

Abolishing Borders, Ending Violence, Transforming Justice

Feminist No Borders Summer School Statement
on the Pylos Shipwreck

On June 14, 2023, a vessel carrying hundreds of people capsized off Pylos, near the Greek peninsula of Peloponnese. Up to 600 people were killed, while only 82 bodies have been found so far. The 104 survivors have been detained in a closed camp and, replicating a pattern of criminalisation of migration and fabrication of legal categories, nine of them have been [accused of smuggling, negligent manslaughter, exposing lives to danger, causing a shipwreck and human trafficking](#).

In the Pylos shipwreck, the non-rescue policies and pushback practices of EU actors and member states are the reason for hundreds of people drowning. The Hellenic Coast Guard (HCG) [not only refused to perform rescue](#), but also prevented other vessels from doing so and —as survivors have stated— proceeded to [cause the vessel to capsize](#) by towing the boat in an apparent attempt of performing a pushback, and then, after the capsizing, [left the scene for about 20 minutes](#). However, the HCG has tried to cover-up its involvement: initially, it stated that people were refusing to be rescued and that the boat had been sailing at steady speed until minutes before it capsized. Yet, tracking data reveal [the HCG knew for many hours that the boat was adrift](#) and numerous [distress calls had been made by the passengers](#). Many open questions remain about the involvement of maritime authorities in this deadly event, as stated by the [Watch The Med Alarm Phone](#) and in an [Open Letter](#) signed by Tima Kurdi and more than 180 groups in solidarity.

We are in deep shock, anger, and grief about the shipwreck. As feminists, we believe survivors. We demand the immediate release of the detained survivors, a full investigation into the involvement of Frontex, the HCG (including a public release of [footage of their conduct](#)), and the Greek government. We call for an end to the European border regime that criminalises people forced to cross borders in a clandestine way, that tortures and kills them at border sites and beyond. As participants of the sixth annual Feminist No Borders Summer School on “Abolitionist Care” that just took place in six different cities around Europe and the world, we affirm: **a feminist world has to be a world without borders.**

The “war on migration”: Borders, prisons, and humanitarianism

After the survivors of the shipwreck had been brought to [an old storage hall, without even the most basic facilities](#), in the port of Kalamata, [guarded by military personnel carrying guns](#), they

were detained in Malakasa camp, an isolated and controlled camp outside Athens. This encampment policy aims to control mobility, restrict freedom of speech (including a ban on photography), and thereby to limit information that reaches the public. It further seeks to isolate survivors in what is experienced essentially as a prison. In this way, their narratives of what actually happened are silenced: survivors are being prevented from telling what actually occurred, a forced silence that only serves the purpose of reinforcing the hegemonic state narrative reproduced by mainstream media across different European countries that: “they were offered help but they refused.” This dismisses the fact that interventions by the HCG usually amount not to rescue, but rather to violently push back people on the move, risking and often causing their death.

Even when migrants are rescued by state authorities, they are criminalised, encamped, and detained. We reject the political practices of separating and categorising people on the move into distinct racialised categories: whether according to degrees of “agency” that are ascribed to them, as passive “victims” or as “criminals”; whether according to the distribution of rights, according to a hierarchy of “vulnerability.” These racialised categories are built on patriarchal assumptions of victimhood and heteronormative gender norms; they are political and violent in nature. Further, categorisation is subject to frequent changes, which highlights the instrumentalisation of (fictional) categories (such as: “Syrian family,” “single men,” “pregnant women,” “vulnerable refugees,” “economic migrants”). The extension and retraction of vulnerability and grounds for protection have the aim of controlling mobility and identities: for instance, under Greek asylum law, shipwreck survivors, just like persons with post-traumatic stress disorders, were once classified as “vulnerable” and were due particular support. The categorisation of “persons with a post-traumatic stress disorder and survivors of shipwrecks” as vulnerable [was removed on 1 January 2020](#) and was not reintroduced in 2022 in the Asylum Code (see [Asylum Information Database](#)).

Placing people in isolated camps and detention centres in prison-like conditions that make it difficult to access and connect with the people inside, shows how [the three industrial complexes \(borders, prisons and humanitarianism\) intersect in a “war on migration”](#). “Care” is coercively exchanged with control; and the forms of “care” survivors receive are, themselves, dehumanising and violent. Drawing upon the feminist principle of Believe Survivors, we call for a public disclosure of the testimonies of the survivors. We call for the abolition of all forms of carceral institutions, including those that pretend to “care,” as well as the binary between “innocence” and “guilt” upon which they draw.

Blaming the victims: Survivors framed as “smugglers”

Nine of the survivors, all of them Egyptian nationals, [have been charged](#) with illegal entry into the country, facilitation of entry, membership in a criminal organisation, causing a shipwreck, and manslaughter by negligence and endangering life—charges which the nine criminalised survivors deny. They are being held in custody until a hearing to determine whether they will be held in pre-trial detention, and face long prison sentences. [In Greece, facilitation of illegal entry is often punished with lifetime prison sentences](#). Migrants who are convicted for facilitation are the second largest group of people in prison in Greece, and those who face the longest prison sentences. It is

worth noting that approximately 60% of people in prison in Greece are non-nationals (see [CPT](#) and [DGHR](#)).

