creation of criminal justice databases which store information on young black or minority ethnic youth, on the basis of discriminatory criteria.

Many of the organisations we have consulted with are also campaigning for legal routes to regularisation for undocumented workers, as well as the right to work for asylum seekers. This is a Europe where the *sans papiers* regularly harvest our crops, labour on our construction sites, clean our streets, airports, hospitals and railway station and care for the elderly and disabled. The politicians know their countries would grind to a halt without them, yet they are too scared of the right-wing press to say so. Instead of the mass regularisation campaigns advocated by 'Alternative Voices', politicians are heightening the climate of hatred against the undocumented through constant raids and expensive deportation flights. These politicians talk loftily about integration and human rights, while daily abusing the human rights of asylum seekers.

And how we treat asylum seekers when they come to Europe seeking sanctuary is also a question of integration. A large proportion, after pitting themselves for years against a deterrent asylum system, will eventually receive refugee status or other residence rights, and finally citizenship. But the triple grip of detention, destitution and threat of deportation means that many will emerge deeply traumatised from their experience – and the denial of the right to work and receive a higher education also delays the integration process. The number of hunger strikes emerging around Europe is resistance of last resort. They draw attention to the increasing marginalisation of human rights groups within detention centres, the growing number of deaths in custody due to medical neglect, as well as the desperation of those who attempt or commit suicide.

Yet all is not bleak. Alternative voices tell of the many exciting self-help and civil rights initiatives which, far from being a threat to progressive European values, are attempting to preserve them. We hope that this report will act as a wake-up call to all European citizens who care about justice. These alternative voices have inspired us. And we hope they will inspire you to set up similar projects that support, record and broadcast the many alternative voices that are out there – waiting to be captured.



AUSTRIA – CONTEXT

Integration

Austria has no comprehensive integration strategy – a fact that was noted with concern by the European Commission against Racism and Intolerance (ECRI) in its fourth report on Austria published in March 2010.¹

Since the September 2008 general election, Austria has been ruled by a grand coalition comprising the Social Democrat Party (SPÖ) and the Austrian People's Party (ÖVP). It is said that the coalition, under the coordination of the interior ministry, is presently drawing up a National Action Plan on Integration (NAPI). But organisations representing the Islamic community, such as the Islamic Faith Community (Islamische Glaubensgemeinschaft in Österreich, IGGIO) as well as NGOs working in the area of immigration, refugees, human rights and anti-racism, are losing faith in what is certainly not a 'two-way process'.² At the centre of doubts is the attitude of interior minister Maria Fekter (ÖVP), who has been accused of restricting the theme of integration to the alleged shortcomings of 'immigrants' and pandering to the extreme Right through the populist promotion of cultural stereotypes about Muslims.

Integration based on 'values' alienates Muslim community

Instead of pressing ahead with concrete proposals to deal with structural discrimination and other barriers to integration, Fekter is concentrating on integration into 'values' in ways that, according to IGGIO representative Carla Amina Baghajati identify Muslims as a threat to democracy and a state based on the rule of law.³ Carla Amina Baghajati argues that Fekter uses 'catchphrases such as Sharia' in public declarations that highlight cultural barriers to integration, which she identifies as customs like forced marriages and female genital mutilation. This 'values-based' approach is reflected in one of NAPI's first points, namely, 'Aims of action in the area of values and of the state governed by the rule of law'.

Attitudinal survey used by government to justify security discourse

As in Germany, attitudinal surveys with dubious methodology, commissioned by the government, are being used by that same government to back up argument that immigrants pose a threat to democracy if integration into values is not adhered to. Thus the interior ministry cites research it commissioned from the market research company GfK, published in January 2010 suggesting that an alarmingly high proportion of people of Turkish origin were poorly integrated into Austrian society and placed adherence to Sharia law over Austrian values. GfK also found that young Muslims with a 'religious-political orientation'

and from a Turkish immigration background were having problems integrating into Austrian society as they had difficulties with respect to the family, partnership, gender roles and equal rights for men and women. To combat what she believes are the 'serious problems' raised by GfK, Fekter called for the payment of family allowance to be tied, up to age eighteen, to attending school or having an apprenticeship.

The federal government is also considering a proposal to make kindergarten attendance compulsory from the age of three, to speed up the linguistic integration of immigrant families. It is a proposal that neatly sidesteps the failure of successive Austrian governments to bring about linguistic integration through educational reform, notably via the proper training of teachers in German as a second language.⁴

While committing herself to combating 'fundamentalist tendencies' within immigrant communities, Fekter has remained vague with regard to another of the GfK study's findings – that more than half of all individuals from an immigration background have been affected by racism and xenophobia in Austria. All that Fekter has said on this subject is that of course everyone must make an effort in order for integration to work; however, the population of Austria had demonstrated in the past 'that it is actually very patient with regards to immigrants' ability to absorb things'. Furthermore, it was well known with what friendliness tourists were received in Austria.⁵

Open letter from NGOs attacks unaccountable process

In May 2009, in an open letter to Fekter, numerous NGOs working in the fields of immigration, refugees, human rights and anti-racism said that they saw no possibility for further cooperation with the government's integration plan unless certain prerequisites were met.⁶ 'We are not willing to serve as adornment for press presentations of position papers, to whose contents we were unable to contribute.'

The NGOs criticise the lack of transparency within NAPI, and the lack of any genuine consultation which has left them disillusioned and feeling that their role was merely 'to produce a show of broad social legitimisation'. Fekter is further criticised for issuing a paper in which she called on immigrants, the provinces and municipalities to take specific measures, without any commitment coming from the federal government to resource those measures or a clear legal framework within which they can act.

Lack of citizenship as a barrier to integration

ECRI is concerned that a large number of people are living in Austria without Austrian citizenship even though they satisfy the requirements for naturalisation, and has called on the authorities to

AUSTRIA – VOICES

Kanafanis challenge Austrian integration policy

By Nina Mühe & Liz Fekete

First published on IRR News, 19 May 2009



The Kanafani Inter-Cultural Initiative (Kulturverein Kanafani) in Vienna, which publishes the journal *der.wisch*, has set itself a goal: to challenge the mainstream political debate in Austria over 'integration'.

The IRR's 'Alternative Voices on Integration' project attended the Kanafani Inter-Cultural Initiative discussion forum 'Integration – a miracle cure put to the test' in Vienna on 5 March 2009.

'Integration can be compared to a carrot, bound to a stick and hanging in front of a donkey's nose. Each time the donkey goes forward and tries to reach it, the carrot is just moved further away.'

With these words, the German social scientist and political writer Mark Terkessidis sought to illustrate the often farcical nature of German and Austrian approaches to integration, as well as how government integration policies impact on members of minority communities seeking citizenship via naturalisation. Terkessidis, also a member of the German anti-racist association, Kanak Attak, and a founder of the Institute for Studies in Visual Culture in Cologne, was speaking in front of an audience of over 200 people (a large number of whom were students) at the atmospheric Semper Depot, a former theatrical warehouse in Vienna's Lehaergasse district. The Kanafani Inter-Cultural Initiative and the human rights organisation SOS Mitmensch were the organisers of the event, which was followed the next day by a practical workshop on 'Exploring the possibilities of anti-racist praxis'.

It was no accident that so many students attended the forum. The Kanafani Inter-Cultural Initiative and Kanak Attak are among a number of exciting movements taking root in various European countries and enjoying considerable support amongst second- and third-generation university-educated migrant youth. (Another such organisation is Les Indigènes de la République in France.) These initiatives are inspired by Black and Third World radical traditions as well as past and contemporary scholarship on racism, Orientalism and Islamophobia. The Kanafanis, as they have come to be known in popular parlance, are a dynamic group of activists promoting inter-cultural action and alternative political discourse. Through this lecture and its first lecture series on 'Islam as concept of the enemy', as well as articles in *der.wisch* (which we are proud to acknowledge has included translated work from the IRR's own journal, *Race & Class*), the Kanafanis are attempting to connect young Austrians to a wider liberatory politics. Hence, the association's decision to name itself after the great Palestinian novelist and pan-Arabist fighter, Ghassan Kanafani, who believed that students' education needed to relate to their immediate surroundings. Hence the practical aim of this Kanafani integration forum was to challenge the mainstream understanding of the term 'integration', to inspire a different and non-stigmatising discourse around Austria's immigrant communities, and to re-animate the discussion about how best to combat discrimination.

Changing the house, not the inhabitants

The meeting's moderator, Mona Singer, professor of philosophy at the University of Vienna, introduced Terkessidis as an 'engaged scholar', in the tradition of the acclaimed French philosopher and anti-globalisation writer Pierre Bourdieu. In this evening lecture, Terkessidis, drawing on the allegory of the donkey and the carrot, argued that not only is the concept of integration, as used in Germany and Austria, imprecise and inherently unstable, but it acts on the assumption of a norm, defined by the majority, with minorities treated as 'strangers' obliged to fit into a fixed and unchanging social structure. Terkessidis felt that there was a need to break with the politically degraded concept of integration and create instead an entirely new political discourse. We must change the house, not the inhabitants, he argued, if we are to bring about societal and institutional change.

While national debates display profound symptoms of political gridlock, Terkessidis felt that in Germany the importation of 'diversity management' policies from Scandinavia, and countries such as the UK and the US, had led to positive change at a local and community level. The changing demography of German society might not influence national

review their approach to dual nationality, in particular by allowing people, who arrived in Austria before the age of 18 or who were born there, to acquire Austrian citizenship without having to renounce their nationality of origin.

Residence rights linked to integration contract

ECRI believes that the obligation to fulfil an 'integration contract' in order to obtain a residence permit is ill-conceived. It argues that this coercive element would be better replaced by incentives and measures to promote integration.

Racism and anti-racism

National Action Plan on Racism subsumed into integration strategy

Following the 2001 UN Durban World Conference against Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia, and Related Intolerance, there were expectations that Austria would adopt a comprehensive national action plan to combat racism. But nine years later, no plan has been adopted, and the new government inaugurated in 2008 announced that the national action plan on integration would substitute for a national action plan on racism.⁷ Could the government's unwillingness to embrace any perceived anti-racism be a sop to the extreme Right? The influence of extreme-Right electoral parties alarms ECRI. Austria is 'worrying' in that 'far-right parties... are openly exploiting prejudices against minorities, immigrants, refugees, asylum seekers, Jews and Muslims'. It has called for the suppression of public financing for parties which promote racism or xenophobia. There is increasing concern that the strong showing of extreme-Right electoral parties is leading to growing acceptance of racist discourse in society and militating against concrete anti-racist measures.

The fact that the ministry of foreign affairs, rather than the interior ministry, is responsible for the implementation of the NAPI (and hence anti-racism measures) is seen by the Islam Initiative as indicative of the low priority the government attaches to combating racism.

Influence of extreme-Right parties

ECRI concluded that the authorities are not responding adequately to growing levels of racism in public discourse.

There can be no doubt that this legitimisation of racism is due to the growing influence of the electoral extreme Right, which consistently pushes the boundaries of what is acceptable free speech. Since the September 2008 general election, the Freedom Party (FPÖ) has gone from strength to strength, doubling its share of the vote in the September 2009 provincial elections in Upper Austria (to 15.3 per cent of the vote) and gaining two seats in the European parliament elections of June 2009. In March 2010, to the dismay of the Jewish community, the highly

influential mass circulation *Kronen Zeitung* newspaper announced that it was backing the Freedom Party candidate in the April presidential election. Barbara Rosenkranz, who garnered 16 per cent of the vote, is married to the publisher of the far-Right magazine *Fakten* and heads the FPÖ's Lower Austrian branch. During her election campaign, she utilised the slogan 'No courage, no values', attacked feminists and called for a ban on minarets. Jewish community leaders in Vienna, alarmed at Rosenkranz's opposition to Austrian laws criminalising Holocaust denial (National Socialism prohibition law), described her candidacy as 'contempt for the 65,000 Austrian Jews murdered in the Shoah'.⁸

In December 2009, the Carinthian branch of the Alliance for the Future of Austria (BZÖ) reunited with the Freedom Party (FPÖ), raising fears of a unified extreme-Right entity to contest the 2010 state elections in Vienna, Burgenland and Styria. The combined extreme-Right forces of the BZÖ and the renamed Freedom Party in Carinthia (FPK) will form a common faction in the Austrian parliament. Their goal is to become the second strongest political force in Austria by the time of the next general election in 2013. Currently, the Freedom Party, with its Carinthian Alliance allies, holds a total of 39 seats in the 183-strong legislature.

Carinthia is the only one of Austria's nine provincial governments whose ruling coalition is led by an extreme-Right party. However, in September 2009, the Freedom Party doubled its share of the vote in the Upper Austria provincial elections, gaining nine seats in the state parliament.

Islamophobia and the extreme Right

Both the BZÖ and the Freedom Party have continued to manipulate Christian symbols and openly pander to Islamophobic as well as anti-Semitic views in the run-up to state elections due to be held in Vienna, Burgenland and Styria in October 2010. The FPÖ contested the June 2009 European parliamentary elections utilising the slogan 'The West in Christian Hands' and mobilised against mosques and minarets; it campaigned for a change to the constitution to outlaw the construction of minarets, against Turkish entry into the EU, as well as for changes to the law to allow a greater number of deportations of foreign criminals.

In many provinces (*Länder*), the extreme Right has called for tighter building regulations, ostensibly to preserve 'local character', with the argument that in Christian Europe 'visible signs of the strength of Islam' should not be permitted. Already in February 2008, the then BZÖ-controlled state of Carinthia (one of the Austrian regions with the lowest Islamic presence) adopted a law prohibiting the construction of 'unusual buildings that don't fit with traditional architecture'. The law provides that in residential areas, busy places such as mosques, cinemas and nightclubs need a special permit.

In 2009, the Citizens' Initiative – Goodbye Mosque was launched in Vienna to oppose the extension of

politics, but if political parties, institutions, and cultural associations were to survive locally, they had to be more open to cultural diversity. Terkessidis concluded by calling for a positive debate that ignored the fiction of a common past in favour of building a common future, a new sense of community making use of the rich potential of cultural diversity with all its challenges.

Terkessidis also touched on the historical context in which German integration policies had evolved (or rather failed to evolve). He maintained that German approaches to integration had stayed largely stagnant since the 1970s when charts to measure 'cultural closeness' and 'social distance' were first introduced. (Such charts produced a kind of league table of minority assimilation, with Greeks, for instance, regarded as more difficult to integrate than the Spanish, and Turks ranked on the very lowest level of integration.) It is a debate, said Terkessidis, that tends to speak in apocalyptic terms about impending fire (*Brandherde*), the source of which could be found in problematic patriarchal family structures within immigrant communities (read Turks), and the threat posed by 'ghetto formation' as second- and third-generation youths failed to advance educationally.¹ How can such a continued debate be relevant, asked Terkessidis, in the diverse societies, cities and districts in Germany and Austria today?

Provoking discussion

The lecture was followed by an animated discussion, focussing on whether a society with a common future needed also a common set of values, or whether universal human rights standards and constitutional guarantees of democratic freedoms were enough to ensure a common future, from which newcomers were not constantly locked out. Some members of the audience questioned whether diversity management, which they saw as a neoliberal concept, could be a useful tool in the fight against injustice. But Terkessidis maintained that whereas this was a legitimate criticism in the US context, diversity management in Germany, where disadvantage and ethnic origin had now become synonymous, was a significant step forward. In the absence of anti-discrimination laws, notoriously weak in Germany² diversity management' strategies imported from abroad have promoted much needed institutional change at the grassroots, he said.³

For the Kanafanis, the event had had a significant impact. Not only did it attract a large audience but also it had resulted in significant newspaper and radio coverage. 'Each lecture we organise draws in new sets of people', Baruch Wolski told us. 'When we invited Étienne Balibar, a lot of students came to the lecture. Now, university professors are taking note of our forums, as well as the articles we reproduce in our journal *der.wisch*; they are seeing that there are new writers out there and adding their names to university reading lists. We are gaining in relevance. Sometimes you are astonished. We are being noticed, and that is really beautiful to see.'

NOTES

- 1 In fact, the fault lies in the historical failure of the German educational system to adapt to the needs of Turkish pupils. According to Stephen Castles, until at least the late 1970s, virtually nothing was done to prepare teachers for the task of teaching foreign children (in particular there was no specialist teacher training). In effect, the education system worked to virtually guarantee the second-generation immigrants remained at the lowest occupational and social levels of society. (See Stephen Castles, 'The social time-bomb: education of an underclass in Germany', *Race & Class* (Vol. XXI, no. 4, Spring 1980). Today, the differences in the educational performance of immigrant children and native students is more pronounced in Germany than in almost any of the forty other countries studied by the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA).
- 2 See Marcus Lieppe, 'Reports from a developing country: on the failure of the anti-discrimination law and the perspectives thereafter', *Statewatch* (Vol. 16, no.3-4, May-July 2006).
- 3 In Austria, the focus has been less on the anti-discrimination laws than the complete failure of the criminal justice system to deal with racial violence as well as institutionalism racism within the police. See Amnesty International, 'Victim or Suspect – A Question of Colour: racial discrimination in the Austrian justice system' (AI Index: EUR 13/002/2009).

a Turkish Islamic Cultural Centre into a mosque on the grounds of 'noise pollution'. The Viennese FPÖ adopted the slogan 'Pummerin instead of muezzin', stating that the large bell at St Stephen's cathedral should not have to compete against calls to prayers from minarets. Mosques and Islam will undoubtedly feature prominently in the 2010 Viennese state elections where it is feared that the Social Democrats will lose their absolute majority, with the FPÖ becoming the second largest political party in Vienna, ahead of the ÖVP.

The Swiss referendum of November 2009 that banned the future construction of minarets in Switzerland was greeted with glee by the FPÖ, which described Switzerland as a 'model' for other European countries.

Extreme-Right and anti-foreigner rhetoric

According to ECRI, asylum seekers, particularly black asylum seekers, are faced with a negative climate generated, to a large extent, by certain politicians and sections of the media. The leader of the extreme-Right parliamentary alliance, Heinz-Christian Strache, vowed that in 2010 he would continue to fight 'uncontrolled mass immigration and fraudulent applications for refugee status'. In December 2009, the Freedom Party moved in to exploit a referendum on the construction of a new asylum seekers' centre in Burgenland, organising a demonstration in Eberau. (See below) The *Kronen Zeitung* said that one of the main reasons it backed Rosenkranz's presidential bid was her opposition to the EU's 'completely incomprehensible opening of the borders to the east'. Indeed, Rosenkranz's presidential bid was based on manipulating fear of crime, which was blamed on eastern European migrants, as well as the EU.

Lack of comprehensive system to monitor racism or prosecute offenders

ECRI has concluded that no comprehensive assessment can be made of the effectiveness of the Austrian criminal justice system in combating racism due to the fact that a) data on racist incidents are not sufficiently captured in official statistics that focus on extremist crimes, and b) neither police, public prosecutors nor courts give sufficient weight to racial motivation in criminal acts. (It also notes that there is no data collection or monitoring of racist incidents in schools.) The government has only just responded by setting up a working party within the ministry of justice, the ostensible purpose of which is to develop a more victim-oriented system for collecting criminal justice data, which would include data on the racist or xenophobic motivation of offences.

Institutionalised racism in the police

ECRI warns that black people in Austria are particularly vulnerable to racism in their dealings with the police and has called on Austria to establish an independent police complaints system. The special unit within the police attached to the federal ministry

of interior, the Bureau for Internal Affairs (*Büro für Interne Angelegenheiten*, BIA), which is responsible for investigating allegations of ill-treatment or corruption on the part of public officials (including the police), does not enjoy public confidence. In April 2009, Amnesty International (AI) launched its report 'Victim or Suspect A question of colour: Racial Discrimination in the Austrian justice system' that found that non-white Austrians are more likely to be suspected of crime and ill-treated by police; their grievances are far less likely to be promptly and thoroughly investigated and the perpetrators brought to justice; and that Austria operates a *de facto* two-tier justice system that 'is an affront to the concept of justice'. AI called for urgent reforms to combat institutional racism, and to address the failure to properly investigate complaints of police ill-treatment.⁹ By the beginning of 2010, there was little indication of government action to review existing policies and legislation.

Poor monitoring of racial violence

Austria has been criticised for its inability to monitor racial violence and the organisation ZARA (Zivilcourage und Anti-Rassismus-Arbeit) in Vienna seems to be one of the only officially recognised victim support agencies. Anti-racists fear that a significant rise in racist violence is linked to the neo-nazi scene which has been emboldened by the parliamentary extreme Right's strong showing in recent elections. The Documentation Centre of Austrian Resistance (Dokumentationsarchiv des Österreichischen Widerstandes, DÖW) is concerned that the success of the Austrian Right in parliament means that Austria is becoming a focal point for neo-Nazis around the world. 'There is a new European right and its core is right here in Austria' said Heribert Schiedel.¹⁰ It also notes that a government announcement in January 2010 that it would do more to fight right-wing extremism in the Austrian military (following the dismissal of seven soldiers from the military for neo-nazi activity in Kosovo) was not followed-up with any concrete action.

Countering discrimination

The Equal Treatment Act (2004) which is now operational in each of Austria's nine provinces, allows that, in certain cases, the Litigation Association of NGOs Against Discrimination (Klagsverband zur Durchsetzung der Rechte von Diskriminierungsopfern), can intervene, as a third party, to represent victims before the Equal Treatment Commission. But the anti-discrimination association is concerned that an under-resourced Equal Treatment Commission lacks teeth. This is a view supported by ECRI which has pointed out that the Commission for Equal Treatment and the Ombudspersons for Equal Treatment lack the structural independence required to command full public confidence. The Litigation Association of NGOs Against Discrimination pointed to several shortcomings in the legislation, particularly

INTERVIEW

Austria: 'provoking and connecting' the Kanafani way

By Nina Mühe

First published on IRR News, 19 May 2009



Below we reproduce a discussion with members of the Austrian Kanafani Inter-Cultural Initiative.

How did the Kanafani Inter-Cultural Initiative get started and what are its main goals?

Baruch Wolski: To start with we were just a circle of Kurdish, Austrian, Turkish and Arab friends. One of the first things we organised were women-only dance events. We were just trying to create a new kind of space for Muslim and non-Muslim women to come together, to party and to

have fun. But these women's dance events without men, and without alcohol, became a big success and without our intention they became political in character. Women from the Lesbian Centre, young Muslim students and other women from completely different walks of life were coming together. In the normal course of things this would never have happened.

We then moved on to organising public events, issuing invitations to lecturers, who had written on issues close to us [i.e. Orientalism] such as Irmgard Pinn, Gazi Caglar and Franz Wimmer. Even though our attempts were amateurish, we were attracting audiences of up to 600 people. That encouraged us to carry on. The next development was the founding of the journal *der.wisch*. We manage to publish this irregularly, not because of lack of interest or a lack of a market, but due to a lack of financial resources.

Alexandra Wolski: It was also one of our aims to make art and culture freely accessible to everyone, to create a space where young artists could present their work.

In Kanafani, Muslims and non-Muslims work together on political issues, how did this unity develop?

Kamile Sahin Batur: We came to know each other at a time of protest against the war in Iraq, and at a time when the Left were calling on Muslims to work with them against the war. But the demands of the organised Left seemed to us instrumentalist. With Kanafani it was different, it just grew out of friendship – to meet and talk just seemed natural.

Murat Batur: Yes, we were not looking for the differences between us. It was about developing a consensus through friendship.

Kamile Sahin Batur: But there were conflicts within our discussions and it was the differences between us that fascinated me. We just kept on discussing things, but always allowing others the space to openly express themselves. We did not exclude people because they thought differently. This is what gave me the incentive to carry on with this kind of work.

You have just organised a public lecture entitled 'Integration – a miracle cure put to the test'. Why have you taken up the issue of integration?

Kamile Sahin Batur: Because integration is connected to a concept of a society which is totalitarian and has a clearly designed, closed value structure. Those on the margins have to adjust to these majority norms, and only get accepted if they meet certain standards and demands. And because everything we do has to do with immigrants, or with other excluded groups.

Murat Batur: Some time ago we organised a public discussion, which centred around the presentation of a sociological study. Nearly everybody present was in agreement with us that the concept of integration used in the research was superficial. It was at that moment that we realised that the term 'integration', indeed the very concept 'integration', was in itself problematic.

Baruch Wolski: It was really about articulating a position against integration – not from the Right, but from the Left. But it is important to point out that it is not our strategy to actively go out looking for an issue to take up. One example of what I mean is the way we organised around the question of double tuition fees for foreign students. Some of us were victims of this regulation, and we called the subsequent demonstration a 'beggar's procession'. (The education minister must be so poor, we mocked, if he needs to take twice as much money from foreign students!) For our association, it's

the fact that there is no protection (at the federal level, or in eight of the nine provinces) against discrimination outside employment on the grounds of religion and that there is no possibility to bring a class action against discrimination on the grounds of ethnic origin or religion. It is currently supporting five plaintiffs (in four separate cases) who were denied access to pubs and clubs. In fact, the introduction of specific instruments and specific bodies to counter discrimination on grounds of race, ethnicity or national origin, as well as the development of a body of legal experts capable of taking action under the law, is a rather recent development and the Austrian government was rebuked in 2005 by the European Court of Justice for its failure to fully transpose the European Directive prohibiting discrimination on the grounds of race or ethnic origin. While the Equal Treatment Act, which previously was concerned with equal treatment between men and women, has been extended into the area of racial equality, ECRI notes that law makers have confined themselves to the minimum required by European Directives and that the law does not provide strong enough protection against discrimination on grounds of race, skin colour, language, religion, nationality or national or ethnic origin.

While there are no official laws banning the wearing of the hijab (as in Germany), ECRI notes that a number of women and girls, who wear headscarves, encounter problems in their everyday lives, on the labour market, in schools and other educational establishments and in public areas. In 2009, the Litigation Association of NGOs Against Discrimination successfully supported a Muslim physician who was denied a job because she wore the headscarf.

Integrating Islam

Major setbacks to a multicultural, multi-faith society have been posed by extreme-Right campaigns to change the constitution to outlaw minarets, as well as a campaign in Vienna against the construction of a mosque. The fact that the government's New Action Plan to Improve the Quality of Religious Education is targeted only at Muslim school teachers has led to claims of further stigmatisation of Islamic teachers.

Austria, due to its particular history (annexation of Bosnia and Herzegovina in 1878 and incorporation of a Muslim minority) has a strong history of integrating Islam – with Islam an officially recognised religious community with the right to give religious instruction in school. But throughout 2009, the media and political debate on improving 'security' has set back previously good relations and religious tolerance. The media gave substantial and largely uncritical publicity to a PhD thesis by Mouhanad Khorchide entitled 'Islamic religious instruction between integration and a parallel society'. On the basis of questionable evidence gleaned from a questionnaire sent out to Islamic teachers that lacked scientific rigour,

Khorchide made generalised claims about a tendency towards extremism within Islamic instruction in Austria that led to scare scenarios and stigmatised the Austrian Islamic Denomination (the representative body for Islamic schoolteachers commissioned by the government to provide Islamic religious instruction in state schools).¹¹

Asylum seekers and undocumented migrants

The refugee support group SOS Mitmensch is concerned about the unbending governmental approach to asylum seekers, who are increasingly isolated in remote areas, where legal support is non-existent. New legislation introduced in January 2010 was criticised by the UNHCR as well as constitutional law experts as unconstitutional and a possible violation of the 1951 UN Refugee Convention. A coalition of NGOs and refugee support organisations, including Asylkoordination and SOS Mitmensch, organised a national demonstration in October 2009 against the proposed legislation, which they continue to fight.

More detention

The contested law broadened the use of preventive detention for migrants and asylum seekers facing deportation, containing a provision to detain them at the start of the process and have them deported to third countries, as well as bringing in age-determination x-rays. The UNHCR has condemned the increase in preventive detention and reiterated that the automatic detention of asylum seekers contravenes the EU Asylum Procedures Directive (which provides that no one can be detained solely on the basis of having requested asylum).¹² The European Committee for the Prevention of Torture and Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (CPT) also considers 'unacceptable' the conditions in which deportation detainees are held at the police detention centre (Polizeianhaltezentrum – PAZ) in Vienna-Hernalser Gürtel, stating that amongst other things foreign nationals are locked in their cells for 23 hours each day.¹³

As the number of applicants held in preventive detention rises from 5,400 in 2008 to 8,700 in 2009, there are also plans to build a new preventive detention centre at Vordenberg, Styria. In contrast to the response to the planned new asylum centre in Burgenland, around 69.9 per cent of the population are in favour of the detention centre on the grounds that it would boost the small community's economy by creating jobs.

AI and UNHCR continue to criticise the criminalisation of asylum seekers via the creation of a special detention unit for 'suspect' asylum seekers in the remote area of Saualm, Völkermarkt District, in the extreme-Right controlled province of Carinthia. The special camp (*sonderlager*) involves those accused of

a kind of unwritten rule that if one of us is faced with a certain problem and brings this problem to the group, then we must take it up and organise around it. So you see we organise events in quite an uncomplicated manner.

Murat Batur: And today we work mainly around Islamophobia. For of course the developments since September 11 have had an important influence on the work of our association.

Are there any other organisations that share your understanding of the importance of working against Islamophobia?

Baruch Wolski: There are not really any other organisations working directly against Islamophobia. Muslim organisations are bogged down with other issues – such as how to create a space for Islam in Europe, or how to respond on a day-to-day basis to the many attacks and accusations. So they are busy with other things, and this is OK.

Kamile Sahin Batur: But now there is also an opportunity to organise an alliance against the new citizens' initiative, which has been formed to prevent the construction of a mosque.¹

Baruch Wolski: Yes, and there is also the possibility that together with the network, we will organise a conference on 'Anti-Semitism and Islamophobia'. A lot of hostility towards Islam and Muslims is acted out through the issue of anti-Semitism and we must seek clarity on these issues.

Do you experience much opposition?

(Much laughter.) **Kamile Sahin Batur:** Yes, from all sides, and sometimes from the Muslim side also. One side suspects us of being anti-Semitic, the other of perhaps being too accommodating to Zionism. It's like people outside are constantly trying to put a label on us, just because we refuse to label ourselves. Sometimes the resistance is very strong and, to be honest, it makes you tired.

Baruch Wolski: Yes, but that could be resistance to anything we do. When we organised an event for Ramadan and invited Sufi musicians, people asked 'How can you invite Sufi musicians?' And then others ask 'Why are women's dance events needed?' And then still others will say 'How come I can't get alcohol, when I come to your concerts?'

The main problem is that we cannot disguise our solidarity with the Palestinian cause. That is always a weak point in Austria, because solidarity with Palestine quickly becomes labelled as anti-Semitism, denial of the Holocaust, etc. Even many people on the Left feel threatened, particularly when they see a Muslim speak on a terrain they feel is a Left area. You see, for many people the idea that a Muslim can be religious and also on the Left just does not fit into their preconceptions.

So you are falling between stools?

Baruch Wolski: No, we are sitting on all stools. But it works in our favour too. We are neither an orthodox left organisation nor a classical Muslim association. If either of these did the work we do, they would not be accepted by their constituencies. But we are always a bit on the margins which means more tolerance coming from all sides for our work...

Kamile Sahin Batur: ... We are at the border ...

Baruch Wolski: ... Exactly. And being at the border creates a freedom, because people are more tolerant, they say 'Ah, it's only them ... it's only the Kanafani'.

Do you receive any funding for your work?

Baruch Wolski: In Vienna, although this is not ever stated, the way things seem to work is that you have to survive as an organisation for about four or five years before the funding agencies perceive your existence. And then you are faced with the question, are you on the same political wavelength as the funders? And if you don't want to allow this to predicate your work, you will always face problems. We have received small amounts of funding from time to time, but in general our work is done voluntarily.

Murat Batur: The concept of our association and how we work is also quite new and hitherto not known. This is why we have occasional alliances with partners over specific projects but don't tend to work with partners on a regular basis. Maybe this is also another reason why we don't get a lot of funding.

What are your next projects?

Murat Batur: A big part of the debate about Islam here in Austria is turning around the EU discussions on Turkish accession, so we are planning to do a symposium with various non-Muslim and Muslim actors on Turkey.

Kamile Sahin Batur: Actually, it is not just about doing a symposium on Turkey, but about showing people, here in Austria, the difference between the real Turkey and the Turkey of their imagination. Many people in Austria have a particular view of Turkish politics. This is also because Turkish migration to Austria in the earlier period was that of the Turkish Left, the Kemalists. The Kemalists tend to be well-integrated in Austrian politics today and dominate the discourse about Turkey.

'delinquency' (mostly Chechens) being isolated from the local community in a specially converted former children's home situated in a secluded pasture in the mountains of southern Austria at an altitude of about 3,900 feet. A criminal conviction is not a mandatory prerequisite for being sent to the facility. AI has said that 'There is no place for this in a modern system within the rule of law'.¹⁴ The organisation 'Chechens, Europeans like us' (*TschetschenInnen-Europäer wie wir*) has been formed to combat the prejudice encountered by Chechen asylum seekers and refugees in Carinthia.¹⁵

Alarming number of hunger strikes

A considerable number of asylum seekers held in preventive detention in Austria staged hunger strikes in 2009. (According to interior ministry statistics, there were 5,398 asylum applicants in preventive detention in 2008, of whom 1,549 had gone on hunger strike. It said that 1,223 of the 3,923 people who had been in preventive detention between the beginning of January 2009 and August 2009 had gone on hunger strike.)¹⁶ Under Austrian law, asylum seekers and migrants can be held in preventive detention for as long as ten months when there are fears that they could disappear underground while their asylum or deportation arrangements are being processed. The Ludwig Boltzmann Institute of Human Rights in Vienna points out that as these facilities are only police holding facilities, often dating back to the 19th century, and originally designed to serve a punitive purpose, they are not suitable for long-term detention. Furthermore, such poor conditions, as well as the inadequate medical care and restricted access to legal services, are the reasons so many of those detained go on hunger strike. 'There are always people on hunger strikes and this is an issue the government needs to take more seriously.'¹⁷

Death of hunger striker in police custody

On 13 September 2009, Gaganpreet Singh, a 20-year-old Sikh failed asylum seeker from India, died of a heart attack four weeks into a hunger strike while being held in preventive custody at Vienna-Hernals police centre. Vienna police said that an initial investigation showed no visible connection between the hunger strike and the heart attack but further tests were ordered to ascertain whether the cardiac arrest was linked to his hunger strike. Asylum rights groups

have voiced serious doubts about the medical care he received in detention. The fact that the inquiry into Gaganpreet Singh's death was carried out by the Bureau for Internal Affairs, once again threw into stark relief the lack of any independent police investigative authority in Austria.¹⁸

A strategy of isolation

The government is currently considering introducing a law of obligatory residence, akin to the system already practised in Germany, whereby asylum seekers are prevented from leaving their area of registration.¹⁹ For SOS Mitmensch, this seems part of a steady build-up of measures to isolate asylum seekers from community support networks. Asylum reception centres are built 50 to 60 km outside major cities, far away from NGOs which could provide legal support. The government-funded Human Rights Association (Verein Menschenrechte), which is contracted to provide social assistance in reception centres, has been criticised by AI and NGOs for its lack of independence.

Citizens' Initiative blocks new asylum centre in Eberau

In February 2010, over 90 per cent of residents of Eberau, a remote town in southern Burgenland, close to the Hungarian border (total population, 1,000), voted in a referendum to oppose the construction of a new asylum centre. There are two large asylum seekers' centres in Austria, in Thalham, Upper Austria and in Traiskirchen, Lower Austria. The Social Democrat-controlled provincial government had called the referendum after the federal ministry announced the plan to build the centre. All the political parties, save the Greens, opposed the construction of the new asylum centre. The Greens' leader Grete Krojer accused the SPÖ governor Hans Niessl of 'creating a problem' by 'stirring up and agitating people in a manner unworthy of a provincial governor'.²⁰ In the run-up to the referendum, the UNHCR called on Austrian officials to 'disarm in language', and 'return to a humane orientation', adding that the whole discourse risked unleashing the generalised suspicion that all asylum seekers were criminals.²¹

Thanks to Philip Sonderegger at SOS Mitmensch and Tarafa Baghajati at the Islam Initiative for advice on key sections in this report.

Baruch Wolski: We also want to show that the rupture lines within Turkish society are also reflected within the Turkish community here. We are also talking with the Verband der Wiener Volksbildung which organises adult education and has a project 'University meets the public'. Ideally, the debates at the symposium will be between an academic and public discourse, giving us an opportunity to attract a diverse audience.

Kamile Sahin Batur: What this means that if we open up to everyone, and give them a forum for discussion, then it is inevitable that there will be conflict, around the Armenian or Kurdish issue and around the headscarf, for instance. I find this really interesting and I am very curious to see what will come out of this – will new discussions be opened up?

