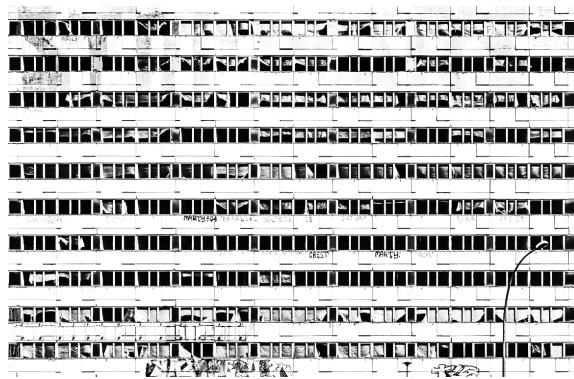


# Berlin, You've Hurt Me / Another Berlin is Possible

Scrappy Capy Distro

berlin, you've  
hurt me



another berlin  
is possible

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A collection of texts about the hurt we've felt within the radical left and the things we could do to make lasting changes.

This is written by and for those of us who hoped to find a home in the radical movement but for whatever reason just weren't quite welcome here. We were promised solidarity and plurality, but often we were met with exclusion. It's hurt us, but also we know how it could be better. This collection of essays from long time residents of this city offers a look into a part of the movement here that is often overlooked.

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# Intro

Just like how Berlin is two different cities in the summer and winter—one green and inviting, the other gray and reserved—the radical left movement in Berlin can be a beautiful but harsh place. There’s more squats and Kūfas than we can count, there’s something going on every night of the week, and we can spot antifas in every corner of the city. But as vibrant as it can be, it can lead to tremendous hurt and misery.

The movement can be welcoming to some but shut out others who are just as deserving of a comradely embrace. Sometimes this feels completely unexpected, but other times we can see it coming because we’re “different” somehow. Maybe we don’t speak German at all (or not that well), maybe we’re from a part of the world with a different radical history or even just different cultural norms. Maybe we’re born and raised here but we don’t fit the stereotype of what a lefty “should” be. The gap between the expectation of acceptance and reality of being pushed away can be jarring, what with all the talk of community and diversity.

Being so shut out means we often feel like we have no voice, and this zine aims to provide some outlet, some way of reaching out to communicate something that we’re desperate to express. Collected here are the stories and experiences written by people who—in some way or another—haven’t found the city to be as welcoming as they’d like. All of us have heard the complaints against the scene, cliques, and individuals before, and while those are a necessary part of transforming our relations, this zine also goes beyond ranting. Each author who penned something that spoke of the pains they’ve felt or the shittiness within the movement was asked to write a second text that makes concrete suggestions for how things could be a little kinder or a little less problematic.

We stick around because we so very much want to be here, but sometimes trying to be a part of the radical movement here hurts us. We—you, us, everyone else—can be better. Things can be better. We just have to want to change, we have to see what’s wrong, and we have to image what that better world might look like.

# Berlin, You've Hurt Me

## The Unwritten Rules (Emma)

Hi, I am an anarchaqueerfeminist from russia. In the word anarchaqueerfeminism, all three components are equally important for me. Queerfeminism without anarchism, anarchafeminism without queer—I find all this insufficient and incomplete.

In russia, I was involved in longstanding activist projects of the kind that can be called infrastructural if you want to sound smart, but also in direct action. In 2018 I came to Berlin and was full of hopes that my radical spirit would blossom in the activist Berlin and that I'd spend all my time at assemblies and protests. I moved to Berlin just as the "Network Case" happened in russia: 8 anarchists from Petersburg and Penza were arrested under charges of terrorism. One of them turned out to be a good comrade of mine, we had organized protests together and were both in the same collective.

Yet in the activist scene in Berlin, I faced a wall of total indifference as I suggested over and over again to organize an event and to talk about that case. No one knew me, no one wanted to listen. Once, people in an occupied space agreed to give me the word because they had a hole to fill in their cultural program. But then the space was evicted, my event got postponed, and then nobody came. Not a single person.

A year later, it became clear to me that you're not seen unless you have recommendations, people who would take you by the hand, take you to places, and introduce you to the right people. But where can migrants find a resource like this? The radical leftist scene consists of symbols, tactics, rules, and if you don't know them (how could you know them?) you can never enter the scene.

A year after I moved, I found a job in a leftist collective. I was the only migrant there at that time. And of course, as a migrant, no one has asked me where I came from. Germans have learned this lesson well. That's indecent, that's wrong! No one seems to know why exactly or what the story behind that is. Everyone seems to have accepted it as a truth that you're not supposed to ask people where they come from. So, for good measure, no one asked me ANYTHING! Not about what I like, not what I used to do, not about the leftist radical activism that used to make up my life. Who I actually was. By contrast, they didn't think twice before giving me advice on how my daughter (10 years old at the time) should learn german quickly. As if germans who have spent their whole life in germany had any idea of how to live through the experience of migration.

