

Artist lists names of fortress Europe's 33,000 refugee victims

Dietmar Henning
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Artist Banu Cennetoğlu has published a list with the names of 33,293 asylum seekers, refugees and migrants who have died since 1993 while fleeing to Europe or in connection with Europe's refugee policies.

The 48-page list was enclosed in the November 9 edition of the Berlin-based newspaper *Tagesspiegel*. As part of Berlin's autumn salon at the Maxim Gorky Theatre, pages from the list will be posted on advertising pillars in the centre of the city.

Cennetoğlu said the list exposes only the tip of the iceberg. In fact, many more people have died while fleeing, including those who drowned in the Mediterranean. "The List" documents what could be compiled from available data, wrote *Tagesspiegel*. The data is based on work by the European network United for Intercultural Action.

November 9 was deliberately chosen as the publication date, *Tagesspiegel* explained in a comment, because in Germany it is a day laden with history. This date is connected with the 1918 revolution, which was suppressed by the Social Democratic Party, the failed putsch by Hitler and Ludendorff in Munich in 1923, the Nazis' pogrom against the Jews in 1938, known as Kristallnacht, and the collapse of the Berlin Wall in 1989.

Born in Ankara in 1970, Banu Cennetoğlu is an internationally successful artist. Her work concentrates mainly on the collection, archiving and publishing of books and newspapers. Giving a place for and names to the countless victims of Europe's refugee policy has been a part of her work for several years.

In cooperation with Cennetoğlu, the Greek newspaper *Ta Nea* published in 2007 a list of 8,855 deaths. In 2010, a poster campaign for "The List" organized by the Kunsthalle Basel included the names of 13,284 victims.

Cennetoğlu emphasised that this is not about her or the names. This list is not a work of art, and the publication is not an artistic act, she said. "It is what it is," she added. She insisted on only one condition: the list cannot be published in part, but only as a whole.

Behind every name there is a human tragedy. Most have drowned in the Mediterranean. Others died in refugee camps, including by committing suicide "with a few shoelaces out of fear of being rejected and sent back home" (Mikhail Bognarchuk from Ukraine in deportation detention). The scale of hopelessness outmatches all power of imagination, added Cennetoğlu.

Tribute is also paid to the 3-year-old Aylan Kurdi, who drowned in the Mediterranean near the Turkish city of Bodrum while fleeing Syria on September 2, 2015. The heart-wrenching pictures of the dead boy lying face down in the sand on a beach shocked people around the world. They cast a grim light on the desperate dramas playing out on Europe's borders.

"It is horrifying how the refugee catastrophe meets with general acceptance," said the artist. It is not a major priority on the political agenda, she added. If it were a natural disaster, things would be different.

Behind each name on the list there is therefore also an indictment: an indictment of the wars waged by the US and its allies, which are the main reason why millions have been forced to flee their homes.

The decades-long wars in Afghanistan, Iraq, Libya, Yemen, Mali, Somalia and Syria, to name only the most important, transformed these countries into a hell on earth. More than 65 million people have been forced to flee from wars and unbearable living conditions.

The European Union member states have responded and continue to respond to the wave of refugees exclusively with suppression and deterrence. They erect

barbed wire fences, build mass camps and mobilize police to keep the desperate people away, and in so doing condemn thousands to certain death.

Every name on the list is also an indictment of the “Fortress Europe” established by Europe’s governments.

Only a tiny minority of the world’s 65 million refugees have sought to reach Europe. According to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), 153,355 people have reached Europe across the Mediterranean so far this year, and almost 3,000 have drowned in the process or are missing.

The Mediterranean remains a mass grave for refugees. Supported by the EU, Italy has concluded a similar deal with the various warlords and rulers in Libya as the EU did with the authoritarian regime of Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan. Refugees are thus prevented from traveling to Europe.

Italy has supplied the Libyan coastguard with patrol boats, helicopters, specialized vehicles, communications gear and other equipment with which they will attempt to prevent boats carrying refugees from leaving Libyan territorial waters. The coastguard has murdered refugees on the high seas and attacked human rights organizations because they wanted to assist refugees.

Since this past summer, hardly any private sea rescue services are operating. Italy forced human rights organizations to sign a code of conduct that included the acceptance of armed police and Frontex officers on their ships. Many organizations, including “Doctors Without Borders” and “Save the Children,” refused and suspended their sea rescue services. Other aid organizations were taken to court on the basis of accusations of assisting smugglers.

The EU boasts that it has destroyed smuggler networks in Libya. Italian Interior Minister Marco Minniti claimed in May, “The people who arrive in Italy have put themselves in the hands of brutal human traffickers. We are merely saving them from this fate.”

The cynicism of the former Stalinist Communist Party member is breathtaking. In reality, the former smuggler groups are earning more money by preventing refugees from traveling than they did from organizing flight. Italy and the EU pay more than the desperate refugees.

The refugees being held back from traveling to

Europe live under inhumane conditions. In Libya alone some 700,000 people are being detained. They are systematically abused, raped and executed at random. Those who cannot pay their guards are often killed or starved to death. Others are sold at modern slave markets in Tripoli—women as sex slaves and men as slave labor.

Joanne Liu, the president of Doctors without Borders, who was in Libya in the late summer, described in an open letter the way refugees are dealt with there. She wrote of a “flourishing business of kidnappings, torture and blackmail,” and accused the EU of being jointly responsible for this. The price for declining numbers of arrivals in Europe is “rapes, torture and enslavement by criminals,” she declared.

The thousands who die in Africa on the way to the Mediterranean coast or in Libya itself are not included in the list collated by Banu Cennetoğlu. They remain nameless.



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