



# love and rage,



*lesvos lgbtqi+ refugee solidarity*



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and  
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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 evangelical 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

Here on the island of Lesbos, the present is defined by indefinite waiting: a form of stillness and immobility that is often unbearable in the hell that is Moria. The past is ever-present in people's minds, as similar kinds of violence to what people may have experienced elsewhere continue to be perpetrated here. We arrived on this island, "on the fringes of Europe", with the expectation and hope that things would be better. That we would be leaving behind the violence we experienced in the past and entering a place of freedom and rights. In our countries, Europe was talked about in abstract language of democracy, human rights, freedom of expression, and equality. The reality we encountered upon arrival has been anything but this. Moria is a place without hope. Here we do not live, we barely survive. The asylum system itself is broken: influenced by the arbitrary whims of officials, corruption, racism, and homophobia. The larger problems are structural: the criminalization of migration, corruption and the EU bordering regime, and the different forms of prejudice and homophobia that exist "even within" European societies.

In the last weeks, tensions have reached a boiling point. In January, draconian new asylum laws came into effect, that will make it even more difficult for people to be granted asylum. Throughout January and February, there were a series of protests by migrants and those in solidarity with them against the rapidly deteriorating conditions here on the island for those on the move. These protests were incredibly powerful as moments of solidarity and collective action, but were brutally put down by the police. Despite local resistance and pressure across political spectrum, the national government also tried to push through on the construction of closed detention centers for migrants, sending 14

units of riot police. In a moment of surprising unity, people from drastically different backgrounds came together and succeeded to halt the construction for now. However, as soon as the riot police left, far-right groups turned their attention back to and started attacking NGO workers and migrants. This led to many NGOs and volunteers leaving out of fear--creating a situation where going forward there will be even less support available for those on the move.

As part of a longstanding political game, where migrants are used as pawns with little to no concern for their safety and rights, Turkey announced at the end of February that it would no longer prevent migrant boats from crossing the Aegean to Lesbos. Amid already strong anti-migration and fascist tensions on the island, this led to a dangerous situation where a mob of locals prevented a migrant boat from landing, fascist presence on the shoreline, and several attacks. The coast guard began actively attacking migrant boats, and registration of new arrivals for asylum has been suspended for a month. Military exercises were held on the southern shores of Lesbos, where live ammunition was fired at the sea.

We demand that things be different. There are LGBTQI+ people all over the world, where is the solidarity? Alone, there is little that any of us can do, but together, we have the collective power to build a different future. Transnational LGBTQI+ solidarity is what we need!

### **Living Conditions in Moria**

We can't breathe. In Moria we do not live, we barely survive. Here, there is no way to rest, no personal space. Originally meant as a transit camp for 3,000 people, Mo-

ria camp hosts over 20,000 people for months if not years at a time in extremely crowded conditions. Throughout the winter, people sleep in flimsy tents flooded by the frequent rains, or on the floor in container homes with 17-20 other people. The electricity is often cut, and there are not enough toilets or showers. Trash accumulates in small mountains and the whole camp is infested with cockroaches and bedbugs. We spend our days waiting endlessly: on lines for food and other services, for asylum decisions, for change that never comes. This is life in Moria. It's not just difficult, it's dangerous—especially for LGBTQI+ People. Tensions rise in the camp due to the overcrowded conditions and it is necessary to always be vigilant. At night, it is often dangerous to go around and there are often fights. As LGBTQI+ people, we are forced into hiding, in fear of being attacked by other people in the camp, the police, and locals. When something happens, the police and camp officials do nothing.

### **Broken Asylum System**

In addition to the immediate problems with unsafe and inhumane living conditions on Lesbos for LGBTQI+ people, there are many problems that are more structural in nature. The asylum service knows about our cases and how dangerous it is in Moria for LGBTQI+ people, and still rejects our cases. There is a severe lack of housing for LGBTQI+ people outside of the camp. In general, it is nearly impossible for anyone—and especially LGBTQI+—to access medical services.

In our "cases" though, the homophobic "suspicious" state and non/state services of control, give us some access in medical services: LGBTQI+ people are sent to medical services to "check" if they are

really LGBTQI+, in ways that are intrusive and retraumatizing. This pressure to "prove" that you are "really" LGBTQI+ also happens in the context of the asylum interviews itself, in which asylum officials ask intrusive, prejudiced, and culturally insensitive questions. There is a lack of trusted translators, and we often fear speaking openly in the anxiety that our personal details will be shared within our national and ethnic communities in the camp. Corruption within the asylum system itself is rampant. Translators, psychologists, and lawyers offer to lift people's geographic restriction if they are able to pay large amounts of money. While this can help people escape horrible conditions present on the island, it also creates a system of further inequality where those with money who are already privileged within the capitalist system can escape, while those without money wait here endlessly. In most of the cases, it becomes far more violent: even if you give the money that they need in order to take you out from the hell that they have already put you in, most of the times, it's just a hoax, a false promise: another violation, in the circuit of violations.