And even though germans have also learned that the word "integration" is kind of uncool, some may not even use it, yet the problem is not the word. The problem is that radical leftists in Berlin demand integration from radical leftist migrants. Just the way german society does. As if my many years of experience in anarchaqueerfeminist struggles suddenly did not count, as if my experience were not good enough, not right, just not enough to interest anyone. This is the essence of integration: you're supposed to give up your experience, your knowledge, everything

that is different. You're supposed to learn the activist lingo, take others' problems as your own and forget about yours.

Almost all radical leftists in Berlin consider themselves experts in everything! In all issues all over the world: Latin America, North America, Asia, Africa—everyone has readymade answers to everything. It's as if they were universal experts, and if you disagree, then you don't belong. But if you have something to say and especially to criticize in those areas where you are actually an expert, then at best you won't be heard and at worst, you'll be excluded. I could feel it very strongly when Russia's fully-fledged war against Ukraine started. My words counted for nothing, as did the words of an anarchist from Kyiv, compared to the German radical leftists' certainty that they knew everything! All there was to know on Azov, nationalists, Donbas. Even though they couldn't read in Russian or Ukrainian. Even though they couldn't even see that to use an article with "Ukraine," to use Russian transcriptions for Ukrainian cities (Kiev rather than Kyiv, Odessa rather than Odesa) meant copying the language of the empire. I don't use an article when I say Ukraine, but I have never been asked why. Of course, who would ask me since German is not my native language.

I can still remember my shock when I came to Germany in 2018 and heard what German leftists thought about the war in Ukraine. I was shocked with how deeply Russian propaganda seemed to have taken root in the German Left. Everyone knew about Azov but no one had heard of Rusich or the Imperial Legion, the far-right neo-Nazi groups that were fighting on the Russian side. In fact, you could collect a whole Russian propaganda bingo if you spoke to a group of radical leftists in Berlin! And above all, they were so certain of their expertise!

A mildly funny thing about language. I learned German as my first foreign language. When I came to Germany, my English was bad but my German was good. Then again, the radical leftists have learned that migrants often speak English better than German. So as soon as they realized I was a migrant, they'd often switch to English. Just like this. It is so humiliating, it really hurts, because I have spent 10 years learning German, but just because I make mistakes and have an accent, people think this is not good enough? That English is better? YOU COULD HAVE ASKED!

Germans in the radical scene have learned many rules but these rules don't suit everyone, and they hurt a lot those they are applied to if you do it without reflection, without understanding. I realize this text is written in a way that goes against the conventions of the German radical scene. Criticisms should be coated with cushions, they should be presented in a nice way, with a smile. I have learned as much during my 4 years in Germany. But sorry, I'm not about to integrate myself, either into German society or into the German radical leftist scene. Of course, I have met solidary comrades during these four years. But these are isolated cases, and they do warm one's heart, but I'm certain that it is these people who won't feel offended if they read this text, nor will they feel hurt by the lack of cushions.

## **Are My Clothes Not Punk Enough? (Zaz Topping)**

I was born in a working-class family in post-industrial, Maggie Thatcher Manchester. I grew up on a social housing estate, with playmates from lots of different walks of life, many from families who lived close to the poverty line. The first in my entire family to go to uni, I studied politics and German (still paying off the student debts now!), and eventually moved to Berlin back in 2010 when I was 23.

Though I subscribed to publications like *Socialist Worker*, read books about poverty, social inequality and class (in both German and English), attended Marxism conferences and took part in demonstrations against budget cuts, I somehow never felt “welcome” in the Berlin left scene. Showing up at “KüfAs” (Peoples’ Kitchens) and speaking in my mother-tongue (English) with my friends who joined me, I had the feeling I was being stereotyped as a rich foreigner who comes to Berlin, speaks no German and gentrifies the city.

To pay my rent, I was working as a secretary in those first years in Berlin, a job I hated but it paid well. I did (and continue to do) what a working-class person does: I worked. Perhaps it was my own insecurity about my identity, but I constantly had the feeling in leftie circles that I had to justify why I was working, why I wasn’t devoting myself fully to activism, why I was contributing to capitalism.

The Berlin left scene (think: squat bars around Friedrichshain, and places where you might see copies of *StressFaktor* lying around) seems to promote solidarity, international collective action and “no borders,” yet I have constantly felt alienated by it. I’ve often wondered: are my clothes not punk enough? Is my hair too “normal?” Is it because I don’t smoke?

To me, the Berlin left scene feels like an exclusive community, one which you’re only part of when you can prove you’re lefty enough to be in it.