So do you think you could get into difficulties through this?

Baruch Wolski: No ...

Kamile Sahin Batur: ... No, not seriously, but ...

Baruch Wolski: ... That's what we want after all ...

Kamile Sahin Batur: That's good.

Baruch Wolski: It's the advantage of being an outsider. We are probably the only association that could afford to organise something like this.

Would you say, then, that you aim to provoke with your work?

Kamile Sahin Batur: Yes ...

Murat Batur: Yes, but it's not our only aim. It's not only about provoking, but also about connecting, bringing people with different opinions together.

Baruch Wolski: But provocation can also have an effect. Provocation does not mean frightening people, but shaking them up a little. We do not want to insult but to animate.

NOTES

- 1 Both the extreme-right electoral parties, the Freedom Party (FPÖ) and Alliance for the Future of Austria have been campaigning since 2007 for a constitutional amendment to prohibit the construction of mosques and minarets in Austria, and in the BZÖ-controlled state of Carinthia the construction of mosques has been effectively banned. In Vienna, according to the Austrian Times online (16 April 2009), the leader of the FPÖ, Heinz-Christian Strache offered his support to a citizen's initiative which was formed to oppose the extension of the Islamic Cultural Centre in Vienna-Brigittenau on the grounds that any planned new mosque would spread 'religious indoctrination'.

NOTES

- 1 European Commission Against Racism and Intolerance, Report on Austria (fourth monitoring cycle), adopted 15 December 2009, Council of Europe, March 2010.
 - 2 In the EU's 2004 Statement, 'Common Basic Principles', integration was defined as a 'dynamic two-way process of mutual accommodation by all immigrants and residents of Member States'.
 - 3 Carla Amina Baghajati, 'Almost worse than Strache', *Die Presse*, print edition, 4 November 2009.
 - 4 See ECRI, Fourth Report on Austria, op.cit.
 - 5 'Fekter wants to combat "fundamentalist tendencies"', *Der Standard*, 26 October 2009.
 - 6 The open letter can be found at <http://www.integrationshaus.at/cgi-bin/page.pl?id=431;lang=de> NGOs. The NGOs which signed the letter were: asylum coordination (asylkoordination), Advice Centre for Immigrants (Beratungszentrum für Migranten und Migrantinnen, Marriage without Borders (Ehe ohne Grenzen), Helping Hands, Helping Hands Graz, Minorities Initiative (Initiative Minderheiten), Intercultural Centre (Interkulturelles Zentrum), Migrare, M-Media, LEFÖ, Language Rights Network (Netzwerk SprachenRechte), Peregrina, Radio Afrika TV, SOS Fellow Human Being (SOS Mitmensch), Integration House Project Association (Verein Projekt Integrationshaus), Viennese Integration Conference – Networking Office (WIK –Vernetzungsbüro), Civil Courage and Anti-Racism Work (Zivilcourage und Anti-Rassismus-Arbeit).
 - 7 See ZARA, 'Opinion on Durban Review Conference, 20-24 April 2009. http://www.zara.or.at/_wp/wp-content/uploads/2009/04/zara_comments_durban_2009.pdf
 - 8 Following a public outcry about comments on the Holocaust, and criticism from her main backer, the *Kronen Zeitung*, Rosenkranz publicly signed a statement pledging never to contest the country's anti-Nazi legislation and distancing herself from neo-Nazi ideology.
 - 9 The European Committee for the Prevention of Torture and Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (CPT) makes the same point. Referring to the (still ongoing) case of the foreign national Bakary J, who was subjected to torture and a mock execution by four police officers in 2006, the CPT draws attention to the insufficient criminal and internal disciplinary penalties imposed on the four police officers involved, noting that none has been dismissed from the police service, despite the serious injuries sustained by Bakary J.
 - 10 See 'The Hitler legacy', *Glasgow Herald*, 18 April 2009.
 - 11 For a full critique of Mouhanad Khorchide's study see Liz Fekete, 'Islamophobia, academic research and scare scenarios', *European Race Bulletin*, no. 67, Spring 2009.
 - 12 UNHCR press release, 'Lehnt automatische Internierung von Asylsuchenden ab Asyl-Debatte in Österreich braucht wieder humanitäre Orientierung', 12 January 2010.
 - 13 Report to the Austrian Government on the visit to Austria carried out by the European Committee for the Prevention of Torture and Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (CPT) from 15 to 25 February 2009, VPT/Inf (2010) 5.
 - 14 The comments are those of Heinz Patzelt, head of the Austrian chapter of Amnesty International. See Austrian Times Online, 7 October 2008, 20 February, 21 October 2009.
 - 15 The project is located within the Research and Consultation Centre for Victims of Violence (*Forschungs – und Beratungszentrum für Opfer von Gewalt*). See <http://www.aspis.uni-klu.ac.at>
 - 16 Statistics cited by Inter Press Service (IPS) News Agency, 20 September 2009.
 - 17 IPS News Service Online, 30 September 2009. The CPT also draws attention to the role of police doctors in detention centres, observing that a lack of sufficient independence could interfere with their ability to determine whether a detainee on hunger strike is fit for detention. It notes that at the PAZ in Klagenfurt, detainees on hunger strike were punished by being placed in segregation and that facilities for the care of detainees on hunger strike were inadequate.
 - 18 Any death in police custody is automatically investigated by the Bureau for Internal Affairs. However, a lawyer can also initiate a complaint to the Independent Administrative Tribunal, if the lawyer believes that a state violation of human rights has occurred. If so, it is likely that the Human Rights Advisory Board will also become involved.
 - 19 See *SOS Mitmensch Newsletter*, 8 February 2010.
 - 20 As cited in Austrian Times Online, 5 January 2010.
 - 21 Austrian Times Online, 30 December 2009.
-

CONTACTS

Asylkoordination Austria

Laudongasse 52/9
A-1080 Vienna
Austria.
Tel: +43 (0) 1 53 212 91
Email: asylkoordination@asyl.at
Web: www.asyl.at

Islam Initiative

IMÖ Initiative Muslimischer Österreicherinnen und
Österreicher
1120 Vienna
Austria
Email: dieinitiative@gmx.at
Web: www.islaminitiative.at

Kanafani Inter-cultural Initiative

Postfach 143,
1070 Vienna
Austria
Tel: +43 676 554 7230
Email: Der.wish@kanafani.at
Web: www.kanafani.at

Zivilcourage und Anti-Rassismus-Arbeit (ZARA)

Luftbadgasse 14-16,
1060 Vienna
Austria
Tel. +43 (0) 1 929 13 99
Email: office@zara.or.at
Web: www.zara.or.at

SOS Mitmensch

Postfach 220, A1070 Wien
Tel +43 (0) 1 524 9900
Email office@sosmitmensch.at
Web: www.sosmitmensch.at

Litigation Association of NGOs Against Discrimination

Luftbadgasse 14-16
1060 Vienna
Austria
+Tel +43 (0) 1 961 05 85
Email: info@klagsverband.at
Web: www.klagsverband.at

FRANCE – CONTEXT

Integration and the 'national identity' debate

A wide cross-section of civil society, which includes Muslim, migrant and minority organisations,¹ trade unions and professional bodies representing historians, teachers and academics, has rallied against the increase in racism and hostility in French society because of the 'national identity debate', the cross-party parliamentary inquiry on the feasibility of banning the burqa and the niqab and the continued controversy over the work of the ministry for immigration, integration and national identity.² Both the national identity debate and the debate on banning the *voile intégral* (justified as an integration measure) have inflamed nationalist sentiment and led to the stigmatisation of foreigners and Muslims, who are collectively seen as a threat to secular and Republican values, as well as to women's rights. The end result was an unbridled patriotism, out of which the Front National (which had previously been written off after its disastrous showing in both the 2007 presidential elections and the 2009 European election) was the principal beneficiary.³

Promoting patriotism via national identity debate

In February 2010, prime minister François Fillon announced the government's plan to convene a panel of experts, including historians and politicians, whose task it would be to establish rules that would foster and promote a greater sense of patriotism. The government would also introduce a set of obligatory measures for new immigrants, who would, in future, have to sign a declaration of values that would define their rights and obligations. Newly arrived immigrants would have to undertake classes in French and gender equality, while in future, new citizens would have to pledge adherence to a list of French values at an official ceremony.⁴

Petition to boycott national identity debate

In December 2009, 200 leading personalities, including journalists, deputies, trade unionists, medical professionals, intellectuals, scholars, writers and journalists working on colonialism, immigration and post-colonialism, became the first signatories to a petition calling for non-participation in the national identity debate which has garnered 46,000 signatures to date.⁵ While refusing from the outset to participate in the debate, the various statements by leading personalities and others against the government's national identity debate have served to provide a vibrant alternative perspective, exemplified by a joint statement issued by the Collective 'Towards a Real Debate'.⁶

The debate was prompted in October 2009 by Éric Besson, the minister for immigration, integration and national identity. Expressing concern that the French identity may be eroded through immigration, Besson announced that from 2 November 2009 until 31 January 2010 there would be an open public debate on issues of national identity. A series of public forums and a website, 'Grand débat sur l'identité nationale', were established by the government ostensibly to ensure public participation.⁷ But as the 'Towards a Real Debate' collective pointed out, when it came to the dominant topic of immigration, the website failed to make any reference to a huge body of literature on the subject by respected French scholars. Nor does the government's website consider that populations residing in the French Overseas Departments or Territories, may have a view, or that the recent 'questioning that has come from the underprivileged banlieues' might also have a place in the debate.

Parliamentary inquiry into burqa and niqab⁸

In April 2010, following a year-long debate, President Sarkozy ordered his government to present a draft law which would make the wearing of the burqa and the niqab illegal. The French Council of the Islamic Faith (CFCM) suggested that at a time when thousands of people are suffering from the severe consequences of the financial crisis, it would make more sense to set up a commission to search for solutions for the unemployed.⁹

At the very most, a total of 2,000 women in France wear the burqa. Yet, what many believe is a marginal issue came to dominate the newspapers and airwaves. While there was some opposition within the cabinet over such an inquiry, a Commission, comprising thirty-two deputies and three non-parliamentarians, was set up on 1 July 2009. It sat for six months, gathering evidence on the practice of wearing the full veil on national territory and investigating the feasibility of a total ban on the burqa.

On 26 January 2010, the Commission, which had received legal advice that a total ban on the *voile intégral* would probably be illegal,¹⁰ issued its findings. While officially declaring the niqab/burqa 'un-French' it issued fifteen recommendations including one for a ban on the wearing of the niqab and burqa in schools, hospitals, government offices (including post offices) and public transport, adding that wearers should be denied services such as welfare benefits and education, offered in such institutions. Its recommendation to bar any foreign woman wearing the burqa from obtaining refugee status or French citizenship is already being carried through by civil servants. There have been several cases since 2008 where women who wear the burqa have been denied citizenship.

FRANCE – VOICES

Unity of purpose in the French banlieues

By Liz Fekete

First published on IRR News, 9 October 2008

For the second year running, French grassroots anti-racist associations joined forces to organise the Social Forum of the Banlieues (FSQP, Le Forum Social des Quartiers Populaires).

This unique and exciting gathering, attended by over 500 people from across the country, was held over three days (3-5 October) in the northern Parisian suburb (banlieue) of Nanterre.

The Forum's roots

The roots of the Forum go back to 2005 and the biggest 'riots' France has witnessed since the May 1968 student protests. The revolt of the youth, which began in the poor eastern Parisian suburb of Clichy-sous-Bois, soon spread to every major city in France. Triggered by the deaths of two youths of African origin, Zyed Benna and Bouna Traoré (attempting to evade police pursuit following an identity check they climbed into a power station and were electrocuted), it led the government of President Chirac to declare a national state of emergency.¹ Soon afterwards, grassroots organisations made the 'Call for the National Social Forum of the Banlieues'.² Fed up with the media demonisation of the banlieues as 'the lost territories of the Republic',³ and 'no-go areas' populated by 'scum' and 'savages', these associations sought to establish through a collective mode of organisation a unity of purpose which would counter local fragmentation of the struggle for social and political rights. Thus, from the outset, the Forum was designed to 'be a place of reflection and a meeting place of different local struggles', while 'offering them political visibility at a national level'.

The history of Nanterre

When North African and other immigrant workers first came to France, principally from Algeria, Morocco and Tunisia in the 1950s and 1960s, social housing was not provided. The new immigrant workers were forced to occupy the most marginal of housing conditions in the squalid shanty towns (*bidonvilles*) surrounding the major cities of France. It was fitting, then, that this year's Forum was held in Nanterre for, in the 1960s, Nanterre (then an industrial area) had been the site of one of France's largest *bidonvilles* (thirteen shanty towns with a population of 8,000 – half of whom were women and children). Today, the children and grandchildren of these first immigrant workers live alongside the undocumented and marginalised in the huge sprawling estates which towered over the conference venue (a series of marquees in the Parc André Malraux). Close by was the gleaming glass of city-skyscrapers and the gentrified housing estates and gated communities which are now home to better-off Parisians.

Unity in action

Just about every French minority community was represented at the Forum – black, white, French-Algerians, Moroccans, Tunisians and (sub-Saharan) Africans, etc as well as, of course, the *sans papiers* represented by the Committee from the 9th Arrondissement. An enormous range of issues was discussed in raw, and often heated (but always democratic) debate: racism, discrimination, educational exclusion, social housing, police violence and media stigmatisation; Islamophobia, feminism, colonialism and its legacy (particularly in the French Overseas Departments); the war on terror and Palestine, an issue that is part of the very heart-beat of the banlieue. What emerged from the debates was the strong unity of purpose of communities fighting as a people, and as a class.

One of the most important themes discussed at the Forum was the destruction of social housing – all part of Sarkozy's urban renovation plans (read gentrification of the banlieue and demolition of estates and dispersal of inhabitants). The session on police violence was addressed by civil rights activists campaigning around recent deaths in custody, such as that of Lamine Dieng in Paris in June 2007, Reda Semmoudi in Seine Saint Denis in January 2008 and Abdelhakim Hadijmi in Grasse in May 2008. The justice and policing session was accompanied by a moving exhibition, with photographs and campaign literature recalling the many young men (mostly North Africans) who have died over the years in police custody or suspicious circumstances involving the police. The exhibition also recalled the tragic events of 17 October 1961 when the Paris police vented its fury at Algerian immigrant workers rallying in support of Algerian independence and in opposition to the nightly curfew. As many as 200 Algerians died when police drove the demonstrators into the Seine where they drowned; others were clubbed to death.

Cultures of resistance

The Forum was not just about political discussion. There was a Cinéma des Quartiers, theatre and other cultural events.

Racism and anti-racism

The French Interministerial Committee to Fight Racism and Anti-Semitism (CILRA) was formed by presidential decree in 2003. But its willingness to counter racism has been called into question, particularly in relation to the national identity debate and electioneering for the March 2010 regional elections, when leading politicians were caught making racist and offensive comments in a series of embarrassing incidents.¹¹

Failure to protect mosques or address Islamophobia

For many communities of migrant origin, there is a belief that the government privileges some forms of racism over others, and that Islamophobia in particular is not acknowledged or addressed. CILRA is responsible for security issues and is meant to ensure the safety of sensitive buildings, particularly places of worship. But in February 2010, the French Council of the Muslim Faith (CFCM) was forced to call on the authorities to take action to end the increasing number of attacks on mosques, adding that there was an urgent need for a national debate on Islamophobia. The fact that there has been no such debate has been a cause of disappointment to CFCM, which was assured that a parliamentary committee on Islamophobia would be established. But although the chair of the parliamentary committee on wearing the burqa had supported such an inquiry, not enough MPs voted in favour of the proposal.

Police do not take racial violence seriously

A law of 2004 established that racist, xenophobic or anti-Semitic motives could be regarded as aggravating circumstances for certain crimes and offences. Yet there seems to be very little action around racial violence in France and the police have been accused of not taking racial violence seriously.¹² In March 2010, Les Indigènes de la République was amongst organisations that expressed disappointment at the media's failure to report the murder of Saïd Bourarach, a security guard of Moroccan origin, whose body was retrieved from the canal after he was attacked at his workplace. There was also anger at the widespread media failure to report a gun attack on a mosque in a town northwest of Marseilles on the weekend of 24-25 April 2010.

Re-emergence of the Front National

The FN, which is near bankruptcy and plagued with internal problems, whipped up tensions in the run-up to the March 2010 regional elections in an anti-Muslim campaign sparked by the national debate on French identity. It released a poster that read 'No to Islamism' and had an image of a woman in a full veil. Another poster included a depiction of an Algerian flag superimposed on a map of France with minarets portrayed as missiles. The FN scored 12 per cent in the first round, and remained in the running in twelve of

France's twenty-two mainland regions. The FN leader, Jean Marie Le Pen, scored a personal triumph in the first round, winning 20.29 per cent in the southern French Provence-Côte d'Azur region. His daughter, Marine Le Pen, expected to take over the leadership of the party, received a huge boost when she scored 18.3 per cent of the vote in the first round in the industrial depressed northern Pas-de-Calais region.

Countering discrimination¹³

In 2009, a Government Commissioner for Diversity and Equal Opportunities was appointed to oversee a new Committee for the Measurement and Evaluation of Diversity and Discrimination (Comité pour la mesure et l'évaluation de la diversité et des discriminations, COMEDD) to implement a government plan of action aimed at reflecting France's diverse society in terms of more 'ethnic' presences on TV screens, in political parties, in elite schools and in high-ranking jobs in government and industry.¹⁴ Under the banner of diversity and equal opportunities, the French focus has been on creating a strong 'ethnic' middle-class, with counter-discrimination measures focussed on equal opportunities within the professions, and promotion of more minority representatives into elite higher educational institutes (*grandes écoles*) and into positions of leadership within the civil service, so that, in the words of Sarkozy, the 'diversity of French society' is also represented within the 'elites' that tend to be socially and culturally homogeneous.¹⁵

No monitoring of racial discrimination

COMEDD was asked to examine whether a new law was needed to allow for the monitoring of discrimination on grounds of race or ethnicity as a prelude to combating it. COMEDD concluded in its report that existing legislation which prohibits the gathering of data on people's ethnic origins and asking questions about race or national origins should stay in force, while recommending that censuses should henceforth include a question on the nationality or place of birth of people's parents.¹⁶ CRAN was critical of the report's findings, arguing that 'statistics on diversity' are needed to better counter indirect discrimination.

The High Authority Against Discrimination and for Equality (HALDE), which was established in 2004, does not have the confidence of independent NGOs and minority organisations.¹⁷ The National Advisory Committee on Human Rights (CNCDH) submits an annual report to the prime minister on efforts to combat racism, anti-Semitism and xenophobia. SOS Racisme and the Movement Against Racism and for Friendship between Peoples (Mouvement Contre le Racisme et pour l'Amitié entre les Peuples, MRAP) are members of the CNCDH, and both operate anti-discrimination advice services.

The first theatrical performance on the opening night of the Forum was by Al Houda, a Muslim feminist organisation from Rennes. Its production 'Le son du tissu' (The sound of cloth), a one-woman performance, explored the personal impact of the stigmatisation and exclusion from society of Muslim women who wear the headscarf. It was based on Al Houda's experiences with French feminists who, amongst other things, banned it from taking part in their annual event on International Women's Day (on the grounds that wearing the veil is incompatible with feminism). Islamophobia and the veil was also discussed the following day in a seminar where school teacher and writer Pierre Tévanian and social activist Ismahane Chouder discussed their new book, *Les Filles voilées parlent* (Veiled Girls speak out). The book explores the experiences of stigmatisation and exclusion of forty-four French Muslim girls following the introduction of the 2004 law against the wearing of conspicuous religious symbols in schools.

What next?

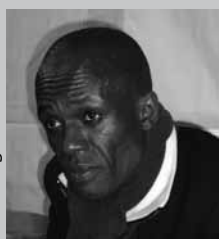
In the Forum's final session, participants discussed their ideas for the future. Just as in the UK, activists were anxious about increasing alienation of young people and much of the focus was on strategic interventions capable of reaching out to them. The many documentaries and cultural films broadcast at the Forum are to be shown in community venues. And there was talk of extending the forum into regional forums, addressing national themes.

Notes

- 1 As many observers noted at the time, the last occasion the State of Emergency was applied by the French government was in Algeria in 1961.
- 2 See www.habitants.de/en/news/movements/index.php/art_0000003.
- 3 In 2002, a book entitled *The Lost Territories of the Republic: anti-Semitism, racism and sexism in the educational sphere*, edited by the Holocaust historian Georges Bensoussan (under the pseudonym Emmanuel Brenner) blamed problems of violence in schools on 'Arabic-Muslim culture'. Following that, it became fashionable for the media to talk of the banlieues as the lost territories of the Republic.

INTERVIEW

Robin Virgin



Organising in the banlieues

By Naima Bouteldja

First published on IRR News, 9 October 2008

An interview with Pierre Didier, president of the Social Forum of the Banlieues.

Pierre Didier, who is active in the Lyon banlieue of Vaulx-en-Velin, is president of the Social Forum of the Banlieues. He is also a member of the Movement of Immigration and the Banlieues (MIB), and DiverCités, a campaigning coalition in Lyon of feminists, anti-racists, Muslims, Catholics and atheists.

Naima Bouteldja: Why did you chose Nanterre for this year's Social Forum?

Pierre Didier: Nanterre is historically a left-wing town. In the past there were many slums, transit camps here. One of the founding members of the Forum, who originally came from the slums of Nanterre, was recently elected on the town council and this has helped us in a number of ways. The council put the stadium at our disposal and it also provided some technical assistance as well as helping us financially.

How is the Forum of the Banlieues organised?

The organisational structure of the Forum consists of three associations, DiverCités (an anti-racist organisation in Lyon), Les Motivés (based in Toulouse) and MIB (Mouvement de l'Immigration et des Banlieues) based mainly in Paris. They work on particular local issues. But through taking on (and often disagreeing with) various agencies in French society, in particular political parties, they have acquired a strong expertise on issues related to immigration, identity and discrimination. So these three organisations decided to extend the struggle to the wider political arena to organise together.

The first stage of this organisational work has been to reveal and reinforce a network which, despite its previous lack of visibility, already existed as the network of organisations of the banlieues. The aim of the Forum is to share experiences and resources for a common struggle. This explains why the Forum is such a very diverse space. Within the Forum's framework you firstly have people campaigning for it to remain a space for networking and convergence. But second, you also have another political current of people in favour of forming a political party or movement. The first trend accounts for the majority of the people.

What were the main themes of this year's Forum?

Growth in religious discrimination

The Association Against Islamophobia in France (CCIF) warns that in spite of no law existing that prohibits women and students from wearing the veil, Muslim women are increasingly finding themselves prohibited from wearing religious clothing at the workplace and on professional training courses.¹⁸ The law of 2004 was meant to be targeted at prohibiting pupils from wearing ostentatious religious symbols within public school premises. But it is now being applied to Muslim adults, and private educational institutions and universities are also applying the ban. The feminist organisation Neither Whores Nor Submissives (Ni Putes Ni Soumises) has even attempted to argue that the law should cover political candidates in election campaigns.¹⁹

Tackling disadvantage in the banlieues

The Plan Banlieue (*Espoir Banlieue*) was initiated by President Sarkozy and his minister for Urban Policy, Fadela Amara, following major disturbances in the poor suburbs (banlieues) in 2005 and 2007. It was supposed to tackle poverty, educational under-achievement and unemployment, but as Laurent Mucchielli, research director at the National Centre for Scientific Research (Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique, CNRS), has commented, to do this seriously requires enormous commitment, both political and financial, which the government does not have.²⁰

No plan for the neighbourhoods, only more repression

The Collectif Banlieues Respect (BR) concluded in January 2010 that there was in effect no plan to combat marginalisation in the banlieues; instead more money and effort had been ploughed into policing the neighbourhoods.²¹

In January 2009, the interior minister Michèle Alliot-Marie announced a huge increase in territorial neighbourhood units of volunteer police (Uteq) to tackle drug use and urban violence in the difficult neighbourhoods.²² A hundred Uteq units, comprising 4,000 neighbourhood police, and 23 new CSI urban police units (*compagnies de sécurisation*) are to be created by the end of 2011.²³

Social Forum prioritises police violence and deaths in custody

The third Social Forum of the Banlieues (*Forum Social des Quartiers Populaires*, FSQP) held in Petit Bard, Montpellier in September 2009, organised by the Movement of Immigration and the Banlieues (Mouvement d'Immigration et des Banlieues, MIB) with DiverCité and attracting organisations from all over France, focussed on fighting police violence in the banlieues. Groups including AC le Feu, Collectif Hakim Ajimi,²⁴ Justice pour Naguib, FSQP and Justice pour le Petit Bard agreed on the need for an organisation to help victims of police violence,

provide a structure to gain more public visibility for campaigns around individual cases, and to cohere the campaigns to make police violence a political issue.²⁵

Already in April 2009 a report by Amnesty International accused French police of racist violence and impunity.²⁶ In November 2009, riot police were accused of deliberate racist violence towards young people celebrating Algeria's footballing defeat of Egypt.²⁷ On 24 September, 31-year-old Hakim Djelassi died of a heart attack while under arrest in a police van.²⁸ On 12 November, Mohamed Boukrourou, a 41-year-old man of Moroccan origin, died during a police arrest in Valentigney.²⁹ AI notes that many individuals who make complaints against police, or bystanders who intervene to protest police ill-treatment, often find themselves facing counter-charges of causing 'outrage or rebellion'; furthermore, such charges may be brought as a way of deterring people from making complaints against the police. It states that the French independent police oversight body, the National Commission on Ethics and Security (Commission Nationale de Déontologie de la Sécurité, CNDS), has played a vital role in investigating cases of alleged police misconduct. But if the mandates of the CNDS and other independent administrative bodies are merged with the newly-created Defender of Rights (Défenseur des Droits), the resources of the CNDS will be severely limited and its work undermined.³⁰

Overseas Territories

Following the 44-day general strike in Guadeloupe, and the 33-day general strike in Martinique in spring 2009, minority organisations in continental France became more conscious of speaking to the needs of their fellow citizens in the overseas territories of Guadeloupe and Martinique where the unemployment rate is almost three times that of continental France. Organisations have been set up to support groups like the Alliance Against Profiteering (Liyannaj Kont Pwofitasyon) in Guadeloupe and the February 5 Collective in Martinique, which are calling for more youth training and employment and a reduction in the cost of living. In June 2009, the Senate Commission on the Overseas Departments held that there was a fundamental need to 'restructure' relations between the overseas departments and continental France. In November 2009, the government presented yet another 'plan to modernize the Overseas Departments and Territories' with the 137 measures criticised by Rosa Moussaoui in *Humanité* as recycling all the old remedies of more 'private-sector competition', tax breaks and gifts to employers.³¹

The Comoros Disapora Collective, Collective of Associations of Friends of Comoros (CAAC) believes that the French government retains a colonial attitude towards the French Pacific Islands and criticised the government's approach to 'illegal immigration' to the island – an approach which it says is responsible for the deaths of thousands of asylum seekers.³²

There have been workshops organised around police violence, education, urban renewal, around cultural and artistic events including a series of workshops called 'Cinéma de Quartiers'. There are also workshops on feminist struggles, gender issues, discrimination and Islamophobia. It was agreed, through a grassroots consultation process, that these themes formed the main issues facing the banlieues.

Our main aim is to look for areas of convergence between associations and activists as well as between movements. But we are also looking at how we can find 'spaces' within which we can build cooperation with left-wing organisations.

There has been much debate at the Forum about how best to work with the political Left. Was this something that concerned the organisers?

We invited José Bové, Olivier Besancenot (leader of the LCR – Ligue Communiste Révolutionnaire) and a high-profile figure within the French Communist Party (PCF) to participate at the Forum and they all accepted the invitation. However, later, one by one, they all cancelled. Annick Coupé from the Trade Union Sud and the Mayor of Nanterre are the only public figures who came.

What are the Forum's plans for the future?

First, we need to figure out which political tools we want to create: either to keep open a space where we can support each other, or whether to transform ourselves into a political movement. According to that choice, we'll develop a strategy for how best to occupy the political arena. We must raise the issue of political representation, of political power relations and the alternatives to, in our opinion, the bankrupt politics of previous governments.

INTERVIEW

Robin Virgin



A Muslim feminist in France speaks out By Naima Bouteldja

First published on IRR News, 5 March 2009

An interview with Zahra Ali, president of Al Houda, a Muslim women's organisation.

During the Social Forum of the Banlieues (FSQP), in October 2008 at Nanterre, Paris, Naima Bouteldja interviewed Zahra Ali, 22, the president of Al Houda, a Rennes-based Muslim women's organisation. Zahra, a student, is preparing a dissertation on the emergence of a Muslim feminist consciousness for an MA course at the EHESS (École des Hautes Études en Sciences Sociales). During the Social Forum Al Houda presented a play based on its experiences of being repeatedly excluded from International Women's Days in Rennes.

Naima Bouteldja: How did you get involved in Al Houda?

Zahra Ali: I have been in Al Houda since I was 15. It provides a religious framework for Muslim women and young girls living in Rennes. We work quite a lot in the mosques and, for the last ten years, what has characterised Al Houda has been the Sunday morning classes. They take place every single Sunday in a mosque in Rennes and enable Muslim women to meet, to deepen their knowledge of Islam, and it also allows them to share the experience of being a female Muslim and what it is like to live as a female Muslim in France.

Could you explain the controversy at the core of the play presented at the Forum by your organisation?

For more than ten years our organisation has expressed an interest in participating in the *Village of the Associations* that organise International Women's Day in Rennes. Nowadays the *Village of the Associations* is spread across the whole month of March in the form of a series of conferences, meetings and debates that are organised by local organisations in partnership with the city of Rennes. Women's Day is generally organised for the Saturday that succeeds or precedes 8 March and it gathers together all the women's and feminist organisations, and the human rights organisations that defend women's rights. They basically introduce their activities to the public. They gather under a big marquee right in the town centre and their activities are advertised by the city of Rennes.

We have been present at the local level in Rennes for the last ten years, and, each year, or at least every other year, we have asked the organisers for the right to participate in the *Village of the Associations*, telling them that we're an organisation that defines itself as feminist and we would like to participate in this *Village* because we belong to this activist community of Rennes and we want to present our activities (to the public). So each year, up until now, we were systematically met with rejection with the exception of one year where we managed to appear on the official booklet of the programme. In fact, we only managed to secure a listing in the official programme of a conference we were organising, but it was something. And then came 2003, the year with all the controversies around the issue of the headscarf, a controversy that fed all the popular fears. For many months, and at least until mid-2004, there was an amazing flood of racist and xenophobic rhetoric. Islam had been reduced to something alien, a segment of the population had been stigmatised by ideas such as 'it's a population that includes sexist, male chauvinistic, violent boys'.

Asylum seekers and undocumented migrants

Throughout 2009/2010, NGOs have been forced to defend their organisations against government attempts to limit interventions in support of asylum seekers and irregular migrants. The state is creating closed systems for the processing, detention and deportation of asylum seekers that lack independent scrutiny.

NGOs marginalised in detention centres

The government has succeeded in marginalising the NGOs in detention centres, as well as their capacity to speak out on human right abuses, despite a campaign by NGOs against its aggressive 'divide and rule' policy.³³ In December 2009 a contract usually issued to CIMADE to provide counselling and legal advice for foreigners was divided between several agencies: France Land of Asylum (France Terre d'Asile), Refugees Forum (Forum Réfugiés), Association of Familial Social Services for Migrants (Association Service Social Familial Migrants, ASSFAM)³⁴ and the Order of Malta. In the past, CIMADE published an annual report which detailed any human rights abuses in detention, but this will now be much more difficult to do, as all those issued with contracts are bound by principles of 'neutrality and confidentiality'.³⁵ In May 2009, immigration minister Eric Besson warned CIMADE that if it continued with its criticisms it would risk having its state funding withdrawn, as it could not be allowed to continue 'permanently biting and spitting on the hands that feeds it'.³⁶

Government proposes extension of legal sites of detention

At present, 'transit zones' (*'zones d'attente'*), which are in law not considered to be French territory, are limited to airports, seaports and railway stations, but new legislation shortly to go before parliament proposes to establish ad hoc 'transit zones' anywhere that migrants are discovered on French territory.³⁷ The legislation was introduced as a response to the successful intervention of the Refugees Forum and France Terre d'Asile on behalf of 123 Kurdish migrants from Syria who landed on a beach in southern Corsica on 22 January 2010.³⁸ Had the legislation been in place when the Kurds were intercepted on a Corsican beach, they would have been considered as being outside French territory, and therefore not able to claim asylum.

Children's rights jeopardised

As a result of a six-month working group under the ministry of immigration, in November 2009 proposals were introduced aimed at overhauling the system of defending unaccompanied migrant children held in 'transit zones'. The proposals were immediately criticised for not providing adequate protection, by a coalition of migrants' and children's

rights groups including the French Coordination for the right of asylum (Coordination Française pour le droit d'asile, CFDA), National Association of Assistance to Foreigners at Frontiers (Association Nationale d'Assistance aux Frontières pour les Étrangers (ANAFÉ), International Defence of Children (Défense des Enfants International, DEI-France), Protestant Federation of Mutual Aid (Fédération de l'Entraide Protestante FEP), Out of the Street (*Hors la Rue*), Education without Borders Network (Réseau éducation sans frontières, RESF).³⁹ Human Rights Watch criticised the treatment of children in transit zones.⁴⁰ The proposal to replace the CNDS (and the children's guardian (*défenseur des enfants*) with a general rights' defender (*défenseur des droits*) has come under attack. Both the CNDS and the children's guardian had demonstrated a significant degree of independence from the State and had intervened in the case of unlawful actions.⁴¹ But as the new rights guardian will be appointed by the Council of Ministers, the post will lack independence, according to NGOs.

The RESF continues to mobilise against the detention and deportation of children. For the twentieth anniversary of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, it launched an appeal for children's rights, with the support of twenty-six migrant and children's organisations and over 200 prominent individuals, demanding an end to expulsions which separate children and parents, to violent arrests of families and to other common practices which traumatise children.⁴²

Targeting the camps

A July 2009 agreement between the UK and France, whereby London paid for surveillance and control at Calais in return for France stepping up deportations of Afghans apprehended trying to travel to the UK, led to the dismantling of the so-called jungle in Calais, and the targeting of Afghans from the camp for removal. Thirty migrant and refugee support groups organised a large public mobilisation against the forced removal of Afghans. A petition that attracted 20,000 signatures in less than a month⁴³ coincided with a successful court challenge to the deportations in October. As a result, a joint UK-French charter flight had to be cancelled (138 Afghans had been rounded up in raids in Calais to fill the flight). However, a second flight did take off, and in December 2009, a joint UK-French charter flight also succeeded in returning Afghans, despite the fact that a French court had ruled that the deportees could not be returned on a European laissez-passer issued by the French immigration ministry, which could not substitute for travel documents issued by the Afghan Consulate.

Charities and voluntary organisations continue to be harassed as they attempt to assist the homeless in Brittany and along the Channel coast through the provision of emergency relief. In September 2009, after 500 policemen broke up the primitive dwellings of the homeless living in the 'jungle', the European Council of Refugees and Exiles (ECRE), France Terre d'Asile,

You saw the re-emergence of the figure of the barbarian (that had been manufactured during colonisation) as well as the figure of the veiled woman either submissive through force or in the pocket of fundamentalist networks.

At the beginning of the 2004 academic year, again we asked to participate in the 2005 *Village of the Associations*. And since we were slap-bang in the middle of the controversy it all kicked off. On 13 December 2004, I think, the town hall organised a meeting with all the representatives of local organisations like Amnesty International, Femmes Solidaires, Mix-cité and the theme was the possible inclusion of the organisation Al Houda in the women's *Village*. So basically the town hall had gathered all the local associations to decide whether it was possible that our association could integrate into the *Village of the Associations*.

The meeting quickly transformed itself into a court in which we were the defendants and were more or less told, 'prove to us that you're feminists!' We were also told that the fact that we were wearing the headscarf stigmatised those who were not wearing it ... and yet in our organisation itself some activists don't wear it (many do wear the headscarf but any Muslim women, veiled or not, can join and participate in Al Houda). And since we also work a lot with the thinker Tariq Ramadan and this coincided with the release of Caroline Fourest's book, *Brother Tariq*,¹ we were also demonised for associating with him. In fact the meeting was unbelievably harsh with us and conducted in an atmosphere of total contempt and rejection.

