10 2017

“Home, Foreign Home”

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The 50-year anniversary of the signing of the Agreement on labor force recruitment from former Yugoslavia for temporary work in Austria has been commemorated through numerous manifestations, exhibitions, conferences, and other events organized by both state and independent initiatives. This all took place within the overwhelming atmosphere of the 2016 Austrian presidential election, which was marked by scandals and obscure, never-before-seen double extensions. The issue, to which Austria does not officially assign any concrete official significance other than on such specific dates, is thus more or less left to socially conscious Austrian migration initiatives as well as their predominantly academically affiliated sympathizers.[1] This year, however, this historical event has taken on greater referential value, which has, in a sense, been able to rip it from its historical context and inscribe it into the contemporary reality of both the mentioned political turmoil and the acute migration crisis – be it in an explicit or openly suppressed way. Throughout the year, *gastarbeiters* have thus mostly been referred to in official public discourse on migrants as a model of *successful integration*. "It is very important that the second and third generations of migrants from former Yugoslavia are integrated well in Austrian society. The example of people from former Yugoslavia shows that integration can succeed,

but that it also takes a lot of time, even more than one generation,"[2] claimed Sebastian Kurz, Austrian Federal Minister for Europe, Integration, and Foreign Affairs. He forgot to mention, however, what the precise criteria for good and bad integration was. The reasoning is in the timing. At the very moment that the minister suggested regulating the migrant crisis along the Australian model and threatened to punish school pupils' "unwillingness to integrate" (*Integrationsunwilligkeit*) with a fine of 1,000 euros, Yugoslav migrants were drawn out of the dusty closet of Austria's social welfare wonders and celebrated as a great success of national politics – usurped from all angles as a social experiment right in the middle of the election year and the controversial migration policies. Each of the larger and more established political parties (with the exception of the radical right-wing FPÖ, whose non-participation needs no explanation), and every state office or agency with "integration," "minority" or both in its acronym, organized their own celebration of the anniversary of the Agreement with a predictable lineup – a series of official speeches, minority-themed entertainment programs, and an array of buffets featuring Balkan specialties.

Glorifying the success of the Austrian integration model, which has been developing for several generations (migration is still ranked by numbers in the official discourse, i.e. “first generation,” “second generation,” etc., as if a grandfathers' or grandmothers' surname was more important than someone having lived in Austria for decades), the official modes of commemorating the anniversary have completely ignored the fact that the multi-generational integration and transformation of temporary workers into permanent ones was based on state directives and documents whose practical implementation precisely prioritized their temporariness. In other words, the government did not project or plan for guest

workers to remain. It took place in spite of it. The very text of the 1966 Agreement is evidence of this. The text is based on similar contractual documents that the Federal Republic of Austria drafted with Spain (1962) and Turkey (1964), which emerged from projections of strong post-war economic growth and the pressure of requiring facilitators for that growth. Along with the regulating mechanisms for the systematic employment of Yugoslav workers in Austria (Austrian employers had to announce job vacancies to the Yugoslav Employment Bureau, through which workers could then apply for certain jobs, to which, after a compulsory health check, they would travel at the employer's expense) and the regulations regarding the rights of Yugoslav workers to benefit from having equal status in relation to their Austrian colleagues, the basic driving force behind the Agreement was the rotational work plan – the additional labor force was, in the full sense of the word, conceived as a *guest* labor force. They were predominantly employed *in waves*, limited by short-term contracts. The importance of the notion of temporariness in the temporary work was further confirmed by the first major economic crisis in Austria (1975–1984), when more than a third of the total number of Yugoslav workers were sent back to their domicile country as a technical surplus.

However, that system of temporary work – conceived, approved, and normalized – already began to collapse after just a few years in practice; but from *within* and in spite of official regulations. Many of the seasonal workers decided to stay. They thus switched jobs in order to get around the right to one-off employment and brought their families over, expanding the possibilities of their stay. At the same time, many Austrian employers started extending contracts of their own accord in order to avoid training another new wave of workers. It is precisely this diversity of the very process of

transforming guests into full-fledged, active subjects of the Austrian state, of "them" into "us," that was entirely missing from the state-initiated anniversary celebrations of the 1966 Agreement – which only subverted its historical conditionality (that was imposed top-down) and its completely predictable forms of representation on rare occasion.

