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The Land is Equal

Interview with Numan conducted by Bue Hansen

Numan Muhammad

Numan is from Pakistan, but grew up in Oman as the son of migrant workers. He has been living independently of his family since the age of 12. He came to Austria from Pakistan by foot, local busses and trucks, travelling via Iran, Turkey, Greece, Serbia and Hungary. In the asylum centre in Traiskirchen he soon became active as an organiser of the protests of the asylum seekers. This interview was conducted by Bue Hansen a couple of days before the asylum seekers occupying the Sigmund Freud Park, sought church asylum in the Votiv Kirche next to the park.

How is the situation in the protest at the moment?

We are walking in a dark place. We are merely surviving, and we don't know the way; we don't know where we can go, and what the next step is. So, it is a very bad situation right now. People want to help us, but they don't know how they can.

I think that if a refugee or any person has a problem, we need to share it. If we share our problems with each other we will mobilize more and more, and through the mobilisations we can change

everything. Because I will share my problems with you, and you will share ours with your friends. And when the time comes when we have to struggle, we will come together, and we will be more powerful.

What do you call each other in the camp? Friends, brothers, comrades?

In the camp, there's a lot of supporters, students and so on; these I call friends. At least right now I don't have my own family. But here I am proud to say I have a good family. So when we sit around the camp fire and when we start a meeting, I say: I am having a family. I am in a family...

How is the camp in Vienna compared to that in Traiskirchen?

It is a very bad time to camp here, it's very cold. So what is the difference between the bad conditions in Traiskirchen, and the bad condition in Vienna? Well, when you go into the Lager in Traiskirchen, you'll never see a smile on people's faces. I never saw one in the two months I was there. But when you come to our camp here in Vienna, when you meet the people who have been kicked off the *"Grundversorgung"*, who have lost everything, you will see they have big smiles on their faces.

I don't know if this happens naturally or because of our thinking, or because of the good gathering we are... But people love the outdoor camp. Here they have their freedom: here they can do what they want to do, say what they want to say. But inside the lager they don't feel free like this.

In the camp here I often saw – at midnight, in the morning – a lot of the people having fun together. People having good smiles on

their faces. I never saw something like that in Traiskirchen. This is the difference between our camp and the government camp.

You are fighting for your rights, and it seems to me that this is about much more than addressing the Austrian Government. Is that so?

As human beings we have rights. What to do if you, as a human, are not given your right? I will say to you: please have my back and I'll have yours. In this way we can share our power to take our rights. We need our rights, we need democracy; we're in the 21st century, but where is it?

It is rubbish to say that we are so developed today in this century. No, we are missing something! We have developed, yes, we have been to the moon, while centuries ago we were travelling by foot or horseback. At that time we did not consider moving to other countries. We've developed our knowledge and built so many things, expanded our capacity to move. Yet we start making borders! These days, if you come here or are going there you have to ask for permission. Before it was not like this.

In many years from now when we might have the chance to live life on the moon, what are we going to do? The same thing as now. We will get land there, and buy and sell it on the internet. We've developed, but we still say “this is yours”, “that is ours”. But the land is equal!

Take the birds... the sky is one, each and everything is one. When the weathers shifts from warm to cold, winter to summer, they are not asking each other for permission, they are just moving. Freedom of life.

Or take the huge sea. The sea is bigger than the land, more than three times the landmass. And there are a lot of things in the sea, travelling to all places without asking. The sea is connected to every river, and it's changing all the time. The water from the west is flowing to Asia, and the waters are together. There is no border-limit.

But even on the sea we are drawing a line, a border! “These are American waters” or “this is the German sea, and this is French”. But why? To truly implement these borders we have to be able to stop everything, to stop all the ships. But why would you think you can say to others: this is a line, this a limit? On the earth you can make a route, saying “this is the road to Salzburg, this is the road to Vienna”. But now the airplanes are flying over the sky, the sky is open! Yet we try to map them with radars and satellites, and to stop others from flying over our country. But what if the satellites and radars weren't developed or didn't work? We're not seing the bad sides of the things we build, of the things we develop. It's like saying you have to move from Landstrasse to Karlsplatz via Prater! Imagine you were told you don't have the right to travel that journey directly, or at all...

We have built a lot of things, we have energy, we have developed a lot. But we are misusing this 'development'. The journey that takes five minutes is forced to be 10 minutes, or made illegal. If we're working like this we're not going to have time for ourselves in this future, sorry to say this.