But this time, we told ourselves that what had just happened was unacceptable; and it was even more unacceptable as not a single organisation had supported us during the meeting, so we really had been alone. We told ourselves that we were going to take the matter to court because we hoped that through that avenue we would transcend this whole impassioned and furious debate and be able to confront arguments with questions like, 'what is it, that allows you to imply that we, by definition, are against women's emancipation? What is it that allows you to imply, that we, by definition, cannot support women's rights? What is it that allows you to imply that we, essentially, support stoning?! We wanted to tell them, 'just put forward your arguments; we've been here for the last ten years, so tell us what we did that allows you to say that we cannot participate in Women's Day!'

So we decided to take the City of Rennes to court but we made a practical mistake by not using the right judicial procedure. The court could have refused our demand solely on the basis of this mistake and it would have then been entitled to close the case. But what the judge decided to do was to give a ruling based on the content of the complaint and he asserted clearly that, 'a Muslim women's organisation cannot be in tune with the spirit of Women's Day!' The judge of the court could simply have rejected the complaint on a technicality but he chose to add his personal judgment that was therefore that of the court. According to him an organisation of Muslim women – read veiled women (our organisation is perceived this way even if all the women of the organisation don't wear the headscarf) – is not in *tune* with the *historical sense of Women's Day*!

We went to see solicitors who told us that we had two years to appeal but they advised us not to do so, and, anyway, by the end of the hearing, whose decision we received in March, we were exhausted. We had taken a lot of pressure and we really needed a break. We had decided we wanted to be treated as equal, we had decided not to keep silent, we had decided not to bow our heads, but ultimately at the end of it we just reaped two years worth of national controversy and intense media attention that contributed in unveiling an evident racism within French society.

Ironically though, around the same period, at the beginning of 2005, there was also a local mosque project in Rennes and for this project the town hall requested our input because the mayor, of course, needed the voice of Muslim women as a trump card so that he could say later on, 'we, in our mosques, don't tolerate the exclusion of Muslim women'. So basically when it's about mosques, there is no problem, our contribution is sought. But when it's not strictly related to community or religious issues, when it's about social or political issues, all the stuff related to 'being fully-fledged female citizens', at that level, everything we do or ask for is perceived as provocative and extreme, as propaganda or as proselytising.

We were even told at that time, to show you how far communication had broken down, that we were operating in the field of irrationality. We were told exactly what Tariq Ramadan had been accused of: 'you say you support women's rights but that's not what you think!' In other words, 'you practise "double-discourse"'. So, when you get to that point, there is no longer any possibility of dialogue. But the breakdown in communication was not coming from us, in the sense that we carried on inviting representatives of local organisations, we carried on inviting the elected representatives of Rennes to our activities, and we did not despair either and we still submitted our requests for public funding (*laughter*).

And do the local representatives respond positively to your invitations?

No, now we are completely ignored. Before the hearing there was at least some kind of dialogue and they would answer us, but, since then, nothing. Recently, during a town council meeting, we heard that the mayor of the city of Rennes himself said that we were a fundamentalist sect that wanted to veil women in the banlieues, so we really are totally stigmatised and dialogue is no longer possible.

Still, do you have any relationship with left-wing, anti-racist and civil rights organisations?

We've always worked in a spirit of partnership. But at a local level in Rennes, we have very little support. We are in touch with some activists but they always work with us as individuals and not as representatives of their respective

Forum Réfugiés and the British Refugee Council issued a joint press release pointing out that the dismantling of the ‘camp’ – which symbolised the dysfunctional nature of European asylum policy – solved nothing.⁴⁴ Around 275 of the displaced irregular migrants and asylum seekers were unaccompanied minors who were subsequently taken to reception centres.

SOS Support for Undocumented Workers set up a makeshift shelter for undocumented migrants in Calais on 7 February 2010 only to find it demolished by riot police a few days later.

Strikes of undocumented workers

A number of organisations from the collective United against throw-away immigration (Collectif Unis contre une immigration jetable) and the collective of undocumented migrants, helped organise ‘A Day without Immigrants, 24 Hours without us’ (*Journée sans immigrés, 24 heures sans nous*). As part of the regularisation campaign,⁴⁵ a free newspaper *Ici*, produced by volunteers and distributed by striking migrants, recorded the views of migrants themselves.⁴⁶ A national strike took place on 1 March 2010. A cross-party group of parliamentarians also supports regularisation for undocumented workers in regular employment who pay taxes and social security contributions. But President Nicolas Sarkozy said that there would ‘never’ be a universal regularisation of undocumented migrants in France while he was in office.

In October 2009, an estimated 10,000 striking undocumented workers, most from West and North Africa and the Comoros Islands, and their supporters, staged a demonstration to demand regularisation. Several NGOs, as well as five trade unions, including the CGT, wrote to the prime minister denouncing the arbitrary nature of the regularisation process,

.....

describing it as a ‘lottery’ and stressing that decision-making varies across the region’s prefectures. While the signatories called on the government to issue a circular with clear rules and criteria for registration, a government circular of 24 November 2009 ties tough requirements (presence in France for at least five years, work in a sector with a high demand for labour, employment contract, proof of capacity to integrate, etc) to a fixed quota for the maximum number of people who can be regularised, of between 500 and 1,000 workers, again paving the way for discrimination and arbitrary decision-making. The government has also issued a crackdown on employers who give jobs to migrant workers with false documents.

Crime of solidarity

NGOs stepped up their criticism of a law they dub the ‘crime of solidarity’ (offence of assisting the irregular entry or stay of foreigners, *délit d’aider l’entrée ou le séjour irrégulier des étrangers*, Article L622-4 of the Code for the entry and stay of foreigners and the right of asylum (*Code de l’entrée et du séjour des étrangers et du droit d’asile* – CESEDA).⁴⁷ In response to the government’s target to arrest 5,500 ‘helpers’ of irregular migrants in 2009,⁴⁸ protests were held outside courts in a number of cities, where demonstrators offered to give themselves up to the state. Immigration minister Eric Besson called the ‘crime of solidarity’ ‘a myth’ and dismissed the findings of a report that documents 26 convictions, including a priest, friends and family members of irregular migrants, on the grounds that the credibility of the report’s authors, GISTI, in such matters is ‘almost non-existent’. But he later admitted that there might be a need to clarify the legislation.⁴⁹

organisations. So we are in touch with members of the Revolutionary Communist Youth who actually have always been on our side and we also work with some activists from the Green Party with whom we managed in the past to organise debates on Palestine. On women's issues, we work with independent coalitions, with activists from Mix-cité.

Do you receive public subsidies?

No. We survive on collections. We collect money in the mosques, we ask for money from individuals we know, and there is also the money from the individual subscriptions. Then we self-finance ourselves: for every debate we organise, we ask the public to pay a fee, which allows us to reimburse the travel expenses of the panellists and the price of the room. We really have slender means and every year we are left with no money in our bank account.

How many members in Al Houda?

We number about thirty, with around a dozen who are very active.

How would you describe the role of your organisation?

The Sunday morning classes are really the basis of everything. They provide a meeting space for both young and older women. It's really intergenerational; some of the founding members of the organisation who are in their mid-40s and have kids are still here, and then we have young teenagers and young adults also attending the classes. So it's really mixed. The teenagers, in general, participate in our theatre workshop. The Muslim families of Rennes know that there is this *halaqa* (Islamic educational meeting) on Sunday mornings and all our activities start from these meetings. In other words, some people come and propose themes for events as well as conferences they would like to organise or attend for the coming year, and then, from that point, we share the tasks amongst ourselves. We are aware that many Muslims share our feelings, we somehow represent a space where young girls can come to inform themselves on all kinds of issues: a girl confronted by a forced marriage, a girl who doesn't want to wear the hijab, a girl who is facing a problem at school. Really the space we have created connects many different things: we work as much on social as on political issues. We also self-educate and train ourselves and we are part of Presence Musulmane² which supplies us with an interesting educational framework.

But it's important to understand that our activities remain generally very local and this has been particularly so over the last few years. We felt that was necessary because of the very high local demand and also because we have witnessed the emergence of a strain of literalist religious thought, that was very marginal in the past but is starting to affect more and more Muslims. The struggle against this school of thought is also one of our objectives. We want to confront it just by being ourselves, by remaining active and by speaking out, as Muslim women. For example, the very presence of a veiled Muslim woman distributing leaflets in a market provides a counterbalance to emergent salafist thought, not just in the banlieues, as often said, but in all social spheres.

Coming back to your own studies now, how do you define Muslim feminism?

The term 'feminist', in itself, I would define in a very generic way as a way of being, of acting, a will to promote women's emancipation by promoting the struggle for universal principles of equality and justice. Within Al Houda we define ourselves as feminist in this way. As for Muslim feminism, personally it starts from a very deep spirituality. We begin with the spiritual idea of equality before God, to state that all issues related to discrimination, all logic that reduces women to objects, women to their role as mothers, their role as spouses, their role as daughters – basically everything that is opposed to the principle of equality and justice – we have to struggle against because we need to remain faithful to a message that came to empower women.

This idea that Islam came to emancipate women can sound quite odd to many people and it also generally contradicts practices one can observe in many Muslim societies.

Obviously we are aware of the fact that proclaiming 'Islamic feminism' seems paradoxical. Firstly, within a Western context, particularly in France, women's emancipation is associated with a certain degree of rupture from religion. Second, within a context where, on the one hand, international news introduces western audiences to a caricature of fundamentalist and sexist religious groups, and where, on the other hand, the concrete realities of the Muslim world itself (in terms of legislation, for example, on the family code and in terms of social relations where women are often relegated to the private sphere, suffering domestic violence etc) are undoubtedly disastrous in relation to women.

But one should start by saying that the majority of Muslim countries are countries which belong to the 'Third World' where political regimes are often far from democratic. In Afghanistan, for example, it is a whole people who are being deprived of elementary rights (such as security, health, access to education) and women, as in every society, are at the bottom of the social hierarchy. Afghan women at all levels suffer on two counts from insecurity, poverty and sexism, with the American occupation adding to difficulties.

But it is obvious that Muslim thought remains largely fossilised when it comes to feminine issues and socio-political answers don't explain everything. It's precisely at that level that we think there is a need to question classical Islamic law and to re-read our sources in a spirit of emancipation. It's our work as female believers to work to remain faithful to

CONTACTS

CIMADE

64, rue Clisson
75013 Paris
France
Tel: +33 144 18 60 50
Fax: +33 145 56 08 59
Email: infos@cimade.org
Web: www.cimade.org

Collectif Banlieues Respect

Tel: +33 606 77 88 27 (Spokesman's phone number,
Hassan Ben M'Barek)
Email: banlieues.respect@gmail.com

Collectif Uni(e)s contre une immigration jetable' (UCIJ)

c/o Cedetim (Immigration Jetable)
21 Ter, Rue Voltaire
75011 Paris
France
Tel: +33 143 14 84 84 / +33 156 55 51 00
Email: ecrire.jetable@rezo.net
Web: www.contreimmigrationjetable.org

Coordination contre le Racisme et l'islamophobie (CRI)

Tel: +33 478 36 03 40
Email: bureau@crifrance.com
Web: www.crifrance.com
Email: bureau@crifrance.com

Forum Social des Quartiers Populaires (FSQP)

41, rue Mouraud
75020 Paris
France
Tel: +33 661 87 75 56
Email: FSQP2007@gmail.com
Web: www.fsqp.free.fr

GISTI

3, villa Marcès
75011 PARIS
France
Tel: +33 143 14 84 84
Email: gisti@gisti.org
Web: www.gisti.org

Indigènes de la République

Web: www.indigenes-republique.org

La Journée sans immigrés – 24H Sans Nous (LJSI)

Maison des Associations
22, rue Deparcieux
Boîte aux lettres n°81
75014 Paris
France
Email: contact@lajourneesansimmigres.org
Web: www.lajourneesansimmigres.org

Mouvement de l'immigration et des banlieues (MIB)

45, rue d'Aubervilliers
75018 Paris
France
Tel: +33 140 36 24 66
Email: mib@no-log.org
Web: mibmib.free.fr

MRAP

43 Boulevard de Magenta
75010 Paris
France
Tel: +33 153 38 99 99
Web: www.mrap.asso.fr

Réseau Education Sans Frontières (RESF)

c/o EDMP
8, impasse Crozatier
75012 Paris
France

a message that, according to us, has been above all liberating for women. For us, the Revelation carried an egalitarian and empowering message for women, and it is our duty to distinguish between contextual readings that, when applied through the lens of cultural patriarchy and sexism, pervert the sense of the Revelation, and the readings that are faithful to the meaning of the message.

What are your relationships like with French feminists, generally speaking?

We had an experience with the Collective of Feminists for Equality,³ of which I was a member alongside other members of Al Houda. And it was a very rich experience because they were feminists from all kinds of backgrounds. We spent one year campaigning in this collective and eventually chose to return to local issues and to concentrate on the work in our city of Rennes and in particular to concentrate on intra-community issues that had been neglected over the previous years.

Now, generally speaking, the French feminist landscape remains very divided in its opinion of us, so the feminists that we are working with are those who have really developed a critique of colonialism. In fact, we found ourselves in a similar scenario to that of our other struggles. We ended up working with feminists who had already worked a lot on, for example, the issue of the *sans-papiers* and on racism.

Now what needs to be said is that I'm not trying to impose my model of Muslim feminism on people. I know that some Muslim feminists don't claim any link to a western feminist legacy. As far as I am concerned, I am a western woman and I have been deeply shaped and influenced by western feminist literature. I have, of course, a greater sensibility towards African-American feminist literature. The literature I was reading first when I was very young was, for example, Angela Davis, but, nonetheless, I feel strongly that I am an heir to the historical feminist movement of the 1970s and the first feminist wave. Of course, I will differ on some of their stances because they will oppose my spiritual legacy. But regardless of my conception of the body, my link with transcendence, I don't feel a rupture, I really feel an heir to this movement of struggle that has enabled women to move beyond what biology has ordained, that has enabled women not to be reduced to their roles as mother and housewife. I feel totally an heir of it all. Simone de Beauvoir is very relevant for me.

What are your future projects?

We have been engaged in working on feminine and feminist issues in Islam for some years and we are beginning to articulate our group thoughts on a certain reading of the Qur'an that would be of feminine and feminist inspiration. We will carry on with our local activities – organising conferences and classes – but what we really have our hearts set on, at this moment in time, is the work on this issue of feminism in Islam.

Notes

- 1 The book by Fourest and Denis MacShane has the subtitle, *The doublespeak of Tariq Ramadan*. Fourest is a French feminist who was given a 'Laïcité' award in 2005. She was also one of the original eleven signatories, alongside Hirsli Ali and Salman Rushdie, of the 2006 manifesto, 'Together facing the new totalitarianism'.
- 2 A Muslim network that provides training courses for Muslim activists in several French-speaking countries.
- 3 The Collective of Feminists for Equality was created following a petition in *Le Monde* in December 2004 entitled, 'A veil on discrimination'. It includes both non-Muslim and Muslim feminists and its charter states there is no 'one single model of liberation and emancipation for women' and calls for respect for freedom of choice on the wearing of the headscarf.

INTERVIEW

Robin Virgin



No glory days for immigrant elders in France By Naima Bouteldja

First published on IRR News, 5 March 2009

An interview with Boualem Azahoum, an activist with DiverCités and El Ghorba in Lyon.

At the Social Forum of the Banlieues (FSQP) at Nanterre, Paris, in October 2008, Naima Bouteldja interviewed Boualem Azahoum, a long-standing activist living in Lyon and a member of DiverCités, a local organisation campaigning on issues such as racism, discrimination, policing, housing, education, affecting the inhabitants of the banlieues. He's also a member of El Ghorba ('to be in exile'), an organisation dedicated to recovering the history of immigration in France, offering support to the Chibanis, the immigrant elders from the former French colonies.

Naima Bouteldja: Can you recount your involvement in political activism?

NOTES

- 1 The term 'ethnic minorities' is not used in France. Whereas in the UK, terms such as 'Black British' or 'British Muslim' have emerged, there is no equivalent hyphenated identity in France, where there is perhaps more social pressure than in any other European country to define oneself as French. Some young people have responded to this pressure by defining themselves simply as Black, or Arab or Muslim. Many more people define themselves as Muslims today than in the past when they would have described themselves as Arab.
- 2 The formation of the National Ministry of Immigration, Integration, National Identity and Co-development in 2007 led to the immediate resignation of eight members of the National Centre of Immigration History (CNHI) in protest at the 'unjustified and dangerous' establishment of a ministry which associated the terms 'immigration' and 'national identity'. *L'Humanité*, 20 June 2007. In December 2009, twenty prominent academics signed an open letter saying that the creation of the new ministry, and its policies of expulsion, immigration raids and exclusion, had fostered division, exclusion and stigmatisation. *Libération*, 4 December 2009.
- 3 The FN scored almost 12 per cent of the vote in the first round of the March 2010 elections in France's twenty-two regions and two Overseas Territories. In the second round, too, it scored better than predicted, with an average of 9.4 per cent, but scoring between 12 and 22 per cent in some southern and north-eastern regions. See Aude Baron, 'Merci Eric Besson d'avoir fait campagne pour le FN', *Le Post*, 14 March 2010.
- 4 <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/europe/8505751.stm>
- 5 The petition was first posted on www.rue89.com but has since been widely disseminated on other sites. It calls for debates that are free, pluralistic and useful, but says that this is not the case with the current debate on national identity; it is not free as the government set it up, defines the questions, and controls the response; it is not pluralistic because it reduces national diversity to a 'unique value'; far from being useful it is a 'tool of division amongst French people' and a means of stigmatisation of foreigners. Mediapart, <http://mediapart.fr/journal/france/021209/lappel-de-mediapart-nous-ne-debattons-pas>
- 6 See 'National identity and colonial history: "Towards a real debate"', written by the collective and published by Research Group Achac (translated from the French by Dominic Thomas). The Collective sees the national identity debate as a continuation of the debate started in 2004, culminating in the Decree of February 2005 which officially recognised the importance of the French colonial enterprise. Under pressure, Article 4 of the decree, pertaining to the 'positive aspects of the French colonial experience overseas' was withdrawn.
- 7 The moderators on the official website were forced to delete xenophobic messages and in many public forums some citizens expressed fears of 'Arab domination'. Trade unions such as the National Union of Higher Education Teachers (Syndicat National d'Enseignement Supérieur, SNESUP) have protested at prefects making use of academics to help stage the debates in universities and colleges.
- 8 The information in this section is taken from 'The background to the French parliamentary commission on the burqa and niqab', European Race Audit Briefing Paper no. 3, April 2010.
- 9 <http://www.jesigne.fr/contreunenouvelleloiiislamophobe>
http://www.islamonline.net/servlet/Satellite?c=Article_C&cid=1245845947279&pagename=IslamOnline-Mobile%2FWapLayout&zone=EME
- 10 In March 2010, the French State Council agreed that a total ban would be unconstitutional but could be justified on security grounds in certain public places such as schools, hospitals and law courts.
- 11 In September 2009, the minister of the interior, Brice Hortefeux, was severely embarrassed when a video was posted on the website of *Le Monde* that led to the organisation MRAP lodging a complaint of racism with the courts. The video showed Hortefeux being approached at the UMP's summer gathering by a 22-year-old party activist, born of an Algerian father and a Portuguese mother, who declared that he ate pork, drank beer and did not fast at Ramadan. Mr Hortefeux then intervened and said: 'He doesn't fit the prototype at all ... We always need one. When there's one that's all right. It's when there's a lot of them that there are problems.' (*Emmahar*, 11 September 2009)
- 12 One incident that highlighted the poor police response was that of Dieudonné Kaffack and his friend who were severely beaten and racially abused in Montauban in an incident in which several witnesses identified one of the two assailants. Yet it was only after media attention that the police were shamed into making arrests. *Migration News Sheet*, December 2009.
- 13 As France sees itself as an 'indivisible Republic' in which individual rights are respected and all are equal before the law, any struggle for 'group rights' is frowned upon and seen as a sign of *communautarisme* and as undermining the universalism of the Republic. As France does not accept it is a country with any ethnic, religious or linguistic minorities, official documents tend not to refer to ethnic minorities but speak more generally in terms of 'promoting diversity'.
- 14 A leading expert on migration, Patrick Weil, immediately refused to serve on the committee, which he said lacked clear operational criteria and independence from government and so would not be effective in criticising existing discrimination within immigration and nationality policies, which he said had reached levels 'not seen since the Second World War'. He added that the tools to combat discrimination already existed in France, and what was needed was the political will to operate them.
- 15 In September 2009, an article by *Le Monde* journalist Mustapha Kessous exposed daily harassment and racist remarks on the internet, and sparked a wave of similar stories from non-Europeans describing everyday racism and discrimination in housing, employment, policing and every aspect of life.

Boualem Azahoum: I'm what you would call a Sonac, an immigrant from North Africa. I arrived in Lyon from Morocco in 1987; at that time I was a student, mainly involved in the Moroccan far-Left milieu. In France, I became a student trade unionist and my political activities made it impossible for me to return to Morocco. Then I naturally started campaigning amongst local organisations in the banlieues of Lyon as well as with immigrant organisations.

When was DiverCités created?

The DiverCités project was born in the mid 1990s, in '93 to be precise, and we've been active since then, although the organisation wasn't officially registered until 2001. DiverCités is an organisation that from its inception wanted to link up people or organisations that were working completely separately on the same issues that were preoccupying the banlieues' inhabitants. So DiverCités gathered together secular and feminist organisations as well as Muslim ones, which were, at the time, and still are, ostracised and demonised. At the time, DiverCités for us literally meant 'diverse cities' ie, communities working together based on an idea of citizenship that takes into account local conditions, our own individual journeys and our local histories.

And El Ghorba?

El Ghorba is very different. The organisation was created in 2002 to carry out work that complemented DiverCités. We mainly focus on issues around history and memory that in the past we had neglected because we had different priorities. We realised that we had an inheritance/legacy, that needed to be comprehended, compiled, worked on and shared to understand the present and to affect the future. So we started working on the difficult relationship between France and our countries of origin, on the history of immigration, its origin and its impact – the why and how.

We managed to build El Ghorba into an activist organisation but not in the classic sense: it doesn't sign petitions or organise demonstrations, other spaces exist for those kinds of activities. Instead, El Ghorba organises conferences and tries to produce books and documentaries. The current project, which is very close to our hearts, undertaken years ago, (with more means at our disposal), consists of capturing video recordings of first generation immigrants and their experiences before they die. We already have about fifty very interesting testimonies.

We also give administrative support on a daily basis to older immigrants who often live in dire conditions with deplorable pensions, suffering from health problems, homesickness and a wholesale lack of recognition.

Was it your research around the issue of memory that led you to work on the Chibanis issue?

Yes, it was linked. Our researches led us to the so-called Sonacotra lodgings that historically are the places where single immigrant workers (as well as those married in their home countries but who travelled alone to France) were accommodated.¹ Many stayed here and these hostels have been transformed into alternative residential homes because old immigrants could not afford to live in genuine residential homes or they refuse to as it's not in their culture to do so.

So we started by visiting them regularly to alleviate their loneliness, and step by step we got them to express their concerns, their problems ... and we realised the extent of their difficulties. It's a population that has always been condemned and assigned to invisibility. And if no one acts, they will depart without leaving any trace behind. They are people who came to France, lived very intense lives, sometimes harsh but lives of dignified people and, contrary to what is often said, they never bent over backwards for anybody. To say that these elders did nothing and were passive is plain wrong; many of them demonstrated, rebelled and organised strikes when needed.

And over and above this work on memory, it became obvious to us that they needed people to assist them with bureaucratic paperwork such as problems over pensions, the repatriation of the dead to their home countries ... This is also an essential part of the organisation's work.

Why did you wait for so long, until the 2000s, to look into this issue?

We were occupied with other urgent matters, as I mentioned before. Unconsciously, at the time, our priorities were not the same and it was a mistake. But sometimes that's how things are since we couldn't have worked on everything. Our concerns were with issues such as racism, discrimination, the police and we were far away from realising the plight of the elders. And these people, who are ultimately our parents, didn't speak out either. They were putting things into perspective and saying to themselves: 'I have lived my life, what is my despair when compared to a young person condemned to perpetual unemployment or compared to a young man killed by the police, or to all those locked up in jail?'

But then we started to realise that part of the reason for the problems and misfortunes confronting us today lay in what could be called a bad start in life with people being poorly paid, despised, and rendered invisible ... From the beginning, the parents were treated in a certain way and there was no reason for their offspring to be treated any differently.

How has the situation of Chibanis evolved? The film, *Indigènes (Days of Glory)* made an impact in France but has the situation of Chibanis improved over the last years?²

The film took the issue of Chibanis, that hadn't been debated before, into schools and wider society – which isn't irrelevant. But is to the Chibanis' history what the film is to World War Two history: entertainment about a serious issue.

- 16 COMEDD, *Inégalités et discriminations – Pour un usage critique et responsable de l'outil statistique: rapport du comité pour la mesure de la diversité et l'évaluation des discriminations*, February 2010.
- 17 See Naima Bouteldja, "'Integration", discrimination and the Left in France: a roundtable discussion', in *Race & Class*, Vol. 49, no. 3, January-March 2008.
- 18 In one case in April 2009 a student was banned from presenting her viva on account of wearing the hijab. A case before the Administrative Court in Paris involved Samia Säid, expelled from an English language course for wearing the headscarf. Another involves a 26-year-old research worker in microbiology at the Paul Sabatier University who had her employment contract terminated on account of wearing the veil; the authorities considered her to be a civil servant and the wearing of the veil was incompatible with her status. In April 2009, Sacoviv, an organisation that allocates social housing, turned down the application of a Muslim family in Vénissieux, Lyon on the grounds that the mother wore a burqa. The matter was referred to the HALDE, but Sacoviv justified its decision on the grounds of an earlier Supreme Administrative Court (*Conseil d'État*) ruling that to deny French citizenship to a woman on the grounds that she wears the burqa was lawful. See *Migration News Sheet*, May 2009.
- 19 During the March 2010 regional elections, in the south-eastern region of Avignon, the feminist organisation lodged an official complaint against the New Anti-Capitalist Party (NPA) candidacy of Ilhem Moussaid on the grounds that the presence of a hijab-wearing candidate perverted the values of the Republic.
- 20 Laurent Mucchielli has his own website at www.laurent-mucchielli.org
- 21 Collectif Banlieues Respect is a federation of around 100 community organisations working in the banlieues, which grouped together as a collective to call for respect and peace after the events of 2005. It commented that following the last interministerial committee on the prevention of juvenile crime, more money had been spent on video surveillance of young people in the banlieues than on anything else, and demanded proper public policies to tackle the issue.
- 22 The units were piloted in Seine-Saint-Denis in 2008, where the minister claimed crime figures were dramatically reduced. The minister emphasised that their role was repression of disorder, not making friends.
- 23 In February 2009, Alliot-Marie announced that over 500 million euro were to be spent on improving police equipment and technology, and that during 2009 she intended to triple the number of surveillance cameras in public places. See <http://www.securite-surveillance.com/blog/index.php/page/3/>
- 24 Hakim Ajimi died in May 2008 in Grasse after being restrained by police officers during arrest. For a long time, the investigating judges refused to bring charges against two police officers believed to be responsible for his death. However, in February 2010, two police officers were questioned on suspicion of 'involuntary homicide', and one of them also on suspicion of 'non-assistance to a person in danger'. In April 2010, the independent police complaints authority recommended that legal action be brought against the police officers. See Virginia MacFadyen, 'France: death in police custody', *European Race Bulletin* no. 64, Summer 2008; AI, France: Briefing to Committee Against Torture', April 2010.
- 25 <http://www.fsqp.free.fr/cr-police-justice-fsqp2009.htm>
- 26 Amnesty International, 'France: Public outrage: police officers above the law', April 2009.
- 27 France24, 27 November 2009.
- 28 See 'Hakim Djelassi était vivant avant son interpellation', *Le Monde* 21 November 2009. See also *US State Department, country reports on human rights practices, 2009: France*, 11 March 2010.
- 29 'Mohamed Boukrourou died in a police van', statement of Indigènes de la République, 14 November 2009.
- 30 AI 'France: Briefing to Committee Against Torture', April 2010.
- 31 Rosa Moussaoui, 'The French Presidency cobbles together yet another plan for the Overseas Départements and Territories.' *L'Humanité* (in English), 12 November 2009.
- 32 Press release, Les Indigènes de la République, 'Communiqué sur le discours de Mayotte du Président Sarkozy', 24 January 2010.
- 33 See joint letter of sixteen humanitarian organisations to immigration minister Eric Besson on 11 May 2009. <http://www.cimade.org/nouvelles/1610-Lettre-de-ponse---Eric-Besson-des-organisations-engag-es-dans-les-rassemblements-sur-le-d-lit-de-solidarit-%E2%80%A2>
- 34 The independence and competence of ASSFAM (as well as the UMF-linked association Collectif Respect, which was originally offered one of the contracts) has come into question. The funding of ASSFAM, founded in 1951 as a private non-profit organisation for migrants' welfare, comes almost entirely from government sources, and it works closely with government departments including the ministry for immigration, and official bodies such as the HALDE.
- 35 For the latest annual report of CIMADE, published in November 2009, see <http://www.cimade.org/publications/38>
- 36 *Migration News Sheet*, June 2009, December 2009.
- 37 France Terre d'Asile has condemned the proposal as an attack on judicial authority regarding asylum seekers. GISTI has observed that the proposed law means that a 'transit zone' can be created round every undocumented migrant found on French territory. Asylum seekers would get significantly fewer rights under the proposals. For an analysis of the proposed law see GISTI's dossier, <http://www.gisti.org/spip.php?rubrique448>
- 38 The migrants were transferred to immigration centres on the French mainland but judges ordered the authorities to free them, ruling that their detention was unlawful. See Forum Réfugiés, 'Réfugiés de Bonifacio', 25 January 2010.
- 39 See 'Défendre les droits des enfants', on http://www.aprs.asso.fr/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=80&Itemid=61
- 40 In October 2009, Human Rights Watch found that France's system of detaining and deporting unaccompanied children put them at serious risk. Amongst other things it found that children were detained alongside adults, routinely threatened with

So much the better if the film exists! But today we can state with certainty that nothing has changed for the elders: the issue was fashionable for a while but soon disappeared. A very simple example relates to the issue of the pension freeze for war veterans from immigrant backgrounds. For a long time it was claimed that, thanks to the movie, they had finally been granted parity in pensions. But it's simply not the case and today many of those war veterans are in court trying to obtain what was promised to them at the time. The government tried to con us with their public pronouncements that ultimately didn't lead to anything concrete.

It's true that, thanks to the film, the debate has entered the public sphere and today nobody can say, 'I didn't know'. Many documentaries on the issue have been made but all too often they suffer from what I call the 'Benguigui syndrome'.³ What I mean is that these films set out to be tearjerkers. We are not looking for compassion, we are looking for empathy. We accept old people as they are – some are nasty, others are nice – just like anyone else ... The Benguigui syndrome transforms every elder into a loveable person on the basis that he or she has a strong foreign accent and lives in a nine-square-metre flat. In *El Ghorba*, we treat elders as they are, not looking for pity or compassion, but seeking the justice and dignity that has been denied them.

Could you remind us about the issue of immigrants' pensions?

There are all kinds of problems that are, by the way, not unique to France. Recently, a British judge granted Nepalese war veterans, who fought in the British army, the right to live in the UK. This right had been withdrawn from those who had left the army before 1997.⁴ In France, the problems are of a similar nature where immigrant war veterans, who fought for France during and even before and after World War Two, were not granted the same war pensions as their French colleagues. A French war veteran can get from 600 to 1,000 euros per month while his Moroccan, Algerian or Senegalese counterparts only get four euros per month. In fact the latter are paid pensions at pre-1958 rates, as if time had stopped then.

In other cases, some people, who worked in France during most of their adult lives and were rewarded with very poor pensions, because they were badly paid, are forced to remain for at least six months in France in order to claim their state pension. They are prevented from living in their country of origin, while cheated out of a decent pension enabling them to live comfortably in France.

Returning to the subject of the banlieues, what are the main problems you are facing?

The same problems as those we are debating at the Forum: extremely dilapidated housing, the chaotic urbanism, one wonders how it was allowed to happen, excessive marginalisation ... antiquated state schools merely churning out the future unemployed, future people with no degrees ... it's also the omnipresence of the oppressive police force. It's a deeper and deeper insecurity that we are trying to fight against alongside the inhabitants of the banlieues themselves so that their interests are taken into account. It's a completely forgotten and abandoned population and, although these problems are affecting immigrants and their children, other populations are also affected.

Any changes since Sarkozy came to power?

He's made some public announcements, but to no effect. If anything, things are getting worse. When it comes to the banlieues anyway there is consensus in France among the mainstream left and right with no real difference between them. Besides, with the economic crisis, it has become even less of a priority ... They find billions to save a few banks while the destitute are not their priority.

Notes

- 1 SONACOTRA, La Société Nationale de Construction de Logement pour les Travailleurs Algériens (National Company for the Construction of Housing for Algerian Workers – the company name has recently been changed to Adoma), is a housing company that builds or buys lodgings for poor people including immigrants and unemployed people. A Sonac, as referred to at the beginning of the interview, is a slang term for someone not born in France.
- 2 *Indigènes* (2006), directed by French-Algerian Rachid Bouchareb, tells the story of five 'Indigènes' who, as French soldiers, took part in the liberation of France in World War Two – illustrating both the debt France owes to its ex-colonial populations and the place immigrant populations have in French history and culture. The film was accompanied by a campaign for equal war pensions for all French soldiers.
- 3 Yasmina Benguigui is a French film-maker and producer of Algerian descent, who has made a number of films including *Inch 'Allah Dimanche* (2001) and *Mémoires d'Immigrés, l'héritage maghrébin* (1997) – the latter being a series of testimonies by North African immigrants in France and their descendants.
- 4 A London High Court decision of September 2008 ruled in favour of Gurkhas who had retired from the British army before 1997 being allowed the right to stay in the UK. The judge pointed to a 'moral debt of honour' owed to the Gurkhas.

- deportation, and subjected to strip searches and to intrusive age examinations. See Human Rights Watch, 'Lost in Transit: Insufficient Protection for Unaccompanied Migrant Children at Roissy Charles de Gaulle Airport', October 2009.
- 41 France Terre d'Asile pointed out in its analysis that the superseded Child Guardian had dealt with 20,000 cases since its formation in 2000, had a network of fifty-five regional representatives and thirty-four volunteers, and was a member of the European Network of Children's Ombudsmen. The independence of the post is required by the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. For the analysis see <http://www.france-terre-asile.org/images/stories/pdf/dmie/note-analyse-suppression-defenseur-enfants-26-03-2010.pdf>
- 42 For the text of the appeal see <http://www.educationsansfrontieres.org/article22337.html>
- 43 See 'Le retour forcé en Afghanistan n'est pas une solution', joint press release by ECRE, Forum Réfugiés and France Terre d'Asile, 6 October 2009; 'Pour l'appel européen contre les retours forcés et pour une protection temporaire: le cap des 20 000 signataires est atteint', 28 October 2009.
- 44 'La situation à Calais, symptôme des défauts du système européen d'asile', joint press release from ECRE, France Terre d'Asile, Forum Réfugiés, British Refugee Council. France Terre d'Asile and the British Refugee Council issued a joint report on conditions in Calais in the same month.
- 45 The petition of the Collective Uni(e)s contre une immigration jetable is at <http://www.immigrationjetable.org/spip.php?rubrique6> For the manifesto of the organisation '24 hours sans nous', see <http://www.la-journee-sans-immigres.org/pages/our-manifest-english-translation-2549727.html> See also 'France Terre d'Asile soutient la journée sans immigrés' <http://www.france-terre-asile.org/index.php/component/content/article/1872>
- 46 'Lancement d'"Ici" journal de soutien aux travailleurs sans-papiers', *Le Monde*, 7 November 2009, cited in *Picum Newsletter*, December 2009.
- 47 See Laetitia Van Eeckhout, 'Délit de solidarité, 'Les associations ne croient pas à une immunité humanitaire renforcée', *Le Monde*, 23 November 2009, as cited by *Picum Newsletter*, December 2009.
- 48 It set the target as part of its *Projet de Loi de Finances 2009* (2009 Budget Proposal) in which it also set a target of 28,000 expulsions.
- 49 One case among many that undermined the minister's argument was that of Claudine Louis, a 58-year-old grandmother who was prosecuted for aiding and abetting illegal immigration after she offered accommodation to a 16-year-old Afghan boy for four months in a bid to shame the authorities into accepting responsibility for the child. A campaign against the prosecution of Jennifer Chary, who was charged with aiding and abetting when she applied to marry her cohabitee of five months, resulted in the prosecution being dropped. See "'Délit de solidarité': Eric Besson prêt à modifier légèrement la loi", *Le Monde* 17 July 2009. For the GISTI documentation of convictions see <http://www.gisti.org/snip/php?article1399>.

