



Sisters in Arms

Shida Bazyar

Ruth Martin, Translator

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First generation immigrants navigate their striated society in Shida Bazyar's pointed novel *Sisters in Arms*.

Saya, Kasih, and Hani grew up in metropolitan Germany, bound by their shared experiences as Muslim immigrants. But their wants diverged: Hani wished to fit in, not to “waste my time on heroics that no one is going to thank me for.” Kasih was aware that the world was unfair to girls like her; still there was appeal to seeming like “normal people among normal people,” so she kept quiet: “If you don’t believe us after one example, you usually aren’t going to believe us after the fiftieth.” But Saya—who became a globe-trotting PhD—could not content herself with such acquiescence. She voiced every slight. She named every instance of prejudice. She was loud about her feminism and antiracism. And, as her friends feared, it got her in trouble: now she’s in the papers. Now, people think she’s a terrorist. And now, finally, Kasih is pushed to set the record straight.

Affable and stream-of-consciousness, the narrative moves back and forth in time, filling in scenes from the girls’ as-normal-as-it-could-be childhood. Kasih works to show how their desires were the same as everyone else’s—but also highlights how they were kept apart. The methods were subtle at first; they became more pronounced as Germany’s right wing flared up. But always—despite family barbecues near cabins, high school parties in the woods, dates with nice white boys, and graduation dances—there were invisible lines that the girls were not allowed to cross. And that’s bound to push anyone, no matter how educated or well-reasoned, over the edge.

Humane, relatable, and self-aware, *Sisters in Arms* is an involving novel that indicts polite neoliberalism and open racism alike for the ways in which people in contemporary societies are forced apart.

MICHELLE ANNE SCHINGLER (January / February 2024)

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