## **Never Enough and Nothing in Between: A queer anarchist Southern European perspective on the Berlin radical leftist scene (Spinne)**

I’ve lived in Berlin for a few years now and I can say I finally feel part of the radical leftist scene of the city. Not part of a community, nor of a movement, but of a scene. A very fragmented, highly heterogeneous environment where I found a niche for my political activism and personal growth. And that hasn’t been easy. Immediately I’ve been confronted with the cold, scrutinising, and condescending looks of what I firstly understood to be a sort of “radical leftist elite,” namely the people who have the control of autonomous spaces, squats, off- and online structures that are essential for networking, action, and long-term organising. These spaces are often closed, made inaccessible to outsiders, especially for migrants. I understand this is also a matter of security, but at the same time it makes them look like an impenetrable fortress you can’t have access to unless you prove your worth and usefulness. But who decides who’s worth of accessing these spaces? Who gets deemed as useful?

There is a constant urgent call for radical action without giving people the access to many of these structures to act in a safe and effective way. So much potential gets lost because of that. “You HAVE to act now against gentrification, capitalism, the police, and far-right movements but also don’t expect us to let you use our tools, spaces, and knowledge. And don’t expect the older generation to help or take care of you. You’re either one of us or you’re not. There is nothing in between. Good luck, you’re on your own.”

This fixation on militancy without the necessary tools for safety has just two possible outcomes: making people feel guilty and frustrated because they’re not able to do enough or pushing people to do unsafe action, exposing themselves to harm and repression.

This adds up to the countless outings of people (mainly cis men) as perpetrators of sexual and patriarchal violence in the last years, which makes me feel even less safe and not able to trust

anyone. What structures am I risking my safety for and giving my time and energy to? What if the projects I'm active in hoard perpetrators who harm(ed) other people? What if my friends and I are their next victims?

This is a very different experience from the one I had growing up. I was politically socialised in an autonomous centre in the south of Europe where there is a big focus on involving and helping people from the outside of our squat, especially refugees, immigrants, and non-radicals. We always tried to connect different types of struggles by bringing people together with community-based activities: food, concerts, sport, workshops, book readings—not aimed at a small group of people but at the whole community. But most of all, we took care of each other, especially of the younger ones. I was not one of the most active ones but all I had to do to get in was to ask if they needed help doing the dishes or sweeping the floor and coming to the plenary meeting.

So, I was quite surprised when coming to Berlin I had the feeling I had to “prove my worth” and get people to trust me before being able to do anything.

And now, after countless demonstrations, actions, published texts and flyers, Küfas and events, I have proven my worth, but the scene is still cold, scrutinising, harsh and unforgiving. Especially the radical leftist queer scene. Especially if you're a migrant.

It feels like we're never doing enough, everything we do is wrong and every move we make gets harshly criticised. People are so polarised that they act on a logic of “either you're with us or against us” and everything that strays from the path they deem “right” must be harmful and called out. And there is nothing in between. It's important to take a stand for what we think is right and show no tolerance towards discrimination, but in this black and white way of seeing the world all the nuances get lost. And with them we also lose the chance to learn from each other. I'm talking about the schism about the Palestinian-Israeli conflict, discussions about racism, colonialism and antisemitism, FLINTA people and cis men, national identity and anti-state tendencies, reformism and radical action, and so on. Everywhere I look there seem to be a divide where people must choose the “right” side and suffer the consequences if they accidentally choose the “wrong” one, meaning exclusion, lies and ostracization. Small realization: you'll always choose the wrong side (as you can't agree with everyone) and will eventually suffer for sticking to your own opinions and having a spine to defend them anyway.

I have the feeling that many of these conflicts trigger past traumas in people who have faced discrimination in life, and it's totally relatable when they react emotionally or with rage. Nevertheless, we must understand that trauma responses are not a sustainable way to deal with political conflicts in the long term. Nor is publicly shaming or dragging people in the mud with lies and rumours for having slightly different ideological stances and condemning every group that works with them in an attempt to politically isolate them. I've seen people do that (consciously or unconsciously) to put themselves or their group on an ideological pedestal and prove to others their political purity. And it's disgusting. And it burns people out and traumatises them to a point where they have to get out of activism. This is not the scene or community I want to be part of.

## **The Unseen Nationalism of the Radical Left (Ceylon)**

I'm an anarchist, and I've been living in Berlin since 2014. I've been active in a number of existing collectives doing things from classical antifascism to mutual aid. I, like many others in



Berlin, am a perennial outsider. I'm not from Berlin, not from so-called Germany. I speak the language competently and have lived here most of my adult life, but I'm not—and never *really* will be—one of you.

There's a core—or perhaps a small number of cores—of the radical left scene in Berlin, mostly centered around the housing projects and social centers. The old guard, the elders, the elite. We could give them many names. They often have outsized control over the rest of the scene, which seems to come from this idea that “they were there, dude.” They were there during the heyday of Berlin's radicalism, they were around for—and are the continuation of—the sort of militant autonomism that gave us these squats and shaped the antifascist scene. Or so the legend goes.