INTERVIEW

Robin Virgin



Speaking for the youth of the banlieues

By Naima Bouteldja

First published on IRR News, 5 March 2009

An interview with Abdul Zahiri, an activist with ACJ REV in Avignon

At the Social Forum of the Banlieues (FSQP) at Nanterre, Paris, in October 2008, Naima Bouteldja interviewed Abdel Zahiri, 28, an activist living in a banlieue populated by 20,000 people, in Avignon (southeast France). He is a member of AJC REV, a local organisation, and has joined the recently formed New Anti-capitalist Party.

Naima Bouteldja: Which organisation do you campaign for?

Abdul Zahiri: I've been campaigning with others in AJC REV (the acronym pronounced in French sounds like 'Act/Dream'), a local organisation in Avignon. At the beginning, our work was quite similar to others': we were doing school tutoring, ensuring that kids could get access, cultural events and so on. The association was doing very well and run exclusively by youth from the banlieue. We were basically addressing the difficulties of the banlieue – school failure, drugs, the underground economy etc. So we basically started with social work and, step by step, we got more politicised. Because, to start with, for young people it's the hell and boredom of the banlieue, then it's the hell of finding accommodation, then it's the hell of finding a job, and finally we find ourselves facing difficulties that we don't have power over at all and which require an investment within the political sphere...

And, therefore, our organisation started looking into political matters and that's one of the reasons we are present here at the Social Forum of the Banlieues because only these kinds of answers will enable us to radically change things.

Social work is ok but does not move us forward; for the last thirty years that's all we've done – social work! For the last thirty years people have been complaining about discrimination, racism, but so what? Where are we at now, thirty years later? There is even more discrimination than before, more hassles than before, and many more people suffering from hunger than ever before because it's on the political level that decisions are taken. So we need to be in the position of decision makers or we need to have amongst the decision makers people who are obliged to apply policies in favour of the people at the bottom. So *voilà*, that's more or less why I'm here; *voilà* more or less who I am; *voilà* more or less what I'm doing.

There is a whole delegation of AJC REV here. What are you expecting from the Forum?

Eight of us came and one of us even hitchhiked. We only heard about the exact date of the Forum at the beginning of the week. The organisers launched an appeal for help and the following day we were here. It was hell, but eventually we managed to set up stalls and tents and things. We came because it's important to gather together and to see the whole movement to which we belong. For me it's important that the veteran activists who are here pass on their knowledge and their experiences to us.

I also have my camera and I'm filming to try to catch what has happened here and show bits to the people of my banlieue because I know that some of them can't read. If they were reading we would have changed things a long time ago. We wouldn't have to beg people to vote during election time and would in fact have our people running for office. We know they don't read and when they try to read we know they don't always understand everything. But we also know why, especially when you have entire families of twenty-five people crammed into each flat. And in the banlieues, we also have blokes who are bought off to calm people down, and there are also drugs. And, surprise, surprise, drugs have never been in such abundance since Sarkozy came to power. We are no longer dealing with just weed, nowadays it's about cocaine and it's getting everywhere. And you think Sarkozy's got nothing to do with the fact that drugs are circulating everywhere? The government created the GIR (a special police force) to supposedly stop the dealers. But the blokes from GIR know everything – they know who deals but they let it happen because it suits everyone. As long as the youth are dealing, they make a bit of money and don't hassle people. But what is horrible is that the youth have been made dependent now, and that means that they can't be mobilised politically because every time we try to mobilise them, we clash with their dependency, it's really terrible...

There are other issues we need to talk about. For example, feminism and the place of women in the banlieues. We know that there are many women who are suffering in the banlieue and one needs to understand that there are situations and mechanisms leading to it. At the same time some work needs to be done with the blokes, on the mindset of the countries we come from. But, having said that it doesn't mean that I want to see my sister wearing a G-string! There are some cultural aspects that one would like to preserve, not to oppress or to dominate but just because they belong to our identity. There are contradictions inside all of us: that we live in France doesn't mean we should eat pork nor does it mean that no one should eat pork – those who want to eat it can eat it, those who don't want it don't have to. Similarly, those who want to follow their religion, should be able to, there is no problem; those who don't want to, don't have to – no problem either! It's this kind of space that we want to create in which everybody is clear, where nobody imposes anything and where one can debate anything.

GERMANY – CONTEXT

Integration¹

The last federal election was held in 2009 and returned a centre-right coalition government led by Christian Democrats.² The attempts by the previous coalition government (Christian Democrats and Social Democrats, 2005-2009) to draw up an integration strategy in consultation with organisations representing Germans of migrant origin³ via specially-convened 'integration summits' broke down in 2007 and was replaced by a series of top-down governmental edicts that effectively blame immigrants for failing to integrate. Notably, in November 2009, commissioner for integration Maria Böhmer proposed the introduction of an 'integration contract' for new immigrants that could be described as stigmatising. While Böhmer said that the contract would elaborate on what kind of support immigrants could expect from German society, she placed an emphasis on what Germany expects of immigrants in terms of support for German values, including freedom of speech and equal rights for women. Thus she gave the impression that immigrants somehow did not accept the fundamental values of a democratic society.⁴

Böhmer's linking of integration with the need to protect German democracy from the threat posed by 'parallel societies', primarily within the Turkish community, is very much in keeping with the narrow, and often security-dominated framework of Germany's integration debate.

Poor academic research emerges as significant issue

This narrow, and sometimes racist, framework is now being legitimised by the academy. Purporting to be scientific, but using questionable methodology, research, most of which has been commissioned by the government, has had the effect of providing cover for the government's strategy of targeting Muslims for specific integration measures.

The first such study, in 2007, was 'Muslims in Germany: integration, barriers to integration, religion and attitudes towards democracy, the rule of law, and politically/religiously motivated violence' (*Muslims in Deutschland – Integration, Integrations-barrieren, Religion und Einstellungen zu Demokratie, Rechtsstaat und politisch-religiös motivierter Gewalt*). This academic research into the religious and political attitudes of Muslims living in the country, and their levels of 'socio-linguistic integration', was commissioned by the interior ministry and conducted by criminologists Katrin Brettfeld and Peter Wetzels, who had no background in comparative religious studies or the sociology of religion.⁵

In 2009, two other pieces of research seem to have replicated the poor design and biased categories of interpretation in the Brettfeld/Wetzels study. 'Unused Potential' (*Ungenutzte Potenziale*),⁶ a study by the

Berlin Institute for Population and Development (Berlin-Institut für Bevölkerung und Entwicklung) has been cited by interior minister Wolfgang Schäuble to back his call for more 'linguistic integration' of the Turkish community and other migrants through the introduction of intensive pre-school preparation. 'Unused Potential' concluded that migrants from a Turkish background had the worst employment situation of all people from a migrant background. (Thirty per cent of all people from a Turkish background have no educational certificate and only fourteen percent hold the *Abitur*, the university-entrance diploma.) But this social reality, as well as other problems experienced by the German-Turkish community, was attributed to cultural or religious factors, with little attempt made to examine structural features such as Germany's long history of discrimination against the Turkish community and the noted failures of the German educational system to adapt to the needs of Turkish pupils.⁷ The Federal Alliance for Housing and City Development (Bundesverband für Wohnen und Stadtentwicklung)⁸ criticised the survey for its inability to differentiate between the social, educational and economic background of Germany's Turkish-origin migrant communities.

Another piece of policy-oriented research that did actually make these distinctions but ended up coming to a similar conclusion was the 'Milieus of migrants survey' (*Sinus-Studie Migranten Milieus*)⁹ carried out by the Heidelberg Institute Sinus Sociovision. This was another attitudinal survey of the Turkish community. It saw communities of Turkish origin as forming certain milieus (settings), with some more adaptable to integration than others. The seven per cent of the Turkish population characterised as existing within a religiously-rooted milieu were identified as 'premodern, socially and culturally isolated, stuck within patriarchal and religious traditions of the original societies'. Thus the report identified religion as the main barrier to integration while failing to observe the clear class stratification that had emerged within the Turkish community – an obvious reason for the separation of German-Turks into different 'milieus' (a rather unscientific term itself).

Both these academic reports received widespread media attention with 'cultural deficit' recorded as the main barrier to integration. The internet magazine MiGAZIN pointed out how this coverage contrasted with the media's lack of interest in another Sinus Sociovision study, 'Discrimination in everyday life – Perception of Discrimination and Anti-discrimination Politics in our society' (*Diskriminierung im Alltag – Wahrnehmung von Diskriminierung und Antidiskriminierungspolitik in unserer Gesellschaft*),¹⁰ which suggested that there was widespread racist

GERMANY – VOICES

Nguyen Tan Manh



Building migrant civil engagement in east Germany

By Liz Fekete

First published on IRR News, 29 October 2009

An interview with Dr Esra Erdem, coordinator of the Empowerment and Participation of Immigrants in east Germany project (EmPa) based at the Brandenburg Regional Centres for Education, Integration and Democracy.

Liz Fekete: This has been a very busy Summer for EmPa, which was set up to promote immigrant participation in the social and political life of the East. In fact, immigrant organisations have organised a whole host of workshops on a myriad of themes in all five of the east German states. Just how did you go about choosing the themes for so many workshops?

Dr Esra Erdem: The themes were actually chosen by participants of the EmPa project themselves, with one-day conferences, organised as workshops, scheduled to coincide with the 'intercultural weeks' held annually in each federal state (*Bundesland*). The workshops addressed a variety of policy issues relevant to immigrant communities in the East, such as discrimination, the lack of recognition of immigrants' professional credentials, as well as problems related to immigrants' difficulties in accessing health and welfare services. All in all, the workshops provided a good opportunity for immigrant organisations in the East to participate in public debate and to showcase their work to a broad audience including policy-makers, community activists, local politicians and the media.

There was also much preparatory work done prior to these conferences. EmPa participants attended a series of leadership development workshops aimed at supporting the professionalisation process within immigrant NGOs.

I noticed that immigrant organisations from Saxony-Anhalt decided to organise a workshop in Dessau around the National Action Plan Against Racism, Xenophobia, Anti-Semitism and Intolerance. What were your impressions of the day?

Dr Esra Erdem: Several of the invited speakers talked about the nature of racism in the city of Dessau and in Saxony-Anhalt at large. That was alarming. But at the same time I found the large audience at the event very encouraging and a clear sign of a vibrant civil society that includes many local immigrant community organisations. Obviously, policy initiatives such as the National Action Plan Against Racism, Xenophobia, Anti-Semitism and Intolerance have a real potential to boost civic engagement in embattled areas such as Dessau – both politically and in terms of funding. But Thorsten Jäger from the Intercultural Council explained that the Plan (which was adapted as a consequence of the 2001 World Conference on Racism in Durban) does not appear to be terribly high on the government's policy agenda. In its current version, it simply reiterates many of the legal and social measures that are *already* in place, whilst failing to address the urgent need for new measures. Crucial issues such as the campaign for immigrant voting rights in local elections or the impact of the draconian Asylum Law were also absent. Consequently, there remains much scope for NGOs to lobby for an improved and accountable action plan.

How do groups in the East react to the national policy and media debate on issues of integration?

Dr Esra Erdem: One part of the national debate on highly-skilled labour migration is actually highly pertinent to immigrants in the East, many of whom face deskilling and unemployment. The EmPa workshop in Leipzig, Saxony, specifically addressed the pressing concerns of immigrants with professional qualifications, around the recognition of degrees and work experience attained abroad. It transpired that recognition procedures vary significantly by *Länder*, occupation, immigration status, country and ranking of the institution where the degree was attained. The workshop was a good venue for immigrant NGOs based in Saxony to work together with local policy-makers to develop a set of procedures that could serve as a model for the integration of highly-skilled immigrants into the labour market.

It has to be said, though, these are not the kind of issues that get into the German media. Generally speaking, the media prefers to focus on issues such as the oppression of women in Muslim communities or White flight from inner-city neighbourhoods, issues that do not necessarily capture the life circumstances of most immigrants in east Germany. In contrast, everyday racism continues to be underreported.

Here in the UK, we know very little about the history of immigration to the East, and how particular communities came to settle in particular areas, and why. Do the immigrant organisations you work with in the East represent migrants from all national backgrounds?

prejudice in Germany. (Every other interviewee said that they did not want to live in the same house with a Turk, and one in four held the opinion that people with black skin colour did not fit in Germany. Almost forty per cent of those interviewed described Muslims as violent and intolerant.)

Lack of citizenship as barrier to integration

Germany is home to the highest number of third country nationals in Europe, yet has one of the lowest naturalisation rates. Representatives of the German-Turkish community have long identified restrictive and discriminatory citizenship laws as a barrier to full integration via naturalisation. Now even the CDU president of the federal parliament, Norbert Lammert, has recognised that increasing the naturalisation rate would be the best path to integration. 'Our problem in Germany is not too high an immigration rate, but rather too little naturalisation,' he said.¹¹

While the government states publicly that it wants to correct the disproportionate constraints that hinder naturalisation,¹² the reality is somewhat different. Sevim Dagdelen (The Left, Die Linke) points out that under the watch of the commissioner for integration, Maria Böhmer, the number of new citizens via naturalisation dropped by about 20 per cent (projections for 2009 estimate that it will decline by a further 10 per cent). Die Linke criticises Böhmer for not addressing the real reasons for the decline in citizenship via naturalisation – the tightening of the naturalisation law in August 2007, the introduction of a national naturalisation test in 2008, the high cost of naturalisation fees and the 'no recourse to public funds' test which acts as a barrier to naturalisation for poorer immigrants.

Other obstacles to naturalisation identified by the Left and Greens are the tightening of the language requirement in 2005 (which impacts on elderly immigrants who are not so proficient in the German language) and the introduction of compulsory knowledge tests about society and culture. But perhaps the most significant barrier remains the obligation to choose only one citizenship between the ages of 18 and 23.

Criticism of Optionsmodell

The Turkish Community in Germany (TGD) is attempting to keep the coalition government to its promise that it would reassess the current obligation to choose only one citizenship between the ages of 18 and 23. (A reform introduced under the previous coalition government in January 2008 means that young naturalised citizens with dual nationality have to choose between one passport or another within five years of their eighteenth birthday. If they fail to do so, they automatically lose their German passports when they turn 23.) This is causing extensive hardship, and the Green Party amongst others has called for such a model, which does not exist in any other country in the world, to be abolished rather than reassessed.¹³ It has asked the government to abolish

the principle of avoiding multiple citizenship and to widen the possibilities for naturalisation to a real *ius soli*, the right for citizenship through birth in Germany without the options model. The option model has also been criticised as discriminatory as it only affects non-EU nationals, since young people whose parents immigrated from EU countries are not obliged to choose one of their passports.

Greater recognition of qualifications gained abroad.

Introducing the proposal for a new integration contract, the commissioner for migration, refugees and integration Maria Böhmer said that Germany needed to increase the number of highly-qualified immigrants coming to Germany and that more needed to be done to 'harness the potential' of existing immigrants through a better recognition of qualifications gained abroad. In December 2009, the government introduced the 'Law for recognition of foreign certificates (Anerkennungsgesetz für ausländische Abschlüsse)'.¹⁴ The federal government plans to present a draft law in the second half of 2010, which should come into effect in January 2011.

The government's change of heart owes much to its demographic crisis, its ageing population and declining birth rate. It is estimated that more than half a million immigrants cannot do the jobs for which they trained because their qualifications are not recognised in Germany.

Racism and anti-racism

The federal government has for many years been criticised for its weak approach to countering racism. The National Action Plan Against Racism (NAP) was only finally completed in 2008, despite Germany agreeing to set up precisely such a plan following the 2001 Durban World Conference against racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia, and related intolerance. The long delay was caused by the government's inability to work constructively with anti-discrimination NGOs. Anti-racist organisations, trade unions as well as Muslim organisations have criticised the NAP for its top-down approach and for not integrating the recommendations from the Institute for Human Rights (Deutsches Institut für Menschenrechte), the Intercultural Council (Interkultureller Rat) and other groups between 2001 and 2008.¹⁵ In a common statement NGOs called the NAP vague, ineffectual and even harmful, because it promotes a form of countering racism that actually ends up 'blaming the victim'. The NGOs say that it is not based on an analysis of current levels of racism in Germany (there is scant information on racist violence and no analysis of why the extreme-Right and neo-Nazi parties have a popular base in some parts of society) and its methodology for countering racism is based on 'measuring integration', giving the impression that racism arises out of the 'integration deficiencies' of immigrants and minority communities.¹⁶

Dr Esra Erdem: The history of migration to the East is quite different from that to the West, both in terms of scope and the countries of origin. In west Germany, labour migration from the 1950s onwards paved the way for today's large communities from the former Yugoslavia and the Mediterranean countries. By the mid-1970s, when authorities in the West were already introducing measures to curb further immigration, the GDR (as the East was then) had launched its own labour migration programme, drawing on the workforce of fellow real-socialist countries such as Vietnam, Cuba, Mozambique and Algeria. A year before the unification of the two Germanys there were around 200,000 migrants living in the East, compared to roughly 4.6 million non-German citizens in the West.

Of course, the last twenty years have seen an enormous shift in migration trends, particularly in the East. Alongside the Vietnamese communities, there are significant numbers of refugees and immigrants from the former Soviet Union, the latter two groups having partly been required by government programmes to settle in east Germany.

Historically has it been difficult for immigrant organisations to establish themselves in the East?

Dr Esra Erdem: As the GDR collapsed, immigrants in the East found themselves confronted with existential questions on several fronts. The federal government was reluctant to recognise the immigration status of the migrant workers in the GDR. At the same time, racist violence erupted in Rostock and elsewhere, signalling, in no uncertain terms, that there was no place for immigrants in the imagined German nation. Finally, as eastern economic structures and industries were dismantled by western experts, immigrants (alongside everyone else) lost their jobs. The founding of many immigrant organisations was related directly to the need to organise to secure a livelihood and fight for their rights and protection against racist attacks. Immigrants from the former Soviet Union – including the ethnic Germans arriving from Russia, Kazakhstan etc. – similarly founded self-help networks to cope with the unique challenges of settlement in a new country. In the process, we also witnessed the reinvigoration of Jewish life in several east German cities. Finally, asylum seekers developed crucial networks to survive racism, confinement to remote areas, restrictions to the right to mobility and the denial of work authorisation.

So where does RAA Brandenburg, where the EmPa project is based, fit in with all of this?

Dr Esra Erdem: The RAA Brandenburg was founded in 1992 in an effort to mobilise civil and institutional networks for a democratic and diverse society and to fight right-wing violence. Today the RAA continues its engagement in this field through six regional offices and also by working in close cooperation with schools to implement anti-bias principles in education. Furthermore, the RAA works closely with the Integration Commissioner of Brandenburg, Professor Dr Karin Weiss, who has been a key figure in raising public awareness about the importance of immigrant participation.

'Empowerment' and 'participation', these are the key words in the description of your project, and are clearly important to you. Perhaps you could tell us a little bit more about the philosophy that guides the EmPa project?

Dr Esra Erdem: Germany has a long history of paternalism towards immigrant communities and immigrant organisations have often been charged with promoting cultural separatism. Also, full citizenship rights are widely considered a 'reward', to be accorded on an individual basis at the end of a successful 'integration' process. Not surprisingly, immigrants are rarely represented in decision-making processes. My colleague Manuela Bojadjizev has a very telling example. Earlier this year, there was a referendum in Berlin on whether high school students should be offered the choice of attending classes on religion alongside the formerly mandatory ethics courses. Although in some inner-city schools kids of Muslim immigrants make up 90 per cent of students, no one even thought of asking their non-citizen parents what they would prefer their children to be taught!

EmPa seeks to redress the balance by encouraging immigrant community activists to participate in local affairs, and provides them with the professional training to further develop these skills. The philosophy that guides EmPa is precisely this recognition of immigrants' right to articulate and represent their specific interests as part of German society. Obviously, immigrants do not constitute a homogeneous category. Hence, we strive to put together a programme with participant groups that, as far as we can, reflects the diversity within the communities. That is also why EmPa focuses on a different set of actors each year, namely NGOs, faith-based communities and youth networks.

It would also be interesting to know a little bit about the everyday running of EmPa. How, for instance, do you ensure that immigrant organisations in the East are effectively involved in the everyday management of the project?

Dr Esra Erdem: The participant organisations shape the project in many different ways. First, the themes of the leadership development workshops are set in close consultation with the participants. These praxis-oriented workshops allow group members to bring their respective competences to the programme. Moreover, participants are asked to evaluate each workshop individually as well as in group discussions. In this way, we hope to constantly improve the project. Second, as mentioned earlier, the NGOs are responsible for the concept development and implementation of the one-day conferences in their regions. And, finally, EmPa has helped foster networks between immigrant NGOs serving different constituencies in the East. It will be interesting to see what kind of internal dynamics these networks develop in the coming years.

Poor record-keeping of racial violence

The government not only continues to downplay the extent of racist and neo-Nazi violence in Germany but has failed to address issues of institutionalised racism within the criminal justice system, as witnessed by the case of Marwa al-Sherbini (see below).

Germany is well behind many other western European countries in developing systems for recording hate crimes with monitoring only introduced in 2008.¹⁷ Part of the problem lies with the post-1945 Cold War approach of the Federal Office for the Protection of the Constitution (*Verfassungsschutz*), which monitors 'political violence' (of both Left and Right). The only crimes ever really considered as racially motivated are those carried out by members of parties of the far Right (even here the political motivation of the crime is what is emphasised in official statistics). In recent years, under the impact of the anti-terrorist laws, the *Verfassungsschutz* has become preoccupied with 'Islamism' and 'foreigner extremism'. This approach also characterises official police statistics, that detail politically-motivated crime, via a special registration system.

Neo-Nazi violence not a priority

Germany is one of a handful of western European countries that has had neo-Nazis elected in regional and local elections.¹⁸ The National Democratic Party of Germany (NPD), that launched a concerted hate campaign during the September 2009 federal and regional elections and was associated with several instances of electoral violence, maintains its strongest base in Saxony, where Marwa al-Sherbini was killed. In Saxony, it has 110 elected representatives at a municipal level and benefits from state funding.

It is deeply worrying that at a time when the neo-Nazi movement is splintering into small dangerous groups based around street violence, the federal minister for family affairs, Kristina Köhler, (CDU) has announced – to the consternation of the SPD, Green Party and Die Linke – that she will use some of the resources set aside for programmes against right-wing extremism for monitoring left-wing and Islamist extremism and criminality.¹⁹ The government's downplaying of extreme-Right violence is all the more worrying as the latest annual report of the *Verfassungsschutz* demonstrates that right-wing activists in Germany are now better organised than they were before, and more prone to violence. The police's PMK registration system also showed a 16 per cent increase in extreme-Right offences, with extreme-Right crimes reaching their highest level since 2001.²⁰

Death of Marwa al-Sherbini

Many of the failures of the criminal justice system were highlighted in the case of Marwa al-Sherbini, a 31-year-old pharmacist from Egypt, murdered by Alexander Wiens, a German citizen of Russian descent, who stabbed her sixteen times as she was giving testimony against him in the Dresden Superior Court. Many NGOs, such as the Intercultural Council and

Civil Courage (Dresden), protested about the murder, and academic bodies such as the Institute for Media Responsibility in Erlangen have sought to place the murder in the context of widespread Islamophobia in public discourse and the growing social hostility towards Muslims. They have also questioned whether institutional neglect in the criminal justice system may have been a contributory factor in Marwa al-Sherbini's tragic death. Even Viecko Bartel, the lawyer of her murderer, has criticised the consequent public debate for failing to reflect on the real causes of the murderer's prejudices which, he believes, lay in media frameworks for reporting Islamic terrorism and the blaming of Islam for constraints on civil rights and freedoms.²¹

Islamophobia and growth of racist stereotypes

The promotion of anti-Muslim stereotypes as well as the media fixation on the veil are at the forefront of the racialisation of the category 'Muslim'. The rabidly Islamophobic internet portals 'Politically Incorrect' (PI) and The Green Pest (*Die Grüne Pest*, a reference to green as the traditional colour of Islam) receive over 50,000 hits each day, and are now under investigation by the *Verfassungsschutz*.²² Both sites are linked to Islamophobic movements including the Christian Evangelical organisation Pax Europa that advertise on PI and which are headed by mainstream politicians like Rene Stadtkewitz from the Berlin CDU. These sites also attack Sinti and Roma, leading the Central Council of Sinti and Roma in Germany to call for an extension on bans of sites that promote child pornography to those that spread race hate.²³ In March 2010, the extreme-Right group Pro NRW (Pro North-Rhine Westphalia)²⁴ hosted the 'Anti-Minaret Convention', where extreme-Right electoral parties from across Europe came together to discuss launching an EU-wide petition against the building of minarets using the European Citizens' Initiative of the Lisbon Treaty.²⁵ To coincide with the Convention, Pro NRW staged a number of vigils in front of mosques throughout the region.²⁶

Thilo Sarrazin (SPD), a former senator for finance in the Berlin Senate and a member of the board of the Federal Bank, was initially rebuked, by the Central Council of Jews in Germany amongst others, for railing against 'Arabs and Turks' and Muslims in general in *Lettre International*. But when the initial furore had died down, charges of incitement to racial hatred were dropped, and the media began to present the views of those who praised Sarrazin for the courage to speak out. Amongst other things Sarrazin had stated that 'I do not have to accept anyone, who lives on the state, rejects this state, does not take care of the education of his children and constantly produces more and more little headscarf-girls. This applies to 70 percent of the Turkish and 90 percent of the Arab population in Berlin.' He also accused Turks and Arabs in Berlin of being, for the most part, 'neither willing to be integrated nor capable of doing so', claiming that they have 'no productive function, other than in

At the moment, neo-Nazi activity seems to be once again on the rise in the East – with the National Democratic Party of Germany (NPD) re-elected to the state parliament in Saxony, and narrowly missing representation in Thuringia. How does the menace of the NPD and the alarming levels of racism impact on EmPa’s work? And do you see any hope for the future?

Dr Esra Erdem: The participants in the EmPa programme are all confronted with and struggle against racism in their regional context. Some of its participants, such as Zeca Schall, a black Christian Democratic politician, are active in political parties and hold mandates. When Mr Schall was attacked by the NPD,¹ there was an immediate wave of solidarity within EmPa. A common statement of support was posted on our website in no time, and individual participants then used this for intervention in their local media.

But the state could certainly act more decisively and support local civic networks that courageously speak up against the extreme Right, raise public awareness through rallies and educational programmes, prevent the NPD from holding events or acquiring real estate in their towns. In Brandenburg, for example, a fruitful collaboration has been established between local policymakers and researchers at the Moses Mendelssohn Center in Potsdam, with both sides taking the fight against right-wing extremism and anti-Semitism in the region very seriously.

Finally could you relate the work of EmPa to the Alternative Voices on Integration project, the aim of which is to draw attention to innovative new projects that challenge racism, break down stereotypes and effect change.

Dr Esra Erdem: In the German context, EmPa is definitely an innovative project in that it fully recognises the legitimacy of immigrants as social and political actors. I think that the European Integration Fund sends a powerful signal by funding EmPa, making a clear commitment to immigrant empowerment. This could certainly be used as leverage for implementing similar programmes in other European countries.

But I also think EmPa could help us broaden our understanding of immigrant empowerment to include , not just secular, but also faith-based civic engagement. This will be the theme of EmPa in 2010. As you know, there is a strong tradition of faith-based community activism in the United States, for example through African-American churches. In continental Europe however, this type of engagement is sometimes eyed with suspicion – particularly when it comes to Muslim communities. If successful, EmPa could provide an important case study for developing a timely European approach to empowerment through faith-based community activism.

NOTES

- 1 In the run-up to the September federal and regional elections, the NPD sent hate mail to thirty candidates with foreign-sounding names, purporting to come from the commissioner for repatriation of foreigners and demanding that they go back to their country of origin within three months. Zeca Schall, who had appeared on Christian Democrat regional election campaign posters, was placed under police protection after receiving hate mail from the NPD which had also publicly described him as a ‘token nxxxxr’ and urged its members in the eastern state to deliver its message to him personally.

the fruit and vegetable trade' and concluding that the Muslim birth-rate posed a threat to Germany.²⁷

Anti-racist organisations sidelined

At the grassroots level groups providing support for the victims of racist violence face a decrease in state funding as well as increased interference from federal government which argues that if projects want to continue receiving state funding they should provide counselling to the victims of Left violence, as well as the German victims of foreigner violence and racism. It is worrying that promoting anti-racist or anti-fascist values can be deemed a threat to the authorities.²⁸ Dr Sabine Schiffer of the Institute of Media Responsibility (Institut für Medienverantwortung) in Erlangen was prosecuted for questioning whether court negligence could have been a contributory factor in the death of Marwa al-Sherbini.

Police: religious profiling and deaths in custody

There is no independent police complaints authority in Germany, as in the UK, and it is very difficult for NGOs to raise issues of institutionalised negligence or racism in the police, as witnessed by the case of Marwa al-Sherbini. In reaction to this, in 2009, an independent inquiry was formed to establish the exact reasons why Oury Jalloh, an asylum seeker from Sierra Leone, came to die in a fire in a police cell in Dessau, Germany, in January 2005.²⁹ At the first trial in Dessau, only negligence charges were brought and all police officers were acquitted for wrongfully causing death. There were mixed emotions when the German Federal Court overturned the lower court's acquittal, as many people strongly believed that serious criminal charges should have been brought. The Federal Court cited conflicting accounts of the circumstances that led up to his death as a reason for accepting the appeal. There were calls for police officers to be prosecuted for giving false evidence.

Religious profiling outside mosques continued to be a problem in Lower Saxony, and intense pressure was placed on the interior minister Uwe Schünemann to stop the mass police identity checks that took place regularly after prayers.³⁰

Countering discrimination

In 2006, the German government failed to pass the German Anti-Discrimination Act, which would have carried EU directives into German legislation, leading the legal expert Marcus Lippe to state that 'in the field of anti-discrimination politics, Germany is still a developing country'.³¹ But while some aspects of EU directives have been incorporated into the German General Act on Equal Treatment (*Allgemeines Gleichbehandlungsgesetz* AGG), the European Commission is far from happy. It has issued treaty infringement proceedings against the federal government for its failure to fully incorporate the Racial Equality and Employment Directives and, unless improvements are made, the federal government will

face a penalty notice and fines.

The German Confederation of Trades Unions (DGB)³² and the Anti-Discrimination Association (ADVD)³³ are also deeply critical of the ineffective nature of the anti-discrimination law, pointing out that the Federal Anti-Discrimination Office (Antidiskriminierungsstelle ADS), located within the federal ministry of the family, has largely failed to take up cases, support the victims of discrimination, or cooperate with other bodies working in the field of anti-discrimination. Even the advisory board of the ADS has criticised the federal agency's work. The ADVD has also called for more anti-discrimination bureaux to be set up across Germany and argues that NGOs should also have the power to file civil suits as many individual victims of discrimination do not come forward because of the financial burden of pursuing a case.

Another disturbing development has been the attitude of employers anxious to evade their obligations under the law. It was only in August 2009 that, as a result of NGO pressure and under threat of a legal action by the data protection agency, a database known as the 'Archive for the General Equal Treatment Act' (AGG) run by the law firm, Gleiss Lutz, was closed down. For three years, employers had been able to consult this archive for information on employees who had taken their bosses to court for discrimination.³⁴

Restrictions on hijab lead to gender and religious discrimination

Since the Federal Constitutional Court ruling of 2003, that upheld the constitutional ability of states to enact laws imposing restrictions on religious clothing,³⁵ at least half of Germany's states have introduced restrictions on women wearing the headscarf in public employment, particularly in schools.³⁶ In 2009, Human Rights Watch (HRW) stated that such laws and policies contravened Germany's international obligations to guarantee individuals the right to freedom of religion and equality before the law and that such laws (either explicitly or in their application) discriminated against Muslim women, excluding them from teaching and other public sector employment on the basis of their faith. Some anti-discrimination NGOs are now taking up cases of women affected, arguing that the civil service ban runs contrary to the Law on Equal Treatment (AGG) that forbids discrimination on grounds of religion, and because of this contradiction makes it even more difficult to persuade the private sector to be non-discriminatory when the public sector can lawfully discriminate on religious grounds.

In its survey, *Discrimination in the name of neutrality*, HRW documented the escalating discrimination against Muslim women. Between April and November 2008, it interviewed thirty-four Muslim women resident in Germany affected by state restrictions on the headscarf. They described how, after sometimes years or decades working as teachers without disputes

Germany: freedom to speak on racism under threat

By Liz Fekete



First published on IRR News, 23 February 2010

In Germany, an anti-racist academic faces prosecution for questioning whether court negligence could have been a contributory factor in the case of Marwa al-Sherbini, who was stabbed to death in a Dresden courtroom in July 2009.

Some of Germany's foremost academics, journalists, peace campaigners, trades unionists and politicians have formed the Action Group against Racism and for Freedom of Expression and Academic Freedom (Aktionsbündnis gegen Rassismus und für Meinungs- und Wissenschaftsfreiheit). The alliance is concerned about the implications for academic freedom posed by the prosecution of Dr Sabine Schiffer,

Director of the Institute for Media Responsibility in Erlangen. Dr Schiffer is accused of slandering a police officer; she has been summonsed to appear before Erlangen Municipal Court on 24 March and, if convicted, could face a €6,000 fine or two months imprisonment.

Marwa al-Sherbini: the questions continue

Marwa al-Sherbini, a 31-year-old pharmacist from Egypt, was three months pregnant when she was murdered by Alexander Wiens, a German citizen of Russian descent, who was known to be a xenophobe and neo-nazi sympathiser. Marwa al-Sherbini was appearing as a witness against Wiens in a case that arose from an incident in a local playground in which he racially abused her and called her an 'Islamist whore' on account of wearing the headscarf. She was giving her testimony in the Dresden Superior Court when Wiens lept up and stabbed her sixteen times, shouting 'you have no right to live'. In the chaos that followed, Marwa al-Sherbini's husband, Elwi Ali Oka was shot and seriously wounded by a police officer who mistook him for the assailant. The officer was initially suspended but an internal police inquiry cleared him of any wrongdoing. It is this police officer who has launched the action against Dr Schiffer whom he accuses of slander.

The background to the prosecution lies in attempts by German academics and some media voices to raise further questions about the killing, and to ask, in particular, whether the criminal justice system bears some responsibility for the tragic death. As one of Germany's foremost experts on issues of media racism, Dr Sabine Schiffer had also questioned whether media portrayals of Muslims could have influenced the police officer who shot Elwi Ali Oka. It is for publicly airing her views that Dr Schiffer faces prosecution.

When, on 11 November 2009, Wiens was found guilty of murder and given the harshest possible sentence under German law (life sentence with no eligibility for early release), many in Germany believed that justice had been done, and that the investigation was closed. Yet major questions on the attitudes of the authorities remained. Could it be that institutional negligence played a role in Marwa al-Sherbini's tragic death? Could it be that an independent inquiry would be the best way to establish the true facts about culpability? Was it acceptable that the police and the courts investigated themselves and cleared themselves of failing Marwa al-Sherbini and her family?

Questioning the system

Questions asked of the criminal justice system and the media include:

Was institutional neglect a contributory factor in the death of Marwa al-Sherbini? Dresden, the capital of Saxony, is symbolically an important city for German neo-nazis (the biggest neo-nazi rally in Europe is held here annually) and it is in the State of Saxony that the neo-nazi National Democratic Party of Germany (which Wiens sympathised with) has its highest support. (In June 2009 local and regional elections, it trebled its seats to a total of seventy-six). Yet despite this, and the fact that there has been a long history of racist violence in Dresden, no attempts were made to place the court case in an appropriate court room where Wiens would have been separated from the witness (he was standing less than two metres away from Marwa al-Sherbini, when he sprang up and attacked her). It also transpired that Wiens had carried the murder weapon, a kitchen knife, to court in his rucksack. He was not searched, despite the fact that he had made repeated threats against Marwa al-Sherbini at previous court hearings.

Why was no independent investigation launched into the shooting of al-Sherbini's husband, Elwi Ali Okaz? The police officer was initially suspended pending investigation but was reinstated in December 2009. The public prosecutor's office in Dresden announced that no charges would be brought, on the basis of an internal investigation. There is no independent police complaints authority in Germany, as there is in the UK.

