The Future Is Not Female

20 Minutes With Intersectional Feminist Leyla Yenirce

by Marlene Obst

The crowd gathering for the third “The Future is…“ reading at this year's Clinch Festival is nearly all female but otherwise quite diverse. Today's speaker is introduced as “young, brutal, a radical leftist and relentlessly opinionated“. She is known for her skilled writing and habit to address incomputable truths. While settling down on a chair in the second row I get the impression that I am already surrounded by such women, eagerly awaiting one of their own. The ClinchFestival aims to strengthen postcolonial and [post]migrant perspectives in society and takes place at Cultural Center Pavillon for the second time. I have come here today to listen to an intersectional feminist. She has drawn my attention by claiming **“The Future is not Female, but Intersectional“.**

Leyla Yenirce has a certain presence, not easy to pin down at first. She is a freelance writer, musician, and filmmaker based in Hamburg who writes for TAZ and used to be a columnist for Missy Magazine. Her work revolves around the cultural dimension of the metropolis and the everyday reality of women with a migrant background in German society.

My thoughts on writing about her outward appearance evaporate while she settles down on her chair at the raised podium. This is a young woman who does not need me to elaborate on her hair, hat or jumper’s colour. While scanning the crowd, her expression conveys confidence and a sense of humour. Yenirce, the third speaker in this series will focus on “everyday urban insanity in the Diaspora“. She has 20 minutes to make this experimental format her own and sets out by reading parts of her “Cleaning Lady Trilogy“. This trilogy is on her mother’s experiences as a Kurdish woman working as a cleaner in a predominately white German society.

“She ones told me about the tepid coffee a lady she was cleaning for used to serve her,“ reads Leyla Yenirce. The woman prepared a pot of coffee as part of her breakfast routine and then continued drinking it throughout the morning. She then served the already tepid leftovers to her cleaning lady who arrived a little later in the day. “The employer probably also felt good about it,“ Yenirce reads a slight frown on her face. “After all, the cleaner gets a coffee, whether it is tepid and already tastes like shit, doesn't matter, because she probably has such low standards that even tepid coffee seems like a gift from heaven.“ The author recalls her mother sounding angry, but above all offended while telling her about the gesture. She felt degraded receiving so little appreciation and stopped working for the family after a while. Leyla

Yenirce remembers her mother saying: *"I only tried the coffee once because I was happy about the gesture. When I knew it was the cold rest from breakfast, I never touched it again.“*