From the way people raised in the German State talk about it, especially white gentiles, there is some imprint of the past that's permanently left on them. National Socialism and Soviet domination have left scars on their DNA, and as a result they can speak unassailable truths about what it means to counter nationalism, antisemitism, and authoritarianism. But those of who aren't German? We can never know. Because our grandparents weren't living under the Nazi regime, because our parents weren't under Stasi surveillance, how could we really know what it's like and what sort of resistance is effective?

I, like many other migrants, bring the experience from my homeland. Things are different there, and I have no illusions that what worked back where I emigrated from won't work exactly the same here. I know that the culture, history, and structures in the two territories are different. But when I make suggestions that could be bent or adapted or could provide insight through an analogous context, I'm shut down.

“It's not like that here.”

“We don't do that here.”

“That wouldn't work here.”

There's no room for diversity of opinions unless the group is majority non-German, and even then, the majority has to push so hard just to get the few Germans to bend. I'm tired of feeling like I'm just supposed to follow the German lead here, that as a non-German my opinions and ideas will never really matter. For all the talk about immigrants and refugees, for how often we slap stickers and wear shirts that say “No Borders,” collectively the radical left in Berlin has not availed itself to all the immigrants who try to make a life here.

And many of us leave Berlin forever, feeling depressed and rejected.

## **A Community Divided (Naema)**

Berlin, you hurt me. You hurt me when I was trying my best. You hurt me when I didn't understand what my mistakes were and if they were really mine. You hurt me when you silenced my voice. You hurt me when you rejected one marginalized group in favor of another.

One fall evening last year, I stood, microphone in hand, in front of a crowd of 120 guests. My heart was racing. I hadn't been as afraid in a long time as I was at that moment, not because so many pairs of eyes were looking at me, but because of what I had firmly resolved to say. I was going to address an almost untouchable subject: Palestine.

How can it feel so dangerous to express an opinion in a room full of supposedly like-minded people? These people had come because they shared the same fundamental beliefs as I did. If you ask different leftist groups about their values, one of the smallest common denominators is

this: no one should be treated unfairly. No one should be deprived of their freedom and dignity without cause. And yet the air freezes into ice when you bring up Israel/Palestine. Suddenly everyone seems to remember my Arab origin, and mistrust spreads.

I can't be unbiased because of my origin, is the implicit and sometimes explicit accusation—an accusation that always comes from Germans. Who is prejudiced here and for what reasons?

Why does my heart race when I stand up on stage and advocate solidarity with Palestine—a political opinion for which I have read dozens of sources, watched videos, had conversations? More likely than most who disparagingly disagree with me?

Many Germans are so afraid of coming across as antisemitic that when they see any criticism of the State of Israel—a national institution that cannot be equated with the Jewish people(s)—they reproduce anti-Arab and other racisms. This fear of criticism of the State of Israel, absurdly, in turn harms Jewish people who oppose apartheid policies. In 2016 and 2019, for the first time since the Nazi era, the bank account of a Jewish group was closed with reference to its connection to the BDS movement. Jewish Voice for Peace, the Jewish Federation, Jewish Voice for a Just Peace in the Middle East—when Jewish voices are suppressed and excluded in the name of anti-anti-Semitism, the neuroses of the German Left are on full display.

In addition to this particular issue area, the Berlin Left also tends to have a broad problem, that of power struggles within various groups. Often these struggles proceed along spectrums of identity presented as two-dimensional, placing identity above action. A person with chronic but invisible illness is categorized as less radical than a person with visible disability. If I disagree with a trans woman on queer issues, I am transphobic, no matter what the actual content of my statement was, no matter how other intersections of identity affect the issue, no matter what my other behavior is, no matter how long we have been walking side by side.

We could set out to find the most marginalized person in the world, and even she would not have all the answers.

We have forgotten the meaning of the word solidarity. It describes a cohesion that goes beyond petty squabbles. One that unites against a common adversary or supports a common cause, even when disagreeing on other issues.

Moreover, we are collectively obsessed with a kind of moral purity. The proverbial clean slate is the most important characteristic of a good fighting partner, and it just doesn't exist. It's a narrative that reminds me of post-traumatic stress—if only I never make mistakes, nothing bad will ever happen to me again. It is an attempt to regain control of a situation by completely blocking out external factors and focusing only on one's own actions and thinking, or on the actions and presumed thinking of others. There is simply no such thing as the perfect person who never makes mistakes and has never made any in the past. We all grow up in cultures that discriminate. It is up to all of us, collectively and individually, to unlearn this discrimination. But this is not a one-time, linear process, and we will all make mistakes along the way.

This power struggle, the struggle for moral superiority, leaves no room to breathe for us as human beings. Everyone has a slip-up now and then, has not reflected on a topic, does not have all the information. It is a supernatural requirement to never do this.

