



love and rage,



lesvos lgbtqi+ refugee solidarity



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Because we love anyway

“There’s really no such thing as the ‘voiceless’. There are only the deliberately silenced, or the preferably unheard.”

- Arundhati Roy

With homosexuality still illegal in 72 countries, it is obvious why many LGBTQI+ people become refugees. Many of us fled from home because of persecution, violence, threats and because we had to hide our gender identities. When we arrive on Lesbos, expecting safety, we are shocked to find the same issues continue for us here. Homophobic harassment and violent attacks are frequent and severe: by fellow residents in Moria camp as well as by the police and camp guards.

According to UNHCR’s website, our specific needs and safety requirements should be addressed: ‘At UNHCR we work to protect LGBTI refugees and asylum seekers everywhere’, right below it a ‘Donate Now’ button. But while UNHCR and other large organizations have comfortably used us for funding and marketing purposes they have structurally lacked to provide genuine specialized support to queer migrants on Lesbos.

Moria camp is largely run by EuroRelief, a hard-line evangelic organization that deliberately ignores queer voices. Members of our group have been called sinners by EuroRelief staff. Demands for our basic rights and specialized support go systematically unheard. Intrusive interview questions and institutionalized queerphobia at the asylum office have wrongfully left many queer people without asylum, to be deported back to the dangerous situations they fled. Homophobic violence is systematically screened from

view, because it needs to be reported to the same police officers who are the instigators of such attacks. A lack of specialized queer refugee support structures is seriously life-threatening.

This book was made by us, members of Lesbos LGBTQI+ Refugee Solidarity, as part of an attempt to break that enforced, systematic and deadly silence that surrounds us. It contains fragments of discussions, workshops, interviews and statements that we have made over the years. It contains our love and rage. Our love for life, each other and for our resistance. Our rage because of the xenophobic, queerphobic, profiteering world we face. Rage because they try to stop us from loving. Love because we love anyway.

We did not flee our homes only to continue to hide and live in fear. We won’t let ourselves be silenced. We won’t be ignored. We will shout it from the rooftops: we are gay, we are lesbian, we are women, we are men. We are here. We are all migrants. We want our freedom and we won’t wait until it’s given to us.

We ask those who are able to hear us to fight alongside us, wherever you are. Queer solidarity smashes borders!

Love and rage,
Lesbos LGBTQI+ Refugee Solidarity

Hidden faces in public places, liberation in hidden places.

What can I do in this world without freedom?

Freedom of movement, freedom of love, freedom...

How can we fight against these walls, these fences, these borders?

How can our love cross these borders of minds, how can we break down walls of suppression, and these fences of racism?

What can we do on this prison island full of suffering?

On Lesbos, we fight together against borders present and for collective liberation of all people. We fight for the freedom to exist here without fear of rejection and violence and to love who we love.

