



## NO BORDERS, NO LAGERS Intersectional Arts & Culture Festival

Our intersectional arts and culture festival in Berlin from 23-25 August 2024 brought together diverse voices from cultures around the world. This vibrant event celebrated inclusive and intersectionality through a rich mix of performances, workshops and discussions.

The venue of the festival (Oranienplatz, Berlin), was beautifully decorated with a stage, banners and tents. Persons from different continents, neighbouring European countries and different German states came together to celebrate solidarity. There were workshops, creative activities, art exhibitions, cultural dances, music, children circus workshop, panel discussions and an archive of the work of Women in Exile.

There was a mural painting workshop from one of the international guests, Vicky Shahjehan a trans/non-binary and self taught artist from Sri Lanka, Colombo's Slave Island neighborhood. Their work is based on archiving stories and a focus on issues around feminism, gender and freedom.

Under the motto "Breaking Borders to Build Bridges", our work over the last 20 years was on display. This archive exhibition will be presented by the Migration Museum Kreuzberg/Friedrichshain at the beginning of next year.

The festival brought together anti-racist, queer, feminist and anti-colonial groups who actively helped organise and/or participated in various

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roles and tasks. Using the power of art and culture, international and local activists and artists came together to celebrate diversity, promote understanding and empower each other. Doing this in an artistic, creative and empowering way is an important way to highlight issues of racism, queerphobia and sexism.

The international refugee womens choir, the children's programme, the stage performance with cultural dances by refugee women were some of the highlights. Not to mention the delicious food, all prepared by refugee women.

The event was well attended, especially on Saturday when we hosted a group of refugees from Eisenhüttenstadt. With an awareness team making sure the activities ran smoothly on both sides of the venue, the whole festival was a success. During the evaluation meeting everyone said how impressed they were with the whole festival, they also mentioned what could be improved for next time, but everyone is looking forward to another festival soon.

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**FROM AWARENESS TO ACTION:**

## **Together Against Violence And Femicide**

The International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women, marked on Monday 25 November 2024, is a globally significant date, particularly for Women in Exile & Friends and all the groups who not only advocate for women's safety and rights but also continue to raise awareness for refugee women\* in Germany facing violence.

As this day also commemorates the efforts to end gender-based violence worldwide and raises awareness through various campaigns, Women in Exile & Friends calls for the murder of a Kenyan refugee woman, Rita O., to be investigated: Justice for Rita – Now!

On a cold day in April 2019, Rita O. 'disappeared' from the asylum Lager in Hohenleipisch, without papers or money. Her child then reported that a man had been violent. Despite this, it took the police three months to find her burnt remains, which were in the immediate vicinity of the camp where she lived – 200 metres away. Even though friends and neighbours reported her disappearance, the police remained inactive and the public prosecutor's office continues to sit on the case to this day, while making racist statements.

The resilience and strength of refugee women in the face of these immense challenges is incredibly in-



spiring. On 25 November, the Soli-Bus will take us to our first phase of action: from Oranienplatz in Berlin at 10.30am to our rally in front of the Brandenburg state parliament in Potsdam, and then back to Berlin for our second action. This second rally will take place in front of the Federal Ministry of the Interior. We will then end the day by joining the demonstration for the implementation of the Istanbul Convention, a Council of Europe Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence.

Even after more than five years, we still don't know who murdered our sister. We ask: What value is placed on the life of a refugee woman\*? Our trust in the police and the public prosecutor's office is exhausted. We have written to the Aktenzeichen XY programme and have also asked the actress Florence Kasumba, who is not only a 'crime scene' investigator on TV, but also solves murder cold cases in real life.

***NO LAGERS FOR WOMEN AND CHILDREN, ABOLISH ALL LAGERS!***



## Take To The Streets Together Against The Shift To The Right! —When, If Not Now?

Climate change is drying out huge areas in Brandenburg, the heat is having catastrophic consequences for agriculture and for the elderly and sick. But the temperature of social interaction is dropping: It's getting freezing cold, and not just in Brandenburg.

Hatred against refugees, racism and queerphobia are becoming more visible. The rise of the AFD is calling democratic basics such as the right to asylum into question. The existence of projects such as Opferperspektive is under threat. However, deportations and payment cards are not just the fault of the AFD; the shift to the right is being paved by parties in the “center”. To combat the AFD, more people need to be deported, according to the cross-party consensus.