Why did the media fail to report the murder as motivated by racism and Islamophobia? The murder of Marwa al-Sherbini barely drew any domestic media attention until it attracted widespread media coverage in Egypt and the Middle East.

or disciplinary problems, their employments and qualifications were suddenly in question. Some have been disciplined and in some cases dismissed. In other cases, Muslim trainee teachers have been denied employment on completion of their education. This has led some women to leave their home state or leave Germany altogether, to prolong maternity and other leave from their employment, or to leave teaching. Anti-discrimination NGOs concur with HRW's observation that few Muslim women facing discrimination take their employer to court.³⁷

Integrating Islam

German Islam Conference (Deutsche Islamkonferenz – DIK)

Islam – the second largest religion in Germany – is not an officially-recognised religion. Criticisms are mounting over the German Islam Conference, which has had four official meetings over the last three years (it also comprises several working groups). The great hopes that were unleashed in 2007, when the federal minister of the Interior, Wolfgang Schäuble inaugurated the Islam Forum, and made the first declaration on the part of a leading German politician that Islam was part of Germany, have not been met.³⁸ Germany has the second largest Muslim population in Europe and the conference aimed to address domestic relations between the majority population and Islam in Germany, define an equal status for Islam with other religions, leading to a new social contract, and eventually form a new representative body for German Muslims. But the interior minister says that while this remains the long-term aim, certain formalities have to be fulfilled for the German constitution to recognise Islam as an official religious community, including the ability to provide teachers to give children education in state schools.

Today, the criticism – much of which comes from DIK participants themselves – centres on the government's top-down approach and the lack of transparency and genuine dialogue with organisations represented at the DIK. The federal ministry of the interior decides not only who participates but determines what issues are discussed, selects chairpersons for the working groups and finalises all protocols. While half of the delegates are representatives of the main Muslim organisations in Germany, the other fifty per cent represent government-selected 'experts', and include a large number of ex-Muslims who seem to have been selected precisely because they have made hostile public statements against Islam. No woman who wears the headscarf is represented at the Conference, leading to a protest from the artist Feridun Zaimoğlu, who resigned from the DIK asking that his position be filled by a headscarf-wearing Muslim woman – which did not happen.

Academic studies commissioned by the government, sometimes as a part of the Islam Conference, have also come in for criticism. The Brettfeld/Wetzels

report, cited earlier, was presented for discussion at the working group 'Security and Islamism'. In 2009, the Islam Conference also commissioned a supposedly broad representative survey of 'Muslim life in Germany', which has been criticised by the Muslim organisation Insaan for supporting a political agenda which includes certain Muslim umbrella organisations while isolating others.

The new government expressed the aim to continue with the Islam Conference. In March 2010, four organisations represented at the Islam Conference announced they were reconsidering their involvement in the forum after the government decision to exclude the Council of Islam, on the grounds of the strong involvement of the Turkish-German organisation Islamische Gemeinschaft Milli Görüs, (IGMG, which is linked to the Turkish Refah party and its offshoots) and is said to represent as many as 7 per cent of Germany's Muslims. In May 2010, the Central Council of Muslims (ZDM) and the Islamic Council announced that as the Islam Conference had no concrete goals and did little to tackle Islamophobia, they were withdrawing from it.

Asylum seekers and undocumented migrants

Detention and deportation

In 2009-2010, the government came under pressure from Die Linke and the Green party to provide details on the growing number of forced deportations of an ever-growing list of national categories, including Iraqis.³⁹ Refugee support groups have also criticised politicians for Germany's readmission agreements with Kosovo (of 14,000 refugees threatened with deportation 10,000 are Roma who sought refuge in Germany in the 1990s), and Syria (despite the 2001 death of the Kurd Hussein Daoud, following his torture at the hands of the Syrian security services). In December 2009 deportations to Syria were temporarily halted, after evidence that one deportee had been tortured on return to Damascus.⁴⁰ FRONTEX is coordinating a growing number of group deportations on chartered flights from Dusseldorf, and the Jesuit Refugee Service points to failures in the 1996 Germany-Vietnam readmission agreement. It says that seventy-five percent of all immigrant detainees held for more than two months in Berlin are Vietnamese and criticises the fact that there is no independent monitoring of deportations from Berlin to Vietnam, suggesting that 100 people were deported from Berlin (on a chartered flight) in circumstances where minimum humanitarian standards may not have been met.⁴¹

Moratorium on deportations to Syria

In December 2009, the federal ministry of the interior called on the interior ministers of the different states to temporarily suspend deportations to Syria. In October 2009, AI sent out an appeal for urgent

Indeed, it was initially reported as the result of a neighbourhood dispute, with headlines such as 'Murder over quarrel over swing'. Germany has high levels of racist and neo-nazi violence, in which scores of people have died. (The IRR European Race Audit documented eight such murders in 2007-2008.) Saxony is an area of known-neo nazi activity. How was it, then, that reporting of racist violence could be such a low priority for the media?

It was the attempt to kick-start debate on the third of these questions – media frameworks that might perpetuate racism – that drew the authority's attention to Dr Schiffer. Her previous work had focussed on media images of Muslims that promote 'scare scenarios'. In a number of media interviews and newspaper articles, she expressed dismay at the way the murder was covered in the press and called for an expert opinion to be obtained as to whether Elwi Ali Okaz was shot because of his appearance, pointing out 'it is an acceptable assumption that such images ... could bring about a spontaneous mistake as to possible perpetrators and victims in a situation where there is not time for calm deliberation and objective examination of the facts'. Crucially, Schiffer, never accused the police officer who carried out the shooting of having a fundamentally racist attitude or of acting intentionally. Nor did she name him. As she explained in a press release of 7 August, 'I merely wanted to note the consequences of media portrayals and admonish society as a whole.' Journalists at the *Berliner Zeitung*, also concerned at the failings of the criminal justice system, point out that it would have made more sense for the police officer involved to file charges against the judges whose failures placed him in an impossible situation where he had to make a snap judgement as to whom to shoot.

Because of the summary penalty order, Dr Schiffer is now forbidden to make any further public statements about the investigation of the murder. This is one of the things that irks the Action Group, which sees the case against Schiffer as an example of the use of legal instruments to intimidate and censor those who voice an opinion in the media and, where issues of racism are concerned, close down on freedom of speech. The group believes that if the prosecution against Schiffer is allowed to stand, then all those who engage in academic research on issues of racism could be prevented from voicing an opinion. 'It should not be illegal to put forward a thesis, to make suggestions in public, in order to improve our insights into how racism works.'

More criticisms of the criminal justice system

This is a valid point, as are the Action Group's criticisms of the court and criminal justice system for failing to establish a wider responsibility that went beyond the actions of the actual murderer. Both these points need to be put in context. Germany has a long history of neo-nazi violence, with victims ranging from the homeless, left-wingers, asylum seekers, migrants, black people and other non-white German citizens. Case after case, from the Lübeck fire (1996),¹ to the hounding to death of the Algerian asylum seeker, Farid Guendoul (2000),² to the death in disturbing circumstances of the British Jewish student Jeremiah Duggan (2003)³ have revealed a pattern of neglect – what we in the UK might call institutionalised racism – by both the police and the public prosecution service. This pattern ranges from the bringing of inappropriate charges (manslaughter is often substituted for murder), flawed prosecutions (public prosecutors have been known to refuse to allow evidence of racist background to be heard), lenient sentencing as well as failure to develop a victim's perspective on extreme-right violence. (There has been criticism, for instance, of the lack of compensation for the victims of racism.) And it is not just academics who are suffering from the knee-jerk reaction of police officers to file suits for slander. Amnesty International has documented a pattern whereby those who allege police racism find themselves served with a counter-accusation of insulting and slandering police officers.

One can only hope that this misguided court case against Dr Sabine Schiffer will finally bring issues of institutionalised racism within the German criminal justice system to the fore.

POSTSCRIPT

On 24 March 2010, Erlangen Municipal Court dismissed the allegation of slander against the police officer and held that Schiffer's right to criticise the police was in line with the constitutionally-guaranteed rights of freedom of speech and freedom of expression. But as the police officer has appealed the verdict, the case continues.

NOTES

- 1 In 1996, ten asylum seekers, mostly African and including six children, died following arson at a refugee hostel in Lübeck. Despite the fact that neo-nazis were seen leaving the scene of the crime, no one was ever convicted, although two unsuccessful prosecutions were brought against a Lebanese asylum seeker who lived at the hostel.
- 2 In February 1999, 28-year-old Farid Guendoul severed an artery and bled to death when he leapt through a glass door in a bid to flee a gang of eleven neo-nazis who were chasing him through the streets of Guben, Spree-Neisse region.
- 3 Jeremiah Duggan, a 22-year-old British Jewish student, was found dead on a dual carriageway in Wiesbaden shortly after attending an anti-war conference which, unknown to him, was organised by an extreme-Right anti-Semitic organisation. The family do not accept the findings of the police investigation into his death.

action on behalf of Khaled Kenjo, a 31-year-old Kurd who was detained by Syrian security services shortly after being forcibly returned to Syria from Germany after his asylum claim was rejected and charged with knowingly spreading false exaggerated information abroad. AI said that he was at grave risk of torture, pointing out that his brother had died of a brain haemorrhage in 2004, a few months after he was beaten by members of Syrian security forces while being held incommunicado.⁴² In January 2010, the website Support Kurds in Syria reported that Kenjo had been subjected to torture, including having his feet and other parts of his body beaten with cables, but had managed to flee, illegally crossing the border from Syria to Turkey where he has once again applied for asylum. In Syria, his interrogators questioned him as to his role in a demonstration in Berlin held to protest the readmission agreement between the Federal Republic of Germany and Syria.⁴³

Two suicides in Hamburg

The Hamburg Refugee Advice Centre (Hamburg Flüchtlingsrat) drew attention to the suicides of two asylum seekers in two months. In March 2010, the refugee support organisation called for an independent investigation into the suicide of David M, a young asylum seeker from Georgia, which they believe was a result of institutional neglect, as well as the systematic denial of the young asylum seekers' legal rights whilst in detention. The asylum seeker, whose age was disputed, became so desperate that he hanged himself at the Hahnöfersand juvenile detention centre in Hamburg on 7 March 2010. He had been on a two-week hunger strike to protest his deportation to Poland under the Dublin II regulation. In response to the tragic death, the Hamburg senator of the interior ordered that in future no juvenile asylum seeker should be detained in a deportation centre.⁴⁴

But there was shock in April when, once again in Hamburg, a 34-year-old Indonesian woman, identified only as Yeni P, was found dead in her cell, where she hanged herself after receiving a deportation order.⁴⁵

'Tolerated' migrants' limited rights challenged

There could be anything from 100,000 to 250,000 undocumented migrants living in Germany.

Amidst much criticism of the limited scope of the government's 2007 residence reform, Pro Asyl has called for a permanent solution to the precarious situation faced by so-called tolerated foreigners. Only around 31,000 migrants (mostly failed asylum seekers) have benefited from the 2007 *Bleiberechtsregelung* that was meant to aid those whose request for asylum had been turned down and who had lived in Germany for several years, offering them a probationary right of residence which would allow them to integrate into society and then seek permanent residence. This was meant to help those asylum seekers with 'tolerated status' (*Duldung* – a special status for those who cannot be deported which allows them to remain in Germany on humanitarian grounds, but with limited rights) who had to extend their leave every three months. The new regulation was meant to be open to rejected asylum seekers, who could not be deported, who had lived in Germany for more than eight years (six for those with children), had no criminal record, were proficient in the German language, could prove continuous employment for two years, and would have no recourse to public funds.⁴⁶

Youth without Borders (Jugendliche ohne Grenzen, JoG) also called on the government to address the problem of young people who had not lived in Germany long enough to apply for the *Bleiberechtsregelung*. It pointed to the despair and alienation felt by many young refugees who, on completion of their higher education, were denied access to work, university education or training opportunities. JoG is among organisations pressing for a reform of the law so that parents can send their children to school without fear of detection and deportation. The new coalition government has agreed to end the obligation placed on schools to inform the aliens department if the parents of children registering at a school do not have valid residence permits. The government's expert advisory board on migration and integration welcomed this move, but asked that it be extended to health practitioners.⁴⁷

Special thanks to Conni Gußner, Biplab Basu at ReachOut and Dr. Riem Spielhaus and Dr. Andreas Hieronymus for their advice in preparing key sections of this report.

INTERVIEW



Creating a support network for young refugees

By Liz Fekete

First published on IRR News, 6 May 2010

An interview with Mohammed Jouni, a 24-year-old refugee from Lebanon who lives in Germany and is active in the Berlin branch of Youth without Borders (JoG, Jugendliche ohne Grenzen).

Liz Fekete: Could you tell us when and why JoG was formed?

Mohammed Jouni: It all really goes back to 2002, when an initiative for the right to stay was launched (*Liederberinitiative*) in Berlin. This initiative arose because of the suffering that so many young people were experiencing because they were living in Germany without basic rights, due to their 'tolerated status' (*Duldung*).¹ The *Duldung* affects around 150,000 people and takes the form of a special permit (usually renewable every three months) which does not give full residence status but provides a temporary stay on deportation and compels refugees to live in camps (with reduced benefits), prohibits them from working or getting higher education or from leaving the district or city of registration. For many young refugees² with 'tolerated status', the only point of contact they have with a sympathetic adult is with a social worker. So they would come to the BBZ (*Beratungs- und Betreuungszentrum*), which is a consultation and supervision centre for young refugees and migrants, and ask their social worker for help, particularly to deal with the despair they feel when they finish school and find that they can neither study or work. And the social worker would tell them that as there were many other young people in Berlin facing the same problems, they should come together to work as a group. And this is how the initiative for the right to stay was formed.

From this small group, the initiative grew. First, a meeting was sought with the interior minister (Berlin) where the young refugees presented their problems. In Germany a conference of all the sixteen states interior ministers (*Innenministerkonferenz der Länder IMK*) takes place twice a year and the first of these bi-annual meetings was held in 2005 in Stuttgart, and it was decided that an unofficial parallel event organised by refugees should be held. And it was in Stuttgart, that the group 'Here to Stay' (*HierGeblieben*) was initiated by the BBZ, the FIB (a refugee initiative in Brandenburg), refugee councils including Pro Asyl, as well as Banda Agita (a young theatre group attached to Germany's oldest theatre company, Grips). And then, at the next IMK meeting at Karlsruhe, we held our first parallel youth refugee conference. Young refugees from each of Germany's sixteen States (*Länder*) came. And it was here that we launched Youth without Borders. And now in almost every German state, there is a campaign organising around the slogan 'Here to Stay'.

These parallel unofficial events around the Conference of Ministers sound really interesting. Do they take place every year, and what kind of meetings and activities do you organise?

Since 2005, we have had many such parallel youth conferences – in 2007 it was just outside Berlin, and this year both conferences will be held in May and November in Hamburg. (We do invite refugees from other European countries, but due to lack of papers it is difficult for them to come.) One of the actions of the youth conference is to elect, each year, a 'Minister for Deportation'. We make our choice on the basis of evidence such as: how many deportations are carried out in each state; what is the situation in the camps; and whether young refugees are provided possibilities for study, training, work or further education (the law differs from state to state). Most recently, we elected Uwe Schünemann, the Christian Democrat (CDU) interior minister for Lower Saxony where there has been an increase in violent deportation raids, the use of force against women and children and where a Kurdish refugee was deported to Syria and tortured. When we announced the award, Schünemann responded by saying he was proud to receive such an award because it proved that he defends the law. But two days later, he issued a press release, clarifying his comments. For us, this proved that our nomination had had an effect – he was beginning to worry about the things being said about him.

How did you personally get involved with Youth without Borders? Have you had the same struggle to access education?

I had finished school and was searching for a possibility to study, here in Berlin. The foreigners' department said this would not be possible, and told me that if I wanted to study I should go back to Lebanon as it was now safe to return. But I had no documents, and the Lebanese embassy would not give me a passport. So, like the other young refugees I went to the BBZ and from there went on to join JoG. Eventually I got a 'probationary right of residence', and I am now studying to be a nurse.

Tell us about the internet projects you are working on in JoG, and why they are needed? We have heard about this exciting new project 'birds of immigrants', are you involved in that?

It's obvious that young people living in the camps have few opportunities and something needed to be done. We started by creating an information document for those in the camps. Then we felt that we needed to go further, to find a better

NOTES

- 1 Much of the information for this report was taken from the internet journal MiGAZIN, which was set up to promote the political, social and cultural participation of migrants in Germany and is an important source of information on issues of integration.
- 2 At this election, the federal parliament saw an increase of MPs from an 'immigration background' (total fifteen, previously four). Most of the new MPs represent either the Green Party, the Left Party or the Social Democrats.
- 3 While terms like 'immigrant' and 'German of migrant origin' may seem old-fashioned in the UK context, in Germany, where very few communities are officially recognised as 'ethnic minorities', such terms are widely used in public discourse, even to describe the children and grandchildren of the original post-war migrants and guest workers. Whereas migrant support groups are critical of official descriptors, they point out that they are an improvement on the past, when those who were recognisable as coming from the global South, even those who were German citizens or born in Germany, were officially described as *Ausländer* (foreigners). Some activist-oriented organisations, frustrated by the terminology that constantly marks them out in terms of their migrant origins, are increasingly turning to the US term 'people of color'.
- 4 BBC News Online, 23 November 2009.
- 5 For a full critique of the study see Sarah Dornhof, 'Germany: constructing a sociology of Islamist radicalisation', in *Race & Class*, Vol. 50, no. 4, April-June 2009.
- 6 <http://www.berlin-institut.org/studien/ungenutzte-potenziale.html>
- 7 The poor teaching of German as a second language, as confirmed by the findings of the PISA report, as well as the banding of children at an early age, all contribute to a situation where nearly one-third of German Turks have no secondary school diploma. The rigid German educational system reproduces inequality, with teenagers' performance in international tests more strongly correlated with family background than in almost any other country. Thus, a child born into a working-class family is unlikely to go on to university, and only 14 per cent of German Turks, over-represented in the working class, qualify for university. See 'Much to learn. Germany's education system is a work in progress', *The Economist*, 13 March 2010.
- 8 <http://www.migazin.de/2009/03/18/bundesverband-fur-wohnen-und-stadtentwicklung-kritisiert-integrationsstudie-des-berlin-instituts/>
- 9 http://www.sociovision.de/uploads/tx_mpdownloadcenter/MigrantenMilieus_Zentrale_Ergebnisse_09122008.pdf
- 10 Sinus Sociovision Survey <http://www.antidiskriminierungsstelle.de/bmfsfj/generator/RedaktionBMFSFJ/RedaktionADS/PDF>
- 11 As cited by *The Local* (Germany), 14 February 2010.
- 12 <http://www.migazin.de/2009/10/26/die-integrationspolitik-der-schwarz-gelben-regierungskoalition/all/1/>
- 13 <http://www.migazin.de/2010/01/21/staatsangehoerigkeit-optionsmodell-gerat-ins-wanken/all/1/>
- 14 <http://www.bmbf.de/de/14070.php>
- 15 See Forum Menschenrechte, 'Eliminating racist discrimination in Germany: Parallel report addressed to the Committee on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination of the United Nations', January 2008.
- 16 Common Declaration of NGOs on the National Action Plan of the federal government for fighting racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia, antisemitism and related intolerance (NAPgR (*Gemeinsame Erklärung von Nichtregierungsorganisationen zum Nationalen Aktionsplan der Bundesregierung zur Bekämpfung von Rassismus, Rassendiskriminierung, Fremdenfeindlichkeit, Antisemitismus und darauf bezogene Intoleranz*).
- 17 ENAR-Shadow Report 2008, <http://online.imir.de/?q=content/schattenbericht-2008>
- 18 The Amadeu Antonio Foundation, in conjunction with the journal *Stern*, provides a regular web-based update on some of the most serious far-Right related racist incidents that take place in Germany. See <http://www.mut-gegen-rechte-gewalt.de/>
- 19 <http://www.migazin.de/2009/12/08/programme-gegen-rechtsextremismus-splitten/>
- 20 Germany, federal ministry of the interior, press release, 20 April 2009, as cited by *RAXEN Bulletin* 1, February-April 2009.
- 21 <http://www.migazin.de/2009/12/10/im-dresdener-mordfall-hat-man-die-chance-vertan-nach-den-ursachen-zu-fragen/all/1/>
- 22 See Yasemin Shoorman and Riem Spielhaus, 'The concept of the Muslim enemy in the public discourse' in Jocelyne Cesari, ed., *Muslims in the West after 9/11: Religion, politics and Law*, Routledge, 2010.
- 23 <http://www.heise.de/newsticker/meldung/Ausweitung-der-Web-Sperren-auf-Hasspropaganda-gefordert-6147.html>
- 24 Pro NRW grew out of the Pro Cologne movement, an extreme-Right group that in 2008 had five seats on the local council in Cologne.
- 25 If the signatures of one million EU citizens are gathered from a significant number of member states, then the petitioners will be able to present a legislative or treaty amendment and invite the Commission to act upon it. See Liz Fekete, 'Direct democracy, racism and the extreme Right', *IRR European Briefing Paper* no. 2, February 2010.
- 26 A small community in the western German town of Völklingen is currently lobbying for a referendum in order to stop the local Muslim community from adding an 8-metre minaret to its mosque. The local newspaper, the *Saarbrücker Zeitung*, backs the campaign. See 'Germany's very own minaret debate turns nasty', *Spiegel Online*, 2 May 2010.
- 27 <http://www.zeit.de/gesellschaft/zeitgeschehen/2009-10/sarrazin-aeusserung-ruecktritt?page=all>
- 28 In February 2010, members of the broad-based anti-Nazi alliance that organised a counter-rally to the neo-Nazi commemoration of the 65th anniversary of the 1945 Allied bombing of Dresden, were treated as the equivalent

way of reaching young refugees in the camps – through the creation of an information portal. We knew how isolated the youth were living in these camps, and that there were few possibilities to talk to other young people about their lives. Because of this, we felt that ‘blogging’ had to be a major feature of the internet portal. The blogs meant that everyone could write in their own way about what they were thinking and what they were experiencing. At first, we thought, no, we can’t do this, we don’t have the experience of working on internet projects, but quickly we came to see how important it was for young refugees to connect with each other via the internet. The internet not only allows them to write about things immediately as they feel them, via the blog, but it’s sometimes the only way they can stay in touch with their families and friends – it’s their only way to communicate. Now, Salina Stroux and Sara Pfau, who used to work in the refugee camps in Germany, are working with young refugees in Greece and they have expanded the project to other European countries through the ‘birds of immigrants’.

Let’s return to the question of the legal situation of young refugees who have lived in Germany for a number of years. Are things getting any better for them? We heard that the federal government had initiated a major residence reform in 2007, aimed at alleviating the suffering of those with tolerated status by offering them a route to permanent residence.

When we heard about the residence reform (*Bleiberechtsregelung*), we thought, that’s great. When the reform was first announced we were told that those who had lived in Germany for eight years (or six years if they were families) would be eligible for a residence permit. But in the months that followed, the authorities began to find more and more loopholes. One reason given for exclusion is if you have committed a crime. And this is something that affects a great many young people, often because of past convictions under the Law of Obligatory Residence (*Residenzpflicht*). This law affects many young refugees as it prohibits ‘tolerated refugees’ from leaving the district or city of registration. And as it is a criminal offence to leave your state, punishable by a fine, or ninety days in prison if you can’t pay this fine, many young refugees now find themselves excluded from the residence reform. In our group a lot of us young people found that we would be excluded from the residence permit because we had a criminal offence arising out of the Law of Obligatory Residence. Now we find that we can’t make an application for the right to stay.

What is life like for young refugees if they have no right to stay in Germany?

The most important thing to realise is that these young people have no prospects. If you are German, you go to school and you know that when you finish school you will go from school to higher education or university, or work, or into training, and you can make a plan. But if all you have is a paper which states ‘temporary stay on deportation’ then your reality is somewhat different – you live knowing that you could be deported any day. So this means that many young refugees ask themselves, what is the point of going to school, if I have no future. They lose all motivation to carry on and this is a very horrible thing for a young person.

But if these young people find their life so hopeless, how can Youth without Borders reach them?

It is true that a lot of young people have given up on themselves; they have no motivation. But we have to try to get through to them. In this respect, the work of the BBZ is very important to us. Youth without Borders could not be effective if we didn’t have an agency such as this to protect us. As young people, we don’t need adults to tell us what to do, but we do need adults within organisations to protect us, and help us in difficult situations. The BBZ allows us to reach out to young people we do not already know. A lot of young people are referred to this agency by their school and through the BBZ they hear about us. And when they come to us, we try to interest them in our work, give them some responsibilities, and in that way challenge their lack of motivation.

It sounds easy when I put it like that but it’s very difficult. Some come, and then they go away, maybe for a year, and then they come back – and we welcome them. We have developed with social workers a project for young people who have committed a crime, and the project also involves their parents. The parents blame their sons for damaging their future in Germany and don’t understand why they have committed a crime. Our project offers support to the parents, and to the children, and provides a forum where we help the children explain themselves to their parents. A lot of young people feel ashamed of the situation they find themselves in here in Germany, but they can’t talk about their feelings of shame. Helping them express themselves – going to court with them to show them that they have support and they are not alone – this is more important to me than the parallel conferences. Yes, the conferences provide publicity – but the most important thing is that we create the opportunities to support one another.

NOTES

- 1 *Duldung* is a special status whereby those who cannot be deported are allowed to remain in Germany on humanitarian grounds, but with limited rights. Those with ‘tolerated status’ have to extend their leave every three months, a practice known as *Kettenduldung*.
- 2 The term ‘refugees’ is used here generically to describe anyone who has fled from their own country and is seeking protection in Germany.

- of the far Right and targeted by the public prosecutor's officers, who, on the grounds that the proposed counter-rally amounted to an illegal public incitement to demolish an assembly, ordered raids during which computers and hard discs were seized. Green Party and Left Party politicians also faced charges arising from their support for the anti-Nazi rally. See *Der Spiegel*, 11 February 2010. In the latest development, the German Police Union (DPoI) has called for the Social Democrat deputy speaker of the German parliament, Wolfgang Thiere, to step down after he took part in a sit-down protest against a neo-Nazi march on May Day 2010.
- 29 The independent inquiry can be contacted by email at: OJKommission@gmx.de
- 30 <http://www.migazin.de/2010/02/03/verdachtsunabh%C3%A4ngige-moscheekontrollen-werden-eingestellt/>
- 31 Marcus Lippe, 'Reports from a developing country: on the failure of the anti-discrimination law and the perspectives thereafter', *Stetwatch*, Vol. 16, no. 3/4, May-July 2006.
- 32 DGB statement 16 July 2009, as cited by *RAXEN Bulletin* no. 1, February-April 2009.
- 33 ADVD press release, 17 July 2009 as cited by *RAXEN Bulletin* no. 1, February-April 2009. Dr. Andreas Hieronymus, interview with Frontal21, ZDF TV channel, 16 June 2009; <http://frontal21.zdf.de/ZDFde/inhalt/1/0,1872,7595329,00.html>
- 34 Press release of the ADVD, 21 August 2009.
- 35 The case was brought by Fereshta Ludin, who applied for a teaching job in Baden-Württemberg in 1998 but was rejected owing to her insistence on wearing the headscarf while teaching, which the supervisory school authority of Stuttgart deemed made her lacking in personal aptitude, and unsuitable and unable to perform the duties of a public servant in accordance with the German Basic Law. For a full analysis of the Federal Court ruling and its implications see Human Rights Watch, 'Discrimination in the name of neutrality: headscarf bans for teachers and civil servants in Germany', 2009.
- 36 Eight states – Baden-Württemberg, Bavaria, Berlin, Bremen, Hesse, Lower Saxony, North Rhine-Westphalia and Saarland – have enacted legislation and policies to prohibit teachers in public schools from wearing certain visible items of religious clothing and symbols. Two states, Hesse and Berlin, have applied the ban more widely, covering many civil service roles. Prohibition of religious clothing and symbols is normally made on grounds of the need for 'neutrality' amongst civil servants, yet the majority of the states with bans (Baden-Württemberg, Bavaria, Hesse, North Rhine-Westphalia and Saarland) allow some form of exemption for Christianity and Western cultural traditions. See Human Rights Watch, 'Discrimination in the name of neutrality: headscarf bans for teachers and civil servants in Germany', 2009.
- 37 However, one case heard in April 2010 involves a medical secretary in Dortmund, who was dismissed from her post in December 2009 after several years of employment, because she started to wear the headscarf. The ground for her dismissal was that if she wore the headscarf she could not win the trust of patients. The anti-discrimination network of the Turkish Union in Berlin-Brandenburg (ADNB of the TBB) also finds itself taking up more cases of discrimination against Muslim women, including the case of a Muslim doctor who, following a successful interview, was offered a position as an assistant doctor in a hospital in southern Germany only to have the offer withdrawn by the church body that administers the hospital on the grounds that a doctor wearing a headscarf violated the hospital's ethical and loyalty guidelines. The case has also been taken up by the Open Society Justice Initiative.
- 38 Shortly after the June 2009 celebration of the 60th anniversary of the German constitution, Schäuble was forced to apologise to the Muslim community when it emerged that his ministry had omitted to send invitations to any representative of the Muslim community to attend the event.
- 39 The statistics eventually released revealed that there were 7,289 deportations in 2009 (including Dublin transfers). 263 deportations failed, 164 due to the resistance of the deportee. Forty-one deportations were aborted on medical grounds. In 58 cases, the pilot refused to take the deportee on board. See 'Reply from the federal government following questions from the Left Party in the Bundestag' (Antwort der Bundesregierung auf eine kleine Anfrage der Linken im Bundestag). See <http://dipbt.bundestag.de/dip21/btd/17/006/1700644.pdf>
- 40 See Liz Fekete, 'The deportation machine: Europe, asylum and human rights', Institute of Race Relations, 2005, p.30. Pro Asyl, 'Auswärtiges Amt legt ad hoc-Bericht zur abschiebungsrelevanten Lage in Syrien vor'.
- 41 Jesuit Refugee Service Dispatches, no. 261, 17 June 2009 as cited by *International Defence Monitor*, no. 8, September 2009
- 42 AI UA: 267/09 Index: MDE 24/025/2009
- 43 <http://www.kurdwatch.org> – Newsletter – 28 January 2010.
- 44 See website of Hamburg Refugee Service; World Socialist Website <http://www.wsws.org/articles/2010/mar2010/germ-m18.shtml?>
- 45 Deutsche Presse Agentur, 16 April 2010.
- 46 In December 2009, the Interior Ministers of all the States (*Innenministerkonferenz der Länder IMK*) decided to extend this time span, which gave the immigrants another two years – until the end of 2011 – to secure employment.
- 47 <http://www.migazin.de/2009/10/30/passabler-start-in-der-integrationspolitik-aber-auch-chancen-verpasst>

CONTACTS

Anti-discrimination network of the Turkish Union of Berlin-Brandenburg (ADNB of TBB)

Tempelhofer Ufer 21
10963 Berlin
Germany
Tel: +49 (0) 30 61 30 53 28
Email: adnb@tbb-berlin.de
Web: www.adnb.de

Centre for Research on Anti-Semitism (ZfA)

Technische University Berlin,
Ernst-Reuter-Platz 7
10587 Berlin
Germany
Tel: +49 (0) 30 314 25851
Web: www.zfa.kgw.tu-berlin.de

Empowerment and Participation of Immigrants in east Germany project (EmPa)

RAA Brandenburg,
Benzstr. 11/12,
14482 Potsdam.
Tel: +49 (0) 331 747 80 33
Germany
Email: e.erdem@raa.brandenburg.de
Web: www.projekt-empa.de

Flüchtlingsrat Hamburg

Nernstweg 32 - 34
3. Stock
22765 Hamburg
Germany
Tel. +49 (0) 40 43 1587
Email: info@fluechtlingsrat-hamburg.de
Web: www.fluechtlingsrat-hamburg.de

Inssan für kulturelle Interaktion e.V.

Gitschiner Str. 17
10969 Berlin
Germany
Tel.: +49 (0)30/ 20619639
E-mail: info@inssan.de
Web: www.inssan.de

Institute for Media Responsibility

Goethestrasse 6,
91054 Erlangen,
Germany
Tel: +49 (9) 131 933 277 8
Email: info@medienverantwortung.com
Web: www.medienverantwortung.com

Migration in Germany (MiG),

Postfach 60 05 16, 50685 Cologne
Germany
Tel: +49 (0) 221/20468058, Fax: +49 (0) 221/942240119
E-mail: info@migazin.de
Web: www.migazin.de

ReachOut

Oranienstrasse 159,
10969 Berlin (Kreuzberg)
Germany
Tel: +49 (0) 30 69 56 83 39
Email: info@reachoutberlin.de
Web: www.reachoutberlin.de

Youth Without Borders

c/o BBZ
Turmstr. 72
10551 Berlin
Germany
Tel +49 (0) 30 666 40 726
Email: jog@jospacepunkt.net
Web: www.jospace.net

NETHERLANDS – CONTEXT

Integration

The UN Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination (CERD) has expressed disappointment that the Dutch government still does not have in place any comprehensive plan to combat discrimination, and observed that the current approach to integration ‘has effectively shifted the primary responsibility for immigration from the State to immigrant communities’.¹

It is impossible to isolate the Dutch government’s lack of commitment to a balanced integration strategy from the poisonous influence on the integration debate of the extreme-Right politician, Geert Wilders, who heads the Freedom Party (Partij voor de Vrijheid, PvdV).

At the time of writing, the Netherlands is facing a period of political uncertainty, following the collapse of the coalition government and an impending general election in June 2010. The 2007-2010 coalition government of Christian Democrats (CDA), Liberals (VVD) and Labour (PvdA) operated the harshest laws on family reunification in Europe (now deemed discriminatory by the European Court of Human Rights) called on ‘new immigrants’ to adapt and participate in Dutch society, and argued that there were limits on the numbers of immigrant children schools could accept.

In the run-up to the general election, there has been a vigorous debate about what approach the new government should take to the PvdV, and whether mainstream political parties should go into coalition with the extreme Right. The Labour Party has said that it would refuse to work in a coalition government with the PvdV. This suggests that the growing anti-racist movement in the Netherlands is having some impact. In July 2009, integration minister Eberhard van der Laan (PvdA) refused to answer a total of nine questions submitted by the PvdV to twelve government departments on the costs of ‘non-western immigrants to Dutch society’, particularly to the welfare state. Not before time, the integration minister implied that the PvdV’s agenda is not that of the government.²

Discussion about terminology begins

The Netherlands is the only country in Europe that persists in using the term ‘non-native’ (*allochtoon*) to describe its ethnic minorities. At the end of 2009, Dutch parliamentarians indicated that they viewed such terminology as problematic, and the integration minister suggested that the term be avoided in favour of ‘new Netherlanders’.³ Nevertheless, *autochtoon*, ‘native’ and *allochtoon*, ‘non-native’ continue to be used by the government, in official documents and media discourse, even to refer to those born in the Netherlands if one parent is ‘non-Dutch’. It often

appears to be a coded way of distinguishing the ‘white’ Dutch population from the ‘non-white’. The phrase ‘non-western background’ seems to be being used in a similar fashion.

Findings of integration annual report

An annual study of integration commissioned by the government and released in November 2009 found that ‘integration had been largely successful’, while some communities have been left behind.⁴ The report, compiled by the Netherlands Institute for Social Research (NESR) provided some statistical evidence of improved integration of young Turks and Moroccans in the labour market and education.⁵ However, many youngsters, from what the Dutch government persistently calls a ‘non-western background’ (a completely unscientific term), are still twice as likely to be unemployed as ‘native Dutch’. It is deeply disappointing that government research persists in using such loaded terminology.

The government’s annual integration research also suggests that youngsters whose origins were in the Dutch-Antilles and Morocco are still overrepresented in crime statistics. Despite the integration minister’s apparent desire to move away from terms such as ‘native’ and ‘non-native’, once again in this report, when discussing crime, a situation is described in which ‘native Dutch people’ felt unsafe because of the presence of ‘non-western immigrants’.

Challenges to discriminatory family reunification policies

The EU Court of Justice has ruled that Dutch family reunification policies are discriminatory. ECRI also called for a review of the discriminatory application of the Civic Integration (Preparation Abroad) Act under which migrants from certain countries must pass the civic integration examination before obtaining a temporary residence permit to enter the Netherlands for family formation or unification.⁶ ECRI believes that the fact that the law applies only to migrants from certain countries could amount to discrimination on the basis of nationality, particularly between so-called ‘western’ and ‘non-western’ state nationals.