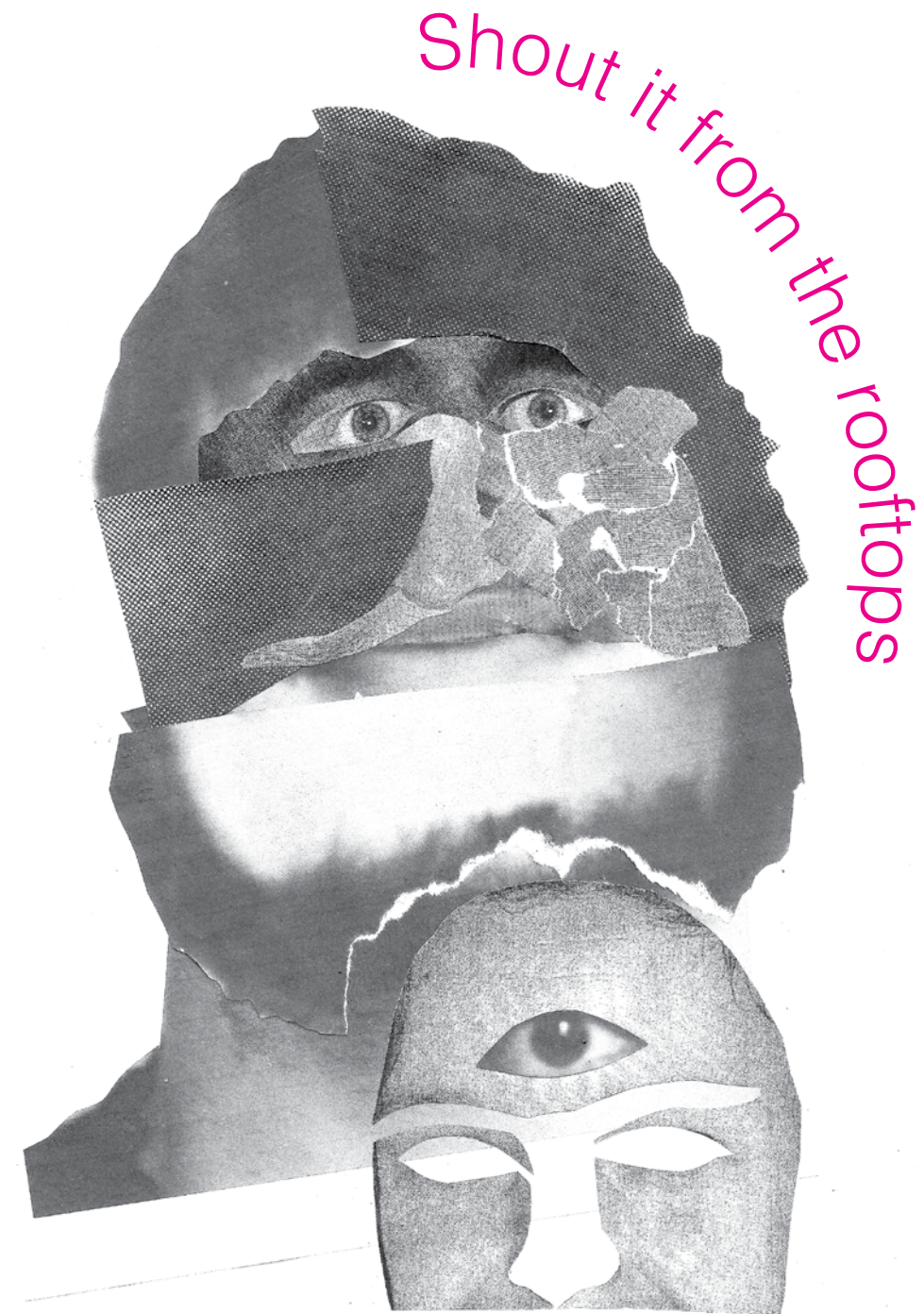
Our collective came into existence organically, as members of the LGBTQI+ refugee community began to identify members of the non-refugee LGBTQI+ community as trusted points of contact and support, in the abject absence of any actor on the island providing specific information or support to the LGBTQI+ refugee community.

We demand:

- > Freedom of movement for all
- > Safe and private accommodation for LGBTQI+ people on Lesbos and the mainland
- > Adequate provision of medical and psychological support
- > Clear and accurate information about the specific rights of LGBTQI+ people seeking international protection
- > An end to institutional queerphobia and harmful misconceptions across the asylum procedure

Members of the group are people who identify as LGBTQI+ and are living in Lesbos as refugees, volunteers and locals. We come from Uganda to Iraq, Cameroon to Afghanistan, Germany to Congo, Iran to Belgium, Syria to Basque Country, the US to Algeria, building a mosaic of experiences that bring to light important questions of what it means to be LGBTI, or fight against borders in today's world.

We aim to build resistance and provide safe spaces in which people are free to express their sexuality and/or gender identity in an environment of mutual support and respect, without fear of judgment or harm. We collectively demand changes to the situation for LGBTQI+ refugees trapped on Lesbos.



In Cameroon if they see you with your lover and you're kissing, they got proof. But even if someone just complains that you're gay, the police will catch you. And you will get a chance to go to prison. I call it chance because if a neighbour catches you, they may put you on fire.



When I had to have sex
with a woman, I realized
that I was a woman
myself.



One day my boyfriend
didn't answer to my
messages and I knew
that they had killed him.



When I was in the boat,
a beautiful cry came.
We're starting a new life.
We were just throwing
all our troubles into the
sea. I wasn't scared. I
just read the Qur'an and
cried. I sat in the boat,
my hand was in the sea
along the way.



In the early days in
Moria, I was
systematically raped.
I've lived in many
places, I've seen the
most difficult conditions,
but I've never seen such
a horrible place.



I left Morocco because
for 30 years
I was insulted,
persecuted and beaten
by the community, the
police and my family,
but on Lesbos I found
the same thing.



A missionary told me:
“If you become a
Christian, Jesus forgives
all your sins and takes
you to heaven.” I asked
him: “If I become a
woman by surgery, will
Jesus forgive me?” No
one answered.



Three policemen surrounded me on the street and touched my ass, because I am effeminate. They asked if I had a condom with me.



The asylum interviewers
told me I'm not really
gay because I'm
"active".



