

REFUGEES IN GERMANY – A CHALLENGE FOR THE WOMEN'S MOVEMENT

War produces Flight.

In Germany this was experienced as a consequence of the 2nd World War.

In 1944 – 45 about 14 Million Germans were deported or forced to flee from the German Eastern provinces which were to become Polish. The refugee treks consisted mainly of women, children and old people. The men had either been killed during the War, or they were still striving about as lost soldiers or they had been taken as prisoners of war. It is estimated that during the period of flight and expulsion about 1.4 Million women have been raped or even killed. All this was the sinister follow-up of Germany's darkest chapter of history: the fascist WAR. We may conclude: The warmongers were mainly men – the yield was paid by the whole population: women, children and men.

This we observe in all wars that have been instigated since. We just heard of the detrimental concomitants of the Bosnian War.

Today we are involved in World War III. Islamistic terrorist groups bulldoze the Near East, parts of Inner Asia and of Africa. They legitimize their reigns of horror by religious guilds, they are winning fealty by declaring the war as being holy and a duty to God. The actual wirepullers, those who are striving for a totalitarian rule are not visible to the rank and file, i.e. for those who are paying the bill with their lives. The economic and financial power-holders, those who become immensely rich through arms exports or speculation, and whose wealth is once more increased by the reconstruction of the countries they have induced to be destroyed before, those keep their slates clean.

Worldwide the number of refugees is higher today than it was at any other historical period. I will confine myself here to speak about refugees coming to Germany, which has accommodated more than any other European country. In the course of the last year they were about 1.1 Million. What makes this flow of refugees special is the fact that the large majority of them (about 600.000) are young men under thirty. A small proportion is single women with and without children.

The women are war victims in many respects: they have experienced war atrocities, they had to leave their homes for a totally uncertain destination, they had to deal with human traffickers, who often demanded additional payment in sex services. On top of all this after arrival in what they hoped to be a safe shelter, many of them are exposed to rape and violence in the camps and refugees' accommodations.

Another feature of the present wave of refugees is the fact that nearly all of them come from strict patriarchal societies where women are considered to be inferior to men, where they are widely excluded from public life, where they are reduced to being their fathers', brothers', husbands, even their sons' servants, where they have no right to self-determination. Unaccompanied women are considered an easy prey by many men who have been educated to take care only for "their" women (mothers, wives, sisters, daughters), but to disdain all other females who do not belong to this category and who do not behave in a decent manner. Decency is defined as staying at home and being invisible to the public. This imperative is offended by women on flight.

The absolute dominance of men over women is legitimized with religion. Men and women are made to believe that this gender apartheid has its source in the divine godly will. Several Koran-surah fix this: e.g.

Surah 2, 223 "Your wives are as a tilth unto you; so approach your tilth when or how ye will."

Surah 4, 34 legitimizes men's violence towards women: "As to those women on whose part ye fear disloyalty and ill-conduct, admonish them (first), (next) refuse to share their beds, and (last) beat them."

Muslim refugees come to Europe where the women's movement over a long and hard struggle has achieved that equal rights for women and men are laid down in the Constitution. In Germany this happened in 1949 on the debris of the Second World War, when in the aftermath of the fascist regime the new post-war states were founded.

Certainly, there still is all too much violence against women in the European countries: women-contemptuous prostitution and trafficking in women, and many kinds of discrimination. Yet, the law, if it comes to be applied, concedes the right to an abused woman.

In view of the large number of refugees now arriving in Germany, **the German society has to cope with a hard task.** The fugitives do not strip off their creeds the day they reach a country where gender equality is valid. The men have been educated to believe in their superiority over the female gender, they have been made to believe that women by nature are impure.

Thus it happens that the Imam of a mosque in Germany refuses to shake hands with a female German politician, saying that he would not want to impurify himself.

It happens that men refuse to negotiate with female staff in public authorities, in medical practices or elsewhere, demanding for a man to talk to.

It happens that before the eyes of the police masses of Arabic men assault women sexually, as it was the case at New Year's Eve simultaneously in many German cities. Women and girls being used to behave at liberty in public places are considered unprotected game.

It happens that in refugee camps and asylums, Arabic men are employed as wardens who feel obliged to "protect" the women they control from the libertine German society. Women are kept like prisoners and are not allowed to leave their accommodations alone or with female friends.