Queers and people with little money are also marginalized. The blame for hardship and homelessness is placed on refugees and the poor - and not recognized in the system of global exploitation of people and the environment and disenfranchisement in the asylum system. The enemy image of refugees is linked to transphobia and is reminiscent of Trump, who hurls abstruse accusations at queers and migrants in particular: “They are eating cats and dogs.” German ideas of “re-migration” also fit in with such ideas.

In sequences, the reality here seems like a nightmare. In Bautzen, 800 neo-Nazis threatened the CSD. It could not take place as planned. Deportations and racist attacks are increasingly feared by

POC, they fear for their lives - and train in self-defense.

What can be done?

The construction of enemy stereotypes and their purpose can be unmasked. Naming those responsible for abuses in the healthcare system, climate change and forced migration opens up the possibility of taking political action and combating capitalist structures.

Let's strengthen extra-parliamentary movements: fight against deportations and the shift to the right, fight for democratic projects and closely network and promote feminist, ecological, queer and anti-racist movements. Preparing ourselves mentally and physically for self-defense is resistance.

We can create and strengthen places of refuge. Spaces of solidarity, regardless of skin color, origin and status, can be creatively designed. Projects for freedom of movement and self-determination offer space for the collective search for the good life. We can meet each other with more interest and warmth, inspire each other and make new friends. Living life can be celebrated.

**WHEN, IF NOT NOW?**

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## Interview With A Person Affected By The Payment Card In The Märkisch-Oderland District Of Brandenburg



*The amount of money to which asylum seekers are legally entitled can be credited to this payment card. The refugee payment card is currently a highly controversial issue, as it has some problematic implications for asylum seekers. A critical analysis of the implementation in Brandenburg, with recommendations, can be found here.*

*The introduction of these happened in Brandenburg and other regions of Germany this year 2024, raises important questions about discrimination and control in the context of asylum policy. The issuing of such cards raises a debate how the measure reinforces discriminatory laws and control mechanisms vis-à-vis asylum seekers.*



*In public discourse, the issue of the pay-as-you-go card often revolves around the people targeted, but they are rarely involved. We want to change that and give refugees the opportunity to express themselves and give their opinion. After a long search, a person affected in one of the pilot areas in Brandenburg, in the Märkisch-Oderland, finally agreed to answer our questions about their situation and to talk to us. Because of the interviewee's concern that their public statement could have a negative effect on their own asylum procedure, the anonymity of the person interviewed is fully preserved in the following pages.*

*The interview was conducted in English on 1st October 2024 at 1.30pm, recorded, transcribed and translated into French and German. The interview has been slightly edited to make it easier to understand.*

**Women in Exile (WiE): How long have you lived in Germany?**

Person concerned: I've been living in Germany for a year and ten months. I arrived here in 2022, in December.

**WiE: How long have you had the payment card?**

I've had the card for five months.

**WiE: How much money do you usually receive per month? Is the money enough?**

I receive 460 euros. That's enough to live on and to meet my needs and wishes, because I go to school and I have to pay for my school as well as my food and clothes.

**WiE: Did the payment system work before you received the card?**

Yes, the money was transferred to my bank account and could withdraw it in cash there. There was no problem. Now I can only withdraw 50 euros in cash from the pre-paid card per month.

**WiE: Now you have a payment card. Has the**

**introduction of the card changed your buying behaviour?**

Yes, it's changed very, very badly. I've accumulated a lot of debts that I have to pay off by paying online. But I can't pay these debts because I can't pay online because of the card. It's very bad for me.

**WiE: Does the card work? Have there been any problems so far?**

Nothing works with this card, we're having too many problems using it. And in some places the card doesn't work, so we can't buy anything there. I can only use it in my postcode area. It's very worrying.

**WiE: You cannot transfer money to other countries, for example to your country of origin. Does this have an impact on you or does it concern you?**

I don't send money to my country. I want to use the money here personally just for me, to buy food and other things.

**WiE: To your knowledge, is it a major problem for other asylum seekers not to be able to send money to their country of origin?**

When asylum seekers send money to their families, it is their savings. They make sacrifices to save money in order to support their families.

**WiE: Is it enough? If not, why not?**

It's not enough, it's very worrying at the moment, even for a lot of people I know. It prevents us from using the card and making purchases.

Many people have various debts to pay. Everyone wants to pay them, but can't use the money on the card.

My wish is that the government transfers our money to the banks.

**WiE: Thank you very much for the interview.**



**KEEP IN TOUCH**

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