

# Breaking Borders Across Waters

The fantastic artist collective, House of Kal, surprised us earlier this year by inviting us to be a part of their archival exhibition on the theme of water – and of course, we eagerly accepted! Our relationship with water is complex. Over the past 10 years, we have conducted several actions related to water, including a demonstration against the AfD, which left a lasting impression on the artists of House of Kal and led them to involve us in their project.



In the past few months, we collaborated intensively with House of Kal, conducting countless hours of interviews and delving into the depths of our archives to find images, footage, and banners. These joint efforts were accompanied by heartfelt laughter, material sorting, and delving into our memories.

In mid-September, the exhibition opened its doors in the heart of Berlin at Alexanderplatz and could be admired until November 14, 2023, at the nGbk (Neue Gesellschaft für bildende Kunst) premises. This exhibition serves

as a window into our anti-racist and anti-fascist work, which perceives water bodies as sites of resistance and solidarity. In 2014, during the Refugee Women\* Tour on Rafts, we traveled for seven weeks on self-built rafts through German rivers, meeting refugee women\* in camps. In 2018, we supported a demonstration against the AfD in Berlin from a raft on the River Spree, and in 2022, we became patrons of SeaWatch 5 – our activists christened the new ship operated by the Mediterranean rescue organization.

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The exhibits, whether in the form of pictures, films, or banners, narrate the stories of refugee women\* actively fighting for their rights. The interviews we conducted authentically capture their voices and experiences. We aim not only to highlight the challenges faced by refugee women\* but also to underscore their strength and resilience.

House of Kal and Women in Exile firmly believe that this exhibition is not just a reminder of past struggles but also an invitation to collectively strive for a more inclusive world. It is a call to action, urging all of us to amplify the voices of those who are often overlooked. We extend our heartfelt gratitude to House of Kal for this opportunity and look forward to future collaborations.

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## Reports from Our Saturday Meeting by Women Living in the Camps in Berlin/Brandenburg

Our last meeting in October was attended by 45 refugee women from different reception and asylum camps in Berlin and Brandenburg. The purpose of our meeting is to bring together refugee women from the different asylum camps who find it difficult to express themselves in the face of the various problems they face in the asylum camps.

During our visits to the asylum camps we invite women to take part in our meetings. In these meetings we share and discuss personal and collective problems experienced in the camps in order to find solutions.

The meeting was attended by women from Eisenhüttenstadt, Wünsdorf, Massow and Bestensee. The women told us about the various difficulties they face in the camps and raised the following concerns:

- lack of hygiene
- Neglect of health care: some women from Eisenhüttenstadt said that they did not receive adequate medical care because they had serious health problems.
- One family complained that other adult refugees living in the same camp were harassing their children by accusing them of stealing things. This shows how some of the camp residents are prejudiced against those who are not from the same countries.

The women from Wünsdorf also talked about their experiences with hygiene, especially in the toilets, which is a major concern because of the diseases associated with poor hygiene. One example was children sharing bathrooms and toilets with adults. Many also complained about the deplorable conditions in collective centres, which led to conflict and violence. Women have expressed their dissatisfaction with the isolation and abuse they face in the asylum camps. That's why we have been fighting for years for women and children not to live in asylum camps and detention centres, where they are treated badly, have no space and no proper medical care. They face racism, discrimination, physical and sexual violence and that is why Women in Exile has always called for the closure of the camps.



# The Invisible Physical And Psychological Violence Against Refugee Women



On the 25th of November, we will once again join feminist activists to celebrate the **30th anniversary of the International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women**. In our experience, refugee women\* communities usually ask or demand solidarity from other activists in their speeches. In these speeches, we remember how refugee women\* experience violence every day during the dangerous journey we took to find safety.

These are journeys where life is threatened every day by the violent repression of the border guards and the Frontex police.

On these journeys, some lose their family members, others lose friends and people they met on the road. All because of man-made borders and policies such as push-backs, invisible to most but not to us. On these journeys, we also live in the fear of forcible deportations, often carried out by the police in the middle of the night, giving women\* and children traumatic experiences with permanent scars. While gender-based violence can happen to anyone and anywhere, refugee women\* are particularly vulnerable given the particular barriers and hostilities they face on the move and at destination when we most expect protection from the state.

You can read our report “Asylum seekers as pawns in the game of European power politics” from a visit to Europe’s deadly borders on our website: [women-in-exile.net](http://women-in-exile.net).