Along with the suitable festivities organized by the official bodies (most of which were not public in character), the few events that did not fall under the aforementioned programming schemes were most commonly held in municipal cultural institutions, such as museums, galleries, cinemas, within the programs of independent cultural centers, or in spaces influenced by temporary guest work like abandoned factory facilities, for example. Regardless of the structure of support for the programs themselves (state, city, political party or independent patronage), the remaining models of representation on the highly complex topic of labor migration that we have seen this year, could, given the character of the material itself, be reduced to two forms. The first deals with displaying the socio-political context, i.e. the mechanisms of controlling and managing migrant labor “from above” (questioning and presenting the administrative conditions, relations of control and management, political decisions, and so on). These were only critically examined on a minimal level by any of the programs analyzed and visited. They were instead merely presented symbolically as some kind of starting point.

The second form of representational material has overwhelmingly prevailed. It refers to the model of representation "from below," the reduction of the phenomenon to a basic common denominator, characterized by the personal testimonies of pioneering guest workers. Those kinds of display items of individual archival material, whether in material or living form,

have comprised the largest part of commemorative exhibitions and manifestations in Austria thus far (e.g. the exhibition "Under a Foreign Sky," opened in September, in the Vienna Ethnographic Museum or the traveling exhibition "We Have Come to Stay" in Linz). This also includes segments of other projects on the same topic (a segment of the project *Langer Weg der Gastarbajt* (The Long Journey of Guest Work) dedicated to the topos of Yugoslav migration in Vienna's 16th and 17th districts and the organization of the Viennese independent initiative *Platform*). Although at first glance it seems praiseworthy to give visibility to and empower the individual actors of these stories, who have, until now, remained largely submerged in the concept of *gastarbeit*. The predominant reliance on the representation of the phenomenon through its particular examples, and without any theoretical interpretation, can likely bring the risk of missing the point of the whole concept.

Regarding labor itself, the vast majority of the statements given by workers with very demanding manual jobs that are used in such projects are hardly present in any context as critical contributions to understanding that highly-qualified jobs in Austria were mostly intended for the domicile population. Testimonies thereby remain minimally critical of the host country and its official policies, and are thus all too easily reduced to the level of individual cases. Similarly, in the spirit of such dominant discourse – which tells the story of the *gastarbeiters* as a story with a happy end –official annual programs have primarily presented positive examples of people who have become "full members of Austrian society" with nothing more than their committed, hard work. This principle of "montage" of the model of success is more apparent when the state becomes more present in supporting the program – critical considerations of, for instance, highly uncertain housing and living conditions, linguistic barriers, difficult structural progress or the exposure to

general social discrimination are generally suppressed or explained away as results of the “unpreparedness of the system," or they are referred to as being temporary or individual cases. However, some programs, mostly those self-organized in nature, such as the aforementioned *Langer Weg der Gastarbajt*, have attempted to avoid such one-dimensionality through a careful selection of interlocutors. This was the case when first generation *gastarbeiters*, who were included in the tour of Viennese districts marked by the lives and work of temporary workers, stood out from the prevailing presentational models by exposing even the negative aspects of life at the boundaries of temporariness and uncertainty.

The first bigger event dedicated to *gastarbeiters* from former Yugoslavia, in which the organizers tried to intertwine both models of representation in order to achieve a more all-inclusive definition of the topic, took place this April in Vienna as a manifestation, entitled "... because I could not imagine Vienna without our Yugoslav friends ..." (a quote taken from Mayor of Vienna, Helmut Zilk’s, address at the opening of the sports games of the Yugoslav Workers' Clubs in 1989). This event, organized by the University of Innsbruck, the independent platform for minorities *Initiative Minderheiten*, and the association *Archiv der Migration*, consisted of an exhibition and a mini conference which took place in the former club *Jugoslaven*, the umbrella association of Yugoslav Workers' Clubs in Vienna, and the *Filmcasino* (the archival materials that show Tito’s photos flaunted in a space which serves as one of Vienna’s most important art cinemas today seems almost surreal). The theoretical framework laid out in the first part of the event corresponded perfectly with the second part of the event, in which leading functionaries of former Yugoslav workers’ clubs presented their testimonies as living witnesses and facilitators of particular political agendas, in a lively panel discussion – their