Singling out nine survivors of the Pylos shipwreck to accuse of “smuggling,” and alleging that they are responsible for the danger of the journey and for the deaths of hundreds of people, is a shameful scapegoating strategy. It is a strategy that quite intentionally seeks to turn the attention away from the real causes of over [27,047 deaths in the Mediterranean Sea since 2015](#), as well as countless—and often uncounted—other deaths at European borders. The Pylos shipwreck is not the consequence of the action of individual migrants, nor is it the consequence of the facilitation of their journey; on the contrary, it is the direct consequence of the material obstacles to their safe arrival and ability to claim asylum in Europe that the EU and member states erect. The shipwreck is the product of political decision-making and sustained and concerted implementation of violent bordering policies in Europe that seek to prevent people from practising their fundamental and inalienable rights to freedom of movement and to seek and enjoy asylum. It is a consequence of European Union and EU member state laws and policies, enabled by EU actors and agencies, including the Commission and Frontex, that seek to normalise racist, violent borders in the name of sovereignty and security.

Grief and mourning as abolitionist care and resistance

The EU's borders have been crafted into zones of unprotection, endangerment, and abandonment, resulting in mass death and enforced disappearance. Border violence has become a daily, mundane form of racist state violence that draws on the patriarchal scripts of gendered and sexualised violence and globalised white supremacy. Despite the attempts of European governments to demobilise and divide citizens from migrants by criminalising solidarity and violently suppressing protest, as feminists committed to border abolition, we refuse to accept this bordered reality—a global state of apartheid based on citizenship—as normal. We feel devastated and furious. We refuse to accept a political reality in which the repeated death of hundreds of people is met with the declaration of [three days of “national mourning”](#), which is clearly intended to deflect responsibility from the Greek state and EU actors and perform regret and remorse for unequivocal acts and politics of willful killing.

We refuse this hypocritical hijacking of our mourning and grief by the very actors responsible for legalising such acts of killing and we fiercely protest its epistemic injustice. Our grief is disobedient, disruptive, and transformative. We seek action against the status quo, not acceptance of it. Our grief of and against state violence shapes all of us who struggle for a world without borders—albeit unevenly, in highly racialised and gendered ways. As we have highlighted throughout the Feminist No Borders Summer School: **There is no justice, there's just us!**

Collective grief, solidarity, and transformative justice

Whereas the dominant narrative of “national mourning” suggests that the event is some kind of exception, a singular, natural catastrophe, or inevitable tragedy, which the EU lacks agency to

prevent, the deadly shipwreck in Pylos on June 14 is similar to many other shipwrecks— including the two shipwrecks off Lampedusa 10 years ago that killed as many as 600 people; the more recent killing of as many as 94 people in a shipwreck off Cutro, Calabria on February 26, 2023; and, days after the Pylos shipwreck, another shipwreck in the Atlantic near the Canary islands on June 21, 2023, in which at least [35 people are feared to have drowned](#). As nation-states collaborate with each other to exchange and expand bordering technologies, these more visible shipwrecks involving mass death coexist with less spectacular incidences of state violence, killing, and murder at and across borders, including “invisible” shipwrecks and pushbacks (those that remain unknown, except to their victims and/or unaccounted for), starvation, sexualised assault, and beatings that happen almost every day.

Against the transnational border regime, prisons, and carceral violences, as feminists in solidarity with those who face and resist the violence of borders, we have been connecting across and against borders through our very hearts and bodies in the Feminist No Borders Summer School. We want to affirm that solidarity exists, it is practised here and now, it is a choice, and it is a commitment. We are here, connecting with each other, across and against borders and towards a transformative vision of a world without borders, prisons, carceral logics, and patriarchal and racist violence. We practise collective care daily through self-organised housing, collective kitchens, agroecology, social clinics, autonomous legal support, education, protest, solidarity and radical love. In a generalised, globalised condition of organised abandonment, these are forms of abolitionist care, solidarity, and transformative justice. We refuse to internalise the state categories that incarcerate us within separate categories and “camps,” turning our very bodies into borders.

There is no justice, there's just us!

And now we have to make a commitment to one another.

This way, just us, creates a new past, present, and future space to inhabit collectively.

Feminist No Borders Summer School: Abolitionist Care

Feminist Autonomous Centre for research

Signatures:

Ilele-Sânziene Association

Manjala agricultural and cultural initiative – Palestine

lesbians on the verge

Associação ComuniDária

Feminist Antimilitarist Collective

de:|border | migration justice collective

DATAWO

HEKLER Collective

Transbalkan Solidarity

MiQ

Mouries Collective

Iuventa Crew

Lesbian* Resistance

DSPLC Displaced
DarSudan
EL*C - EuroCentralAsian Lesbian* Community
InterFem Collective
End Deportations Belfast
Stichting Vesta
Association des Femmes de l'Europe Méridionale AFEM
I Have Rights
Prison Renaissance at Stanford
Abortion Network Amsterdam
Pekarna Magdalenske mreže Maribor Slovenia
Labrisz Lesbian Association
Seebrücke Oldenburg
Border Violence Monitoring Network
HuBB - Humans Before Borders
Orospuyaövgü (praisetothewhore)
Sex Work Polska
Academics for Peace-Germany
Inter Solidarity Turkey
DOMIE (experiment of collective self-care), Poland
LiLA PaUSE
The Hidden School (Skopelos/Mytilini/Izmir/Mardin)
Athens Museum of Queer Arts | AMOQA
pick nick
Violetki Collective
Bibliofem Collective
Somoud Palestinian Community Centre
Feminist Mobilisations (Femmobi)
Free Hodayoun
DEMO Moving Image Experimental Politics
Sex Workers of Winnipeg Action Coalition
tumbalacasa
Centre for Women's Studies
Aegean Migrant Solidarity – Community Peacemaker Teams

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