

*From Competition to Community*

I arrived carrying the old lesson:  
that leadership must be proven,  
that space is scarce,  
that women advance  
by outgrowing one another.

But Berlin shifted my understanding.

What I learned there  
was not how to win,  
but how to belong.

Not how to speak louder,  
but how voices multiply  
when they are shared.

RECLAIM taught me  
that feminist leadership in Europe  
is not an individual struggle  
but a collective movement  
built through solidarity,  
through allyship,  
through learning across borders.

We traced women's biographies,  
written in different languages,  
shaped by different political realities.  
Poland.  
The Czech Republic.

Listening to these stories,  
I understood:  
inequality is not personal.  
It is structural.  
And structures cannot be dismantled alone.

Meeting women from across Europe,  
sharing experiences,  
recognizing ourselves in one another,  
made clear what progress requires:  
community instead of competition,  
cooperation instead of isolation.

Walking through Berlin,  
Black and Queer Feminism  
rooted theory in lived experience.

Intersectionality was no longer abstract  
it was present, visible, necessary.  
It asked who is missing  
when power speaks,  
and who is silenced  
when leadership is narrowly defined.

Somewhere along the way,  
something shifted inside me.

I learned to claim space  
without apology.  
To use my voice strategically,  
authentically,  
in service of collective goals.

I learned that my voice matters  
especially when it strengthens others.

I carry this empowerment forward:  
into my political work,  
into feminist networks,  
into spaces that still need reclaiming.

I remain curious  
about how transnational feminist cooperation  
can be sustained,  
protected,  
institutionalized  
so that solidarity becomes structure,  
not exception.

Trust your voice.  
Use it not only for yourself,  
but to open doors  
for others to enter.

With solidarity and love

Nergis Zarifi