testimonies about how these clubs were established and run (there were even twenty such clubs at one point in Vienna) very clearly revealed the mechanisms behind the official relations between their home country and Austria and the methods behind them. That event was rounded off by screening several documentary films on *gastarbeiters* (by Krsto Papić, Želimir Žilnik, Goran Rebić), which opened the question of not only how Yugoslav cinema approached this phenomenon, but how it "used it" to present a sort of critique of its own system.

The third, nearly bastardized, model of representation presents the topic of labor migration through contemporary art production. Despite lacking contextual, theoretical, and historical references, that model still has some advantages regarding an actualization of its critical potential, because it reflects a phenomenon of the past through the relevance of the personal socio-political context of the artist.

Along with numerous individual art projects presented through various programs,[3] the *Ajnhajtklub* exhibition at Freiraum Q21 – which collected both international artists as well as artists from former Yugoslavia working more or less “temporarily” in Austria – was the clearest and certainly the most representative example of an artistic approach on the topic of *gastarbeiters*. Even though the anniversary was once again the main reference point for the curatorial concept in this case, the setting itself surpassed the specific narrative of Yugoslav workers at some points, bringing the topic of guest and temporary work into the broader current socio-economic context.[4] However, what was missing in the exhibition was an activation of the political potential of the exhibited content by shifting the topic to the reality of the present-day political situation in Austria which is clearly marked by the migrant crisis – not one of the displayed works scratched the surface of the

correlations between those working conditions and today's "economic" migration or how the state tries to deal with it.

Nevertheless, however conceptually and substantively withdrawn it may have been, the political potential of the exhibition existed to some degree, although only through a few "external" facts that marked it. Firstly, the exhibition was negotiated and produced under the auspices of the Austrian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Integration, headed by Minister Kurz, which certainly had an effect on the concept of the exhibition. The second external "scandal" related to the exhibition concerns Tanja Ostojić's withdrawal of her work from the original exhibition.[5] Regardless of the nature and range of the event itself, this still revealed an interesting symptom, more precisely the question of censorship or of the existence of "designated guidelines" in not only that exhibition but also in similar art projects financed by the state which question Austria's "holy cows."

Furthermore, as both the mentioned artist and the curator of the exhibition, Bogomir Doringer, share a geographically common migrant background, the issue of different approaches to the idea of integration and its political actualization became more complex, albeit outside the space of public discussion. Although a public critical examination of these contextual problems was completely absent (aside from the somewhat sidelined public statements by Ostojić and Viennese artist and activist Aleksandar Nikolić[6]), the more informed Austrian and broader public could see not only the mechanisms of imposing control over cultural and artistic production, but also a clear position that shows how the topic of the *gastarbeiter* and its public representation still require official control. In other words, we can surmise that the persistence of the narrative about Yugoslav labor migration as an example of "successful integration" may still lie in the fact that the dominant

political system generally does not allow any dissent from such a narrative.

What became visible through these various examples is the fact that the majority of the manifestations, which honored historical processes of labor migration in various ways over the last year, have not yet made an articulated deconstruction of how official discourse attempts to relegate the notion of *gastarbeiter* to the past or how it interprets the positive outcomes of its "destiny." Likewise, and perhaps more importantly, none of the mentioned programs have placed the historical phenomenon of the guest work force into a direct correlation with the present moment, thus failing to activate its broader political and social significance in relation to the current migratory flows that have had a decisive impact on Austria over the last few years.