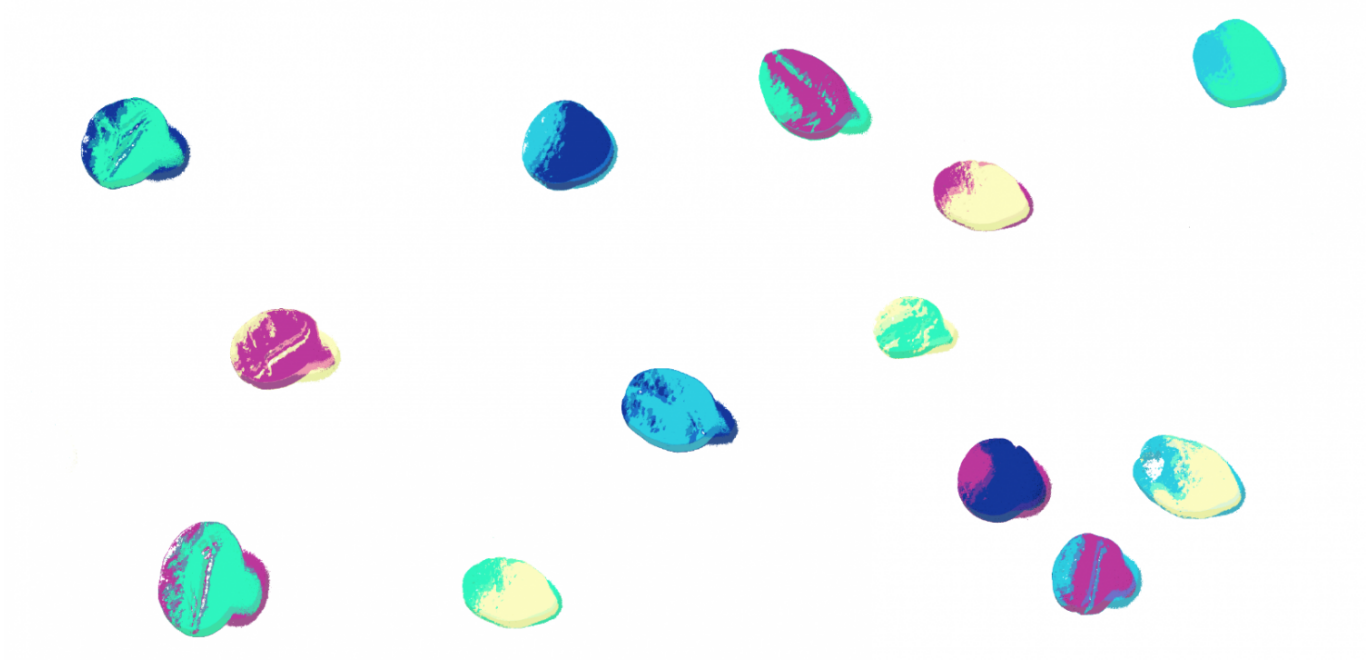
Leyla Yenirce says this story reminds her of a saying that has been cropping up on various memes and T-shirts all over the Internet. "The Future is Female.“ Her face shows hints of irritation while she repeats the claim. **“No, it is not. The future is not female, the future is intersectional! I don’t see the woman who offers my mother the leftovers from the pot fighting by her side. They may both have to deal with the structural discrimination of a patriarchal system, but as long as the coffee in the pot is not hot, I don't see them standing next to each other, but my mother only beneath her. And down there she stands with many other women who don't like cold coffee.“** Yenirce reads looking up at the crowd.

If women cannot respect one another, they cannot stand up for each other, let alone for everyone in society. The women around me seem familiar with this theory and the term intersectionality. I myself feel like the odd one out. I do not know much about intersectional feminism but feel I ought to.

On the podium, Yenirce refers to her mother’s anger and frustration resulting from the experience. She says she, unlike her mother, has the means now to address these topics and forms of subliminal discrimination. Through her work as an author, artist, and musician she can express the anger her mother could not scream out at the time. I wonder whether this rage she refers to and presumably also can relate to herself is the driving forces behind her activism. Eying the occupied rows of chairs around me I ask myself if some of the other white women here also struggle to grasp the actual complexity of the topic in question. Leaning back in my chair, I think about what intersectional feminism actually stands for and whether I could be a contributing part of such a movement, not having experienced this type of discrimination myself.

The Merriam-Webster dictionary defines intersectionality as “the complex, cumulative manner in which the effects of different forms of discrimination combine, overlap, or intersect”. To break that down, it means that discrimination does not exist in a bubble. Different kinds of prejudice and discrimination regarding aspects like gender, race, disability, sexual orientation or religion can amplify each other or overlap in one person — or in this particular context: one woman.

According to Leyla Yenirce, appearances or social standing do not necessarily determine whether one can be an intersectional feminist. Empathy, courtesy, and respect might be enough. **“A person can be at the top of the survival scale intersectionally: physically intact, white, wealthy, hetero, but can still make fresh coffee.“**



In my case, the Clinch Festival has managed to achieve what its organizers set out to do. It has provided people like Leyla Yenirce with a platform and given women like me access to perspectives that so often lack the adequate representation in society's discourse.

To sum up the experience. Refreshingly straightforward, intelligent and authentic. Leyla Yenirce broadened my understanding of feminism.

However, the question that has brought me to mentioned chair in the second row has only been partly answered. I want to learn more about the origin of intersectional feminism, the movement, and the term itself. In the upcoming weeks, in an attempt to fill in the blanks I will write about specific aspects of intersectional feminism for Upgration.de

Next week: The Origins Of Intersectional Feminism.

CLINCH Festival: Informationen zum diesjährigen CLINCH Festival findet ihr hier: https://clinchfestival.de/

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