From 2003 to 2006, the Dutch government, which has long argued that ‘spousal immigration’ of poorly-educated women (mostly from Morocco and Turkey) constitutes a major barrier to integration, brought in a pre-arrival integration language examination to prove assimilability for family reunification and marriage purposes, as well as an income requirement⁷ and a minimum age requirement of 21 for foreign marriage partners.⁸ Towards the end of 2009, immigration minister Hirsch Ballin, who had already introduced new measures against so-called import brides and a proposal to ban marriages between first cousins, said

NETHERLANDS – VOICES

Reggy Andresen



Migrant coalition-building in Amsterdam

By Liz Fekete

First published on IRR News, 25 June 2009

If you want change, argues the Transnational Migrant Platform (TMP) in Amsterdam, you need to build a broad coalition capable of working simultaneously both on the domestic and the international front.

Over the last six months, the IRR has been trying to find out more about the pioneering work of the TMP, which was launched in June 2008 in Amsterdam, as an umbrella organisation to unite migrants, undocumented workers, asylum seekers and refugees from many regions of the world, including Latin America, Philippines, Turkey, Africa and the Maghreb. One way of finding out more was to join the TMP forum – held on 13 December 2008, to mark international migrants' day (as well as the sixtieth anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights).

TMP founding organisations include the Commission for Filipino Migrant Workers (CFMW), the Organización de Trabajadores Domesticos Emigrantes Latino Americanos (OTRADELA), the European Centre of Migration and Development (EMCEMO), the Africa Roots Movement and the Transnational Institute. At the forum, attended by fifty representatives of the various affiliated organisations, the IRR had a chance to hear the views of representatives from many of these groups. It soon became apparent that one of the unique strengths that the TMP brings to migration and integration issues was its coalition-building approach whereby a broad range of contacts across interest groups – in migrant communities, within the NGO-world and amongst trade unions – are pooled. It is as a broad-based coalition that the TMP can develop resources to effect change at a domestic and international level, simultaneously. Great emphasis is also placed on a bottom-up, migrant-led approach, with those with secure legal status coming to the aid of those living without documents and therefore denied basic rights. TMP founding member, Nonoi Hachang, spoke of the need to bring about a 'convergence of our strengths and develop a strategy of action based on self-organisation'.

Prioritising rights under international law

Foremost amongst the TMP's concerns is the need to improve the legal status of migrant workers in the Netherlands, to stop the criminalisation of those without papers and to encourage the trade unions to accept into membership migrant workers, whether documented or undocumented. But it is a struggle that also necessitates a European and international approach if the lack of a human rights dimension in EU migration policies is to be successfully challenged. At the moment, no European government has ratified the International Convention on the Rights of Migrant Workers that guarantees the basic human and social rights of migrant workers, irrespective of their immigration status.

One highlight of the forum was the launch of the Commission for Filipino Migrant Workers (CFMW) and RESPECT's (Rights Equality Solidarity Power Europe Cooperation Today) international campaign for the rights of migrant domestic workers. 'RESPECT, with its Europe-wide membership, has been working together with our international partners to put pressure on the International Labour Organisation (ILO) to adopt a specific convention on domestic workers', Fe Jusay, co-ordinator of RESPECT, told the meeting. 'Already the governing body of the ILO has agreed to include the item "Decent Work for Domestic Workers (Standard Setting)" on the agenda of its ninety-ninth session in 2011. So today, we launch the campaign to ensure that the rights of all domestic workers including migrants will be strongly protected in the Convention.'

Both Petra Snelders (chair of Respect NL) and Marlyn Villegas (TRUSTED Migrants) spoke of the high levels of discrimination and exploitation in the workplace, accentuated by the criminalisation of the undocumented. 'The overwhelming desire of migrant workers to pay taxes and be integrated into Dutch societies for the sake of our families and children was frustrated by the legislative framework', argued Marlyn. 'Migrant work is indispensable and needs to be acknowledged as such', stated Petra Snelders who reminded the audience that large numbers of Filipino, Latin American and African women (and increasingly migrant men are employed as domestic workers), working in private households as domestic workers, are excluded from national labour legislation and vulnerable to exploitation.

Immigration policing – a pressing problem

A large part of the forum was given over to discussion of another pressing concern – namely the breakdown in police-community relations that followed the government decision in October 2006 to set a target for the detention and removal of 12,000 asylum seekers per annum. As Dutch police were expected to realise the government quota, through

that he was considering introducing even stricter measures to end the 'inflow of unskilled marriage candidates because it negates all the energy and money invested in integration'.⁹

The Centre for Migration Law at Radboud University believes that the Dutch approach – the harshest in Europe – is no longer feasible, following the EU Court of Justice ruling that the minimum income requirement for foreign marriage partners, which is higher in the Netherlands than anywhere else in the EU, is at odds with the European right to family reunification, as laid down by European Council Directive 2003/86/EC. E-quality, a think-tank for emancipation, family and diversity issues, also believes that the Dutch emphasis on reducing foreign marriage partners is counter-productive and that more emphasis should be placed on providing opportunities for foreign marriage partners who are highly motivated to work and learn.¹⁰

Lack of citizenship as a barrier to integration

Before the collapse of the coalition government, there were expectations of a reform to the citizenship laws whereby the government would grant citizenship to 90,000 people born before 1985 to a Dutch mother and a foreign father who previously had no right to Dutch nationality (only the children of a Dutch father were entitled to a Dutch passport). Although a temporary scheme enabled those affected to acquire Dutch citizenship, many were unaware of the possibility at the time and the Green Left MP, Naima Azough, had called for change to the law.

Racism and anti-racism

Influence of extreme Right

Anti-racist organisations such as Netherlands Recognises Colour (Nederland Bekent Kleur), as well as researchers at the Anne Frank Foundation, have stepped up their efforts to ensure that the media use precise terminology when writing about the PvdV.¹¹ The media routinely described the PvdV as a populist party, which lends it respectability by masking its true nature as 'an extreme-Right racist party'.¹²

Mobilising Islamophobia

At the time of writing (prior to the June 2010 general election), the PvdV has nine seats in the Dutch parliament and five seats in the European parliament. In the March 2010 municipal elections for 400 local authorities, the PvdV (which lacks candidates) only contested two areas – The Hague and the multicultural city of Almere, an overspill city for Amsterdam's growing population. The PvdV came in first in Almere (21.6 per cent of the vote, and nine seats) but failed to form a governing coalition, and second in The Hague (17 per cent of the vote, and eight seats).¹³ In both cities, scores of men and women turned up to vote, sporting headscarves, in protest against Wilders' demand for a tax on the hijab.¹⁴ Wilders is also calling for a ban on the wearing of the hijab (which

he described as a 'head rag') in public buildings.

Following his victory, Wilders declared 'We're going to take the Netherlands back from the leftist elite that coddles criminals and supports Islamisation (and) still believes in multiculturalism.'

While Wilders mobilises against the 'Islamisation of the Netherlands' (no more immigration from the Muslim world, a moratorium on the building of mosques, deportation of 'criminal youths' with passports from other countries etc), he often uses the term 'non-western immigrants' as a code-word for Muslims, thereby maintaining the fiction that he is not against Muslim people *per se* but against Islam as a religion.

At the beginning of 2010, the Stop Wilders Now Party was formed in The Hague and presented its own list of candidates aimed at opposing the PvdV's presence in the municipal elections of March 2010.¹⁵ And on March 21, international day against racism, former prominent politicians from all the major political parties issued the statement 'Citizens should make themselves heard. We cannot be held hostage by the verbal violence of the hate mongers'. (*Wij nemen stelling! U ook? Burgers moeten van zich laten horen. We mogens ons niet laten gijzelen door verbal geweld van haatzaaiers*).¹⁶ The March 2010 municipal election results also saw another significant development in that dozens of candidates from a migrant background were elected to local councils, often getting more personal votes than others higher on the party list of candidates. Not all of those in the Labour Party reacted positively to these changes, drawing attention to the power of the 'immigrant vote' and the haemorrhaging of 'expertise' due to the dismissal of more experienced candidates.¹⁷

Public prosecutor's office and police do not treat racism as a structural problem

Ethnic minorities in the Netherlands are protected from discrimination by Article 1 of the Dutch Constitution and Article 137 of the criminal code which deals with incitement to hatred. But the European Fundamental Rights Agency (EFRA) is critical of the public prosecutor's office, as well as the police, in its operation of the criminal code. ECRI has also drawn attention to a failure on the part of the Dutch authorities to adequately quantify the number of prosecutions and convictions for acts of violence or incitements on grounds of race, colour or ethnic origin. The political scientist, Rob Witte (see below) suggests that this failure stems from a wider problem – namely the systematic failure to deal with racism as a structural issue, relegating it instead to isolated incidents.¹⁸

It was in recognition of existing weaknesses that in December 2007, new 'Instructions on discrimination' were issued to the police and public prosecution service, requiring the police to keep a national register of discriminatory incidents reported to them about extreme-Right vandalism and graffiti, threats and intimidation and actual bodily assaults. But EFRA

a performance contract (*prestatiecontract*), immigration raids began to spread fear in the community. This fear grew following the targeting of a church in Rotterdam and a refugee solidarity café in Utrecht, and the sudden death in October 2007 of the 34-year-old Ghanaian *sans papiers*, Mike Osei. (He fell from the seventh floor of a building during an immigration raid in Biljmer southeast Amsterdam.) Only a few months before Mike Osei's tragic death, in June 2007, the Campaign to Stop Police Raids was formed after police raided a concert by a popular West African musician in café Het Vervlog, arresting 111 of the 250 concert-goers. During the heavy-handed police raid, in which horses and dogs were deployed, police photographed and demanded proof of identity from all black people at the venue (white people did not face similar checks). Police initially claimed that the raids were part of an operation against internet fraud but nearly all those arrested were questioned about their immigration status and seventy of those detained were issued with deportation orders two days after the arrest. Other detainees accused of immigration irregularities were ordered to be released in a landmark ruling in the Amsterdam first instance court, since their arrest was based on a discriminatory and unlawful police act. However this was overruled by the ministry for internal affairs (IND) and the migrants were deported before their appeals could be heard.

For the Campaign to Stop Police Raids, 'the police used immigration powers to target the African migrant community for arrest without a criminal investigation, thereby conflating immigration and crime law enforcement and policy'. While undocumented migrants and refugees often found themselves without police protection when they needed it, immigration powers were being used to carry out raids on undocumented migrants. The conflation of criminal and immigration investigations underlines the popular perception that undocumented migrants are criminals.

The right to police protection

The Africa Roots Movement was represented at the TMP forum by music promoter Thomas More, a key mover in the campaign for police accountability. Alongside the Dutch solidarity fund XminY Solidariteitsfonds, the Africa Roots Movement organised a public forum on 4 October 2008, with a discussion panel on police repression against black communities, principally in Amsterdam Zuid-Oost. 'The one positive thing that emerged out of the police raids was the opening up of a dialogue with the mayor of Amsterdam', said Thomas More, outlining the background for the demand and what it has meant in practice. 'Out of this action grew a grassroots movement that also started a dialogue with the police. From here, has emerged a concrete consultation process whereby every three months, the community, local police and the local commissioner have a meeting.' Now, the local commissioner of the Amsterdam district Southpost has given a commitment that any undocumented worker can file a criminal report and not be interrogated over his/her immigration status. Furthermore, a community policeman will be appointed to deal with such crime reports.

For Thomas More, these are very important concessions, as migrants without papers often suffer a high incidence of crime; they may be robbed (some people are repeatedly robbed every time they are paid) but they cannot seek redress by reporting the robbery to police for fear of an investigation into their immigration status. In the absence of police protection, the Africa Roots Movement, which sought advice from the Newham Monitoring Project in London, now set up a free legal advice service. If the victim of a crime is too frightened to approach the police, 'we forward the report' on their behalf. 'We are now receiving between seven and ten complaints a week. We want to spread this initiative to other parts of Amsterdam', concluded Thomas More.

An international movement of migrants

For TMP, the insecurity faced by the African migrant community and other undocumented migrants in the Netherlands reveals the failure of intergovernmental bodies to take a positive approach to migration and development issues, the sort that puts human rights at the centre. Both Nonoi Hachang and Abdou Menebhi, director of EMCEDO, felt that though things might seem bleak on a domestic level, on an international level migrants now comprise a new and important social movement. They saw this demonstrated first-hand at the Global Forum on Migration and Development (GFMD). Here migrants' associations, migrants' rights NGOs, trades unions, women's organisations, peasant organisations, fisherfolk, indigenous people from Africa, Asia, the Caribbean, Latin America, the Middle East, Europe, North America and Oceania came together to launch the 'Joint Civil Society Declaration on Migration, Development and Human Rights' and to campaign against the EU's new 'return directive'. According to Abdou Menebhi, 'We migrants have welcomed the protest responses to the EU Return Directive from Latin American presidents as well as from some African leaders – we were very inspired that world leaders let their voices be heard on the human rights of migrants.'

At the TMP forum, documents outlining the background to the Global Forum on Migration and Development (GFMD) were distributed. These explained how the GFMD was initially convened in New York in 2006 as a High Level Dialogue under the auspices of the United Nations (UN) to tackle the contemporary nexus of migration and development issues. But, whereas the initial intention seems to have been to offer civil society and NGOs a role in a UN-led policy dialogue, the process was very quickly hijacked into a non-binding inter-governmental meeting, which held its first GFMD in Brussels in 2007 and its second in Manila in 2008. Migrant advocacy has succeeded in opening a limited space within the GFMD where civil society organisations can participate for two days – the Civil Society Days (CSD/GFMD). However, migrant organisations feel that this has become a cordoned-off space excluded from substantial dialogue or decision-making. In response to this, migrant organisations held a parallel civil society forum in Brussels providing a venue for

states that the gathering of data is not enough; insufficient priority is still given to acting on incidents of discrimination reported to the police. Since 2008, the National Discrimination Expertise Centre (Landelijk Expertise Centrum Discriminatie, LECD), which is based within the public prosecutor's office, has published data based on police lists. No statistics are yet available for incidents in 2009.

A 2008 attempt to prosecute Wilders, both for racist remarks directed against Muslims and for his inflammatory 2000 anti-Islam film, *Fitna*, foundered on the public prosecutor's interpretation of Wilders' comments as criticising religion (an aspect of freedom of expression) which, while potentially 'offensive', did not constitute an incitement to racial hatred, or a criminal offence. However on 21 January 2009, the Dutch Amsterdam Court of Appeal overruled this decision and, as a result, the public prosecutor's office has reviewed its original approach, bringing new charges against Wilders. These charges have been widened to include five counts of inciting hatred and discrimination towards Moroccans and non-western ethnic minorities. Lawyers at the anti-racist organisation Netherlands Recognises Colour have joined the proceedings as an interested party. While Wilders appeared in court on 20 January 2010 to hear the preliminary charges, no date has yet been set for his trial. Wilders makes no secret of the fact that he intends to use the court case against him as a way of putting Islam on trial.

Racial violence must be prioritised

In 2008, researchers at Anne Frank House and Leiden University warned that the neo-Nazi scene was being boosted by Wilders as well as by the government's counter-terrorism focus on Muslim extremism. The researchers accused the authorities of turning a blind eye to the resulting upsurge of Islamophobia and increasing violence towards Muslims. In February 2010, the political scientist Rob Witte published "For centuries a hospitable people": Racist violence and government responses in the Netherlands 1950-2009'. (*Al eeuwenlang een gastvrij volk, racistische geweld en overheidsreacties in Nederland* (1950-2009)).¹⁹ The book argues that racial violence is a structural problem in the Netherlands and has a long history; that the state's denial that racism is a structural problem, coupled with the way it is treated as a taboo subject by Dutch society as a whole, has been a contributory factor in the development of racial violence.²⁰ Rob Witte is calling for a full parliamentary debate and action on racial violence.

Countering discrimination

It is paradoxical that the Netherlands has some of the oldest anti-discrimination laws in Europe and a wide network of anti-discrimination bureaux, yet discrimination on grounds of race, ethnicity or national origin is not adequately addressed. The Equal Treatment Act (*Algemene Wet Gelijke Behandeling*,

AWGB) was amended in 2004 in order to implement EU anti-discrimination directives. The Municipal Anti-Discrimination Services Act, which obliges municipalities to provide anti-discrimination services came into force in July 2009. The Dutch Equal Treatment Commission will merge with the Human Rights Institute by January 2011. The National Bureau Against Racial Discrimination (Landelijk Bureau ter Bestrijding van Rassendiscriminatie (LRB) takes up cases of national interest, but generally refers cases to local anti-discrimination boards. The National Federation of Anti-Discrimination Bureaux represents an estimated thirty-four regional anti-discrimination bureaux throughout the country.

There is no official ban on the wearing of the hijab in the Netherlands. Nevertheless, the Equal Treatment Commission has taken up a few cases of religious discrimination, including that of a 23-year-old woman who was refused medical treatment on the grounds of wearing the burqa.²¹

Racialised crime statistics and discriminatory databases

Throughout 2009-10, community organisations were anxious to highlight a rather neglected area of discrimination. The Dutch Caribbean Consultative Body (*Overlegorgaan Caribische Nederlanders*, OCaN) successfully drew attention to an important, growing and largely unrecognised field of discrimination within the gathering of data on young people considered at 'risk' of committing crimes. In 2009, OCaN²² launched a successful action against the minister for housing and the Dutch data protection agency,²³ in relation to the operation of the Reference Index of Antilleans (*Verwijsindex Antillianen*). OCaN, alongside the Open Society Justice Initiative,²⁴ argued that not only was the database discriminatory as it registered information on young people on the grounds of ethnicity, thereby treating every Antillean child as a potential criminal, but it established a dangerous precedent in that once established the database could be generalised to deal with young people from other communities of foreign origin and to justify specific measures such as deportation. Despite the Council of State ruling against this discriminatory database, which resulted in an acknowledgement by the government that new non-discriminatory databases on 'problematic youths' would have to be created, Rotterdam city council has announced that it will maintain its existing database on 'problematic youths' which includes entries concerning ethnic origin.

The role of the media and academic research

Data-gathering on 'problem youth' broken down in terms of ethnic origin draws legitimacy from other worrying trends in the Netherlands, namely the racialisation of crime, either via police crime statistics (often broken down in terms of the ethnic origin of the perpetrators of crime), or blinkered media frameworks. The police as well as large sections of

broader participation of migrant organisations. In Manila, the civil society mobilisation was organised within the platform of People's Global Action (PGA), and this resulted in a major participation of trade unions, migrant organisations and other civil society organisations from all global regions. Thus the organisations that came together in the PGA 2008 to launch the 'Joint Civil Society Declaration on Migration, Development and Human Rights' at Manila, were also protesting against the erosion of human rights perspectives within the GFMD and calling for a return to the global migration policy process within the UN framework as the best guarantee of a human rights perspective on migration issues. For the TMP it is paramount that within all debates about migration and development the inalienable rights and human dignity of migrant workers be central.

Integration of migrants into trade unions

Wilma Roos of the FNV Mondial, the global programme of the Dutch Trade Union Federation (FNV) (which has accepted the membership of migrant workers, both documented and undocumented, since June 2006) was also speaking at the TMP's December 2008 forum. For her the issue of migration is now becoming central to the work of the Global Unions Federation (ten sector-wide international trade union federations with affiliates in all continents). Global Unions issued a policy statement to the second GFMD entitled 'Constructing an architecture of protection of human rights and trade union rights for migrant workers and their families'. Among other things, Global Unions argues that governments should 'frame migration policies around core labour standards'; give equal importance to development issues when framing migration policies; respect international conventions such as the UN Convention on the protection of the rights of all migrant workers and members of their families, as well as the various conventions and declarations of the ILO. Furthermore, Global Unions calls 'for a resolute shift away from the current narrow focus on temporary forms of migration to fill labour market shortages and further the economic gains to capital in the global economy'. For it is precisely this approach, argues the unions, that is leading to 'frequent incidence of violation of the fundamental human and trade union rights of migrants'. There is particular criticism of the GATS Mode IV of the World Trade Organisation (WTO) on the temporary movement of natural persons. With its 'narrow focus on labour as a tradeable service' as well as 'temporary forms of labour migration', the WTO is playing a detrimental role in the shaping of bilateral and regional migration agreements, argues Global Unions. And within such migration agreements, no concrete commitments and monitoring goals related to guaranteeing the well-being and protection of the rights of migrant workers and their families, are included.

In such a climate, argued Roos, it is vital that trade unions respond to the needs of migrant workers and provide them with assistance as to how to access their basic human rights. Dutch trades unions are backing the formation of migrant centres and help desks in the countries from which workers migrate.

What next?

Where next for TMP? The Third GFMD will be held in Athens from 3-6 November 2009; its central theme is 'Integrating Migration Policies into Development Strategies for the Benefit of All'. On this occasion the People's Global Action 2009 will also hold its activities on 3-5 November. Will the TMP be there? Definitely. It has already started organising and is linking the preparatory process with the Athens based hosting committee and the Migrant Rights International (MRI) network which, together with the Migrant Forum Asia (MFA), has been in the forefront of developing the People's Global Action (PGA). On 29 May, the TMP held its first preparatory Europe Consultation, bringing together the organisations from Europe which participated in the 'Turn Over' ceremonies in Manila last October as well as other organisations interested in preparing in the GFMD and PGA process in Europe 2009. Migrant Europe-wide networks and migrant organisations from six countries participated and agreed a plan of action which includes holding national consultations among migrant, refugee and other civil society organisations on the agenda of the GFMD 2009 and organising a Europe-level conference on 26 September. It was also agreed to set up a European working group (EWG) to co-ordinate the preparations for these activities, which aim to strengthen and further develop a Europe-wide migrant network and ensure the projection of migrant voices on migration, development and human rights are forged into a substantive agenda which can be further developed beyond Athens 2009.

the media persist in racialising crime, with the term 'criminal Moroccan' now becoming commonplace. One example of the interplay between police perspectives and media frameworks came in March 2010, when the NICIS Institute published research commissioned by the Dutch national police on the subject of 'Moroccan perpetrator populations'.²⁵ The NRC newspaper (17 March 2010) drew attention to several glaring weaknesses within the report's methodology that were not sufficiently questioned in other media reporting. For instance, throughout the report many Dutch youth were classified as Moroccans even though they were born in the Netherlands. The report also seemed to take a very complacent view of police statistics, which referred not to convictions for crime, but to crimes where the police were 'convinced' that Moroccans had committed the crime. The report did not give sufficient attention to other research on issues of institutionalised discrimination within the criminal justice system, suggests that a contributory factor in the rising prison population of youth from a Moroccan background was harsher sentencing (with other Dutch children, not of migrant origin, not being imprisoned for similar offences); and that police data for arrests might not take into account the fact that a higher number of arrests of youths from a Moroccan background might be due to the fact that the popular debate stereotypes Moroccan youth as the source of crime. Another glaring omission in the debate on so-called 'ethnic crime' is the failure to relate this to the disproportionate unemployment rate amongst ethnic minority youth (nearly twice the rate of that amongst so-called 'native Dutch' youth).

Asylum seekers and undocumented migrants

Amnesty leaves thousands without status

The June 2007 amnesty for long-term asylum seekers (often referred to as the General Pardon), that followed years of campaigning on the issue, only came into effect in July 2009. But with an estimated half of the 26,000 or so applications refused²⁶ – and those refused now officially deemed 'illegal'²⁷ – the immigration minister Nebahat Albayrak vowed to step up the rate of deportations, using 'unorthodox measures' if necessary, such as searches on homes and workplaces without a search warrant. Refugee support organisations like Participating Refugees in a Multicultural Europe (PRIME), an affiliate of the National Association for the Undocumented (Landelijke Ongedocumenteerde Stichting, LOS Foundation) have been placed under great pressure, first assisting regularisation applicants and now supporting those the authorities now officially classify as 'illegals'. PRIME and the Los Foundation report a climate of heightened surveillance and harassment of the undocumented. Many small charities working with the undocumented report increasing police scrutiny,

particularly since the immigration minister made it clear that those who 'help' undocumented people may be regarded as complicit with their illegality and the crimes they commit.²⁸

NGOs, as well as the mayors of Amsterdam, Rotterdam, The Hague and Utrecht, criticised a proposed reform to the 2000 Aliens Act which, if passed, would mean that people who stay in the Netherlands illegally for any length of time would jeopardise their right to a residence permit.

Schiphol – the focus for many campaigns

In March 2009, there was a hunger strike and protests at the detention centre at Schiphol airport, near Amsterdam, and the organisations PRIME, Migrant to Migrant radio (m2m)²⁹ and the prisoners support organisation BONJO, documented a pattern of abuse and brutality at the centre. (It is alleged that in one incident armed and masked riot police were brought in during a hunger strike.)³⁰

The committee of NGOs set up to represent survivors and relatives of the October 2005 Schiphol detention centre fire, in which eleven detainees lost their lives and countless others were injured, continues its campaign for justice. In January 2009, the European Court of Human Rights deemed admissible a legal action against the Netherlands for violating Article 3 (cruel and degrading treatment) of the European Convention on Human Rights. The, then, justice minister, Piet Hein Donner resigned after an independent inquiry into the fire found that proper safety precautions had not been followed at the detention centre. The only person to be prosecuted as a result of the fire, a Libyan detainee who was accused of neglecting to put out a cigarette, has since been deported, after serving a prison sentence.³¹

Campaigning for better protection of children

Criticisms made by Defence for Children International (DCI) against the Netherlands for not providing adequate shelter for foreign children, even those illegally in the country, were upheld by the European Committee of Social Rights.³² It found Netherlands was in violation of both Article 31§2 (right to housing) and Article 17§1.c (protection of children) of the Social Charter.³³ NGOs continue to campaign against the practice of detaining unaccompanied children and families with children upon their arrival in the Netherlands and ECRI has called on the government to establish alternative living arrangements for families and children. The Transnational Migrant Platform's (TMP) call for the Netherlands to sign the International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and their Families was backed by ECRI.

Special thanks to Helen Hintjens and Rob Witte.

INTERVIEW

Michel Utrecht



Young Dutch Muslims find a venue

By Chandra Frank*

First published on IRR News, 22 October 2009

An interview with Umar Mirza, the 22-year-old chief editor of the Dutch website 'We're Here to Stay'.¹

Chandra Frank: The results of a TV opinion poll, released shortly after the Islamophobic Freedom Party (PvV)² won record results in European parliamentary elections, indicated that a large proportion of Turkish and Moroccan migrants no longer felt welcome and would consider leaving the Netherlands. This makes the title of the website you edit, 'We're Here to Stay' particularly pertinent. What's behind the name?

Umar Mirza: 'We're Here to Stay' means different things to different people. Against those who rather like the idea that Muslims should leave the Netherlands, there is a defiant message here. We are not leaving, we are here to stay. But 'We're Here to Stay' should also be read as an invitation to young Muslims to write about their personal experiences; it provides a space for all those from an Islamic background to write about any subject they choose, as well as participate in online discussions. That is the beauty of the name. It allows more than 50,000 young people who visit our website each month a unique opportunity to interpret 'We're Here to Stay' their own way.

But, incidentally, in relation to the poll you mentioned,³ that suggested that young educated Muslims wanted to leave the Netherlands and return to their country of origin, I find the opposite to be the case. Interviews for this particular survey were conducted mainly within the Turkish and Moroccan communities, which are a large part of the Muslim community in the Netherlands, and whose views are important. But the Dutch Muslim community is very diverse, and my experience is that more and more organisations are being established, to represent this diversity. Also, with the increase in the number of Muslim students entering higher education, has come a growth in Islamic associations and multicultural student groups such as MashriQ. Via the organisation Minhaj-ul-Quran I run a course on Islam at the University of Rotterdam. When we started out we only had twenty students and now we have around seventy. My personal belief is that most young Muslim people are determined to remain in the Netherlands.

When you set up the website, was it your intention to create a space aimed specifically at young Muslims?

Yes, that was our intention when we set up the website four years ago (and by the way we have managed to survive all this time without any government subsidies, thanks to the work of volunteers). However, even when we set out, we were motivated by the desire to find out more about the problems and successes of young Muslims in society and by so doing promote more awareness amongst non-Muslims. When we started the website, we were using a lot of Islamic terminology. We assumed we were writing for people just like us, but that was not the case. Within the Muslim community, there is a great diversity, not just the Muslims who were born in the Netherlands, or the highly educated, but newer arrivals too, and there were also non-Muslims with strong opinions who were visiting the website and also wanted to share their opinions. They are welcome as well, as long as they are not racist or offensive. Our aim now is to reach out to this very diverse group of people.

There has recently been quite a bit of criticism about the way the Dutch media covers matters relating to Muslims, particularly the space they give Geert Wilders to express his Islamophobic views. Do you see the website as a kind of counter-protest to the mainstream media debate?

No, it wasn't our intention to react to the media debate. The website was not set up as a reaction, a protest, it was more positive than that – an attempt to create an alternative space. It was a way of spreading a message through providing a stage upon which young Muslim voices could be heard. The mainstream is constantly talking about Muslims yet the voices of young Muslims are not heard. Of course while much of this is the fault of those in authority who do not give young Muslims a stage, we also have to be self-critical, and acknowledge that we are not always well-organised. The website also helps promote better communication by providing a space for readers to promote their activities, lectures and seminars.

But, indirectly, we do have an impact on the mainstream. For it is possible for us to be immediate, to respond more quickly to issues than the mainstream media. But none of this should imply that we are uncritical. For instance, if there is an Islamic school that performs badly it is also our task to be critical, and to ask why. We are not here to defend Muslims; we just want to adjust a certain image people have of Muslims. We try to highlight important issues and promote the right causes.

NOTES

- 1 Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination, Seventy-sixth session, 15 February-12 March 2010. CERD Document C/NLD.CO17-18.
- 2 In response, the Freedom Party commissioned the Nyfer Institute to carry out research on the issue. In April 2010 Wilders announced, even while the research was still in progress, that immigration of non-Westerners to the Netherlands cost the country between six and ten billion euros a year. See Radio Netherlands News Online <http://www.rnw.nl/international-justice/article/wilders-immigrants-cost-billions>.
- 3 In a letter to the lower house in the Hague that accompanied its annual report on integration, integration minister Eberhard van der Laan used this new terminology, stating that the old terminology emphasised someone's origins, while 'new Nederlanders' better expressed that people belonged here.
- 4 The Netherlands Institute for Social Research's 2009 annual report can be accessed at http://www.scp.nl/Organisatie/Onderzoeksgroepen/Educatie/Minderheden/Lopend_onderzoek_van_E_M/Jaarrapport_Integratie_2009
- 5 The nrc handelsblad online (18 November 2009) reports that the number of Turkish and Moroccan Dutch youngsters going on to higher education has doubled over the past ten years to 40 per cent; the number of Turkish and Moroccan Dutch in the job market went up 10 per cent to 55 per cent. While the NESR report suggested that the number of unemployed had almost halved from more than 20 per cent to 11 per cent, an analysis of unemployment statistics for the whole of 2009 provided by Forum Institute for Multicultural Development found that the unemployment rate for Dutch ethnic minorities was more than double that of so-called 'native Dutch' youth. It only analysed statistics up to mid-2009, and acknowledged that this was before the full impact of the 'credit crunch' on youth unemployment really set in. See Forum Institute for Multicultural Development, *Fact sheet on youth unemployment*, September 2009.
- 6 For the best account of the problems associated with Dutch family reunification policies and pre-entry integration tests, see Human Rights Watch, *The Netherlands: Discrimination in the name of integration*, May 2008.
- 7 Following the European Court ruling, the Dutch government has dropped the income requirement.
- 8 The government also said that it introduced the measures to prevent forced marriage. But a study by the justice department's science bureau found no relation between spousal immigration and forced marriages, according to an article in nrc online (11 March 2010).
- 9 *Migration News Sheet*, October 2009.
- 10 nrc online 11 March 2010.
- 11 From a non-Dutch perspective, it is very difficult to understand how the PvV can continue as a *bona fide* political party, when it is not registered as a political party, has no membership list and organises no party conventions where members can vote and decide who will represent them. Instead the PvV is registered as a *stichting* (foundation) and, as a result, the strict regulations for receiving donations that apply to political parties do not apply.
- 12 This is the correct terminology as suggested in 'Racism and Extremism Monitor', Leiden University & Anne Frank House, 2008. A detailed account (in Dutch) of all Wilders' racist statements can be found at <http://www.WatWilWilders.nl> Also see (in English), René Danen, 'Sufficient evidence to convict Wilders', *Nieuws Uit Amsterdam* 11 January 2010; 'Call Wilders what he is: a racist', *nrc handelsblad*, 11 June 2009.
- 13 The anti-immigration Liveable Rotterdam party also gained fourteen seats on Rotterdam Council. The populist party 'Proud of the Netherlands', formed by the former integration minister, Rita Verdonk, also made gains. It stood for election for the first time in more than forty councils and won over fifty seats. See *Searchlight*, April 2010.
- 14 In the run-up to the municipal elections, Wilders proposed that Muslim women should have to apply for a permit to wear the headscarf and pay an annual tax of €1,000 for the privilege.
- 15 The Central Voting Bureau initially refused to register the name of the party, on the grounds that it would restrict the personal freedom of Geert Wilders, but after a challenge in the Netherlands highest administrative court, the name was allowed to stand. For more information on the campaign in The Hague see <http://www.stopwilders.nu>. In Almere, the Refugee Organisations Netherlands (Vluchtelingen Organisaties Nederland) issued the 'Manifest van Almere' in opposition to Wilders' campaign in the city. <http://www.vluchtelingenorganisaties.nl>.
- 16 See <http://www.nederlandbekentkleur.nl/indepers21.html/>
- 17 Meindert Fennema, Professor of Political Theory at the University of Amsterdam, points to the inevitability of this response which 'happens with every renewal. When the aristocrats had to give up their place in politics, they said the same thing'. See John Tyler, 'Immigrants leapfrog natives in local government', *Radio Netherlands News*, 11 March 2010.
- 18 Organisations have attempted to respond to the official lack of data by producing alternative data and analysis. Since 1997, the Anne Frank House and Leiden University have published the 'Racism & Extremism Monitor'.
- 19 The title, a reference to a statement by the former integration minister Rita Verdonk, is of course ironic. Verdonk had argued that as the Dutch did not discriminate, there was no problem of racial violence in the Netherlands.
- 20 According to Rob Witte 'Knowledge and experience in the field of racial violence is hardly present among [the] professions. And because racism is not conceived as a structural problem, no-one feels an urge to develop approaches that would be capable of tackling this phenomenon.' Email correspondence with Rob Witte, 2 April 2010.
- 21 *Migration News Sheet*, January 2010.

Why is the notion of giving young Muslims 'a stage' so important to you?

Well, perhaps the answer has something to do with my upbringing. A while ago, I had a discussion with my parents because they wanted to go back to Pakistan. They thought their children would study in the Netherlands and after that go back to Pakistan and buy a piece of land. Nothing wrong with that, in principle, but the idea just didn't appeal to me. That's my holiday place, I know the language, I can speak, read and write it but I think in Dutch.

And then there were other pressures. During high school I noticed that people were constantly asking me questions, about Islam, Muslims, violence, but also about my opinions on homosexuality. I felt like I had to defend myself although I was not the one who was concerned about those issues. I thought to myself, it's crazy that we are so far apart just because somebody looks different, or has a different set of beliefs.

I feel a great need to help all sides, to promote dialogue but particularly to reach out also to young religious Muslims who may have seen the film *Fitna*,⁴ and feel angry about the debate around it, but need to respond to the misinterpretation of Islam in a constructive way. I feel the most constructive approach here is a personal one, to get into conversations with young Muslims, particularly at the mosque. Young Muslims who follow the course I organise at the University of Rotterdam learn that Islam is in fact not against democracy and that men and women are equal human beings. The debates and projects the government organises can sometimes be useful, but personally I think that rather than have debates about non-issues it would be a lot more effective if there would be more interaction, if somebody would join a Muslim for food during Ramadan, for instance. The public debate is so often about non-issues, issues that people are afraid of but that will in fact never happen. For instance, throwing homosexuals from roofs just because an imam said something like that a few centuries ago, have you ever heard a single case of Muslims who throw homosexuals off roofs in the Netherlands or in Europe for that matter? It's just very unrealistic to have these kinds of debates. Those people who are frightened about Islam, it seems to me, are constantly alluding to something that has not happened as yet. Maybe one or two mosques from the five hundred mosques in the Netherlands are in favour of implementing Sharia in the Netherlands, but that's a really, really tiny proportion of the Muslims in the Netherlands. What we need to do is to ensure that the voices of the majority are heard and in this way people can isolate the voices of the unrepresentative smaller group.

Finally, could you tell us what you believe to be the unique features of the website?