Intent is not the only important thing, but it is wrong to leave it completely out of the equation when evaluating a statement. It makes a difference whether someone thoughtlessly repeats a racist term or actively interrupts, silences, ignores BIPOCs. It makes a difference whether criticism is accepted and acted upon or dismissed.

Is it meaningful to cast out all people from a movement who do not share certain beliefs? Is strife in the queer movement meaningful because not all people are vegan? Is it meaningful to make common action dependent on a long list of requirements? To focus on the differences rather than the commonalities?

Once I asked a friend if she could take an awareness shift at a queer event I was organizing. She hesitated.

“I’m white and straight. Am I really the right person for this?”

This answer shows that she was. I had not asked her for help because of her sexual orientation or skin color, but because I knew of her compassion and her always open ear. With this answer she proved to me that she was aware of her limitations. And she knew that she would not have to do anything alone, that she could ask me or countless others for help if a task exceeded her capacities.

That’s what we need. Community across identity boundaries.

# Another Berlin is Possible

## “Shut Up and Listen” Doesn’t Work (Emma)

I have asked myself several times what I’d wish from the German radical scene, both in general and in the specific situations where I have felt excluded.

I’m very interested in activism, yet I have always felt as if I were banging my head against a brick wall. Why weren’t they accepting me? Why did I feel excluded? I think all collectives perceived me as different. On the one hand, I didn’t know basic German activist things: common acronyms, the names of movements or groups. But how many times do you think a new person, a migrant who is the only one speaking with an accent at an assembly, can ask: “What’s that? What does that mean?” During the same assembly. Trust me, not a lot of times.

On the other hand, I behaved differently, I didn’t follow the activist codes. I didn’t and still don’t know how to behave in the way that is expected in the Berlin activist scene. All those unwritten rules of the scene, never named, never spelled out.

I want to call upon the radical leftists to be open, to accept people with different experiences, to ask, to let people in and open up to them. Don’t think all the world’s activism revolves around Germany, accept that migrants might not be aware of how things are in Germany with abortions, with police, or with laws. This does not make them less radical or not leftist enough. Understand that your struggle is not the only one out there.

How many times did I come to an existing collective for the first time and wasn’t asked what I was called. How many years have leftist radicals worked side by side with me without even knowing I had a child, where I came from, or what I was studying at the university.

I want to call upon Germans to invite new people to go have a smoke together, or to walk together to the metro station after an event, or just chat with them. I mean, this is so easy! And so vital for the new people who constantly feel like outsiders, unwelcome, inadequate, out of place. And it’s precisely from such chats that we can learn about laws, and how things are with the police or with abortions, and then come home and know what to read up to understand what your struggle is about. It’s common among you to call a lot of facts knowledge, but it’s also by walking with me to the metro station or having a smoke with me that you can learn more than, for instance, just the fact that there is a homophobic law in Russia. You might learn that there are queers, that they are building communities, that they are fighting, keeping alive, not giving up, that there are queer bars and parties. You might even learn that there are more than just nationalists and Azov in Ukraine, but also huge leftist networks, organisations, and anarchist structures that need support right now.

Reflect upon the rules that you understand too literally! “Shut up and listen” doesn’t work if you shut up all the time, if you don’t ask questions or show your interest. Then there will be nothing for you to listen to. This is why we keep silent and so do you, and there is nothing to listen to. Don’t be shy to talk to us!

## A Perspective From Britain (Zaz Topping)

My experiences of lefty communities in Britain have been vastly different, with a much **more inclusive, non-judgemental approach** to welcoming people, showing **curiosity and openness** for the diverse perspectives each person might bring with them.

Here's what I would wish for in Berlin:

- **Multi-language:** Text for events, signs, publications etc not just in German but also English, perhaps also other languages depending on event.
- **Cross-generational:** Spaces for people from lots of different age groups to come together and be mutually respected. Family-friendly events as well as spaces to bring your grandma.
- **Multiple forms of expression:** How about community creative nights, choirs singing folk or protest songs, story cafés (a format where people are invited to share their biographies), amateur theatre?
- **Playfulness/Lightness:** Activism doesn't have to always be serious, gloomy work. How about exploring more playful ways of engaging with the topic and injecting more humour?
- **FRIENDLINESS:** ABOVE ALL, JUST BE FRIENDLY! Show kindness and curiosity to people who you encounter and share space with.

## Something in Between (Spinne)

The Berlin radical leftist scene often feels fucked up. It can be a cold and harsh place where we experience exclusion, where we're belittled and left out, and where some of us even experience psychological and physical abuse. I often wonder how people who are self-proclaimed antifascists, feminists and radicals can act this way. But it's a dangerous illusion to see ourselves as better than the mainstream, unable to perpetuate the harm that permeates our society. This doesn't mean that we must constantly look for the culprit in our own ranks, because eventually we will all fuck up. It's a matter of how we and our comrades will react when we're confronted by it. As exhausting as it sounds like, we must find ourselves in a constant transformative and improvement process to enable our scene and groups to learn from our own mistakes.

