

INTRODUCTION

“But again and again there was resistance and solidarity. There have always been people who are active, get organised, and join forces to fight, speak and act against racism and thus say: We exist, we are here.” - Ayşe Güleç¹

WE EXIST, WE ARE HERE. The last sentence stood out to us. It concludes a speech that pays tribute to the nine victims of the German Nazi killings known as the “NSU murders” and details the fight for justice for them.² It highlights the power that lies in political organising - and can even lie in us merely existing. We chose it as the title of our book.

To exist, to be here – this is the act of defiance of all the women speaking in this book, who came to Germany against all odds. They made it, even though they were never supposed to. And their message is: in spite of the systems working against us, in spite of the everyday violence of living under patriarchy, in spite of the misogynist and racist attacks against us; we were, we are, and we will be here.

WE EXIST, WE ARE HERE. is our second book. In 2015 we published IN OUR OWN WORDS, a collection of 10 testimonials of different women, just a year after the Women Space was evicted from Gerhart-Hauptmann School.³ In the last three years, we have distributed almost 5000 copies and travelled all over Germany to give readings and take part in discussions about its contents. We were determined to continue our quest of documenting our experiences, the experiences of women - to contribute to writing our own history, which is otherwise repressed, hidden, and ignored.

The stories of many women are echoed in these pages. This book is for them. It is also for those women whose stories could not be told in this book: the stories of those women who did not make it across the Mediterranean. The stories of those women who did not escape enslavement in Libya, in Iraq, in Kurdistan. Of those women who survived the deadly journey across land and sea, but, having reached Germany, were detained in Lagers only to be deported at dawn several months later. Of those women who resisted deportation tooth and nail. Of those women, armed and unarmed, who died in revolutionary struggles, including the revolutionary struggle to simply survive in a world ravaged by war, (neo)colonialism, capitalism and patriarchy.

Unlike an autobiography, the “I” of the testimony is a collective “I”. The eight women who speak in this book bear witness to our struggles, which are common. As a result of our editorial decision to make these women speak together, side by side,

we speak back: we demand that you see our differences - in class, in education, in experience, in politics, in perspective. But at the same time to see that the artificial categories imposed on us, to create divisions between us - between the lives worth and not worth saving - have no other goal than to further the exploitation of our bodies, of our labour and in many cases, our lives.

We do not buy into the illusion of freedom and democracy in Germany and Europe when we see Nazi mobs roaming the streets, when rescue ships are turned away at the European border, when police are beating up Black people and people of colour on the streets, when people are burning to death in police cells and when human beings are locked up like animals in high-security lagers that are called “homes”.

We are self-publishing as a feminist act. It is our collective way of meaning-making. It gives us the freedom to utilise our skills, to self-educate, to self-empower. It makes us independent from an outside editor’s censorship, content manipulation and instrumentalisation. From transcription to translation, from editing to proof-reading, from photography to illustration, from layouting to printing: this book is the work of women. We organise the content and control distribution, which means we can prioritise distributing the book to women’s spaces and groups, to refugee and migrant women.

We are launching this book on the 25th of November 2018: The International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women.⁴ In the tradition of the uprising of Latin American women we continue to say: Ni Una Menos - Not one woman less! We call all our feminist, anti-racist accomplices to speak up, speak out, self-determine, self-defend!

International Women Space

Berlin, 25th November 2018

¹ Ayşe is one of the founders of the 6th of April Initiative, which was formed in memory of Halit Yozgat, who, in 2006, was 21 when he was murdered by the NSU, while he was at work, in an internet cafe, and in the presence of a German Domestic Intelligence agent. See glossary: NSU

² The NSU murders were the largest scale organised Nazi crime which is known in Germany’s recent history and a scandal for the German state, its secret service, police and politicians. The speech was written as part of the NSU-Tribunal organised by activists and victims’ family members and was read aloud at our conference WHEN I CAME TO GERMANY. See glossary: NSU-Tribunal.

³ See glossary: Gerhart-Hauptmann School

⁴ See glossary: 25th of November.