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Fleeing Force – Society in Motion – Of Migrants and Tourists

Translated by Wieland Hoban

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Introduction

All that exists is the world here and elsewhere, the way the world is, and no one arrives anywhere.
GIORGOS SEFERIS

In May 2006, numerous ships laden with refugees landed on the island of Tenerife. The wooden fishing boats had endured a long journey: between 700 and 1100 nautical miles. These boats, referred to by the Spanish as *cavucos*, had embarked from the coasts of Mauritania and Senegal; their passengers came from southern Africa. Most of the primarily young men who had survived this crossing arrived in the harbour of the holiday resort Los Cristianos, a centre for nautical traffic among the Canary Islands.

Los Cristianos is a part of Playa de las Américas, the centre for package tourism on Tenerife. The town is growing rapidly. There are building sites everywhere – one can see hotels, housing complexes and holiday apartments coming into existence. Even brand-new beaches are being created. The countryside is completely at the mercy of the tourists, who are supposed to spend their leisure time in a spectacular setting.

Certainly the holidaymakers were not unmoved by the fate of the *boat people*. They came in crowds to the end of the lively harbour pier, to the outlook terrace of the ferry terminal, to catch a glimpse of the new arrivals in the holiday paradise. The migrants, however, were quickly taken away by the police – to an inconspicuous camp near Santa Cruz, the capital of Tenerife. Beyond entertaining the tourists, the fate of the immigrants might have disturbed them in the long run.

Is the situation in Los Cristiano merely a coincidence? When we started examining the connection between migration and tourism, friends and acquaintances often reacted negatively. They were not willing to admit that there could be a relationship here. Some found it cynical to link the journeys of the migrants to those of the tourists. And the example of the black African »boat people«, who risk their lives in the attempt to reach the tourist centres of the Canary Islands, only seems to confirm this suspicion. Do the people from Guinea-Bissau, Sierra Leone or Cameroon not flee to the territory of the EU due to poverty and hopelessness, whereas holidaymakers from Germany, England or France jet to the outermost edges of Europe to bathe in the same Atlantic in which the refugees risk their lives?

The scepticism underlying this question is justified. But it strikes us not only as a legitimate, but also an extremely symptomatic one. There is a widespread need to separate the two areas. One encounters this need in the state, but also among individuals. The spaces within which the migrants move and the spaces within which tourists travel – they cannot, they must not overlap. We suspect that this is the case because we are dealing not only with geographical or physical spaces, but also with social ones. To many people, the notion that one's own social role as a tourist could have a share in a role as a migrant, and vice versa, is an extremely disturbing one. That is why they deny so vehemently that there could be any points of contact here.

But a temporary intersection of migration and tourism such as that in Los Cristianos corresponds far more closely to everyday social experiences than one would often like to admit. For many reasons, more and more people are forced to be mobile, to travel, to commute between the workplace and home. Cheap airlines, motorways and high-speed trains, mobile telephones, the Internet and portable computers supply the necessary infrastructure for this mobility.

Even if some of our friends were initially restrained in their enthusiasm for our reports on migration and tourism, most of them had numerous experiences to relate from their own increasingly mobile lives. There are so many people who are in fact constantly in transit. And even though most of the people we know travel, like ourselves, in connection with culture and science, this already paints a fairly impressive picture of mobility.

This picture would still have looked quite different 20 years ago, and would not have been familiar to so many people from their own experiences. Today, searching for jobs automatically also involves searching for new focal points in one's life. In contrast to the days of a relatively settled industrial society, employees now follow the increasingly rapid movements of capital. The unstoppable dynamics of economic globalisation after the end of the Cold War forces growing numbers of people into a more or less nomadic way of life. Some enjoy being constantly on the move; in their own loss of roots they discover the privilege of a new mobile elite. Others suffer under the pressure of forced movement. In order not to miss opportunities on the job market, however, they are willing to travel substantial distances, often on a daily basis.