In the following paragraphs I will list some key points that I think could be helpful to transform our scene in a more welcoming place where respectful interaction and cooperation is possible, as well as enabling safer and more efficient radical action and mobilisation.

### Open spaces, open minds

Structures, spaces and resources that are necessary for networking, (direct) action, short- and long- term organising should be more open and accessible, especially for young people and migrants. That could look like giving your self-organised bar one day a week to a FLINTA, youth or (post-)migrant group so they have a space to meet and organise events. In Berlin we have squats, libraries, groups and organizations that have been part of the city for decades, and they represent a crucial point for the development of our collective political work. This work is hindered if

only a few people have access to these resources. We should find easily accessible, community-based activities and radical actions that are low repression (such as Kūfa, posterings, ad-busting, guerrilla gardening, etc.) to enable networking, sharing tools and knowledge for people who are new to the scene. I am aware that these things are already happening and that it is a lot of work. It can be hard and frustrating opening up and taking care of newcomers or young people and many of us often don't have the energy to do that in addition to all the work we're already doing. But this is not something that we can leave out. Let's face it: no one will care about our next demonstration or radical action if we have no people left to support and help us. This also means we will have to find a balance between accessibility and security. A way to let people in and let repressive forces out.

Opening spaces and structures also means respecting other people's ideas and experiences, even if they might be different from how things have been done in the scene so far. I was just a teenager when I first came to Berlin, and I felt constantly belittled and not taken seriously, especially by older German activists. I was too young, a foreigner, I had no idea how things are done here, I didn't have enough experience or connections. It's true that I had a lot to learn, but I had my own ideas, beliefs, and experiences, which might have been useful if listened to. Our society is constantly and quickly evolving, and we need new perspectives, ideas and solutions to current problems. If we keep on acting the way we did 20 years ago, stagnation and failure are our only options. This means listening to the younger generation of activists, newcomers, migrants, foreigners, and giving them space to voice their opinion and put it into action.

### **Build community, build resistance**

What we have in Berlin now is not a community, is not a movement, it's a scene of different groups and cliques, loosely connected to each other and that often act alone. If we want to resist and survive the attacks of the state and right-wing groups, we must form a community as a mean to self-defence. The first step to do this has already been described above: open your spaces. But that is not enough. We must take care of each other and spend more time for community-based activities that also involve people outside of our closed circles. This means moving past the cool Berlin scene attitude and starting to be more welcoming and show interest towards new people, ideas and experiences. It means shifting our focus and involving the people who are most targeted by state and right-wing violence: homeless people, (undocumented) immigrants, sex workers, Black, Indigenous and people of colour, trans and intersex people, refugees, working class people, and so on. It means taking care of the younger generation, guiding and teaching them, instead of constantly criticising and belittling them. It means working all together and moving towards a common goal, despite our different upbringing, age, origin, and culture.

Taking care of each other also means creating spaces that do not harbour abusers and perpetrators and where these people have no power. And if such people are in our structures, we must engage in processes to hold them accountable, help them be better and, if they refuse to change their behaviour, eventually kick them out. No matter how politically important or how well-connected they are.

Care work is also radical work, and it cannot be carried out just by FLINTA people. If we want to build strong movements and communities emotional work is necessary and it should be cis men's responsibility as well. So start learning.

## **Build an emancipatory culture of discussion**

Everyone knows it: radical leftists love to argue. It's part of the never-ending dialectical process of how our movements evolve, and it's not always a bad thing.

In the years I've been here I've witnessed a multitude of highly polarised political debates that end up in a division of the whole scene. Meta-conflicts such as the one about the Palestinian-Israeli conflict, discussions about racism, colonialism and antisemitism, FLINTA people and cis men, national identity and anti-state tendencies, disagreements about reformism and radical action, and so on.

These discussions that we're having are important and crucial for the development of our political consciousness, but they must be carried out in a way that is emancipatory, useful, radical, and human. In a way that shows that we really want to change the world and our own communities, instead of holding on to a sense of ideological purity or perfection. This does not mean we have to tolerate racists, antisemites, transphobes, sexists, ableists or other discriminatory assholes and perpetrators of violence (kick them in the teeth for all I care). It means that we must find a way to solve these conflicts in a way that is focused on challenging current power structures, authoritarian tendencies and discrimination without exclusively basing on identity, group belonging and ideological purity. Without kicking people out, spreading lies or ostracizing them in an attempt to defend your group and showing you're better than them. Because reality is complicated and ultimately, we're all oriented towards the same goal: total liberation.

We will never truly liberate and emancipate ourselves if we keep using the master's tools of punishment, ostracization, revenge, defamation or by virtue signalling. We need to turn to more sophisticated, transformative, anti-authoritarian and emancipatory ways to deal with conflicts in our communities, while still holding people accountable.