As part of this journey, some will also experience what we name the Lagers. Detention systems can lead to gender-based violence from the part of other residents. The police can break into rooms in the middle of the night and wake them up by force. The fear and the threat of being deported re-traumatise them and make them wonder why this is happening in a civilised, democratic country like Germany. This is why we fight for “No Lagers for women\* and children! Abolish all Lagers”.

Why do we keep repeating this? The abuser is likely going to be transferred to another camp where he is likely to repeat the same offence. The authorities will often ignore a woman\*s request

for counselling or support. The authorities will also refuse a woman\* to a women’s shelter, if she is at risk of being deported under the EU Dublin III framework.

The police hasn’t helped us even when our sister Rita was found murdered close to her Lager of Hohenleipisch in southern Brandenburg in April 2019. To this day, despite our numerous questions to the authorities, demonstrations, press releases and meetings with politicians, Women in Exile & Friends and other organisations have only seen a botched and negligent investigation by the prosecutors in Cottbus, which have left us with no answers at all.

This is where solidarity comes into play, it is important to be invited to rallies and demonstrations, to read speeches. But it is also important to include refugee women\* issues and demands in feminist struggles. Questions like “How open is my political structure to refugee women\* and their issues?” and “What does my support and solidarity look like?”, or asking yourself “Are we just inviting them to join us on the picket lines to make the demonstrations more diverse from the outside?” are useful starting points.

We all have struggles and goals different groups want to advance, but solidarity means being active together in what we believe in. After 30 years of the International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women, let us reflect on our possibilities and take an active role in the fight against the issues refugee women\* face. It is important to fight together and leave no one behind! Solidarity is what unites us and strengthens our struggle for freedom from violence.





## Around Europe: Fences, Wire Mesh and Internment Camps

The European Parliament has submitted a draft law that envisages the systematic detention of refugees on the edges of Europe. It is part of the reform of CEAS, the acronym for Common European Asylum System. The proposed law is justified by cross-state “solidarity” with the countries where most refugees arrive. There is no talk of solidarity with people in need, those who have to leave their countries of origin. After their arrival in Europe, refugees are to be interned in prison-like conditions, including families with children. Fast-track proceedings without legal assistance are aimed at mass deportations.

### **The following considerations show what these laws mean for refugee women\* and LGBTIQ:**

1. The Istanbul Convention enshrines the protection of women\* from violence. Deportations to states that do not guarantee gender-sensitive treatment are not compatible with this. The convention was only recognized by the federal government in February 2022. Protecting refugee women\* from violence was in line with the goals of the Ampel-government. The SPD/Greens/FDP came into office with the promise of ending the deaths in the Mediterranean, taking action against push-backs and protecting persecuted women\* and LGBTIQ-people. The times have changed. The current reform

takes the opposite direction. Detentions at the EU borders will lead to retraumatization and further violence against women\* and queer people. LGBTIQ-people are fleeing countries where they are persecuted, imprisoned and murdered. They need protection and time to be able to explain their reasons for fleeing. However, camps are places of violence that promote the mistreatment of women\*, homophobia and transphobia. Attacks and threats come from staff and other prisoners. Practice shows that camps are completely unacceptable even for disabled people and children; their needs are ignored and human dignity is violated. Systematic detention of refugees will lead to a drastic increase in violence, retraumatization and an increase in suicides. Fast-track trials and mass deportations can mean death for countless people, not just women\*. People who flee due to global climate change also receive no protection; their death is at least accepted. Millions of people worldwide are suffering from global warming. If the region of origin is flooded or withered, there is no longer any source of food - and no return for people who are stranded in refugee prisons on the edges of Europe.

2. The drastic cuts in the right to asylum are justified by the increase in asylum applications. Germany claims to be completely overwhelmed with the 240,000 applications for the current year 2023. But in 2022 it was possible to take in a million people from Ukraine. White refugees from Europe were warmly welcomed and laws were changed so that Ukrainians had a good start. Why is it not possible to continue this policy? Society and politics in the EU have sought out an enemy: refugees from countries in the Global South. Real problems such as the wide gap between rich and poor, inflation, climate change, homelessness and the inadequate healthcare system remain hidden in the shadow of the much-hyped “migration crisis”. Exclusion and racism are promoted by politics and the media, refugees are declared guilty and criminalized.



### **KEEP IN TOUCH**

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### **DONATIONS**

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*We thank the following foundations and organisations for their continued support of our work:*

