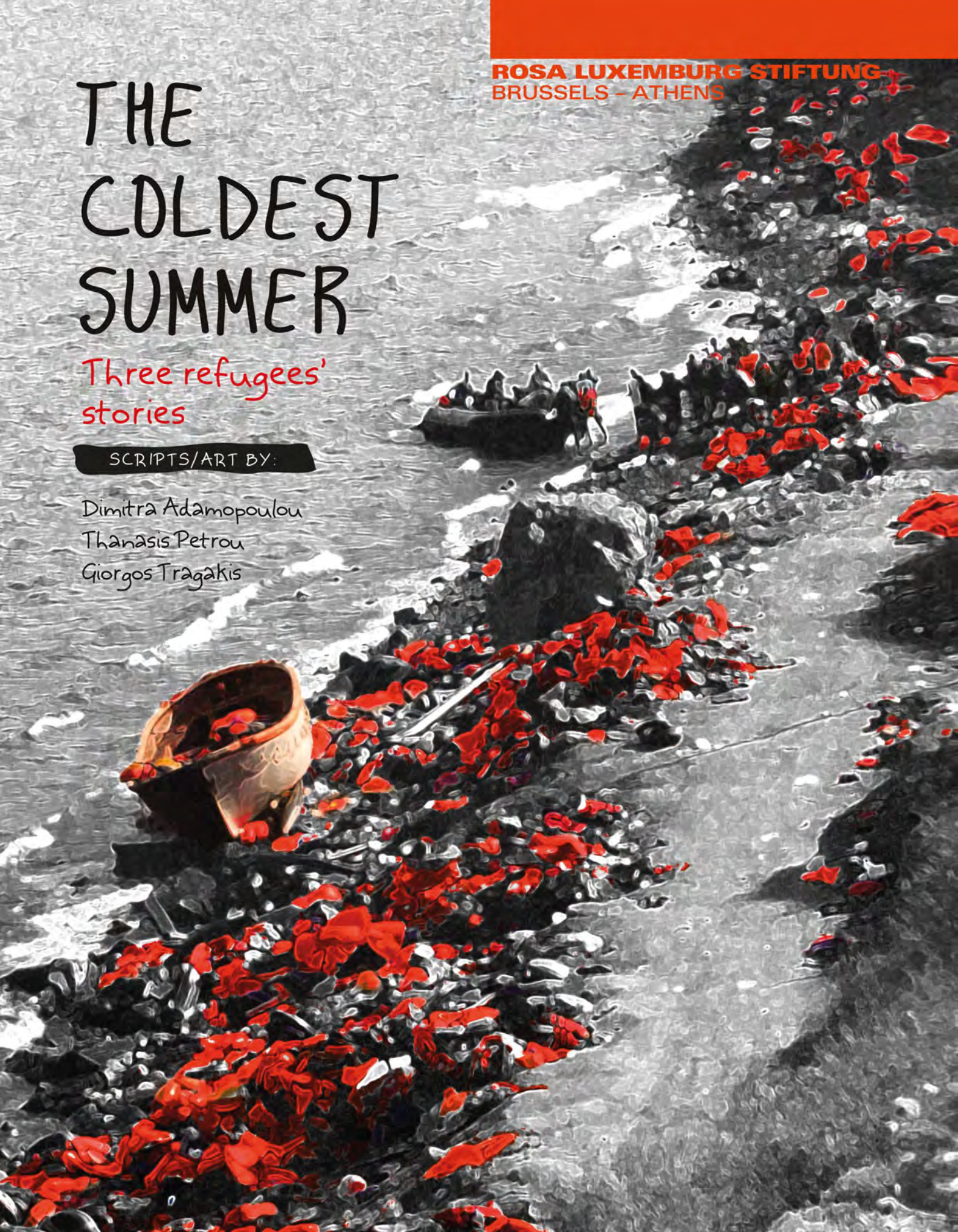
ROSA LUXEMBURG STIFTUNG
BRUSSELS – ATHENS

