

## FOREWORD

*“For within structures defined by profit, by linear power, by institutional dehumanization, our feelings were not meant to survive. Kept around as unavoidable adjuncts or pleasant pastimes, our feelings were expected to kneel to thought as women were expected to kneel to men. But women have survived.”*

*Audre Lorde, Poetry is not a Luxury, 1977*

It is an honour to be given the opportunity to write this foreword for International Women Space’s second book documenting the stories of refugee women in Germany - in the face of unchanging, albeit worsening political circumstances for many of the affected people with a similar plight. Migration has always existed, as we all know. Migration is a human right. And it has also always been used as a way to exclude, manipulate and control unwanted people since times immemorial. Language has been crucial in this respect, as it has been misused to categorize who belonged and who doesn’t belong to a certain community. Learning to master the difficult German language is a challenge that even if successfully achieved, is often still used for discrimination.

Asylum laws in Germany have been deconstructed since 1993. On an international level, the fact that existing nation-states obstruct and “regulate” the number of immigrants entering their countries, does not make it “right”! Border police see in immigrants their enemy. Too many words describing the laws pertaining to these regulations take away humanity until we are left only with a dead skeleton of administrative rules arbitrarily applied or not as the case may be. What do the so-called “boat people” in the South Pacific, the Rohingya of Myanmar, the Honduran families walking to a dreamed freedom or the many African desert travellers care about these immigration laws? How do Iraqi or Syrian refugees circumnavigate shipwrecks and shattered aeroplanes left on their mountain plateaux? The Mediterranean Sea, the Florida Straits and the Gulf of Mexico share the same fate as a maritime graveyard to drowned refugees.

Particularly women and children, who are the collateral beauties and whose blood serves as a bed for the roses of war, seem to keep paying the highest price ever. When racism meets misogyny and the powerful refuse to give the poor a chance of survival, crossing the sea might become the only available option to live. The barbaric things that humans can do to other humans, like torture, hunger, murder or rape are dripping of humiliation, bullying, contempt and disgust. But where does the hate feed its fear from? Distrust and ignorance dwell in the dark. But also our anger and our rage breed power in the dark. We might ask ourselves: What change has emancipation, women’s rights and liberation movements, marches, fights,

academic achievements and analyses really brought us women? Are we not still having to face the same discriminations and injustices that our great grandmothers suffered, over many centuries, everywhere? What have we gained, when many of our children are, now, secretly and openly longing for death rather than for life?

What, then, can we do? How do we keep up hope? We can continue teaching our children that it really is worth living a decent life and striving to make the best of our talents. Not just to prove something to someone, but to satisfy and realize the spiritual, material and practical needs of oneself. There’s absolutely nothing wrong with that - self-determination. And by simply doing that, working to accomplish one’s best results, we shine excellence. We only need to keep our social channels open to radiate out our excellence, our peace, our sanity, for anyone who wants to come and take a ride along on the wave of freedom. The sad and disturbing, but also empowering stories the women tell in this book are proof of the valour, strength and attitudes many heroines can gather when their minds are set on achieving the liberty that life itself promises.

Doris’ story is a cry for help. Her nakedness becomes her weapon. But her dignity cannot be stripped from her. There are no numbers of suicides and fatal incidents in asylum centres or airport deportation prisons or in the deserts. Deportations kill! Not only the deportation centres, asylum centres and/or prisons, but also the newly erected detention centres in African deserts, are trying to keep people from walking to freedom. Governments and Embassies have constructed fortresses to ensure exclusion of the desperate.

Dania is a free spirit, raised by an activist mother. But in Syria ...“They don’t really understand you if you are that honest... They take you for a rude person if you are direct.” How it must be when two women have a romantic relationship in the middle of the war? Although homosexual people manage to secretly organise in The Middle East, risking their lives, of course, leaving their countries for Europe becomes, for some, the only available option. Discrimination in her own Syrian refugee community, therefore, is doubly painful.

Zeynep has been an academic both in her country of Turkey and now in Germany. Her story of resistance in Turkey shows the totalitarian nature of Erdogan’s regime. In Germany, it is proof of blatant racism towards her academic status and the refusal to issue her a residence permit based on her achievements and merits of integration. Her lawyer friend said it correctly that ...“Germany makes no effort to integrate migrants. ...A key instrument of this segregation, he added, is the “refugee status”.

Fatou’s story is the typical one of recognition, acknowledgement and respect which marks our daily struggle against racism and discrimination as black women.

Indeed we can also be black, intelligent and valuable human beings worthy of esteemed and regardful treatment. But prejudice and bias influence the work of many manipulated right-wing workers on all levels. As fascism is on the rise in Germany, and with the AfD party becoming stronger and stronger, the future looks bleak.

Nubia had already discovered the world and her sexuality when she witnessed the Arab Spring in Egypt. There, too, societal attitudes, governmental and religious rules were not ready for a self-determined sexuality. It is a story of the (im)possibility of sexual liberation in a country that persecutes any deviation from the norm.

Maryam from Iran dreamt of emancipation. First from her family and then from her boyfriend. Why is a woman that develops her own thoughts and ideas from an early age and longs to live a free life a threat? "...and it was clear to me that the only reason we were together was that we had left that hell to come to Europe." When physical and psychological pressure become so much that a woman begins to cut herself and have panic attacks, her mere existence is a heavy burden. A support and protection system is required to help the survival and recovering of victims of war and abuse, who have experienced such ordeals.

Mercy's story is so sad and shocking, it is almost unbearable to read. Fortunately, Mercy was born an intelligent and strong-willed girl that has fought her way out of many rough situations, from being raped in Nigeria to being sold in Libya. It is important to read and know about a woman that has gone through so much trial and tribulation and who was able to find her way and be successful. She rose like a phoenix to become the tough woman she needed to be, to give her and her daughter the good life they deserve! Blessed be!

Larissa's incredible story is one of transgression, fearlessness, pride and courage. Most people cannot imagine what it's like to leave your comfort zone and lose complete control over every aspect of your life. That is what junkies are prepared to do. The slogan "my body is mine" is applied by drugtakers to the extreme. Of course, it is a human right to destroy or to want to end your life. Then, fighting for the humane treatment of addicts becomes a zealous and noble cause. Respect!

We women do not want to be victims of patriarchy nor its systems! Women are equal humans to men. Accept that fact and act accordingly. The lie that we are being overrun by refugees in industrialized countries cannot be upheld any longer. Politicians and corporations, fix your politics and economics and stop the ransacking of people and resources! Stop selling arms and supporting corrupt governments!

According to Germany's most recent "integration barometer", 60% of people without a "migration background" are in favour of continuing to accept refugees. At the same time, the majority of people questioned also want an upper limit to the number of refugees coming into the country.

Deutschland where is your "Einwanderungsgesellschaft" heading to?

by Esmeralda Guerra Collantes (alias Asma-Esmeralda Abd'Allah-Álvarez Ramírez)



*Esmeralda is a Black, queer, transcultural activist. A native Cuban, she arrived in Germany with her parents at the age of six. Among other things, she has worked as a translator and cultural mediator. Most recently, she worked as a counsellor at the refugee office of Kargah e.V.. She was active in the Initiative of Black People in Germany (ISD) and at Radio Flora. International Women Space invited her to moderate a panel discussion with refugee women at our conference WHEN I CAME TO GERMANY in October 2017. Esmeralda has since moved back to Cuba where she is active in feminist circles and supports the Afro-Cuban activists, the LGBTIQ Community and is a carer for her mother, among many other things.*