Can the journey to the workplace also be a tourist experience? In the 1990s, texts examining the connections between economy and mobility in Eastern Europe or Turkey featured the term »shopping tourism«. This was not a reference to the shopping excursions which retail organisations and city marketing groups attempt to promote in Western Europe. The matter in question was rather a new form of travel from market to market, from bazaar to bazaar, with one's own stall and transportable wares, often covering great distances, normally by rail. In these movements, known also as »suitcase trading« or »tourist trading«, the mobility of people is intimately connected to that of commodities. Not only men, but especially women find their place amid the commuter traffic between Warsaw, Berlin, Kiev and Istanbul.

The fact that the word »tourism« was used in this context should not simply be taken as irony. For the suitcase traders rely on an infrastructure of trains, stations and cheap accommodation that can be considered a tourist one, even if it is a tourism of minimum resources. At the same time, this reference to tourism opens a subjective dimension: its state of transit in the economic informality of the new Europe can thus appear to the travellers as a gain in autonomy.

On the pier of Los Cristianos too, the differences between migrants and tourists are only seemingly clear. In fact, the holidaymakers could see in the refugees not simply victims or intruders, but their own alter egos – the doubles of their neo-liberal selves, damned to mobility. In turn, one cannot completely deny the presence of tourist motives among the arriving migrants. To see only deprivation and sacrifice in migration is to reduce the migrants to victims. To view the tourists purely as hedonists is to overlook the strain of travel and its proximity to a migrant way of life. It is therefore necessary to establish a connection between migration and tourism. The more closely one examines the terms »migrant« and »tourist«, the more questionable they become.

We would propose speaking about migration and tourism in a different way than usual. For this purpose, the terms »migrant« and »tourist« will not refer only to actual *persons*, but also to *social* positions within a society in movement. As »types«, as conceptual figures, they can help us to describe and analyse this mobile society.

The intention underlying this new usage is a revision of the ideas circulating about migration and tourism. If migrants are alternately represented as a welfare problem or as a threat, as the losers of globalisation or Islamic fundamentalists, this is not only politically fatal. It also prevents people seeing a great diversity of practices and ways of life, as well as migration's capacity for social change.

The dispute as to whether Germany is an immigrant country or not is a consequence of this political and cultural ignorance. The same is true of tourism. The World Tourism Organisation (WTO) counts over 800 million »international arrivals«, and supposedly around half of the German population goes on one or more overseas holiday trips of at least five days each year. Although we are dealing with one of the world's largest economic sectors, however, this remarkable travel activity is hardly ever perceived as a factor in social change. And yet the culturally-dominant notions of what it means to lead a good life, as well as the political rights of the country's citizens, are increasingly dictated by tourism.

When we decided to examine the respective mobilities of migrants and tourists, a substantial concern from the outset was to regard migration and tourism not as isolated forces, but rather in their relationship with one another – as a compact *fleeing force*.[1] We were particularly interested in the way migration

and tourism articulate themselves materially, i.e. in the physical domain. What is the nature of those places in which both occur? What sort of architecture appears there, how do cities and entire landscapes change under the impression of migration and tourism?

So we travelled. We visited Spain and Morocco, as the traffic of migrants and tourists between these two countries has a long history, and has escalated dramatically in recent years in the Straits of Gibraltar or on the Canary Islands. We went to Italy and Albania, as there is also an old connection between the coast of Apulia and the area around Tirana, based on colonialism, migration and tourism, which entered a new phase in the 1990s. We travelled through the former Yugoslavia, initially motivated by the history of frequent hotel use in the wake of the wars during the 1990s, but also to assess how the population movements that resulted from the war still affect life today. Israel and the Occupied Territories of Palestine interested us because of the laboratory character of the region, where control over mobility is the decisive means of power. Another laboratory is the tourist landscape in Languedoc-Roussillon in the South of France; a gigantic model of leisure life was created here in the 1960s and 70s. In Bilbao, Venice, Berlin, Paris, Hamburg, Marseilles or Barcelona, finally, we observed the transformation of city centres into urbane entertainment centres for a new type of citizen: the tourist.