In January, new asylum laws came into effect that have made it much more difficult for those seeking asylum to have their claims recognized. This will disproportionately impact vulnerable groups, such as LGBTQI asylum seekers. The more recent complete suspension of registering new arrivals asylum for a month, and deporting all those who arrive, further endangers the lives of all of those arriving--including LGBTQI people who are undoubtedly among them.

The crisis has become a business for camp authorities and the state, and an excuse for the fortifying of fortress Europe and the EU Bordering Regime. Within this,



the criminalization of migration has been used to justify increasing forms of border control, and high levels of state violence against those on the move. Increased fascist presence on the island, and the overlap of fascist, white supremacist, xenophobic and homophobic ideologies has meant that we face violence from many fronts with few places to turn to for support.

Both on the island and elsewhere in Europe, the problem remains societal forms of discrimination and prejudice. Homophobic and transphobic people and policies continue to violently impact our community throughout Europe and the world. As LGBTIQ+ migrants existing at the intersection of multiple marginalized identities, we also encounter racism and xenophobia, in addition to being discriminated against due to our sexual orientation and gender identities. We are exploited by a capitalist system which sees migrants as cheap, disposable labor and nation-states that deny us labor and citizenship rights. As European states swing further to the right and adopt openly fascist ideologies, we face increasing pressure on all fronts.

We have had enough. We are tired of living with this constant stress and fear of violence, coming from every direction.

**We demand that things be different:**

There is no way to feel safe in Moria as an LGBTIQ+ person. We demand safe housing for all LGBTIQ+ people outside of the camp. We demand that the geographic restriction be lifted for all LGBTIQ+ people on Lesbos, so that they do not have to stay here while they complete the asylum process.