These people are looking at you like you're rubbish. Like you smell. On the street, on the bus. I don't know how to explain this. Even when you're on the street you feel ashamed, like there is shit on you.



If we can't dress up the way we want, if we can't do our make-up, why come to Europe?

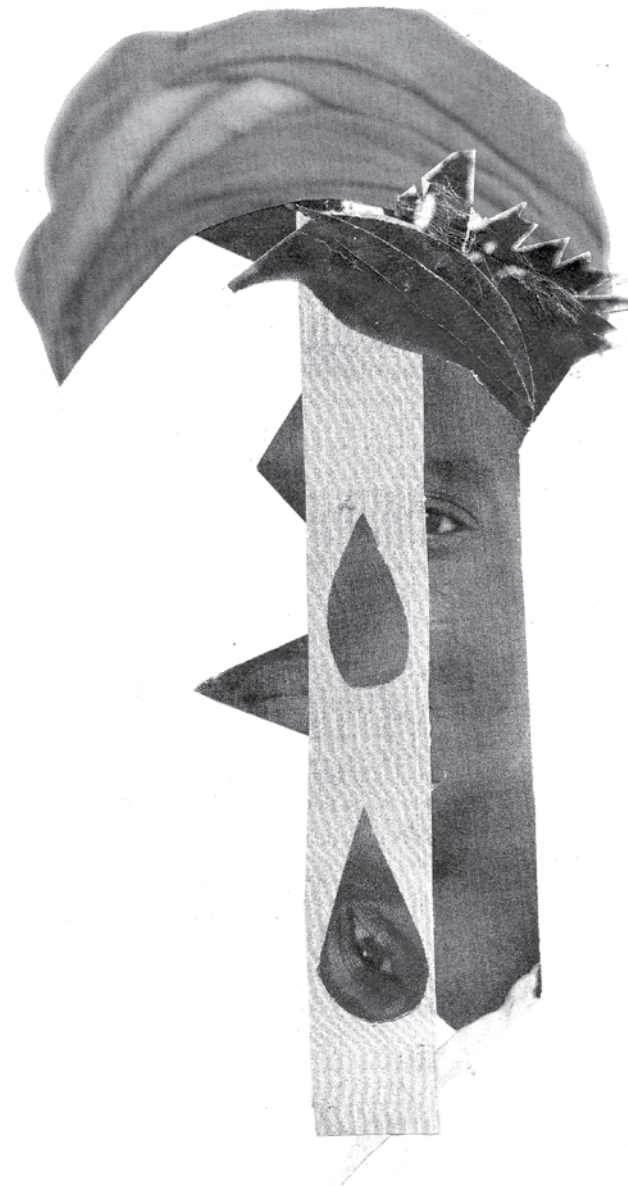


There is a saying in Syria: “You travel naked in a country where you are a foreigner”. To me, if they call you naked, get even more undressed, free, free.



And together we will
change the world so
that people will never
have to “come out” ever
again!





Extraterrestre

When I arrived at your house it was dark. The sun slipped in through the door and if you tap the lamp the right way the light will stay on. But your life is full of shadows, your room also, I don't understand them and I don't know how, and you also tell me, I don't know. They are in your eyes. Let's go outside? Wear something warm. We drove up the hill, the twisted road through the plastic trees.

At the top you can see the other side of the island and all the islands in between. We walk through the crackling pylons that gate the way to the path. Thick silver rope rooted in gravel. Among the roots are baby shrubs. You tell me it is green like Africa. And then you turned off the path, so close to the edge I was scared, but you just wanted me to take a picture. You are in a stream of sun that draws a bright line across the sea, all the way to you in your rainbow hat. I still felt relief when you came back towards the path, away from the sheer cliff, and we continued our stumbling way along the spine of the hill. We stood at the end, between sky and sea. Did you know that extraterrestre means something like, more than this earth? Terrestre means earth, so extraterrestre it's like.. more than us. Do you believe in them? They wouldn't look like us. Your words should have been caught in the wind but you spoke them with all your energy and all your life. You must shout into the wind, to be heard by me and to be heard by those more than me. Shout into the wind and breathe into the wind, shallow breath from the climb and the thrill of being here among the green shrubs and the grey air. We took different paths back through the trees, glancing through the branches, until we

stopped together by the pylon, alien between the pines. I can wrap my hand around the cable and I will not be hurt, because the cable is rooted in the earth. Do you know how electricity works? Bracken and stone and braided metal running through it and energy streaming between them. Tears in the wind.

Queer! No Borders!

On Lesbos as elsewhere, LGBTQIA+ or “queer” and No Borders solidarity often work hand in hand. The following is a reflection on my own understandings of Queer and No Border politics, based on time spent organizing with both movements (and at their intersection) in Istanbul and on Lesbos.