THE COLDEST SUMMER

Three refugees' stories

SCRIPTS/ART BY:

Dimitra Adamopoulou
Thanasis Petrou
Giorgos Tragakis



THE COLDEST SUMMER

Three refugees' stories

SCRIPTS/ART BY:

Dimitra Adamopoulou
Thanasis Petrou
Giorgos Tragakis

Table of Contents

Introduction [5]

Here I am [7]
Electra Alexandropoulou

THE COLDEST SUMMER [8]
Script and art:
Giorgos Tragakis

A FEW MONTHS TO GO [26]
Script and art:
Thanasis Petrou

JOURNEY TO THE WEST [44]
Script and art:
Dimitra Adamopoulou

Ten points on the geopolitics of the refugee crisis [58]
Mihalis Panayiotakis

Immigration policies in Greece and Europe: Do we know what we (don't) need to know? [63]
Kostis Tsitselikis

Introduction

LAST YEAR SAW Greece at the centre of global attention, propelled into the limelight by the advent of the Syriza government and its negotiations with Greece's creditors and by its position as the main entry point for hundreds of thousands of refugees fleeing war-torn regions in search of a home in central and northern Europe. Located on the external border of the European Union, Greece is now struggling to cope with the drastic increase in administrative and practical requirements brought about by the influx, while having to deal with the pressures caused by an ill-equipped EU, with its improvised immigration policy and conflicting interests. On the one hand are its statutory obligations to respect human life and the right to asylum, and, on the other, the desire to seal off Europe through the rigorous policing of its external borders which has resulted in the deaths of thousands in the Mediterranean. Meanwhile, within the EU, the extreme right is gaining ground, expanding its reach and influence into the broader political arena, luring both public discourse and the direction of immigration policy increasingly to the right. This development has created conditions conducive to racism, giving rise to a dangerous situation for anyone of a different skin colour and seeking refuge in Europe from their ravaged homelands, countries in which EU member states themselves have played significant roles in pursuing policies that have proved disastrous for local economies or in encouraging the outbreak and continuation of military conflicts.

The Rosa Luxemburg Foundation is committed to devising a new immigration policy of the Left, fully aware that such a policy would, of course, be enforceable only in the context of an EU that is willing to invest in social policies and marked by a shared sense of solidarity, where member states are entrusted with an equal share of obligations and responsibilities. As it stands, EU institutions seem bent on achieving the opposite. Their continuing imposition of austerity has constructed and nurtured an antagonism among the similarly dispossessed, pitting the socially and financially weak against migrants, who are presented as burdening the societies in which they live or in which they hope to find a home. The Rosa Luxemburg Foundation intends, therefore, to grapple with issues such as the reasons why migrants leave their homes, border politics, the political reception of refugees, their right to work and self-organisation.

Working closely with the Brussels office, the Foundation's Athens office has already published Eleni Takou and Vassilis Papastergiou's booklet, *Migration in Greece: Eleven Myths and Even More Truths*. Whereas that publication sought to deconstruct certain myths that circulate and are reproduced in Greek society, now we turn to real stories told by real people: a working mother, a working father and two children who are forced to struggle to survive, to leave their homeland because it has become too dangerous, to abandon the life they knew as it had become unbearable, and to leave their families behind in the pursuit of a life where they can think beyond the next day or month and in which they

will be able to plan a future in peace: to work, study and live among us with equal access to democracy, social rights and culture. The stories are based on the autobiographical narratives of refugees we met in Athens and in Berlin. They are random stories, without a particular climax. We chose to turn them into comics in order to avoid drama but at the same time to retain narrative detail. The protagonists of the stories are people who could have been members of our family, our friends or our neighbours. They are, beyond doubt, people who, some day, will become our fellow human beings in our societies and in our spaces. Let us welcome them.