Our website is open to everybody, there is no need for registration; it promotes itself, we have never had to have a PR campaign. And while the website has an Islamic identity, our readers are Muslims and non-Muslims. The website does not promote one communal view – all are welcome to voice an opinion. And in this way, the website actually creates a new consciousness amongst those that write and debate with us. Sometimes, I don't agree with an article but I will publish it anyway because there should be room for different opinions on our stage. It can be hard to stay positive and optimistic all the time, but we have to try to light that spark in each other. It certainly helps to know that there are more and more committed young Muslims around.

*** Chandra Frank is an International Public Law student in Leiden and a volunteer on the IRR's European Race Audit.**

NOTES

- 1 The We're Here to Stay website can be accessed at <http://www.wijblijvenhier.nl>. A linked site also exists in the UK at <http://www.muslimsinengland.com>
- 2 The Freedom Party (PVV) has nine MPs in the Dutch parliament. It was formed in 2006 and exists solely to represent the interests of its maverick leader Geert Wilders who was once an MP for the VVD (free market Liberals) but left to form his own party. In the June 2009 European parliamentary elections, the PVV seized 15 per cent of the vote and four seats in the European parliament. Wilders is well known for his anti-immigration and Islamophobic views and for regularly denouncing Islam, which he describes as a totalitarian religion akin to fascism. He also wants the Qur'an, which he compares to *Mein Kampf*, banned and for an end to immigration from the Muslim world.
- 3 The poll was commissioned by the current affairs TV programme *Netwerk* in response to Wilders' European election success. 57 per cent of the 319 Dutch citizens of Turkish and Moroccan origin interviewed said they felt less welcome in the Netherlands; 51 per cent said they were judged more negatively since the rise of Wilders and four out of ten reported an increase in discrimination. In addition, research carried out by the Nicis-Institute, based on 225 questionnaires sent to Dutch citizens of Turkish, Moroccan and Surinamese origin living in Rotterdam, also indicated that young people of migrant origin did not feel welcome in the city.
- 4 The controversial video *Fitna* is a 17-minute internet film in which Wilders repeats his call for a ban on the 'criminal' Qur'an on the grounds that it encourages terrorism. It juxtaposes selected quotes from the Qur'an with media clips and newspaper reports which purportedly show or describe acts of violence and hatred by Muslims. Wilders has evaded prosecution in the Netherlands on charges of incitement to racial hatred on the grounds that while *Fitna* is offensive to Muslims, its critique was limited to Islam as a religion. In February 2009, Wilders, who was due to screen *Fitna* in the House of Lords at the invitation of Lord Pearson of the United Kingdom Independence Party, was denied entry to the UK.

-
- 22 OCaN is one of the seven organisations that form the umbrella organisation, the Dutch Consultation of Ethnic Minorities (LOM) which officially conducts talks with the Dutch government on policies concerning ethnic minorities.
- 23 In fact, in order to establish the Index, which included data regarding ethnicity and race, the Dutch government had to apply for a waiver from the Dutch data protection agency.
- 24 A full briefing on the challenge is provided by the Open Society Justice Initiative which was also part of the action taken before the Council of State. It argued that the database violated the European Convention of Human Rights and that the creation and use of the Reference Index for Antilleans constituted a form of ethnic profiling. See <http://www.soros.org/initiatives/justice/litigation/dutchcaribbean>
- 25 It would seem that the report builds on a 2009 police report, 'Analysis of Moroccan perpetrator populations in Dutch municipalities' that ranked 181 municipalities according to the severity of the so-called 'Moroccan problem'. The report was commissioned after a financial request from mayors of twenty-two municipalities and as a way of measuring how much funding each municipality should receive to combat the problem.
- 26 In December 2008, the Council of State ruled in favour of a right of appeal for those whose application had been rejected.
- 27 Michael Jandl, 'The estimation of illegal migration in Europe', *Studi Emigrazione/Migration Studies*, Vol. XLI, no. 153, March 2004.
- 28 See Helen Hintjens, Richa Kumar and Ahmed Pouri, 'Pro-aylum advocacy in the EU: confronting global apartheid' in *Transnational Migration*, Springer Books, forthcoming, 2011.
- 29 Migrant 2 Migrant (M2M) radio grew out of the protests over the Schiphol fire, conceiving the community radio station as a 'tool' in the hands of the survivors of the Schiphol fire and their supporters. Its mission is 'to make communication free and to look at migration in a different way'.
- 30 PRIME press release, 'Unveiling the truth in the Netherlands: attack on hunger strikers inside Amsterdam's Schiphol airport detention centre' by Helen Hintjens. <http://www.theporcupine.org>
- 31 The case against Ahmed Isa was that he had neglected to put out his cigarette butt before falling asleep, hence he was sentenced on the ground that his negligence had caused the deaths. Campaigners point out that, even if this was the case, and the facts are disputed, this action was not responsible for the fact that the fire spread throughout the detention centre due to lack of appropriate safety standards in the building and the substandard level of training amongst personnel.
- 32 Defence for Children International (DC) v. the Netherlands (no. 57/2008). See <http://www.coe.int/T/DGHL/Monitoring/SocialCharter>
- 33 Families whose applications for asylum fail can be evicted from designated accommodation. The ministry of justice claims not to keep records of how many families it evicts each year. See *Volkskrant*, 15 March 2010.
-

CONTACTS

Anne Frank Foundation

PO Box 730,
1000 AS Amsterdam
Netherlands.
Tel: + 31 (0) 20 5567100
Web: www.annefrank.org

FORUM Institute for Multicultural Development

Postbus 201
3500 AE Utrecht
Netherlands
Tel: +31 (0) 30 297 43 21
Email: informatie@forum.nl
Web: www.forum.nl

The National Association for the Undocumented (LOS Foundation)

243 Canal Street
3531 CJ Utrecht
Netherlands
Tel: +31 (0) 2990222
Email: info@stichtinglos.nl
Web: www.stichtinglos.nl

Netherlands Recognises Colour

Postbus 59606,
1040 LC Amsterdam
Netherlands
Tel: +31 (0) 20 6897555
Email: info@nederlandbekentkleur.nl
Web: www.nederlandbekentkleur.nl

Participating Refugees in Multicultural Europe (PRIME)

Repelaerstraat 84,
2515 NA The Hague,
Netherlands.
Tel: + 31 (0) 70 3050415
Web: www.prime95.nl

M2M Foundation

Zeeburgerkade 386
1919 HP Amsterdam
Netherlands
Tel: +31 (0) 68 4446021
Email: m2m@streamtime.org
Web: www.streamtime.org

Overlegorgaan Caribische Nederlanders (OCaN)

Laan van Meerdervoort 145 A
The Hague
Netherlands
2517 AX
Tel: +31 (0)70 803301
Web: www.ocan.nl

Transnational Migrant Platform (TMP)

c/o EMCEDO,
Derde Weteringdwarsstraat 25,
1017 TC Amsterdam
Netherlands
Email: (Nonoi Hachang) admin@cfmw.org

We're Here to Stay

www.wijblijvenhier.nl

.....

UNITED KINGDOM – CONTEXT

Integration

Since 2001 and the ‘race riots’ in northern towns of the UK, the government’s approach to integration has focused on community cohesion and the promotion of shared values. While the ‘Improving Opportunity: Strengthening Society’ strategy (2005-2009) was aimed at reducing inequality through monitoring the progress of Black and Minority Ethnic (BME) communities¹ with respect to various key public services such as education, health, housing and the criminal justice system, the popular debate, encouraged by the government, focused on integration into the more nebulous concept of ‘values’. Initially, the ‘community cohesion’ agenda was seen as a welcome shift from some of the worst aspects of the ethnic and culturalist approach of previous government policy, but by 2008 there was concerted criticism of the government’s funding criteria for voluntary associations and community groups. After a wide number of representative community groups pointed out that ‘single identity groups’ can play a vital role in empowering communities who were often marginalised and excluded from the mainstream,² government guidance implying that single-ethnicity groups were separatist had to be withdrawn.

Throughout 2009-10, there has been further criticism of the government’s approach to integration, focussed on the stigmatising effect of its counter-terrorism strategy, Prevent, coordinated by the Communities and Local Government Department (CLG). The strategy, aimed at promoting shared values and opposing violent extremism, was targeted at Muslim areas of the country, thus giving the impression that Muslims were the only community which encountered problems of extremism, as well as the only community opposed to ‘shared values’. According to the Institute of Race Relations (IRR), ‘Prevent has undermined many progressive elements within the earlier community cohesion agenda and absorbed from it those parts which are most problematic’; and the singling out of the Muslim community in and of itself undermines a cohesion agenda.³ A parliamentary select committee inquiry, which took evidence from many organisations representing the Muslim community, reported in March 2010 and was highly critical of the government.⁴ It stated that it was wrong that a government department charged with promoting cohesive communities had taken a lead role in a counter-terrorism initiative and that this has led to much of the CLG’s positive work – to promote better community cohesion and to curb social exclusion – being tainted by association with the counter-terrorism agenda.⁵

Prior to this, following widespread criticism, the government announced in September 2009 that ‘Prevent’ was to be extended to cover white extremist racist groups.

‘Probationary citizenship’ hinders integration

The Borders, Citizenship and Immigration Act, passed in 2009, also popularised the view that new migrants pose a threat to shared values, particularly via its requirement that citizenship be ‘earned’. The new law, which was strongly criticised by the Joint Council for the Welfare of Immigrants (JCWI), the Immigration Law Practitioners’ Association (ILPA) and other groups, imposed a lengthy residence requirement described as ‘probationary citizenship’ (although it brings none of the benefits of citizenship), which can be reduced if candidates are prepared to undertake voluntary work (described as ‘active citizenship’). According to organisations like the Migrant and Refugee Communities Forum in London, the concept of ‘active citizenship’ is demeaning to non-citizens, who may be perceived as somehow unworthy if they do not make a greater commitment to British society than British citizens.⁶

According to immigration minister Phil Woolas, those who engage in crime or in behaviour which offends ‘British values’ or who demonstrate a ‘failure to integrate’, may be denied citizenship and have their residence in the UK terminated. Similar tests will be applied to anyone who wishes to stay in the UK more than temporarily.

ECRI has singled out the Borders, Citizenship and Immigration Act as a cause for concern, stating that ‘Care needs to be taken to ensure that the implementation of concepts such as “earned”, “probationary” and “active citizenship” and longer qualifying periods for naturalisation do not hinder the integration process’.⁷ In relation to this, ECRI implies that the term ‘probationary citizenship’ is misleading, as what is really meant is an additional period of temporary residence. It is this slower pathway to full citizenship via naturalisation that could hinder the path to integration as it reduces or delays migrants’ access to social rights, such as further or higher education.

Inequality becomes more entrenched

ECRI also pointed out that the government’s integration strategy did not seem to have sufficiently addressed persistent inequalities. It stated that black children were still around twice as likely as others to be permanently excluded from school, and ethnic minorities continue to be over-represented in the prison population, and their proportion continues to rise. The government’s ‘Improving Opportunity, Strengthening Society’ strategy had the twin aims

UNITED KINGDOM – VOICES



Pioneering a new educational forum

By Liz Fekete

First published on IRR News, 11 December 2008

A debate on asylum-seeking children organised by students from Bristol's City Academy, in which the IRR played an active role, could provide a model for schools.

Most people in the UK will have heard of *Question Time*, the televised debate in which politicians and public figures are questioned by a studio audience about issues in the news. On 2 December 2008, Bristol City Academy students, many from newly arrived communities or refugee backgrounds, appropriated the *Question Time* format for a half-day event called 'Time for Questions'. It was attended by over 300 students from across the city, as well as teachers, school governors and members of the community. On the 14-strong panel answering the students' questions were Kerry McCarthy MP (Labour Bristol East), local Liberal Democrat councillors, the prospective parliamentary candidate for the Conservative party, Bristol Defend the Asylum Seekers Campaign and a 7-year-old schoolboy, Norik Vardanyan, detained with his family for six days in 2006 and still fighting today for the right to live and study in Bristol.

The format and the debate

If you are part of an audience in a television studio debate, a warm-up act is provided to get you in the right frame of mind. This event started with young magician 'Billy the Kid' rousing the audience with an amusing display of tricks. With children from Bristol Brunel, Whitehall Primary, Cotham Secondary, Bristol City Academy and City College all seated and suitably warmed-up (parents and members of the local community, including asylum seekers and refugees were also well-represented), 13-year-old Asiyah Hassan opened the debate. Asiyah, a prime mover in the *Question Time* event, told her young audience that she had seen several of her schoolmates taken to Yarl's Wood detention centre and held in conditions which she believed gave the lie to the government formula that 'every child matters'. When Asiyah quoted Martin Luther King's injunction that 'an injustice anywhere, is a threat to justice everywhere' she was greeted with loud applause. But applause turned to laughter when she turned to adults on the panel declaring: 'It's our future, and it's time for us to take charge' because, 'let's face it, these older people aren't going to be around for ever'.

As author of *They Are Children Too*, which had been distributed to all Bristol secondary schools prior to the event, I was then invited to brief the young people on the nature of child detention in the UK. City Academy principal Ray Priest, a panel member, explained that of the 1,300 students at City Academy, from forty-one different nationalities, 111 were asylum seekers or others experiencing immigration problems.

Then it really was, time for questions. Feelings were running high. Five City Academy pupils (from Somalia, Uganda and Jamaica) had faced deportation orders in recent months and 14-year-old Mariama Jalloh, a member of the committee organising the event, also fears deportation to war-torn Liberia. But despite this, politicians, including those representing the Labour Party, were given a polite and sometimes enthusiastic response. In fact, the debate, as all the politicians agreed afterwards (even the Labour MP who faced the hardest questions), was of a very high quality.

Questions included: 'Why do people underestimate asylum seekers and refugees and make them feel uncomfortable?'; 'how would you feel if it were your child that was taken to a detention centre?' The question 'once a child has been deported, can they ever come back' was particularly pertinent as, only recently, a higher education student had been forced to return to Mauritius in the middle of his A' Level course. Other questions included 'why do we put more stress on poor countries, by sending people back?' and 'how come we spend so much money on deportations, when the money could be used to support local services and people experiencing the credit crunch?'

After ninety minutes of sustained debate, the young people were ready to return to their lessons. As they piled out of the lecture hall, they were still talking about the detention of children and evaluating the different political responses to the issue. It was clear that they felt that their voices had been heard. Many of the students later contacted the steering committee to ask whether the debate could be staged annually.

Background to the event

One reason why 'Time for Questions' was such a success was that the student audience had considerable personal experience of immigration and asylum issues. About three months ago Bristol Defend Asylum Seekers and several students at City Academy, many of them young Somali girls, organised a one-day community event at Easton

of increasing race equality and building community cohesion. However, ECRI's findings and other data would suggest that the government has failed to deliver on its promise to bring about greater racial equality. The programme was concluded in 2009, and a consultation launched on further race equalities strategies within the single equality framework. The results of the consultation have not been published.

In January 2010, a report by the Institute for Public Policy Research (IPPR) revealed that almost half of young black people were unemployed, compared with 20 per cent of young whites, following a big rise owing to the recession.⁸

Racism and anti-racism

The impact of the government's 2004 decision not to draw up a National Action Plan against Racism (going against its commitment to the 2001 World Conference Against Racism) continues to be felt. Its argument for abandoning the plan was that its equal opportunities and community cohesion agenda was adequate to deal with racism. In January 2010, the communities secretary, John Denham, in a speech assessing ten years of race relations legislation, went further in explaining the government's approach, suggesting that the promotion of equality, as well as strong anti-discrimination laws, had helped create a society more comfortable with diversity than ever before.⁹

Despite the police having in place stronger systems for recording racial incidents than many other European countries, six years after the National Plan against Racism was abandoned, levels of racial violence, as well as religiously-aggravated assaults, are once again a cause for concern.

No national action plan against racial violence

Around 60,000 racist or religiously motivated incidents are reported to the police each year.¹⁰ The British Crime Survey indicated that the actual number of racist incidents is rising. An IRR briefing paper published in June 2010¹¹ examining cases of racial violence states that the UK government is failing to acknowledge the true extent of racial violence in the UK and that much of the impetus since Sir William Macpherson's inquiry into the death of Stephen Lawrence has been lost.¹² Not only is the government failing to respond adequately to growing levels of racism, but in many cases the popular debate, specifically stigmatising migrants and Muslims, helps create a climate of hostility towards these groups. Organisations like the Islamic Human Rights Commission and the European Muslim Research Centre (EMRC) at the University of Exeter¹³ have also drawn attention to the growing levels of attacks against Muslims, and Muslim places of worship, such as an arson attack on a Luton Islamic centre and two petrol bombings in a week of a mosque in Bexley, Kent.

ECRI has recommended that the government carry out research into the reasons for an increase in racist

incidents in recent years, paying close attention to the links between racist discourse and racist violence.

Victim support groups underfunded

Grassroots organisations responding to racial violence are also concerned that the government's new approach to equality (see below) is leading to a situation where independent groups providing support to the victims of racial violence are passed over in favour of a local authority-led multi-agency response to 'hate crimes'. The Birmingham Racial Attacks Monitoring Unit (BRAMU) was told that unless it broadened its remit to cover all 'hate crimes' – a policy which, BRAMU's Maxie Hayles pointed out, ignores the institutional racism which led victims of racist attack to turn to community-based organisations in the first place – it would have its funding cut.¹⁴

In June 2009, after an ugly, violent and sustained campaign of racist intimidation in Belfast, thirty Romanian families in Belfast were forced to flee Northern Ireland. The coordinated violence threw into stark relief both the manner in which small neo-Nazi groups were exploiting disaffected young Protestant gangs and the failure of police adequately to protect the victims of racial violence.¹⁵ There was, however, wide support for the Romanian families from political parties, trade unions, churches, Amnesty International and the traveller community.¹⁶

Concern about the impact of the far Right

There was great concern when the far-Right British National Party (BNP) made a significant breakthrough in the June 2009 European parliament elections, gaining two seats, as well as winning seats in the local elections. But from there on its fortunes waned, and in the May 2010 general and local elections it was all but wiped out. The racism of the BNP was thrown into stark relief when, following a legal challenge from the Equality and Human Rights Commission (EHRC) which accused it of breaching the Race Relations Act, it was forced to change its rules in order to admit non-white people (Its constitution stated that only 'indigenous Caucasians' could join).

Another cause of concern has been the provocative demonstrations against 'Muslim extremists' organised by the newly-formed English Defence League and its Welsh and Scottish sister leagues which have held a number of rallies and demonstrations against 'Muslim extremists' in various towns and cities including Birmingham, Manchester, Leeds, Nottingham, Wrexham, Swansea and Glasgow.

Racism in prisons highlighted

Racism in prisons is a particularly sensitive subject in the UK, as in 2000 a 19-year-old British Muslim, Zahid Mubarek, was murdered by a known racist inmate with whom he shared a cell, at the Feltham Young Offenders Institute. Following legal challenges from the young man's family, the government was forced to establish a public inquiry which, after an eighteen-month investigation, concluded in June

Community Centre where several families came forward and spoke movingly of their ordeals in detention and dawn raids during which they had been forced into vans and almost vomited from the lack of air. Six young girls, led by Asiyah, then approached City Academy teacher Paulette North with the idea for the 'Time for Questions' event'. A steering committee was formed comprising the six girls as well as the DICE group at City Academy (a separate group of twelve students from newly-arrived communities). Having secured the backing of the principal, and support from the Young Bristol campaign and the Camelot Fund, it was possible to flesh out the young people's proposal.

After the event, I spoke to Paulette North, who has taught at the Academy for nine years. She was clear that this event had been organised by young people, with adults playing a supportive role. Much of the credit for its professionalism, Paulette explained, should go to Global Xchange, the international volunteer exchange programme for young people aged 18 to 25 run by Voluntary Service Overseas and the British Council. It was a stroke of good fortune for City Academy that Global Xchange had a project going in Bristol in the months running up to December. Two Global Xchange students, John Mark Ramiso from the Philippines and Laura Marshall from Scotland, were seconded to the Academy. Laura, who had had no previous experience with working with young people, or with asylum seekers, was appointed to act as Asiyah's personal assistant and given office space where she soon found herself surrounded by dozens of students anxious for advice on how make their vision a reality.

When I caught up with Laura after the event, she was back at her computer recording the feedback of excited students. 'It went great. I loved the debate', one student enthused. In a few days time, Laura will be off to the Philippines to complete the second half of the exchange programme. 'Before coming to the Academy I thought that working in Bristol would be the easy bit of Global Xchange ... But this has been the most amazing challenging experience with a very steep learning curve', she concluded.

According to Paulette North, the event was so successful because it dealt with issues which were in the children's own backyard. 'There are so many children in Bristol with immigration problems.' The 'external context' of their lives 'erodes their sense of belonging here'. The by-product of the event, she hoped, would be a greater confidence amongst such students who 'could now see that it was safe to discuss such issues'. The damaging nature of the external context was revealed when I spoke with some of them afterwards. While everyone wanted to talk about fighting on behalf of friends facing deportation, nobody wanted to identify themselves as an asylum seeker or refugee. As Asiyah had said in her introductory remarks, 'I don't like the terms asylum seeker, refugee'. These were derogatory and divisive terms and what mattered to her was that we were 'all human beings'.

An educative function

By the end of the day, it was clear that the event had led to a cumulative change in the attitudes of both teachers and students. As I walked the Academy corridors with Paulette, she was continually being approached by beaming teachers telling her how proud they were of all the students, that they had behaved so well and asked such intelligent questions. One teacher remarked of one student, 'I never knew she had it in her.' 'It was an educative process for the teachers as well', explained Paulette. 'Suddenly they see their children in a new light.' And 'if you do things that relate to the children's lived lives this also makes sense educationally. Education is about making sense of the world. The event made the kids think, it made them reflect.'

Even though the school day was coming to a close, members of the steering committee were not going home. A second after-school event was planned. A proud principal was there again to welcome parents and members of the community. He told the new, mainly adult audience that it was his strongly-held belief that 'schools have a role in shaping the society of the future. They have to be brave about taking a stand on what is right.' What City Academy did by staging 'Time for Questions' was to 'help young people understand complicated issues via a democratic process'.

And the impact of the day went still further. Throughout the day Paulette's phone had not stopped ringing. BBC Education, BBC Bristol Driveline, *The Bristol Evening Post* and the local radio station, Ujama, were amongst those looking to break the story of how a group of young people pioneered an exciting new educational forum.

2006 that Zahid Mubarek's death had been 'entirely preventable'.¹⁷ Another inquiry by the Prison Service highlighted institutional racism within prisons and warned of growing anti-religious sentiment in its own ranks.

Government figures released in February 2010 under a Freedom of Information Act request suggested that racist incidents in the 139 prisons in England and Wales had risen by a quarter and that prison officers were more than twice as likely to be reported for racism than prisoners. Staff-on-staff racism had also increased in the period under review.¹⁸ The Prison Service's own research indicated in 2008 that black prisoners were consistently more likely than white British prisoners to have force used against them,¹⁹ and the prisons inspectorate warned in the same year of growing 'disaffection and distance' between Muslim inmates and the prison system.²⁰

Renewed concern about institutionalised racism in policing

Ten years after the Macpherson inquiry officially found institutional racism in the police, an investigation by the NGO the Runnymede Trust into progress since the inquiry, has concluded that in three areas – stop and search, recruitment and retaining ethnic minority staff, little had changed in the Metropolitan police.²¹ In addition, there has been criticism of the Independent Police Complaints Commission, which is independent of the police but funded by the Home Office. It deals with appeals against the way a police force deals with complaints, but was criticised by a cross-party group of MPs for failing to win the community's trust and for a lack of transparency.²² The MPs singled out for special criticism the fact that ex-police officers were being used to investigate complaint against their former force.

Countering discrimination

The government has declined to sign Protocol 12 to the European Convention on Human Rights, which protects against discrimination, arguing that domestic legislation gives equivalent protection. Racism was subsumed into other 'inequalities' when the Commission for Racial Equality was merged in October 2007 with the Equal Opportunities Commission and the Disabilities Rights Commission to form the Equalities and Human Rights Commission (EHRC). The policy continued with the passage through Parliament in 2009/10 of the Equalities Bill.²³ Ministries such as the justice ministry launched 'single equality schemes' for the criminal justice system, prisons and the probation service which lumped racism together with other forms of discrimination such as that based on religious belief, disability, gender, age and sexuality. Cilius Victor of Newham Monitoring Project (NMP) gave voice to many organisations' frustration with the new approach: 'The whole discussion on race has taken a reactionary leap back twenty years in the post 9/11 world and the space

for critical thought and engagement is now getting narrower and narrower and narrower'.²⁴

New laws against religious discrimination

The harmonisation of discrimination law brought in by the Equalities Act 2010 means that protection from discrimination on grounds of religion and belief is now essentially the same as that provided on grounds of race. There is no ban on the hijab in the UK, although there has been a vigorous media debate on whether the burqa should be banned and in January 2010 the chair of the UK Independence Party called for a ban.²⁵ There has been a small number of cases involving Muslim women wearing religious clothing being refused access to services and a number of incidents where veiled women have been abused in the streets.

Massive increase in discrimination in stop and search

Increased powers given to police by the Terrorism Act 2000 have been consistently attacked by NGOs. And in a landmark ruling in February 2010, the European Court of Human Rights ruled police stop and search powers under the Terrorism Act 2000 unlawful, on the basis that the powers were too wide, there were inadequate safeguards against abuse and the risks of discriminatory use were 'very considerable'.²⁶

A review by the EHRC suggested that black people were at least six times more likely, and Asian people around twice as likely than white people to be stopped and searched by the police under Police and Criminal Evidence Act stop and search powers and that the police were more likely to give white youths more lenient reprimands or fines, while black youths were more likely to be charged. The Commission has written to forces warning that they could potentially be sued for breaching the Race Relations Act, with the areas with the most disproportionate use of the powers against black people including Dorset, Hampshire and Leicestershire.²⁷ In February 2009, the BBC revealed that a disproportionate number of Asians and black people are being stopped by police and fingerprinted with a mobile scanner in pilot identity checks carried out by 20 police forces across the country.²⁸

Discrimination in criminal databases

Black Mental Health UK²⁹ and Genewatch have drawn attention to a worrying new area of discrimination. The DNA of three-quarters of young black men aged between 18 and 35 is now on the Police National DNA database amid allegations that such men are deliberately arrested solely to collect their DNA.³⁰ (To qualify for inclusion on the criminal database you do not have to be convicted of a crime; if you are arrested, but later acquitted, your DNA is still held. Home Office figures estimate that around one million people on the database have no criminal conviction.³¹)

The UK national DNA database is the largest in the world, containing the biometric samples of approximately 5.1 million people.³² Since April 2004, the police in England and Wales have been able to

INTERVIEW



Speaking up for young people

By Laura Marshall*

First published on IRR News, 11 December 2008

An interview with 13-year-old Asiya Hassan, a member of the Bristol City Academy steering committee that organised a forum on the detention of asylum-seeking children.

What made you decide to organise 'Time for Questions'?

Several months ago, some friends and I organised a one-day conference in Easton Community Centre on the issue of children in detention centres. We did this because some of our friends had been detained, and we were shocked by their experiences. The way they were treated while in detention was unbelievable. They weren't allowed the rights that a normal kid should have. After the conference we decided that we should take this further – that MPs and councillors should get involved and start answering our questions.

What do you hope to achieve with this event?

I want to raise awareness of what's going on. We must stop detention centres, particularly the detention of children, and make the UK a more welcoming place. At the moment it is not at all welcoming to refugees. I also hope to gain respect for young people. Our hopes should come true and we should be able to put pressure on people in power to achieve this.

Was it easy to organise such a big event?

It has been very difficult – there have been challenges I didn't expect. But I'm gaining lots of skills which will be useful to me in the future. In addition to the general experience and responsibility gained from organising a big event, it is great to get experience on this particular issue as I hope to go into a career in politics. I've also met lots of new people who have all been very helpful.

Do you think young people have enough opportunity to have their voices heard?

No! Absolutely not! Young people need to speak up for themselves if they want their voices heard, which is what I'm doing right now. In order to get our point across we need to organise many more events like this. And we will be heard, no matter what it takes.

So do children have the same human rights as adults in our society today?

Yes and no. In this case, the whole problem is to do with children being treated the same as adults, being locked up in detention centres which are NO PLACE FOR CHILDREN.

Are young people proactive enough in the community? If not, why not?

Some are, but some are not. I think some kids just need a little bit of help in order to get their voices heard. They also need to grow in confidence, and maybe be made aware of the ways in which they can be heard. Some people just aren't aware of what happens around them, or if they are aware, often they don't take much action. My hope is to empower young people to get out and do things they've never done before – to campaign for positive things, for change.

You seem very engaged, do you have another campaign in mind after this one?

My next campaign will be about knife crime, and how we can make Bristol, and the UK, a much safer place to live. At the moment it isn't. Levels of knife crime in this country are already atrocious, and are increasing. Something must be done about this.

****Laura Marshall volunteers for the international volunteer programme, Global Xchange.***

take DNA samples without consent from anyone over the age of ten arrested on suspicion of any recordable offence. Olu Allake, president of 100 Black Men of London, said that 'The DNA database is a decisive issue for our communities. So many of our youths are on it even though they haven't ever committed any crime and their parents are worried about what implications this could have for the future.'³³

Discrimination in sentencing of Muslim protesters

In March 2010, a campaign was launched to defend twenty-two young Muslims, convicted of public order offences as a result of taking part in demonstrations in London, in December 2008 and January 2009 following the Israeli invasion of Gaza. The campaign, which is backed by a parliamentary group of MPs, says that young Muslims have not been targeted and punished in connection with public order offences on this scale since the charges and convictions linked to the Bradford 'riots' of 2001. Research indicates a disproportionate police operation against young Muslims: that young Muslims were targeted for arrests months after the demonstrations in dawn raids (in one such raid a 12-year-old boy was arrested); many of the arrests were of students in full-time education and with no criminal record; that those arrested were required to surrender their passports, despite the fact that the vast majority of those charged were British citizens; that British Muslim citizens were served with immigration notices, which stated that they could be deported depending on the outcome of criminal proceedings; that Muslim demonstrators were sent to prison for lengthy terms, often against recommendations in pre-sentence reports from the probation service.³⁴

Segregating foreign prisoners

The EHRC brought a legal challenge against the government policy, criticised by the Chief Inspector of Prisons, of concentrating foreign national prisoners in a small number of prisons, away from home prisoners and from their families, where prisoners have fewer rights and are subjected to greater punishments.³⁵ While the High Court ruled that the Prison Service, the National Offender Management Service (NOMS) and the UK Border Agency (UKBA) all breached their own race and disability equality duties in bringing in the scheme in 2009, the Court did not quash the segregation policy.³⁶

Asylum seekers and undocumented migrants

The government maintains a harsh and inhuman deterrent approach to asylum seekers and an unyielding approach to the undocumented, despite the mounting momentum for a regularisation programme and an amnesty. The Asylum Support Partnership, which consists of five government-funded agencies providing services to asylum seekers, has

concluded that destitution is now a fundamental factor within the asylum process, although driving desperate people into destitution is not succeeding in forcing them out of the country. In the face of repeated legal challenges, the government persists in removing failed asylum seekers to some of the world's most troubled spots. Expulsion by charter flight is becoming more commonplace.³⁷ The vulnerability of those faced with deportation was exposed by a tragedy in March 2010 when the bodies of three Russian asylum seekers were found below a block of flats in Glasgow, all three apparently having taken their own lives by jumping from the fifteenth floor.³⁸

Protests against forced deportations

The National Coalition of Anti-Deportation Campaigns, the International Federation of Iraqi Refugees, the Zimbabwe Association, the Congo Support Project and other refugee communities have all mobilised against forced deportations to these countries. Deportations to the DRC, suspended in 2007, resumed in 2009, with the first charter flight in two years taking place in May 2009. The *Guardian* newspaper reported that at least two of the deportees were immediately detained on arrival. One man, Nsimba Kumbi, was reportedly tortured by members of the general directorate of intelligence and special services who also forced him to give one guard oral sex while his hands were tied behind his back. Another man, Rabin Waba Muambi, was also placed in secret detention where he was forced to drink his own urine.³⁹

In November 2009, the government announced that it would resume forcible removals to Zimbabwe, after a three-year moratorium. In October the government began charter flights to Baghdad, the first since 2003, although flights to Kurdish-controlled northern Iraq had resumed several years earlier.

Voluntary sector and charities highlight destitution

The government's continuing refusal to give status to refused asylum seekers whose countries were too dangerous to return to, including Zimbabweans, Somalis, Afghanis and Iraqis, led to widespread hardship and destitution.⁴⁰ The Asylum Support Partnership states that most refused asylum seekers who were destitute for more than six months came from a very small number of countries, all with well documented human rights abuses, persecution, impunity and/or conflict.⁴¹ The Joseph Rowntree Charitable Trust found refused asylum-seeking families with children from the world's most troubled countries scavenging in bins for food, caught between asylum refusal and the impossibility of safe return. More than a third had been destitute for over a year, and two-thirds came from Iraq, Iran, Zimbabwe and Eritrea.⁴² The Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission found that the exclusive focus on immigration status by local housing and social service departments meant that the right not to be discriminated against in the provision of basic housing and subsistence was being



Young? British? Muslim? Listen Up!

By Rebecca Wood*

First published on IRR News, 21 January 2009

An innovative new youth project has made itself felt in north London, challenging media stereotyping and an increasing sense of marginalisation amongst young British Muslims.

The project, Young Muslim Voices (YMV), could provide a useful model of successful youth engagement for other groups of young Muslims in the UK, and young people more widely. IRR News went to find out more.

Stop and search

Eighteen-year-old Tariq speaks eloquently of being stopped and searched by the police almost every day on his way to school when he was younger. Repeatedly late for school and incurring the wrath of his teachers, Tariq says he simply got used to being stopped by the police and assumed that it happened to everyone.

It was only later that he realised he was being singled out because he is a young Muslim man. With that realisation came an understanding of the wider context: that young Muslim men are being stopped disproportionately and risk unequal treatment by the police.

Because of his involvement with YMV, Tariq has become increasingly able to articulate his concerns about policing and the disproportionate impact it is having on young Muslim men. He is talking about the issue not only with his peers, but also to the police themselves. And what's even better? The police might just be listening.

Tariq's rapid journey to this level of engagement in many ways mirrors the growth of YMV itself. Just over a year after it was launched, YMV enters 2009 having completed a series of successful and imaginative projects and with plans to meet Beverly Hughes MP, minister for children, young people and families, to discuss knife crime. At the end of 2008 the project was awarded one of the Philip Lawrence Awards for active citizenship.

Beginnings: disengaged and marginalised

The project was launched in August 2007. It emerged from a growing concern about the low levels of engagement and the lack of opportunities for young Muslims to speak about issues affecting their lives. The group, led by some twenty young leaders, has, in this short time, successfully engaged with over 2,000 young people who live in and around Islington, north London.

It began in humble fashion: finding the things that interested young people and using them as a way to start talking. And most ironic of all, it began at a place which has been increasingly associated in the media with all things 'extremist': Finsbury Park Mosque.

Finsbury Park and football

In 2007, Noori Bibi, coordinator of YMV and a member of Islington Council's umbrella youth participation project Listen Up, linked up with City University where an Events Management course was set up. She was looking for young people to join the course and approached Finsbury Park Mosque, which put forward the names of a number of young people, including 17-year-old Mohammed. They in turn recommended the course to their friends and so it grew, drawing in, amongst others, Tariq.

At the same time, Noori was making contact with the local Somali community. She was encouraged to go to Finsbury Park and one Saturday turned up to find about sixty Somali teenagers, with no funding or external support, running and managing their own football team. Their ethos was all about keeping other young Somalis off the streets and providing them with a sense of a community of their own. They mentored and advised younger teenagers and talked about the dangers of drugs. Eighteen-year-old Omar and 21-year-old Amin were both involved and, through Noori, were also signed up to the Events Management course, hoping to find ways of expanding and finding much needed funding for their football team.