No Borders!

You can't evict a movement!

No Borders politics can be understood as constituting a refusal of both borders and of the state, in that borders are technologies of the state that instrumentalize a state's ability to decide who can enter and who cannot, who belongs and who does not. It is a refusal also of the racist, fascist, sexist, xenophobic, and homophobic norms and policies of states, and how those forms of violence impact people on the move. Indeed, a refusal of the border is incompatible with the state, because to think of a world without borders is inherently to imagine a world without states. A No Border politic is also a positive assertion of the freedom of movement and settlement. It goes beyond refusing or contesting the state by seeking to be autonomous from it. It involves large scale actions and political statements, but also the subtle ways that those on the move and those working in solidarity with them create alternative ways of being, circulate knowledge about mobility, and build transnational, self-organized, non-authoritarian collectives. It is found in the everyday strategies and resistances people use to keep moving, and the support networks built up among those on the move.

Today, policies such as the Dublin Reg-

ulations and EU Turkey deal, and restrictions on mobility enacted by individual states violently restrict the freedom of movement of many travellers. On Lesbos, thousands remain stranded in dangerous and inhumane conditions in the main camp on the island, Moria, and in the surrounding area due to these policies. Whereas in 2015, millions of people were able to reach Europe via the Balkan Route, the closure of the “formalized corridor,” EU Turkey Deal, hotspot approach, and building of fences along the route in recent years has made the situation much more dangerous and difficult. This comes along with a resurgence of fascist and authoritarian politics throughout Europe (and the world), which contribute to violence against minorities and the turning of public opinion against those on the move. The violence of the border does not end at the geographic border of states, but extends throughout the territory in the form of racist attacks and racial profiling by authorities, labor discrimination, and other inequalities.

No Borders, Meet Queer.

Queer, meet No Borders

In its refusal of sexism, homophobia, and other forms of discrimination experienced by queer people, No Borders politics and initiatives already stand in solidarity with Queer politics and people. Queer folks—both travellers and those here in solidarity—have been heavily involved in No Border initiatives, and other solidarity initiatives along the Balkan Route. However, the connection between No Borders and Queer politics, I propose, runs even deeper than that. I use the term “queer” to mean “non-normative logics and organizations of com-

munity, sexual identity, embodiment, and activity in space and time”—in essence focusing not only on queer-identified individuals, but also the refusal of normative, hegemonic structures (gender, race, class, homophobia, xenophobia, transphobia, the state, etc.) that aid in supporting patriarchy, heteronormativity, white supremacy, and capitalism. Jacqueline Stevens in her 2004 work *Reproducing the State*, envisions queer theory and activism as a site for articulating “a revolution against all forms of state boundaries . . . the unhindered movement and full-fledged development of capacities regardless of one's birthplace or parentage.” Queer politics is by nature coalitional, in the ways that activists have grappled with the complex intersection of racial, classed, gendered, national, and ethnic identities often present within queer communities. Those who kicked off the Stonewall Riots, and helped start the movement for gender and sexual liberation in the United States were black queer transgender women. Around the world, queer people have been involved in anticolonial, workers rights, antiracist, and indigenous rights movements—even if their efforts are not always included in mainstream narratives. On Lesbos, LGBTQIA+ solidarity functions as a small, self-organized collective, building safe spaces and mutual support. We take a stand against violence against queer people on the island, and affirm the freedom of movement and settlement for all those on the move. We stand in solidarity with queer folks all over the world, refusing both the borders of nation states, and social barriers faced by queer people such as homophobia, racism, and inequalities in accessing safe and affirm-

ing employment, housing, medical care, etc. Many members of the group come from places in which queer people and politics face heavy discrimination, and we affirm the right for movements to organize and struggle for collective liberation. Further, the act of building safe, autonomous, non-authoritarian spaces for queer people in this space is in itself political, and a rejection of violence and invisibility otherwise present.

Movement of movements

As two politics involved in the refusal of all borders present, No Borders and Queer politics fit together snugly. They are both about freedom of movement in an individual and collective sense: freedom to move through the world with the identities that you hold, to for movements to be able to organize and struggle for collective liberation, for the movement of people without restrictive borders. In building safe, transnational, autonomous and self-organized communities among people on the move and those working in solidarity with them, both movements imagine alternate ways of being and a borderless world.

