

*on providing tools to immigrants / decolonialized democracy / belonging to humanity /
living in a commune / equal needs / feeling human / time to reflect together /
the old culture of the family*

with **Mohammad Numan**
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*an ongoing collective exploration / learning from experiences of togetherness and uncertainty / reflecting on listening – with **Mohammad Numan, Matteo Zoccolo** – 17 may 2021
matteozoccolo.net/on_listening/conversations.html*

MZ: So, Austria defines what is the way of living here, and then people who want to move here have to follow it.

MN: Or not. The point is that you don't learn, you don't go to school. You don't have an education. We don't offer them German courses. We don't offer them translators. Interpretation and translation are a big problem for the immigrants.

MZ: When you say 'we', do you identify as Austrian?

MN: No, I identify as an activist. Because I still have a problem with learning German. I am a student with no right to work, if German courses cost from €400 to €800 a month. How should I afford that? I'm just learning German from my experience with the system. And then Austria says, "You are not integrated." How the fuck I should be integrated in Austria if I don't get a possibility?

MZ: Definitely. But what is the root of all this? Immigrants are not welcome, alright. But why?

MN: Yeah, that's a question. Because we are not modern, and we are not open. And I say 'we' now as an Austrian, because I change my image to someone who is living in Austria. And definitely, I would say, if I don't get a German education, how could I have another person living next to me in this environment? You know, you always change your positions.

We would be happy to welcome people in Austria, *but*, of course, if we can solve the previous people's problems. We have immigrants with problems. That's true. But we are not willing to solve the problems of the immigrants. We just tell them, "You have a problem. Figure it out and come back."

MZ: Alright.

MN: But there is not enough clarity. What could you do to get out of problems? There is no way. You can go to the psychologist. The psychologist says, "Yes, there is a problem, but I can't help you. Just take a pill and sleep." You go and meet a friend and talk about him, he says, "Yes, there is a problem. But I can't help you." You're not stable or integrated enough to solve the problem.

MZ: Let's say, you don't have the tools.

MN: You don't have the tools to solve the problems.

MZ: But why doesn't a state provide those tools?

MN: Then the state says, "Because we don't have the budget."

MZ: Yes, this is an excuse. But what is the deep reason why this happens?

MN: Because they don't want to do it. Because they don't want to. That's what I have been trying to figure out for many years. I was in a roundtable of the inner ministry in 2013, as part of a group of refugees from 2012, protesting and demanding the normal, basic needs and rights. And they said, "Well, what you're demanding, is not concerning the minister of inner affairs. It's a part of another problem." Single politicians don't want to take criticism and responsibility.

MZ: So, why don't people want it?

MN: People want it, but people are not being heard.

MZ: So where is democracy?

MN: There is no democracy. That's what we are talking about. We are not democratic. We are in Austria. We are called a democratic country. But democracy is being decolonialized.

MZ: What do you mean?

MN: Because it is not democratic. It's just on paper.

MZ: So, democracy has been decolonized.

MN: Exactly.

MZ: Which means?

MN: Which means we are not equal. We are not open, we are not what you think.

MZ: But sorry, when I hear 'decolonization', it appears as a positive concept. So, I would say that it's good to decolonize.

MN: Yeah, but decolonizing democracy is not the best.

MZ: What do you think it's good to decolonize?

MN: Again, I will come to the simple answer to that: demolishing. The politicians have demolished democracy. But it is not well known.

Look at Austria, where first there were the right wing and the left wing. There were two parties, the right wing was recently behind Sebastian Kurz. And the left wing was always demanding Sebastian Kurz to resign. And what happens in a pandemic? The right wing stood up, and said, "We don't want you anymore." They started asking their own politician to resign. But it is not being talked about in the media. Nobody is listening.

MZ: Alright.

MN: Let's say, there were two parties. It is a democracy

and one party has a problem. Now, there are two parties who are asking someone to resign. Who is holding the power then? Who is the decision maker?

MZ: In a state of exception...

MN: Where is the exception? Who is making the exception? Austria is contributing to demolishing democracy.

MZ: But back to decolonization, I still don't get it. I would be very curious because really, I always heard about decolonization as something that we should pursue, that we should go for.

MN: Yeah, we should go for it. But the point is, who is letting go for it? The problem is, where is the power? Who is a power holder? You know, the topic is not decolonization, which is OK. But when somebody doesn't want to accept... For example, today I want to go to visit a friend in Israel. But I cannot go there because who represents me doesn't accept Israel, since I have a Pakistani Passport. If I am represented by someone who doesn't have my same values, where is democracy? I want to be liberal. But do I represent liberalism? Or liberalization is representing me? We still don't know to whom we belong.

MZ: Do you think it's important to belong to something?

MN: Yeah, that's the reality. We belong somewhere. We generally say we are human beings, and then human beings are not treated equally. But we are still human beings. We can definitely make a difference between dogs and cats. But how do we define a human being?

MZ: So, I think we should feel we belong to... Humanity.

MN: Humanity. Where is humanity? That's the final topic. What is the definition of humanity?

MZ: To me, it's interesting that now we are speaking about feeling a sense of belonging to humanity, which is the widest group you can take, but you're living in a commune, which is 9 people. So, what is this shift? Is it through those 9 people that you feel part of humanity?

MN: And that's the point. That's the point of coming to a commune like the 'Hofkollektiv Zwetschke'. Why did I move there? Because the community has been built up from equal goals and an equal understanding of the environment and humanity. Being a human being. And out of the system which is called democracy.