In this book we also continued what we began in the earlier books *Mainstream der Minderheiten. Pop in der Kontrollgesellschaft* [The Mainstream of Minorities: Pop in the Society of Control] (1996) and *Entsichert. Krieg als Massenkultur im 21. Jahrhundert* [Safety Catch Released: War as Mass Culture in the 21st Century] (2002): a history and theory of the subject under neo-liberalism. There are manifold and obvious connections between the mobilisation of mass-cultural war, which recruits individuals medially and militarily, and the mobilisations of migration and mass tourism. One can identify them whenever the »New Wars« waged against the civilian population trigger large-scale migrations and the growth of refugee camps, or when tourist paradises become the targets of terrorist attacks.

In the mobile society, the categories of majority and minority also shift. In places of transit, along the routes of migration and tourism, new collectives come about, new communities united by a lifestyle and a shared fate. At the same time, individuals increasingly become subjects of mobility. People then

move in trans-local networks, and their ties to a given place depend on the opportunities offered by that place for the realisation of their projects.

These changes inevitably result in social changes; the public reaction, however, is very slow. This book was written to the soundtrack of intense debates regarding the dominant culture and integration. An examination of the real conditions in a mobile society, however, makes these debates seem not only provincial, but downright absurd. More and more people are connected to their place of residence in a way that is determined far more by mobility than nationality. This circumstance should be taken into account. For we have long since awoken from the dream of an integrated society. The less attention this discussion pays to the reality of mobility, the more remote its concept of integration will be from the world we live in.

Cologne / Berlin, June 2006 Tom Holert / Mark Terkessidis
More at http://www.isvc.org/fliehkraft

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2 Places of Temporary Residence

A Village of Huts for Stopovers

For many decades, the town of Sisak in the Yugoslavian republic of Croatia was an industrial stronghold. Iron works and refineries produced here, and the population grew very rapidly. The town is not far from the *Lonjsko polje*, a large nature park full of wetlands just under an hour's drive from Zagreb. On the banks of the Sava, one of the three rivers that meet in this flat country, one can still find coins from the time of the Roman Empire. Now, in a state of economic ruin caused by the war in the 1990s and the end of the socialist project, they remind us that Sisak once played a central role on the western Balkan.

Not far from Sisak lies Šašna Greda, a village as marginal as one could possibly imagine. The village hardly even seems to exist, or at least only the name, which is supposed to group together a few scattered houses and farmyards. Beyond this, however, the name »Šašna Greda« refers above all to a

piece of land where different agents of mobility meet in the shadow of the present and in the hinterland of history.

It is a hot September day in 2005, and the sun is scorching the dust. Sisak, only a few kilometres away, seems unreachable. There are unattractive hints of forests and fields. In the middle of these set pieces of a landscape without any appeal or identity are about 20 wooden huts, neatly arranged in a circle. Each one of these huts probably had rich colours once; now the red, the blue, the green and the yellow are so faded that the scenery looks as if it had been drawn with chalk pastels. This model village was erected by a Swedish charity in 1994; it was intended to help solve the problems created by the mass homelessness that resulted from the war. And so a number of people of predominantly Croatian origin who had been forced to flee from Bosnia in the mid-1990s, and later also from Kosovo, were brought here. Upon the outbreak of war, everyone in the crumbling empire of Yugoslavia was suddenly called upon to act according to a particular ethnic identification. Millions of people who were unwilling or unable to fight had to leave their homes in order not to be killed, deported or raped.

In the no man's land between village and town, the tiny settlement of Šašna Greda, once intended for around one hundred people, is almost entirely devoid of ties to the social life of the region. Everything is too far away without a vehicle to take one there. Precisely this isolated location, however, is one of the factors that makes it a strange and disturbing idyll.

Evidently the Swedish architects who designed these ready-made houses were influenced by the layout of holiday resorts or campsites. The spatial distribution of the buildings, assembled from industrially-manufactured modules, resembles the radial plans of ideal cities familiar from the utopian urban theories of the Enlightenment, and are considered models of modern town planning. A circular path connects the outermost ring of shacks, each of which has a number, a door, two windows, 20 square metres of living space and electricity. There is a separate television hut, and also one bearing the inscription »Sport Sala«. Between the buildings one can see grass and trees, as well as clotheslines.