Gloria Anzaldúa has described the Mexican-American borderland as a ‘herida abierta [open wound] in which the third world grates against the first world and bleeds.’ Something similar can be said about Lesbos, as a place in which the geographic and structural borders of Europe violently oppress our bodies and desires. The Mediterranean is a graveyard—a space in which the systemic neglect and racist enforcement of borders of fortress Europe put in danger the lives of so many on the move. Yet, we remain here. Our bodies defiantly refuse and transcend borders imposed by the state.

- A member of the collective

LGBTIQ+ refugees at grave risk: statement from Lesbos LGBTIQ+ Refugee Solidarity

November 5, 2017

As another deadly winter sets in, Moria prison camp on Lesbos is thousands over capacity and growing fuller every day. In these conditions, LGBTIQ+ refugees are particularly at risk of exposure, violence and death.

Around 3000 of the over 5500 people in the 2000-capacity former military prison at Moria are only sheltered by woefully inadequate summer tents and have to sleep on the floor on thin sleeping mats or blankets. Yet people are still arriving in their hundreds every week.

Being forced to live in such close quarters exposes LGBTIQ+ refugees to sexual, physical and psychological violence. There is an absolute absence of specific support for LGBTIQ+ refugees, so needs are institutionally disregarded. Some members of Lesbos LGBTIQ+ Refugee Solidarity have been beaten and even hospitalised in homophobic and transphobic attacks. Some fear rape whenever they are in the camp. All have had to repress their identity, living cheek by jowl among communities which replicate the persecution they fled in the first place.

LGBTIQ+ refugees in Moria have been driven from their assigned containers and tents by insults and threats of homophobic and transphobic violence. Some spent the night sleeping in front of the camp offices, waiting for them to reopen so they can beg for relocation. This is a harsh and terrifying experience even in summer. In winter, it could kill.

The police routinely either laugh off homophobic and transphobic abuse or

engage in it themselves. They offer no protection.

Even in the rare event LGBTIQ+ refugees are transferred to alternative accommodation outside of Moria, being trapped on the small island of Lesbos presents a fundamental barrier to safety, dignity and the right to live freely in accordance with their identity. Members of Lesbos LGBTIQ+ Refugee Solidarity have experienced homophobic, transphobic, racist street violence from ordinary citizens on Lesbos, and feel unsafe dressing in accordance with who they are, or displaying affection in public.

Hundreds of activist groups are calling on the Greek government to see sense and open the borders, but instead the authorities are increasing "fast-track" deportations, imprisoning new arrivals from "undesirable" nations for the duration of a curtailed asylum process before dumping them back in Turkey in a matter of weeks.

Refugees from these countries – Morocco, Tunisia, Algeria, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Cameroon – are accused of being mere "economic migrants". But these are the same countries where LGBTIQ+ people are criminalized and have to fear violent attack, imprisonment or murder because of their sexual orientation or gender identity. The fast-track procedure prevents people from accessing proper legal help, and may condemn LGBTIQ+ individuals to deportation back into the violence they fled, or to face state-sponsored homophobia and violence in Turkey.

All refugees trapped on the Greek islands will suffer this winter. More will die. And LGBTIQ+ individuals are among those most exposed to the arbitrary cruelty of the border regime.

"The situation in Moria for LGBT people is unbearable," a member of the solidarity group has written. "Take my case as an example: due to the way I dress, I am already subjected to mockery and homophobic abuse. People go as far calling me a mistake of nature, saying that I am shameful for my country."

"And that's just the start of it, there is so much to say about what happens to me there that I am already beginning to weep as I write. The same verbal abuse that I suffered in my country- it hasn't changed here in Moria. I even asked social services to help me get out of there, but I didn't get any response. For gay people like us, Moria is hell."

We demand Europe stops painting itself as a liberal beacon of LGBTIQ+ rights when it is directly responsible for continued violence against LGBTIQ+ refugees. The particular risks that LGBTIQ+ refugees face on Lesbos need to be taken seriously and measures need to be taken to prevent further violence.

We demand the human rights of the members of our collective – Lesbos LGBTIQ+ Refugee Solidarity – are not trampled over any longer.

We demand that LGBTIQ+ refugees are transferred to the mainland where they have access to LGBTIQ+ support structures.

We demand that they are sheltered in adequate shelters outside of Moria camp until their transfer.

We demand the borders to be opened, and free movement for all refugees.

Queer solidarity smashes borders!

Get in touch

If you are based on Lesvos and would like to join the group
If you know someone on Lesvos who would like to be put in touch
If you identify as queer and are interested in coming to Lesvos to support our work long-term
If you are part of a collective active outside Lesvos and you would like to collaborate
If you believe in queer revolution and want to join our struggle

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Image by: Lesbians and Gays Support the Migrants, UK