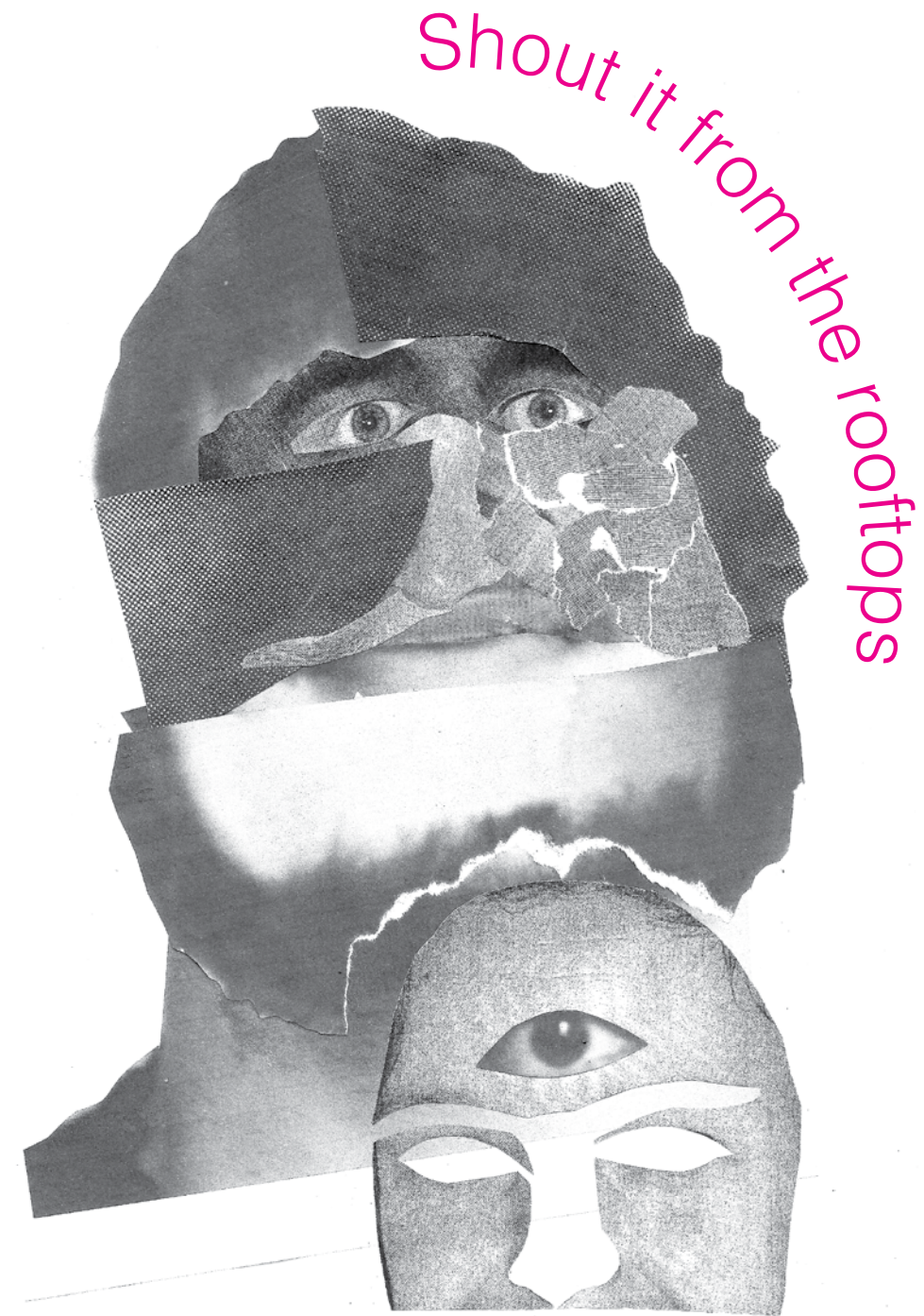
We want our claims to our identities as

LGBTIQ+ people to not be questioned. We are not obligated to explain ourselves in order to prove our worth. We should not have to prove we are vulnerable, we are vulnerable. We should not have to go to the doctor to prove that we are LGBTIQ+.

We demand access to health services. We demand an end to racism and homophobia/transphobia within health services. We demand access to legal documents necessary for integration and citizenship within society. This includes national health insurance (AMKA) and a Tax Identification Number (AFM), which are necessary in order to be able to work or access state services.

We demand safety and security:  
From the violence of the police.  
From the violence of the asylum service, from deportations.  
From the daily violence of living in the camp.

We do not make these demands in the desire to have a better camp, but rather in recognition that people come here with the human right of migration and mobility. That people should have the right to choose where to go, and to define their own lives. It is not about making a new prison, it is about affirming people's right of movement. We stand in solidarity with LGBTIQ+ people all over the world, with all of those impacted by the violence of borders, with those imprisoned, with those impacted by imperialist wars, with those who have left their countries of origin in search of something better, and those who could not leave. We invite LGBTIQ+ friends, family, comrades, and allies to join us in our struggle, to bring attention to the abuses happening on Lesbos, and to work towards positive, concrete change.





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?





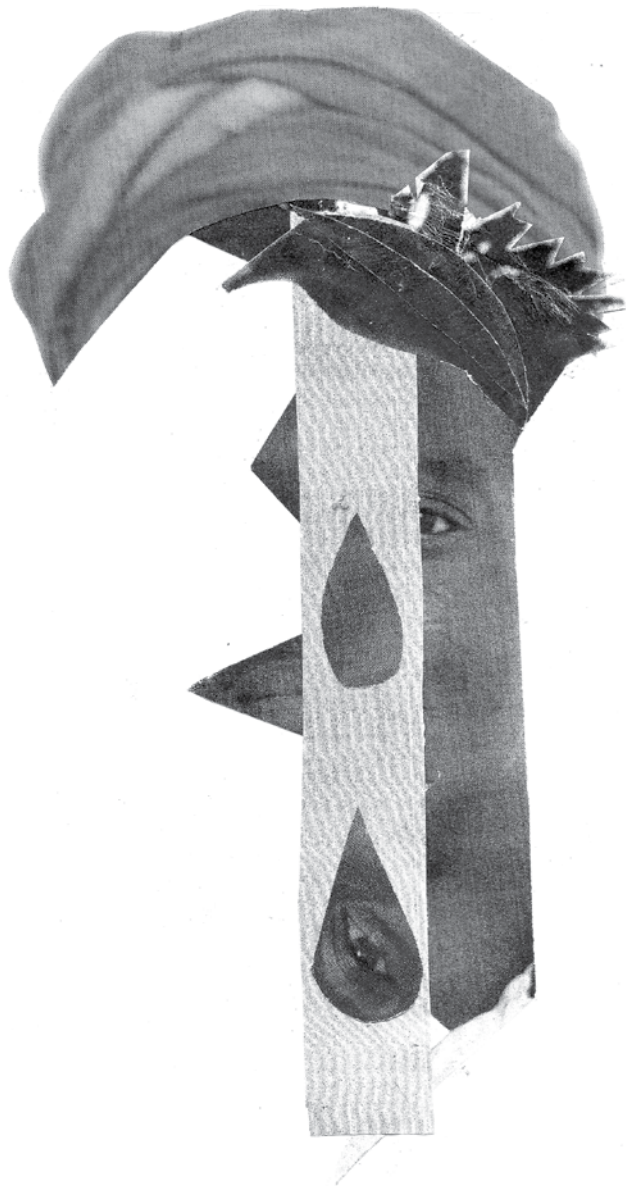
There is a saying in Syria: “You travel naked in a country where you are a foreigner”. To me, if they call you naked, get even more undressed, free, free.





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

**Lesvos LGBTQI+ Refugee Solidarity** has been active as a grass-roots collective since July 2017. We 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 are a collective of LGBTQI+ refugees, volunteers, activists, single-mothers, people who were formerly incarcerated, survivors of violence, locals, and allies that work together to build solidarity and mutual support on the island of Lesvos.

### **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

**lesvos.lgbt.r.solidarity@gmail.com**

**@LesvosLGBTIQRefugeeSolidarity**



Image by: Lesbians and Gays Support the Migrants, UK