MZ: You don't have democracy there?

MN: We have a system in a commune which is called democracy. If one person stands and says, "Hey, I am against this," 9 people are going to listen to that problem. And 9

people are going to say, “If it is not fine for you, it’s not fine for us (even though it is fine for us, but we want to stand behind you).” Because you are not being pushed out of it.

That’s the reason why I moved to a commune. We have one castle, we have one system of bank accounts. We divide the money for every single thing, for social projects and for social benefits. We have an education sector, a health sector, a renovation sector, a holiday sector, a sector for people who are in trouble... So, we care about every single thing in a commune. And everybody has equal rights to every thing. We are deciding what we need a budget for, how do we want to spend the money, how much should we spend. We are checking our budget 4 times a year. How much money is coming in, how much going out? How much are we spending for the environment? How do we build up our social context more broadly? How can we have more guests? How could we be more into society?

MZ: So, you actually want to expand that idea?

MN: We want to expand, it would be nice to expand it because it’s a nice system. It doesn’t happen that you are having less money, and you cannot afford your things. When you cannot afford to live, you get psychological problems and stuff like that. But in a commune everybody is putting the money in the same place, and everybody has equal rights to take it for their needs, which are also equal.

MZ: Which needs?

MN: The need of life. What is the need of life? That is a big question.

In a community, you can have a good life with the needs of the life. For some people, we live in luxury. But the point is that we spend according to basic needs. And that’s fine. We are seeing each other, we are taking good care of each other, we are taking good care of the environment and we are taking good care of our mental health. Here in Vienna, for example, you are working in a society in which you feel fed up, and if you cannot go to work you don’t have enough money resources, you can’t do anything. And OK, if you don’t feel fine, then take your time for yourself and feel fine! And one day you could say, “I don’t feel fine. Fuck it, I don’t feel like doing anything.” It doesn’t mean that you are going to be kicked out of the commune. It means that people will stand behind you. You feel fine, we feel fine. We can take over your job. We can take over your goals. We can take over your tasks. And that’s simply a normal goal of life. To feel human.

MZ: It’s amazing! But of course, this is not possible on a large scale.

MN: We are doing that on a large scale. That’s the point where we have to introduce the system. People in Vienna, in a pandemic, still don’t know their neighbors. They still

have fucking problems with their neighbors! And this is when a social system is breaking down. People are sick with psychological problems. What is the reason? You have every single thing, you have every infrastructure you need, in cities we have every single basic need of the human being. But the people are sick. What do you do?

MZ: You provide mental health care, no? Doctors.

MN: Yeah, but doctors can only heal the symptoms, they cannot give you feelings, and I think some people are missing feelings. Feelings, the biggest problem of this society.

MZ: Which kind of feelings?

MN: Like loving, caring, saying in a good manner ‘hello’ to each other. People come out of their door and they’re like, “Fuck.” When I came now to Vienna, I thought, “What the fuck? Where am I?” Everybody seems to be in stress, in a hurry. People are like a time machine over here, like a clock. They don’t have time to stop for one second and say, “OK, I want to reflect now.” In the city you cannot reflect.

MZ: What is to reflect?

MN: To reflect what you have done and how you can make it better. What could I do today to make it work much better? Thinking takes time, and time is running.

MZ: And it’s not paid.

MN: Exactly. And you cannot make it better tomorrow if you cannot reflect today. And in a community, you say. “OK, I don’t feel fine? Fuck. I want to think, I want to stop. OK, let’s sit down. Let’s think. Let’s think together.” We are not paid as well, but we are there for another person, even to think in a broader way.

MZ: I would say what you achieved in the community is similar to the understanding of relationships under capitalism. So, where do you find those feelings? You cannot find them in the people in the streets. But maybe you can find that special person that has specific characteristics that you are searching for, and you can be two, you’re not alone anymore. How do you relate to this way of seeing relationships?

MN: Relationships? I think that we are much stronger in relationships. We are close. It’s the old culture of the family. If you go back in history, people were living in joint houses and families. At that time, it was very much possible. Everybody is standing behind you, to make it better. When we grow up, we say we are adults, and we want to move on in our lives. So, moving on in your life looks very nice and delicious, but then what happens? This is a way you cannot go back because you are so disappointed that

you cannot face it.

MZ: Disappointed by yourself?

MN: Yes. You know, at the age of 18 you are moving out of your parents' house, from the joint family, to explore the world, and then shit starts. Because until 18 years old, you don't have problems, somebody is taking care of your shit. And then you cannot go back to your parents saying, "Hey, I have this problem, can you solve it?" You will be ashamed of the problem and you will ignore it. People start ignoring problems, and go on. And that problem will follow you back.

MZ: And why cannot you go back to the family?

MN: We don't want to go back because we want to explore!

MZ: And now you came to another kind of family, in your commune.

MN: Exactly. We found each other. Not everybody's lucky as I am. That's a special thing. You know, you have to be a very special person to find a solution! And you come to paradise, that's what has happened. It was by chance.

I would have not ended up here if there was not my friend living in the commune. I was so much into city-life and into problems that I couldn't look around. Was it good luck to get to know this person, who has discovered this commune? Or is it not by chance that people with the same mentality and the same understanding of building up a group meet up? Anyway, it works! I'm happy that I found this place and I'm glad of that.

But what would have happened if I had not found it? I wouldn't be here today. Either I will be sitting in some prison, either I will be sent back, or either I will be fed up with the system.