One would not think that this makeshift settlement belongs to a network of provisional residences that serves to guide, control and organise the movements of people both in the forecourt of the EU and within the EU itself. When it was set up eleven years ago, the quaint houses of Šašna Greda belonged

to a series of places of temporary residence that had come into existence on the territory of the newly-founded state of Croatia with the start of the war in 1991. Together with Zaprude and Spansko on the outskirts of Zagreb, or like Gasinci in East Slavonia – which, sometimes housing a total of over 6000 inhabitants, is the largest collective accommodation for refugees and »internally displaced persons« (IDPs) –, Šašna Greda is part of a geography of provisional communities in Croatia and the entire region.

Many of the camps that were established and administered by such relief organisations as the Red Cross or the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) during the Serbo-Croat conflict, the war in Bosnia and the war in Kosovo, have meanwhile disappeared. A number of the large hostels were quite literally set in motion again by being taken down, transported away and set up once more in other places.[2] In Bosnia-Herzegovina in particular, one can still see the provisional quarters of the international community put to new use. Portakabins or transport containers with the UN logo are used in road construction, as kiosks or as market stalls.

Other camps stayed in place but were assigned new tasks, like Šašna Greda. In the year 2005, there were no longer any refugees or IDP from the former Yugoslavia accommodated here, but rather migrants in transit staying »illegally« in Croatia. They had applied for asylum or, having no papers, could not simply be expelled. Many had come from Bosnia-Herzegovina. Until around 2002, people from Turkey, Tunisia, Bangladesh or China usually came to Bosnia via Sarajevo airport as »tourists«. Supported by lax visa policy and led by smuggling organisations, they travelled directly from the airport – or after a stopover in a low-budget hotel in the old town of Sarajevo – to Croatia, and from there on to Slovenia or Austria, the closest EU states.[3]

Meanwhile the security measures have become stricter, also at Sarajevo airport, and the Bosnian authorities immediately turn away many new arrivals as »illegal« migrants without any judicial procedures. Nonetheless, between 10,000 and 20,000 people attempt to reach Croatia in this way, which culminated in 2002 in a return agreement between Croatia and Bosnia-Herzegovina. This enables the Croatian authorities to send back migrants and asylum-seekers arriving from Bosnia without further ado.

This possibility does not seem to have been put into practice in the case of the inhabitants of Šašna Greda, however. The men and women sit in the entrances of the once-colourful huts, watch their laundry dry, and most likely

plan how and when their journeys will continue. That same late summer's day in 2005, 22 people are staying in the huts, according to the director of the settlement. She is employed by the Croatian Red Cross, and asks us not to speak to anyone, and above all not to take any photos. An instruction for the purpose of protecting the migrants, as one will happily believe. But also in the interests of the state, which grants these people, who apparently come from Moldavia, Romania, Turkey, Iraq or China, a temporary abode in this place in the flat depths of the grey area. The »illegal« persons must remain invisible. They will not stay here for long in any case – despite regular meals, occasional psychological support and leisure activities. The director explains that most of them leave again after a few nights, without permission, but also without any way to prevent them. The hut village is unguarded. And as long as Croatia's future EU membership remains uncertain, most migrants do not want to end their journeys in Croatia, but rather in an EU member state.

Waiting in the Ježevo Motel

Next to the Red Cross, which acts as proprietor, the UNHCR also offers financial support for the maintenance of Šašna Greda. The responsibility for this intermediate stop for unwanted travellers lies with the Croatian Home Office. Since the passing of the first Croatian asylum law in 2004, shortly after the former Yugoslavian republic of Slovenia joined the EU, the number of migrants and asylum seekers in the country has increased. Between 2000 and 2003, only 203 people handed in applications for asylum; not a single one was approved. It is hardly surprising, then, that the number of applications tells us far less than the number of »illegal« migrants in transit, though no new statistics regarding the latter have been published yet.

