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Lesbenberatung & LesMigraS Call for Reflection on Transgender Day of Remembrance

The first Transgender Day of Remembrance took place on November 20, 1999, to commemorate the life of Rita Hester, a Black trans* woman who had been killed a year before on November 28.

On this day it is important to recognize the Transgender Day of Remembrance, and to raise awareness with everyone about the violence committed against our community, especially trans* people of Color and even more so, trans* women of Color, who experience racism and other forms of discrimination in addition to transphobia.

The Transgender Day of Remembrance is important to acknowledge and to broach the issue of the violence daily inflicted on the trans* community, which is being normalized and made invisible on a structural level. We are encouraged to use this day to take action and to educate, but also to continue healing and making trans* lives visible. The Transgender Day of Remembrance is important to highlight the existence of trans* People in a society which refuses to officially recognize more than two gender identities (Cis-Men and Cis-Women) and assumes any other gender to be non-existent.

It is time to center the experiences of trans*people, in particular trans*of Color, trans*women/femininities, trans* refugees, trans* sex workers as well as trans* children and adolescents and trans*people with disabilities. This practice is crucial to do not only within our small LGBTIQ-bubbles but in society at large. It is necessary to understand that transphobia is not the only cause of violence in our community; there are other myriad forms of oppression in our society that increase violence and limit the safety and well being of many members of the trans* community. Trans* people who experience multiple discrimination are particularly at risk, that is, individuals who simultaneously experience transphobic, racist and economical violence, and who are affected by life threatening violence.

The dimension of violence against trans* people does not only include trans* people being physically attacked, severely injured or even murdered, but also the structural refusal of equal rights and life perspectives – for example by the juridical and medical pathologization of trans* people as “physically ill”, by not acknowledging their names and gender identities, by refusing trans* people their desired medical treatment, by officially not acknowledging their existence and by structurally excluding and

discriminating trans*People in all important areas of life (e.g., school/education, work, health care, housing market).

The pathologization of trans*, that is the medical and juridical classification of trans* identities as a psychiatric condition, is an important dimension constituting the foundation of discrimination and violence. For this reason, we as Lesbenberatung e.V./LesMigraS support the international movement in pleading for an unconditional end to the pathologization of trans* people and equally for an improved health care financed by the welfare state. Trans* people are not ill, however, violence and discrimination can make people ill! We need a society which recognizes the existence of more than two gender identities!

So on this day our remembering should be active. We remember the names of the victims but we should remember the heinous ways that they lost their lives, or rather the ways their lives were taken away.

We need to remember how a system has failed these individuals, especially through the treatment within the health services, the law, the job market, the housing market or through the media.

Each part of this system reminds us that they believe trans* lives and deaths do not matter. As we take these events to remember these lives we make it clear to this system which perpetuates violence and discrimination that we are taking an active measure in valuing the lives of trans* People and refusing for them to be erased. Our mourning then becomes a way to celebrate their lives by re-establishing and/or building stronger communities. The ways in which we mourn are diverse; it does not have to be an isolated process that is performed in a controlled manner. However, in terms of understanding public mourning and remembrance, it is important to note that we are still in a time where hashtags, shares and likes are used as a means for expressing empathy at times where these shared stories can seem like distant realities and become lost within another shared post. We have to move beyond merely sharing posts and start sharing resources, showing solidarity to the activists, organizations and members of the community who are actively trying to break this system of oppression.

We should use this day for this reason: to remind ourselves that trans* lives are valuable and integral parts of the community, not just victims of tragic murder or victims that we simply mourn. This is not enough. We have to continue resisting and destroying the racist institutional structures that legitimize their deaths. This should not be the task only of the trans* communities, nor communities of Color. We want to commit to challenging the violence brought into our community, and nurture a space for healing and growth.

We have to celebrate the trans* feminine People of Color for being at the forefront of the queer and trans* liberation movement in the past and continuing to do so today, and open a dialogue with intergenerational trans* movements. The elders in our community have been the voice before us, have seen many herstories of violence, and made new herstories possible.

As long as we are still learning the language of resistance, as long as we are still gaining the tools for building a collective movement, we will still have the power to amplify our voices. And whether you call yourself an ally, an activist, or a friend of trans* people, step up and use your resources to cultivate and nurture an environment that honors and values our differences.