Even though there has been an analysis of the relationship between the phenomenon of *gastarbeiters* and current migratory movements in the media and in the public to some degree, this has mostly been done with the aim of distinguishing and separating between them. The focus on differentiation most commonly lies in the initial motivations of the migrants themselves, so that one generally compares the initial positions of these groups of guest workers (ranging from the desire for economic prosperity to the necessity for preserving bare life). By placing *gastarbeit* in a sort of direct comparison with the newly-titled "economic migration," official narratives can thereby link a large portion of the current migrant flows to economic prefixes, thus limiting their mobility as well as their stay in Austria to market conditions. Therefore, it is clarified in several places, without any awareness of its blatant "economic racism," that there was a time when the Austrian market generated the demand for a new work force. Whereas today, that same market, due to processes of globalization and

automation, simply no longer offers jobs in the service sector, traditionally intended for guests workers. An additional distinction is mentioned in the conditions and requirements that Austria has imposed on newcomers both then and now – the ease of obtaining work permits as part of the historical "from-train-to-job" employment system is thus compared to the current, almost Kafkaesque mechanisms for acquiring the right to work, which now includes a certain command of the German language, the attendance of "integration" courses, the transferral of diplomas and licenses, and so on.

There is no need to further emphasize how much these and similar differential inferences blur the view on much more important issues, such as those that question systemic mechanisms or the global political and economic contexts that have led to such drastic changes in the regulation of the work conditions for incoming workers. In the official narrative of the Austrian state, *gastarbeiters* are regarded as an example of the success of a state system and its integration processes. However, the same chance of gaining equal status when it comes to the "social welfare" within that same state is not given to current job seekers in Austria. Although the reasons should certainly be sought in the aforementioned trends in the global market as well as in prevalent ideological currents, one may get the impression that these reasons are still be related to the specific historical experience of Austria itself and its systematic reaction to it. In other words, if the phenomenon of the *gastarbeiter* is perceived as a model of successful labor migration on an official level, why should that change now? If social diversity is one of the most prominent achievements of modern Austria and it is presented as such by the state itself, why does this trend of "enriching" Austria's social landscape through the arrival of others not simply continue today?

Instead of having the state learn from historical facts by adapting its mechanisms of control and permeability, migrants themselves should – regardless of the particular historical moment that defines them – learn the most from these experiences. And it is in exactly this direction that an emancipatory approach to presenting and producing cultural material which deals with the phenomenon of a guest work force should go. The publication and presentation of the personal historical narratives which deviate from the official *happy-end* storyline of historical labor migration have hardly been inscribed into the official annals of either the host or the home country thus far, and is therefore extremely important, especially in light of the fact that such programs can not only best communicate with a broader audience, but also with an audience of migrants themselves, who can recognize themselves in such experiences, and thus concretely build affiliations or maybe even veer away from that notion altogether.

The "*gastarbeiter* audience," if it can even be referred to this way, is a very heterogeneous community with a specific set of variegated experiences, which generally lacks its own form of autonomous political articulation. By not questioning the guest work force and its inscribed position as a fixed and generalized event, we not only open up possibilities for official manipulation, but on a much more concrete level, this also makes the generation of forms of political potential and articulated engagement possible – both in direct relation to the current state system as well as in all the aforementioned contemporary socio-political problems in which this phenomenon is reflected.

This is a revised version of the article published on kulturpunkt.hr on January 16, 2017, within the project "Blurred Images of the Future," co-funded by the Fund for Promoting Pluralism and Diversity of

Electronic Media: *http://www.kulturpunkt.hr/content/dome-strani-dome*.

[1] http://www.kulturpunkt.hr/content/cuvanje-i-stvaranje-nove-povijesti-austrije

[2] http://www.kosmo.at/ajnhajtclub-offiziell-eroeffnet/

[3] E.g. the performance "Greetings!" (*Pozdrav*) by Marko Marković (which was a part of *Langer Weg der Gastarbajt*), the premiere of Đorđe Čengić's film *Unten*, or the video by the artist duo *Doplgenger* at the Krems Museum.

[4] E.g. the work of Addie Wagenknecht, "Optimization of Parenthood, Part 2," where a robotic arm reacts to each child's cry by swinging a cradle, thus invoking the issue of working parents absent from home and their children, then and now.

[5] The withdrawal of Ostojić's work from the original exhibition and her public statement on the systematic censorship of her planned work, should have critically addressed the position of the BCS language within the framework of public cultural institutions (https://art-leaks.org/2016/06/09/censorship-of-tanja-ostojics-art-project-at-the-q21-exhibition-space-in-mq-vienna-austria/)

[6] http://www.seecult.org/vest/tanja-ostojic-cenzura-u-becu