Šašna Greda is supposed to remain a place of accommodation for people without papers, refugee status or residence permits until a new camp is opened in the former barracks of Stubivka Slatina, in the vicinity of Oroslavje, a town near the Slovenian border. By establishing this »reception centre« for asylum-seekers, Croatia hopes to come one step closer to meeting the requirements for EU membership.[4]

A centre of this kind would perhaps also render obsolete another place that one passes on the way to Zagreb. Unlike the hidden temporary hut

settlement, the prison camp of Ježevo is situated directly along the motorway to Belgrade, right next to a petrol station that includes a small service area. Anyone who stops here to fill up their car, go to the toilet or get something to eat is only a few metres away from this prison, which holds people whose journey was forcibly interrupted by the police.

The camp used to be a motel; the irony of this misappropriation is clear enough. According to the cultural scientist Meaghan Morris, motels, unlike hotels, negate the qualities of the local and the historic in favour of »movement, speed and constant circulation«.[5] But sometimes even these monuments to constant circulation lose their purpose. During the 1990s, the late modernist pancake buildings of the Ježevo motel, which in Yugoslavia was the meeting-place of »a twilight world of transit from Hamburg to Istanbul«, as the cultural sociologist Žarko Paiv writes,[6] deteriorated into a place without any function or potential. At the end of the decade of war, the Croatian Home Office decided that »illegal« migrants of Kurdish, Chinese, Afghan, Iranian, Iraqi, Turkish, Moldavian or Romanian origin picked up by the police should be brought here. In this former motel, heavily guarded and surrounded by a high fence, they spend the days and weeks until their fates are decided.

On one of those hot September days in 2005, around fifty prisoners are sitting on the terrace that faces the motorway. This outlook platform, from which one can watch the traffic rushing past outside, was originally open, but is now fenced in; it thus resembles a cage. As the terrain is closed off across a large area and it is impossible to obtain a visitor's permit, one can only gain a rough impression of the situation from the outside; but if one stands 30 metres away, one has the feeling of watching a group of travellers trying to pass the time of a drawn-out stopover beneath the scorching sun.

Notes on the text excerpt:

1 Translator's note: there is a play on words here that cannot be transferred into English. The original word *Fliehkraft* is in fact the term for centrifugal force, but is used here in the literal sense of its components: *fliehen*, »to flee«, and *Kraft*, »force«. The preservation of the meaning ultimately intended was considered more important than an attempt to convey the pun.

2 This happened to a camp in Kutina run by the Danish Red Cross, for example, which was transported in portions to the East Slavonic village Ilok in order to increase the numbers of available beds for older refugees. See on this the following

reports of the International Croatian Red Cross: »Croatia: Assistance to Refugees, Displaced Persons and Returnees«, Programme no. 01.36/98, und Peter Rees-Gildea / Renny Nancholas (ICRC) »Croatia: Assistance to Refugees, Displaced Persons and Returnees«, appeal no. 01.36/98, situation report no. 3, 10. November 1998.

3 See Lejla Mavris, »Human Smugglers and Social Networks: Transit Migration through the States of Former Yugoslavia«, in: *UNHCR – New Issues in Refugee Research*, Working Paper No. 72, December 2002.

4 See Delegation of the European Commission to the Republic of Croatia, EU Asylum Policy Guide, 2004, http://www.delhrv.cec.eu.int/en/eu_and_country/asylum_policy.htm.

5 Meaghan Morris: »At Henry Parkes Motel«, in *Cultural Studies*, vol. 2, no. 1, 1988, pp. 1–47, here p. 3.

6 Žarko Paiv, »Prisoners of a Global Paranoia. The Ježevo Motel qua the End of the European Grand Narrative«, in *Gazet'art. Magazine of the South-East European Contemporary Art Network*, No. 1, December 2002, pp. 8f., here p. 8 (see also its first publication in a spezial issue of the Zagreb online culture magazine *Art-e-fact*, issue no. 1, 2002, which appeared in connection with the »Ježevo Motel Project«, ab art project dealing with illegal immigration (http://artefact.mi2.hr)