As well as joining the course, Noori encouraged these young people to visit the White Lion Centre in Islington, home of Listen Up. From these initial seeds a series of creative projects grew: an anti-racism football event called Kick Islamophobia, film projects documenting the experiences of young asylum seekers, refugees and British Bangladeshi boys living in Islington, a radio show, focus groups, arts in schools projects and ultimately the launch of Young Muslim Voices.

violated in the case of homeless and destitute asylum seekers and other migrants.⁴³

Hunger strikes, violence and lack of care in detention centres

There have been repeated hunger strikes in detention centres such as Brook House at London's Gatwick airport, and Yarl's Wood in Bedfordshire, and the activist group Medical Justice continues its campaign against widespread violence and brutality on removal of refused asylum seekers.⁴⁴ In March 2010, Public Interest Lawyers issued a lawsuit, claiming that a few days into a peaceful hunger strike of over forty women at Yarl's Wood, the women were corralled into a small corridor and subjected to the public order crowd-control technique of 'kettling'⁴⁵ as well as physical and racial abuse by centre staff. In January 2009 the London Detainee Support Group published a report 'Detained Lives', describing how hundreds of failed asylum seekers and foreign ex-offenders who could not be removed from the country were dumped in detention centres for periods of up to eight years. An official inspection report published in June found that vulnerable men at Colnbrook immigration removal centre, near London, were held, sometimes for years, in 'oppressive and degrading' conditions, with an increase in bullying and the use of force.⁴⁶ In January 2009, an official investigation was launched after two immigration service staff working with asylum-seekers were found to have links to the BNP. In the two previous years asylum seekers made nearly 300 complaints of brutality, including 38 claims of racism, about private security and immigration staff.⁴⁷

The government have also made it difficult for visitors to make complaints about the way detainees are treated. Visitors from SOAS Detainee Support Group were banned from visiting Yarl's Wood in July 2009 for being 'confrontational'.⁴⁸ There have been persistent complaints about poor standards of health care in detention centres and in April 2010 an investigation was launched into the death of Eliud Nguli Nyenze, a 40-year-old Kenyan man at Oakington centre near Cambridge. Police were called in to break up a 'disturbance' after his death, amidst allegations that the man had repeatedly asked for painkillers and was seen 'crawling around the floor in pain' before he died.⁴⁹

In November 2009, the Independent Police Complaints Commission (IPCC) launched an inquiry after a Chinese woman arrested and held overnight at Heathrow airport as a suspected overstayer died when she fell from a perimeter bridge at the airport shortly after her release.

Campaign mounts against the detention of children

The Children's Society and Bail for Immigration Detainees (BID), supported by the Diana, Princess of Wales Memorial Trust, formed 'Outcry',⁵⁰ which is now supported by 94 MPs who have signed an early day motion calling for an end to the practice whereby the UK detains children for immigration purposes. Despite

the government's withdrawal in January 2009 of its immigration reservation to the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child⁵¹ an estimated two thousand children were arrested and held in immigration detention during 2009, according to former Children's Commissioner for England Sir Al Aynsley-Green.⁵² Zimbabwean asylum seeker Lorraine Thulambo, aged 18, attempted to hang herself in February 2009 after two months spent locked up in the Yarl's Wood Detention Centre in Bedfordshire. In October, a ten-year-old Nigerian girl tried to hang herself after being detained in Tinsley House removal centre, Gatwick. She was detained for the second time despite warnings by health professionals that she might try to kill herself if she was re-detained.⁵³ The new Conservative-Liberal Democrat coalition government that came to power in May 2010 has promised to end the detention of children, although what is proposed is not clear at the time of writing.

Campaigning for the right to work

There are an estimated 700,000 undocumented or irregular workers living in the UK, about two-thirds of whom have been in the UK for five years or more.⁵⁴ Strangers into Citizens, which campaigns for legal routes to regularisation and recognises the right of long-term migrants to remain in the UK, has won the support of London mayor Boris Johnson, among others. In January 2010, the Refugee Council with Barnardo's, Migrants Rights Network, Still Human Still Here and Brighter Futures, trade unions and others launched 'Let them work', a campaign calling on the government to allow asylum seekers the right to work.

The Citizens for Sanctuary campaign (see below) challenged prospective parliamentarians in 200 constituencies to sign up to the Sanctuary Pledge which is based on the on the recommendations of the Independent Asylum Commission (IAC).⁵⁵ The migrant-led newspaper *Migrant Voice* brought out an Election Special that had a strong focus on capturing migrants' ambitions with regard to the economy.

Students protest arrest of cleaning workers campaigning for living wage

In June 2009, students at the School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS) of the University of London occupied the building for three days to protest at the arrest of nine cleaners who had campaigned for a living wage. The nine had worked at the school for years, and were arrested when an 'emergency staff meeting' to which they had been called turned into a raid by twenty immigration officers dressed in riot gear. The students were angry at the university administrator's role in the raid, and their campaign led to the formation of 'Hands Off My Workmate'.

Ethnic businesses deplore aggressive immigration raids

A new points-based system for regulating economic migration, introduced in phases over 2008-9, restricted immigration to specified highly skilled occupations,

Young Muslim Voices

The young people working tirelessly in their own time for YMV are trying to show a different picture to that commonly presented about British Muslims. They call on lazy minds and disinterested hearts to question what damage is being wrought to a whole generation of young British people and to a whole community in the name of national security and community cohesion. And they think of themselves as inclusive, starting with the issue of young Muslims but encouraging non-Muslims affected by the same issues to join them.

Their rapid success and appeal to other young people is largely due to a formula that Tariq concisely explained to IRR News: 'It's about engaging with young people in a way in which they like. Like through football. Through anti-racism. You have to have something that's attractive to young people – it's like having a product to sell!' For 19-year-old Shukri, one of the few young women involved, it is all about 'being friendly and providing what they need'.

The first year of YMV became a consultation exercise and resulted, at the end of 2008, in the launch of the *Young Muslim Voices Report 2008/9* at a one-day youth-led conference. The event was well attended by key decision makers and community leaders as well as police and other young people. The issues raised by the young people, and detailed in the report, included policing and the criminal justice system, identity and Britishness, anti-Muslim racism, the media, education, employment, housing, girls and young women, and asylum seekers and refugees.

More projects, greater engagement

The issue of community policing and criminal justice is one example of the way in which YMV has turned concerns around key issues into concrete action. As a result of the determination of a core group of young people, including Tariq, YMV has succeeded in getting a commitment from the borough commander as well as other police leaders to work with YMV on the issue of policing young people, particularly young Muslim men. This new project, called Breaking the Barriers, is just one of the many ways in which YMV has expanded beyond its original consultative phase, by beginning to work on positive change around key issues.

Projects on engaging with young Muslim girls and women, on asylum seekers and refugees, and on the Somali community are all beginning to take form. An ongoing Listen Up project on knife and gun crime, which will include the meeting with Beverly Hughes sometime in the near future, is also taking shape.

Alongside all of this, some of those young people who initially signed up for the Events Management course are now doing an accredited course on youth work with Islington Council so that they, in turn, can get the skills they need to go out into the community and work with other young people. Suddenly this group of young people, who had felt so marginalised and stereotyped, are finding their voice, becoming active and, in the process, becoming empowered.

An important model

The success of YMV provides a significant model for young people around the UK, especially British Muslims. It comes at a critical moment when anti-Muslim racism is on the rise and the terms 'Muslim' and 'extremist' are becoming fused in the public imagination. In doing so, Muslim voices are silenced and marginalised, or misrepresented, at a time when, arguably more than ever, they need to be heard.

These young people ultimately represent a significant strand of Britain's future. They are rising to the challenge of being marginalised with conviction, determination and pride. In the process, they are forming ideas of who they are and what it means for them to be young, Muslim and British. Debating the concept of Britishness, they came up with a definition: 'a cosmopolitan community where people are respectful of different faiths and different backgrounds'. And their wish for the future: not a British Obama, but a real sign of progress. A black Muslim woman prime minister.

Listen up? Yes, we are!

***Rebecca Wood is a regular contributor to the IRR News Service and is currently researching youth deaths and racial violence.**

and also pushed more of the burden of policing immigration onto employers, who became subject to a continuing obligation to ensure that their employees are legally entitled to work in the particular job. Thousands of employers all over the UK, the vast majority small high-street businesses such as take-aways, restaurants and groceries, have been subjected to aggressive raids by immigration and police in search of illegal workers.⁵⁶

Points-based immigration system condemned

The new points-based immigration system is leading to widespread injustices, and more and more professional bodies have criticised it as irrational and detrimental to the national interest. It resulted in many recitals, concerts, theatrical and other artistic events being cancelled as directors and performers were refused visas or withdrew applications following contemptuous treatment by immigration officers. Leading artists, directors and performers launched a

campaign against the new system in February 2009, and attracted over 6,000 signatories to their petition in a few weeks.⁵⁷

City of Sanctuary movement formed

In July 2009 a national network of local groups in ten cities throughout the UK formed a 'City of Sanctuary' movement, based on the work done in Sheffield in 2005, to 'build a culture of hospitality for people seeking sanctuary in the UK', and to counter politicians' negative stereotyping and the popular racism of the media. The formation of a city or town as a City of Sanctuary is based on the commitment of member organisations and groups, support from local politicians and the active participation of refugees and refugee groups. Several local authorities, among them Bradford, Coventry, Oxford and Swansea, have endorsed the City of Sanctuary initiative and there are City of Sanctuary groups across England and Scotland.

CONTACTS

Bail for Immigration Detainees (BID)

Media and policy inquiries
Tel: +44 (0)7962 460956
Email: Amanda@biduk.org
Web: www.biduk.org

Bristol Defend The Asylum Seekers Campaign

Box 41,
Greenleaf Books,
82 Colston Street, Bristol, BS1 5BB
Email: asylumbristol@hotmail.com
Web: www.asylumbristol.or.uk

Hidden Herstories

Email: hiddenherstories@octabiahousing.org.uk
Web: www.hiddenherstories.org

Islamic Human Rights Commission

PO Box 598,
Wembley, HA9 7HX
UK
Tel: +44 (0) 208 904 4222
Email: info@ihrc.org
Web: www.ihrc.org

Just West Yorkshire

Unit 4, Carlisle Business Centre,
60 Carlisle Road,
Bradford BD8 8BD
UK
Tel: +44 (0) 1274 542 222
Email: admin@justwestyorkshire.co.uk

Manifesta

88 Cambridge Gardens
London W10 6HS UK
Tel: +44 (0) 208 892 8504
Email: marion@manifesta.org.uk
Web: www.manifesta.org.uk

Medical Justice Network

86 Durham Road
London N7 7DT
UK
Tel: +44 (0)207 561 7498
Email: emma.ginn@medicaljustice.org.uk
Web: www.medicaljustice.org.uk

Migrant Media

PO Box 47412
London N13 5WG
UK
Tel: +44 (0)7770 432 439
Email: info@injusticefilm.co.uk
Web: www.injusticefilm.co.uk

Muslim Youth Helpline

18 Rosemont Road
London NW3 6NE
UK
Tel: +44 (0) 207 435 8171
Email: info@myh.org.uk
Web: www.myh.org.uk

REVIEW



Islington's not so silent voices

By Najia Ahmed and Nazmin Ali*

First published on IRR News, 16 July 2009

In June 2009, Reel Islington Screenings (RIS) held its second film festival to showcase up and coming young film-making talent in Islington, north London

Islington has been acclaimed for its outstanding youth work throughout the borough. Young Muslim Voices (YMV), part of the youth engagement programme of the Listen Up project, won the prestigious Philip Lawrence award in 2008 for its

youth engagement work. RIS has been working alongside many youths across the borough in order to support budding film-makers. In so engaging youths in different activities to better their lives and provide them with skills that are not taught in schools, RIS has provided Islington youths with the opportunity to express their opinions on matters they find most important, issues that would not have been explored by the mass media.

Reel Islington showed a variety of short films all of which evoked empathy from the audience and sent out thought-provoking messages about society today. Some were documentaries, others short fictional films and some made the audience laugh once they had recognised the irony of situations which we all at some point experience.

There was also the more serious three-part documentary *All Shades of Grey*, produced by Minou Norouzi, who worked alongside young Muslims from the YMV project based at the White Lion youth centre in Islington. These were initially filmed for the YMV conference in November 2008, where key decision-makers, with the power to make change, were invited for the day to hear the issues facing young Muslims today.

All Shades of Grey proved to be a success straight away. Part one featured two Eritrean refugee girls who arrived in this country a couple of years ago, were dumped, helpless and unable to speak English, in Islington and left to fend for themselves. The films made a huge impact when shown at festivals in Germany and Canada. One of the girls, Maria, was able to travel to Germany to make a personal appearance at the film festival, resulting in a very emotional reaction from many in the audience who had never before experienced or witnessed such despair. The two girls, Tsieher and Maria, are now, with support from YMV, looking to establish their own organisation to help girls in similar situations – using their experiences to help others.

The second part of *All Shades of Grey* is about young Somali youths who have arrived in this country and transformed their passion for football into the creation of their own football club, Jubba FC. In doing so these boys have challenged the stereotypes of young Somali Muslims. The film showed an interview with Omar describing his work and success as a community leader. He and co-leader Amin Hussein have created the organisation Jubba Youth Community Association, primarily to help youths adjust to life in this country and promote a sense of community in young people who may feel alienated from society. Omar and Amin are an inspiration to all young people because of everything they have achieved in the short time they have spent in this country and because of the hope they offer to any newly arrived migrants. They are true role models to everyone within their community.

The final documentary in *All Shades of Grey* is on silent voices – the voices of girls. In the last few years, much attention has been paid to Muslim women, with stories continually portraying them as oppressed by the religion of Islam. However what most people are unaware of is the important way in which cultural factors impact on a young Muslim girl's life. It is usually these factors rather than Islam that prevent them from having a voice. YMV has given Muslim girls a place where they can get involved freely and engage in activities they otherwise would not have experienced. Not only does it offer activities such as self-defence but also valuable life skills which girls can use in the future. One active member of YMV talks about her experiences as a young British Muslim Bangladeshi girl and the cultural obstacles she faces from her family over the simplest of things such as her decision to attend the White Lion youth centre and trying to establish a relationship of trust between her and her parents.

These three documentaries barely scratch the surface of the issues facing young people. But they have gone a good way in highlighting the problems that need to be addressed and definitely made more people aware of the problems facing the youth nowadays. As such they represent a positive step towards integrating Muslim youth within the wider community.

It is worth mentioning that although *All Shades of Grey* were a great success at the Islington festival they were not the only films screened. These other films were evidence that youth talent is on the rise. These young film-makers are the ones to watch out for in the years to come.

***Najia Ahmed and Nazmin Ali are both students and volunteers at Young Muslim Voices.**

National Coalition of Anti-Deportation Campaigns (NCADC)

86 Durham Road,
London N7 7DT
UK
Tel: +44 (0) 121 554 6947
Email: ncadc@ncadc.org.co.uk
Web: www.ncadc.org.uk

Outcry!

c/o Children's Society,
Edward Rudolf House,
Margery Street,
London WC1X 0JL
UK
Tel: +44 (0)845 300 1128
Email: supportercare@childrenssociety.org.uk
Web: www.outcrycampaign.org.uk

Statewatch

PO Box 1516,
London N16 0EW
UK
Tel: +44 (0)20 8802 1882
Email: office@statewatch.org
Web: www.statewatch.org

Migrant Voice

Web: www.migrantvoice.org.uk

Young Muslim Voices

Listen Up project
Tel: +44 (0) 20 7527 4499
Email: noori.bibi@islington.gov.uk

NOTES

- 1 During the 1980s, statutory agencies began to use the term Black and Minority Ethnic (BME) to refer to Asians, Africans and African-Caribbean people who had come to the UK post-second world war (from former British colonies) and their descendants. It is now used as a descriptor for anyone from a visibly different minority ethnic group. However, many young people from BME communities choose to describe themselves in a way reminiscent of hyphenated Americans (i.e. Black British or British Muslim) simultaneously acknowledging their Britishness and their heritage.
- 2 A government consultation exercise on these funding arrangements led to critical responses from ninety-eight groups. A successful legal action was also launched by Southall Black Sisters (SBS), a long-standing domestic violence support group for BME women in west London, which had its funding cut on the ground that it should serve all victims, regardless of ethnicity. It took the London Borough of Ealing to court, arguing that provision of services to an ethnic minority was compatible with equality and cohesion, and won.
- 3 Arun Kundnani, 'Spooked! How not to prevent violent extremism', Institute of Race Relations, 2009.
- 4 House of Commons Communities and Local Government Committee, 'Preventing Violent Extremism', 6th report of session 2009-10, March 2010.
- 5 See Parliament News Online, 'MPs warn Prevent programme backfiring in local communities', 30 March 2010.
- 6 See Zrinka Bralo, 'What price a volunteering "fast track" to citizenship' in *Migrant Voice*, March 2010.
- 7 ECRI Report on the United Kingdom (fourth monitoring cycle), 2 March 2010. CRI (2010)4.
- 8 IPPR press release, 'Recession leaves almost half young black people unemployed, finds IPPR', 20 January 2010, <http://www.ippr.org/pressreleases/?id=3846>
- 9 <http://www.communities.gov.uk/documents/communities/pdf/1432344.pdf>
- 10 The statistics, which are published annually by the ministry of justice, were cited by ECRI. The Crown Prosecution Service (CPS) also produces an annual Hate Crime Report covering all racist and religious crimes prosecuted.
- 11 'Racial violence: the buried issue', IRR, June 2010.
- 12 Stephen Lawrence was murdered in April 1993 in Eltham, south-east London. The police investigation was the subject of mounting criticism and the family, which was forced to bring its own private prosecution, successfully fought for an independent investigation which was launched in July 1997 under the chairmanship of Sir William Macpherson. The Macpherson report into the death concluded that there was institutional racism in the police force and made seventy recommendations related to policing and dealing with racial violence. The IRR's research indicates that eighty-nine people have died in racial attacks since 1993, and that 93 per cent of the victims were from BME communities.
- 13 Jonathan Githens-Mazer and Robert Lambert, 'Islamophobia and anti-Muslim hate crime: a London case study', European Muslim Research Centre, 2010.
- 14 Rebecca Wood, 'Can community campaigns against racism survive the new funding agenda', IRR News Service Online, 2 April 2009.
- 15 ECRI was concerned that there may be resistance among police to recording racist incidents or acknowledging their seriousness, and recommends more effort to ensure all those working in the criminal justice system in Northern Ireland receive extensive training on the criminal law provisions against racially or religiously-aggravated behaviour.
- 16 See "'We owe migrant workers", Belfast rally told', *Belfast Telegraph*, 2 July 2009.
- 17 For the report see <http://www.zahidmubarekinquiry.org.uk/article3d65.html?c=374&aid=2848>
- 18 See <http://www.guardian.co.uk/society/2010/feb/07/complaints-prison-racism-staff-inmates>



Exploring belonging through film

By Jenny Bourne*

First published on IRR News, 5 November 2009

In the UK, a number of innovative projects have been using film as a way of encouraging young people to look at their communities and engage with issues of identity and the meaning of heritage.

The projects are of differing sizes, address different age groups and have had access to different amounts of funding. But all have in common the ambition to work with young people in multiracial and deprived urban areas, to impart knowledge and skills about the media and, through film, to enhance young

people's awareness of their heritage and therefore their place in society today.

I'm black and I'm proud

One of the first to embark on such a venture was BEAT – the Black Experience Archive Trust – in 2006. With backing from the Heritage Lottery Fund, members of Migrant Media – better known for hard-hitting documentaries on migrant labour exploitation and deaths in custody – worked through the Parkview Academy and the West Green Learning Centre in Tottenham (north London) with over forty black young pupils of 12 or 13 years old. Meeting for two hours after school each week, the pupils were trained in digital media skills by Ken Fero and Soulyeman Garcia. At the same time discussions were held with the young people about the importance of knowing one's heritage and they were encouraged to investigate their own communities to uncover the contributions that local black people had made. Interviews were then set up and filmed with local black people talking of their experiences in Britain – which ranged from being a pilot in the war to being part of a local rap crew.

BEAT co-founder Ken Fero explained how important it was for the young people to retrieve their own history. 'When the anniversary of Windrush happened [1998] it was like if you didn't come over on that ship, you didn't exist. This project is all about pride in black heritage which has been ignored for so long.'

In March 2007, the young pupils were taken to see the play 'Black Heroes in the Hall of Fame' at the Hackney Empire, an important theatre in east London, after which they had the chance to interview some of the cast members. And the comments of the youngsters were telling. From Sheddean, 'At first I thought the performances were going to be boring but then when I saw a boy that was rapping I changed my mind. The bit I enjoyed most was the part when Malcolm X said "An eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth" ... I found the whole day interesting and I have learned to be proud of who I am and my skin colour. As they said in the play "I'm Black and I'm proud".' From Carlyne, 'The Black Heroes in the Hall of Fame was the most fun, exciting thing that I have ever seen because it was about the black people in the old days and how they lived. It was very hard, but they tried their best to cope.' From Stephanie, 'I was happy I went, impressed and inspired. This is the best source of information to learn black history ... Mostly black people made a significant contribution to the world like we started music and dancing and if it were not for our contribution England and America would not be the super-powers they are now.'

This educative outing obviously left a deep impression. As well as interviewing local people, the young people also wrote accompanying material about their own family and a black person they found inspiring. This resulted in an exhibition of autobiographical panels from some of the teenagers who had taken part, with heroes ranging from Marcus Garvey to Thierry Henry (then a striker for north London club Arsenal). In June 2007 the BEAT community history of three CD Roms with nine hours of oral histories was given to the London Metropolitan Archives and a selection of video interviews and information about the project was also launched.

I'm here to stay

Manifesta worked during 2008 along similar themes to BEAT, but on a larger scale and across Europe, with support from the Calouste Gulbenkian foundation, Portuguese Television RTP2 and the Equality and Human Rights Commission on its 'Belonging' project. Manifesta was set up by Institute of Race Relations' chair Colin Prescod and cultural worker Marion Vargaftig, who have collaborated since 1996 to develop (marginalised) youth voices, using artistic expression. So 'Belonging' worked with youth, with the arts, with new media and with marginalised communities.

'Belonging' was a film project with over twenty 15 to 19-year-old young people from culturally mixed backgrounds in Newham (an area of east London in which many minority ethnic groups, including recent refugees, have settled), Casal da Boba (where many families from Cape Verde have lived in slums in Lisbon) and the 20th arrondissement (one of the poorest working-class areas of Paris where immigrants have traditionally settled).

According to Colin Prescod, 'our first priority and leading ambition was to use the project workshops to encourage youth expression in regard to their excluded predicaments – to tap into, to promote and to platform their preferred ways of

- 19 See <http://www.hmprisonservice.gov.uk/news/latestnews/index.asp?id=9355,38,6,38,0,0>
- 20 'Report on an unannounced full follow-up inspection of HMP Whitemoor, 7–11 April 2008', by HM Chief Inspector of Prisons, June 2008, http://www.nefafoundation.org/miscellaneous/FeaturedDocs/HMChiefInspectorPrisons_HMPWhitemoor.pdf
- 21 Nicola Rollock, 'The Stephen Lawrence Inquiry 10 years on: An analysis of the literature', Runnymede Trust, 2010.
- 22 Home Affairs Select Committee, 'The Work of the Independent Police Complaints Commission', Eleventh report of session 2009–10, 23 March 2010.
- 23 The new equalities legislation harmonises anti-discrimination provisions covering the 'protected characteristics' of age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex, and sexual orientation.
- 24 Cited in Rebecca Wood, fn 14 above.
- 25 See BBC News, 'UKIP chief Nigel Farage calls for burka ban', 17 January 2010.
- 26 Adam Elliot-Cooper, 'Section 44 stop and search ruled illegal', IRR News, 11 February 2010. See also 'Misuse of section 44 stop and search powers continues despite European Court ruling', Max Rowlands, *Stewatch*, Vol. 19, no. 4, March 2010.
- 27 'Police stop and search powers "target minorities"', BBC News, 15 March 2010.
- 28 'More minorities scanned for ID', BBC News, 27 February 2009.
- 29 Black Mental Health UK press release, 'Westminster "wash up" will determine civil liberties of every black Briton in the UK', 7 April 2010.
- 30 As Max Rowlands points out in 'UK Government's "clumsy, indiscriminate and disproportionate" approach to DNA retention', *Stewatch* Vol. 19, no. 4, March 2010, the over-representation of the black population in the statistics is due, in large part, to the fact that black people are four times more likely to be arrested than white. The UK government's own advisory board, the Human Genetics Commission, also pointed out that the DNA profiles of over three-quarters of black men aged 18 to 35 have been collected and retained on the national database. In its report, 'Nothing to hide, nothing to fear?', it warned of the disproportionate inclusion of ethnic minorities and people from vulnerable groups, such as individuals with mental health conditions and children, on the database.
- 31 In a landmark ruling, on 4 December 2008, the European Court of Human Rights criticised the police database for its failure to safeguard privacy and rights, specifically singling out the fact that the database includes the DNA of those subsequently not charged, or acquitted of a crime, after arrest, and that such information was held permanently. Following this ruling, the Home Office held a consultation on whose records should be kept on the DNA database. The Crime and Security Bill that was due to be rushed through parliament before the general election of May 2010 proposed that DNA profiles of innocent people be held on the national criminal database for up to six years.
- 32 See Max Rowlands, op. cit.
- 33 Zephaniah Samuels, 'Parliamentary reception on DNA database confirms this as an election issue for Black Britain', 9 March 2010. http://www.blackmentalhealth.org.uk/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=742&Itemid=117
- 34 See Harmit Athwal, 'Gaza protesters defence campaign launched', IRR News, 12 March 2010.
- 35 In 2006, the Chief Inspector of Prisons drew attention to the 'systemic failures, at all levels, in the support, care and management of foreign national prisoners'. See Liz Fekete and Frances Webber, 'Foreign nationals and enemy penology' in *Race & Class*, Vol. 51, no. 4, April–June 2010.
- 36 See Frances Webber, 'Segregation policy for foreign national prisoners condemned', IRR News, 25 February 2010.
- 37 Of the nearly 11,000 refused asylum seekers removed from the UK in 2009, 1,973 were expelled on a total of 64 charter flights, to Afghanistan, Albania, Democratic Republic of Congo, Iraq, Jamaica, Kosovo and Nigeria
- 38 See Harmit Athwal, 'Protests follow deaths in Glasgow' IRR News, 11 March 2010. More information from Positive Action in Housing (www.paih.org) and Unity Centre Glasgow (www.unitycentreglasgow.org).
- 39 Diane Taylor, 'Britain sending refused Congolese asylum seekers back to threat of torture', *Guardian*, 27 May 2009.
- 40 In January, the British Red Cross spoke out about the levels of destitution among refused asylum seekers, saying some of the circumstances showed 'a degree of suffering and inhumanity that if we as the world's largest humanitarian organisation witnessed ... in a different environment, such as an area of natural disaster or a conflict zone, we would be shocked into making an immediate emergency response'.
- 41 Kate Smart, 'The Second Destitution Tally: an indication of the extent of destitution among asylum seekers, refused asylum seekers and refugees', Asylum Support Partnership, May 2009, available at <http://www.refugeecouncil.org.uk/news/archive/press/2009/may/20090514>
- 42 Hannah Lewis, 'Still destitute: a worsening problem for refused asylum seekers', Joseph Rowntree Charitable Trust, 2009, available at <http://www.jrct.org.uk/text.asp?section=0001000200030006>
- 43 'No home from home: homelessness for people with no or limited access to public funds', Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission, September 2009. See Frances Webber, 'Destitution shame', IRR News, 1 October 2009.
- 44 Medical Justice, formed in 2006, facilitates the provision of independent medical and legal advice to asylum seekers in immigration removal centres. In 2008, Medical Justice, Birnberg Peirce and Partners and NCADC published 'Outsourcing Abuse – The use and misuse of state-sanctioned force during the detention and removal of asylum seekers'. The Home Office was forced to conduct an inquiry into the documented cases which included reports of numerous injuries sustained by asylum deportees at the hand of private 'escorts' contracted by the Home Office. In March 2010, the results of that investigation were released. See Baroness Nuala O'Loan, 'Report to the UK Border Agency on Outsourcing Abuse', UKBA, <http://www.ukba.homeoffice>.

addressing matters ... With “Belonging” we were engaging in interrogating the notion of “youth identity crisis” which is much touted as explaining cultural or social alienation experienced by new generations of peoples recently migrated and settled in metropolitan heartlands of the capitalist world system.’

‘Belonging’ encouraged young people of these urban areas to explore on film how migrations shape communities and how young people ‘manage multiple, flexible identities while belonging to more than one place’. Working with local creative video artists and film-makers in each place, the objective was to carry the voices and perspectives of young people not just to their own communities, but also on into the mainstream and to policymakers in the three countries. And the project was as much about *how* to engage with young people as it was about examining the ultimate output. (Even some of the adult animators in the workshops reported on their own personal growth as a result of the challenges specific to working with young people on ‘Belonging’.)

‘The lessons for policy-makers from our project are firstly not about what the film-works say, but about how the quality of (well intentioned) engagements with youth will influence the quality of outcomes of youth projects,’ says Prescod. ‘These will be lessons for project funders, as well as for project organisers and project deliverers.’ And the impact of the films is made at a number of different levels. ‘The films were first screened in young people’s neighbourhoods, then at a variety of public venues in their home cities, as well as internationally at media festivals and on youth media websites – fronted wherever possible by the young film-makers. Finally, these films have been incorporated as core materials in an education pack, specifically designed to address “citizenship” in the formal education curriculum.’

Before the filming began there were a number of small workshops. There was a ‘careful search and selection and preparation of the professional video-artists and film-makers as well as of the local historians who took charge of the workshops in each city neighbourhood’ and ‘deliberate and thoughtful “front-loading” of the workshops, eg priming the young participants with relevant historical and sociological information about their neighbourhoods/cities/nations.’ Close attention was paid to assisting the young participants through each stage of the process. The Lisbon and Paris workshops were ‘animated’ by up to ten adults for up to fifteen young people.

From the workshops emerged forty-three short films. Those about London focus on cultural identity and the idea of Newham being a multiracial melting pot – with many street shots of colourful sari shops and markets. Interestingly, those from Lisbon and Paris, explore more complex social and political aspects of belonging, often through reconstructed mini dramas, having a greater emotional impact. ‘*J’y suis, j’y reste*’ (‘I am here to stay’), for example, shows a young woman – impassive but firm – contesting day-to-day racism on the Metro.

According to the project coordinators they learned ‘that the way young people feel is determined by a range of things including generational issues, male/female relationships, fear and danger on the streets, the role of the police ... A recurrent theme in all three locations is doing nothing, having nothing to do and being bored; so too are issues relating to peer pressure ... unsurprisingly, scenes of habitual prejudice and daily life racism are also represented in some of the films.’

The DVD entitled *Belonging/Pertenecer/Chez Nous*, presenting eighteen of the short films is available in English, Portuguese or French from the Runnymede Trust in the UK. An education pack for use in schools to go alongside the DVD is also available.

To change the world

The last film project is run from a somewhat unlikely source – a charity which commemorates the work of 19th century social reformer Octavia Hill. The Octavia Foundation is a charity in west London which encourages community involvement, the delivery of employment and training opportunities and the promotion of financial inclusion and social care. In 2008, with a grant from the Heritage Lottery Fund, the Foundation gave eight young west Londoners the opportunity to document the history of their local areas in a film tracing the evolution of Labroke Grove (in Notting Hill, west London) from the 1958 race riots to the present day. The young people attended research sessions and had training in film, interviewing, oral history and archiving. *Grove Roots*, the highly-acclaimed film they made, premiered in February 2009 at the Electric Cinema on Portobello Road and went on to be screened across the country and was widely reviewed in the national press.

Following up on that success, the Octavia Foundation embarked in 2009 on a ‘Hidden Heroes’ film project (since renamed Hidden Herstories) to celebrate the heritage of four local women – Jayaben Desai, Claudia Jones, Amy Ashwood Garvey and Octavia Hill herself – who had a profound impact on community welfare. With support from the Heritage Lottery Fund, the new project started in July 2009 and runs for eighteen months. Twenty local young people, seven of them disabled, received training in researching and interviewing techniques as well as production skills for filming and editing an hour-long film and magazine. They also had seminars with key people knowledgeable about black history such as Marika Sherwood (founder of the Black and Asian Studies Association), Hakim Adi (academic and author on black History) and Colin Prescod, and received disability equality training to promote inclusion within the group. The archive research and filming was carried out over the summer of 2009 and the DVD incorporating three documentaries will be launched on International Women’s Day in March 2010.

-
- gov.uk/sitecontent/documents/aboutus/reports/oloan-report
- 45 'Kettling' involves corralling protesters into a limited area where they are controlled by a large formation of police officers.
- 46 In June 2009, Fariat Mohammadi, an Iranian asylum seeker held at Colnbrook for eleven months, stitched up his eyes and mouth in protest at his continuing detention. Mohammadi, who fought for human rights in Iran before fleeing, said: 'I have been forced to take this drastic action. I haven't been outside or seen any part of Britain since the day I arrived.' 'Report on a full announced inspection of Colnbrook Immigration Removal Centre 17–21 November 2008', HM Chief Inspector of Prisons, June 2009, <http://www.justice.gov.uk/inspectors/hmi-prisons/colnbrook-rem.htm>
- 47 See Robert Vervaiik, 'BNP links to immigration service staff', *Independent on Sunday*, 14 January 2009.
- 48 Conditions at G4S prison 'worse and worse', *Corporate Watch*, 2 December 2009.
- 49 'Police investigate detainee death', *Guardian*, 16 April 2010. NCADC News, 'Death at Oakington – answers demanded', 21 April 2010.
- 50 See http://www.childrensociety.org.uk/all_about_us/how_we_do_it/campaigning2?outCry!?19866.asp
- 51 The UK Border Agency's (UKBA) Code of Practice for Keeping Children Safe From Harm came into force, and UKBA stated that '[t]he welfare of children within Britain's immigration system is a number one priority'. Section 55 of the Borders, Citizenship and Immigration Act, which came into force in November 2009, imposed a duty on the Secretary of State and immigration officers to ensure that immigration, asylum and nationality functions are performed having regard to the need to safeguard and promote the welfare of children.
- 52 The Children's Commissioner for England's follow-up report to 'The arrest and detention of children subject to immigration control', February 2010, http://www.11million.org.uk/content/publications/content_394
- 53 Ibid.
- 54 Statistics cited by Austin Ivereigh, 'With roots come rights', *Migrant Voice*, 2010 Election Special.
- 55 The Independent Asylum Commission was formed at the request of the Citizens' Organising Foundation in Birmingham and London. It carried out an independent review of asylum policies which took place over eighteen months and subsequently in 2008 published a report which contained 180 recommendations to safeguard those seeking sanctuary.
- 56 In the six months to November 2008 (the latest period for which statistics are available), over 4,700 'enforcement visits' or raids were carried out, resulting in over 4,000 arrests. Businesses employing foreign staff not entitled to work are 'named and shamed' on a Home Office website as well as being fined up to £10,000 per employee (discounted for employers' co-operation in trapping undocumented workers), while employees are often sent to prison for up to eighteen months for using false documents to work. There have been many protests by the ethnic restaurant sector, complaining that the raids deter customers and breach UKBA promises that they will only act on intelligence.
- 57 The 'Visiting Artists Campaign' website is at <http://www.manifestoclub.com/visitingartists>
-

According to Gabrielle Tierney, who coordinates the project the young people 'have had in-depth and lively research searches, interesting day trips to places such as parliament and Ealing studios, and, most importantly, they have had extensive training throughout. Their confidence has grown and they have made friends within the project.' A worker at the Institute of Race Relations, which supported the project via its Black History archive, commented on the way that the young people benefitted from the intellectual contamination of going out to new venues. Eighteen-year-old Moktar, of Yemeni descent, thumbing through the IRR's copies of the *West Indian Gazette* for information on Claudia Jones and Amy Ashwood Garvey, came across stories about Patrice Lumumba's murder. 'Who is he? Can we do a film on him next? He looks really interesting?' Tamieka, a young woman educated in Jamaica, found one of her old school primers on a shelf and delightedly explained to the group the fables about Anansi the Spider-man.

Mohammed Adam El Omrani, who was introduced to the project by friend Moktar, who had worked on *Grove Roots*, sums up what he has gained. 'The experience was a chance to get to know my area's history and a touch of history of society. This gave me the opportunity, not to just learn about the historical background of society, but its politics which lie beneath it. This gave me knowledge I needed to know and that knowledge gained needs to be used and spoken of as I am initially into politics. There is a lot of wrong in the world today, but to imagine what it must have been like 40-60 years ago, more than credit must be given. With the willpower and motivation people can actually strive to change the world and make it a better place and we should take this opportunity to use people like Claudia Jones and Octavia to learn by example and to change the world as much as we can. I'd like to quote Malcolm X, "Tomorrow belongs to those who prepare for it today".'

Obviously such film projects involve much preparation and educative programmes that go far beyond mere technical classes. But handled in the right way, they can give young people a unique opportunity not just to interact as a group, not just to acquire new skills and learn about their histories but to harness their imaginations to the fight to change the world.

***Jenny Bourne is a researcher at the Institute of Race Relations and a consultant to its Black History Collection.**

**INSTITUTE OF
RACE
RELATIONS**

2-6 Leake Street
London WC1X 9HS
United Kingdom

+44 (0) 20 7837 0041

www.irr.org.uk
info@irr.org.uk