It happens that men do not allow "their" wives to attend German lessons, if there are men present – either as teachers or as participants.

The German public now has to insist that in this country all civil rights invariably apply to all women, whether indigenous or immigrants. All newcomers have to abide to the free democratic basic order and have to accept and practice gender equality. This has to be made a precondition for the right of residence.

Germany is an immigration country.

Soon after the 2nd World War this became evident. In the 1950s Germany recruited foreign labour: first from Italy, Spain and Greece and finally arrived the largest of all groups, the Turks. In 2014 1.5 Million citizens of Turkish origin were living in Germany. The immigrants improved Germany's demographic structure. In the Postwar Period they replaced the men which were lost through the War. Since the 1970s Germany's birth rate has continually been at a low level. Economic experts expect that about 300.000 individuals cease to be part of the active population every year. Within three years this amounts to nearly a million deboarding the labour market. In order to keep the economy and the social system going, Germany needs immigrants to fill the gap on the employment market. This is the deeper reason, why Germany at present

practices the most liberal policy towards the acceptance of refugees. I do not believe that Chancellor Angela Merkel praises the German “Welcome-culture” for humanitarian reasons. If it were so, she would do all she can to stop German armament exports. But at present this is rather increasing than diminishing – thus producing more and more wars and more and more refugees. The German Economy is profiting from the wars in the Near East and elsewhere. In the *Süddeutsche Zeitung* it can be read (19th Febr. 2016): The German armament export reaches a new peak of 12.5 billion Euros.

The motivation of the German population to welcome refugees is a different one. Many people see the chance to make amends for the atrocities committed by Germans during the Nazi-period, which was responsible for the death and the flight of Millions of people. There is a big gap between the interests of the politicians and the industrial and financial capitalists on the one side and the well-meaning population on the other. There is also an increasing group of xenophobic people, who are taken in by right wing demagogues. Only very few people analyze the dynamics of our society from a sociological point of view, and even fewer understand the manipulation they are exposed to. In the case of the refugees this works in both directions: either to welcome or to reject them. What I mean to say: People accepting the refugees have to fight at a political level against Germany’s armament production and export. Without a critical understanding of our society and without the necessary political action, there will be ever more wars and refugees.

Yet, there is also another aspect to be considered: **Living in Germany offers a great chance to the refugees.** It is not just the possibility to find a safe shelter or an economic existence, but it also means to benefit from the existing free democratic order and to experience self-determination. This applies equally to women and to men. In traditional tribal communities (as many of them exist in rural areas in the Near East) as well as in Islamic societies, men, too, have to unconditionally obey their elders or do what the community demands of them. They are far from being self-determined. If there is a successful integration process, if men and above all women participate in the individualism that our open society enables them to, there will be the chance that they can determine the peace process in their countries by giving their new society a fundamental democratic basic order with gender equality as a substantial part of it.

The UN Resolution 1325 on women, peace and security from 2000, which is an outcome of the reestablishment of the Balkan Nations, envisages an active role of women in the peace-making process. It acknowledges the disproportionate and unique impact of armed conflict on women and girls, and it calls for the adoption of a gender perspective to consider the special needs of women and girls during conflict, repatriation and resettlement, rehabilitation, reintegration

and post-conflict reconstruction. It is up to the societies accommodating the refugees originating from totalitarian patriarchal war-mongering societies to equip them with the consciousness and the tools to participate in the democratic reconstruction of their countries.

In order to offer this opportunity, our society has to do everything to inhibit the development of two parallel societies: the open society for the indigenous population on the one side and an ever increasing minority which lives in more or less the same way as it was practiced in their countries of origin on the other, i.e. girls are not given full access to schooling and vocational training, they are forced to marry as young teenagers to men they don't know, they have no right over their own bodies, having to give birth whether they want to or not; they have no access to the labour market and therefore cannot lead an independent life. Such parallel societies exist already in Germany, i.e. in cities like Dortmund, Duisburg, Hamburg, Berlin and elsewhere. **It must be our foremost aim as a welcoming society to level the pass for all refugees, and especially for women, to get full access to all human rights which are fixed in our Constitution.** This is the most important value of our secular society.

Times of crises are times of opportunities. The Women's Movement is now specially asked to defend our achievements and to expand it to all other societies where women up to now are not heard or seen. **Let us seize the chance!**

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