This means not publicly shaming or dragging people in the mud with lies and rumours for having slightly different ideological stances and condemning every group that works with them to politically isolate them, put ourselves on an ideological pedestal and prove our political purity. We must reject populist ways of making politics, challenge fake news and not immediately believe half-baked stories told by some groups just because we already agree with them. And for fuck's sake, we must stop it with the shitstorms on social media.

We also have to challenge the consumerist attitude we often have towards radical leftist events. Demonstrations, rallies and community events are not a product for you to consume and complain about when it doesn't meet your standards. Everything happens because of unpaid voluntary work, and we must respect that. Our events are never going to be perfect and constructive criticism is always welcome, especially if something is leading to the exclusion of a group of people. But complaining and showing indignation online is often just a way of virtue signalling and to show one's political superiority towards others. Instead, when we see something we think could be improved we should talk directly to the organising team, explain our criticism and eventually get involved if we have the capacity to.

## **Focus on grassroots & groundwork**

As much as it hurts to admit, we must understand that we are currently in a phase of organising, rather than action. We do not have the radical mass movement and mobilisation we had in the 60s, 70s or even until 20 years ago, at least not in the radical left. We are witnessing a

moment of high state and police control and inability to defend ourselves against their attacks. We always say we want to be ungovernable but how do we get there? How do we ensure our and our comrades' safety while still being able to act radically and effectively?

I think one solution might lie, as already mentioned before, in community building, sharing tools and knowledge, opening our spaces and structures, organising not just for ourselves but trying to reach people outside of our scene. We must create a common foundation of different political praxes, accessible structures and groups that enable a larger-scale mobilisation. Giving more people the knowledge and resources to build their own structures or act inside of the already existing ones. Enabling them to take radical action in the most effective and safest way possible and granting the well-being of the people who are part of these organisations. Supporting and engaging in all different types of local struggles and connecting with people that might not be radical (yet).

I must admit I have no clue how to get there and that this is indeed a lot of work. It sounds almost impossible, but I know it was possible in the past and therefore it should be possible today. It's a matter of how we set our priorities and deploy our energies. Focus on quality rather than quantity. Do less but better structured and organised. Try stuff out, make mistakes, learn from them. We've got your back.

### **Go easy on yourself and others**

I know, being part of the radical left is often exhausting and frustrating. Many of us get burned out in an attempt to change a political and societal landscape that looks nothing but disastrous. I understand that we sometimes need to rant. Nevertheless, constantly nagging and criticizing brings yourself and other people down, it makes them feel unappreciated and leads them to feel that no matter what they do, it's never enough. Which subsequently gives rise to feelings of hopelessness and rage and might finally lead people to give up or push them to take desperate and unsafe measures.

It's true, we live in terrible times, but there's no use in hopeless and desperate actions. You don't carry the fault of the radical left's failures on your shoulders, nor does anyone. And burning yourself out will not solve our problems. Nor will constantly nagging about the state of the scene. Instead, let's focus our energies on the change we can enact right now and support people who share our goals. And yes, of course you can rant with your friends sometimes but, for fuck's sake, stop constantly complaining on twitter.

### **Breaking the Cycle (Ceylon)**

The subtle nationalism and German supremacy within the radical left scene in Berlin often edges out all other issues and opinions. It comes back to the idea that only those who were raised within the German State can fully understand it, and without this full understanding (especially of its nazi past!), actions taken against it are ill-informed. If non-German opinions always come second, what are we to call it other than nationalism and supremacy?

If this is one of the causes of the dysfunction within the radical left in Berlin, how can we change our behaviors? What can we do differently to break the cycle that so often excludes immigrants from radical structure and circles?



The first step is to acknowledge that this is a factor. One's antifascism might include being against the German State, and one could assume that this would be anti-nationalist. But if this position is taken with some assumption that Germany is a uniquely evil State or that a German understanding is required to counter it, then this anti-nationalism has itself become a form of nationalism. Immigrants, refugees, and even German citizens with a familial background in Africa, West Asia, and other non-“white” places (and even at times “white”, non-German-speaking territories) take the brunt of the discrimination and oppression. The unique knowledge such people have is critical to countering authoritarianism, and we are not looking for white/German saviors to lead us to utopia.

The radical left understands in some academic sense that a white-first, white-led movement is at odds with the most basic tenets of socialism, anarchism, or even garden-variety feminism and anti-racism. Often this leads to seeking token speakers—migrant, queer, PoC, women, etc.—for demos and events as a way to legitimize the collective hosting it. Without these tokens, the group is open to criticism of being too cis/het/masculine/white. However, often this leads to fishing for diversity instead of drawing from the collective itself or the sort of tight connections between social groups that should exist. There is no simple answer to how to move beyond this, but each crew or collective should deeply reflect on why they are so often (nearly) entirely white or German. Why don't groups of PoC or immigrants work with you? What are the barriers? How can you tear them down and actually engage with other people with diverse ideas in a way that isn't tokenizing?

Berlin is in a rut. We're not building new structures, and the old structures are crumbling or being stripped away by State violence. We need to try new things. Be daring. We keep doing the same things, and comrades from other territories have a wealth of experiences, theories, and tactics that can benefit us all. Germans don't know best for so-called Germany, and it's time to break the cycle and find more open and intersectional approaches to organizing.

## **A Path to Rapprochement (Naema)**

My grandfather also fought on the side of Germany in the Second World War. That is a fact that I cannot change, just as millions of other Germans cannot change it. But it does not have to determine my actions. I must not avoid dealing with today's situation because the unchangeable past weighs on me. It does not help the murdered people of the past if I now close my eyes to the truth, and it helps the Jewish people of the present just as little. Human Rights Watch, B'Tselem, Amnesty International—how many more globally recognized human rights organizations must point out the unjust system before the German left is willing to listen? How much longer must the Palestinian people suffer German guilt?

That is what the solution can be. Listening. Even such hackneyed clichés sometimes have their justification. We have to stop forming opinions before we have gathered information. We have to start listening to both sides of a fight within the community, and checking the accusations for their rightfulness. They exist, the abysmally lost, the neo-Nazis who beat people up because of their sexual orientation or reject them because of the color of their skin, but this issue is not about them. It's about the well-meaning who try to do everything right and are willing to take respectfully expressed criticism. We must stop equating honest mistakes, ignorance, or dissenting opinions with bad faith. To do this, we must learn to calm our egos. Not everyone can fight every

battle. We must learn to let different attitudes—within certain limits—stand naturally. It is neither meaningful nor respectful to exclude the person oppressed due to their refugee status because they buy meat at the discount store. We need to relearn the meaning of the word solidarity. We need to give people after their mistakes—which will inevitably come, because no one can be perfect—the opportunity to make amends. We need to offer criticism respectfully and take an interest in how that hurt occurred to avoid future hurts.

We need community, but we rarely know how to create it. An important first moment is to never assume malice when ignorance is enough of a reason. We must learn to hold people accountable for their actions without declaring a court martial. We need to stop playing oppression olympics. You can't compare individual suffering. Someone who drowns in ten centimeters of water is just as dead as someone who drowns in ten meters of water.

Drawing boundaries too strictly inevitably excludes people. How can one be one hundred percent confident in being able to recognize group membership—for example, of queer people—without thereby enforcing strict markers? Sometimes I dress femme, sometimes masc. Does my dress change my inherent queerness? Who gets to determine that? If we want to create truly inclusive places, we all need to think along. If you want to create a BIPoC-only space, you have to listen to light-skinned BIPoCs as well. FLINTA spaces must also provide shelter for cis-passing trans men. I'd rather a cis man enter a FLINTA space than have masculine appearing non-binary or trans people fear for their access.

Restorative justice offers one method of dealing with hurts and mistakes. This model focuses on repairing harm that has occurred and is based on the fact that we are intertwined as a community. Attention is paid to the communal dimension of injuries—what can we work on to repair the past and prevent future injuries? How can we create a system, which does not seek one solution to complex problems, but can offer different solutions to different people?

Many marginalized people experience frequent trauma, which can then make big waves in a supposedly safe atmosphere like a leftist grouping when the smallest injuries occur. Often I have seen the person who causes harm become equated to the entire oppressive system, because the actions reproduce similar injuries reproduce. But this is rarely the intention, and the person doing the hurting is also exposed to trauma as a member of marginalized groups. We must want to empathically understand the actions and motivations of the person who causes harm without equating that with an absolving of guilt.

How can we move past conflict? We must be willing to allow people to change. We must not only demand personal growth, but also give it a chance.

We can't see the forest for the trees. We have to stop getting bogged down in small conflicts and losing sight of the larger, societal movement. We have to understand that you can't transfer overarching structures to individual people. If everyone ate vegan starting tomorrow, twenty corporations would still be responsible for 35% of greenhouse gas emissions.

Diversity without difference is nothing. We need to learn to embrace it again. Maybe someday we can even celebrate it.

## Outro

There's probably nothing here you haven't heard before. Maybe in passing, maybe online. Maybe someone stopped showing up to your collective's meetings, or maybe someone came to your event, never returned, and you didn't even notice. Things spoken aloud and posts online can be fleeting, but with these words that have been written a little more carefully, you can hopefully see some of what we've been going through.

These weren't perfectly academic critiques, nor all-encompassing statements that illuminate and clarify everything we've experienced. They're just stories, experiences, and hopes.

Where we as the movement go from here is, naturally, up to us and only us. We can continue on as we always have, or we can find ways to make things a little more inclusive of differing opinions and other ways of doing things. We can be fluid instead of static. We can be progressive instead of conservative, locked in to our old ways.

Berlin has hurt us, but another Berlin is possible.

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