Martin Schirdewan,
Director of the European Office
Brussels-Athens

Ioanna Meitani,
Coordinator of the Office in Greece

Here I am

Electra Alexandropoulou

Here I am:
the Immigrant, the Foreigner, the Exile, the Refugee, the Stateless, the Displaced

The one you don't want to see
who has no name
who crossed the sea
who left the fine red line behind him
who carries the dead with him, on him, in him
who did not want to fight

I, who knew how to say "ya habib" only to slowly forget it. I learn "the people": Volk.

I, the "civilised savage"
the one who buried children and fathers under the rubble
who lives, bemused, among you
who comes forth from a broken world into a stranger one
how long can it hold -
an "I" who wants to go back
and another who wants to stay here with you forever

I, the one who at night dreams of Damascus' bazaars and pistachio ice cream,
of music and the Aleppo river
of neys and violins tangled in his hair -
of Amira, whose hand slipped out of mine at the demonstration in Homs (it was drizzling that day, I remember),
of the frosted rubble of Kabul,
of the blue domes baking in Kandahar at noon,
of the fruit we picked from trees in the gardens of Jalalabad,
of the ruins of Babylon, near Baghdad,
where I travelled with my mother, father and siblings
-we fought and ran through them, shouting; they were ours -
of the dusty banks of the Euphrates in Falluja,
of the skyscrapers burning like coals against the Tehran night
of the green hills of Islamabad and the sea at Ramsar
I still remember them
I, the one who doesn't know what they will call me now
I, the one who wants to be himself among you

I, the one who still hopes
I, the one who came
who arrived
who is here.

THE COLDEST SUMMER

INTERVIEW: Myriam Klapi (Berlin)
SCRIPT/ART: Giorgos Tragakis

A German woman hosted the narrator of this story and another four refugees in her home. She found them sleeping outside the LaGeSo.[1] He reached Germany in August. His wife and four children are still in Damascus. He holds on to a small portion of his meagre income and sends the rest to his family. He doesn't know when or how he will manage to bring them over.

He now lives in a refugee reception centre outside Berlin, in the small town of Eisenhuettenstadt, where the local community has received the refugees warmly. He shares a room with a young man from Pakistan. He has taken on work as a translator and assists the centre's director. He seizes every opportunity to travel up to Berlin, a city he wants to get to know. As he ambles through the city, he visits the public library and borrows books in English and Arabic. He has a lot of time on his hands: endlessly waiting for the chance to adopt the normal rhythms that accompany a decent life. The hours roll by very slowly; he spends them alone, missing Syria and hoping for a normal life in Germany.

In October, he was granted asylum and a residence permit. Now he will have to start looking for work. He would like to pursue a PhD in law. He craves knowledge.

1. Landesamt für Gesundheit und Soziales, the authority responsibile for the registration of refugees in Berlin. The building is located on Turmstrasse, in the city centre.

I'M NAMELESS IN THIS STORY.
I'M A MAN FROM SYRIA,
BORN 40 YEARS AGO...

I'M ALL THOSE PEOPLE WHO
TRY TO TAKE THEIR LIVES
INTO THEIR OWN HANDS...

MY STORY BEGINS WITH
THE START OF THE 2011
REVOLUTION AND IN THE
PROTESTS AND DEMONSTRATIONS
DEMANDING DEMOCRACY
IN OUR COUNTRY...

I WAS AMONG ONE OF THE FIRST
TO BE ARRESTED BY POLICE.

THEY BEAT AND TORTURED ME
FOR 15 DAYS.

THEY MADE ME SIGN A STATEMENT THAT
I WOULDN'T PARTICIPATE IN A DEMONSTRATION
AGAIN. THEN THEY RELEASED ME.

THE CITY I LIVED IN WAS SOON OCCUPIED BY ISIS AND IT WAS IMPOSSIBLE FOR ME TO WORK THERE.

I COULD NO LONGER SUPPORT MYSELF.

A FRIEND HELPED ME WITH FOOD AND MONEY. HE TOLD ME I SHOULD LEAVE.

I HAD NEVER LEFT SYRIA BEFORE.

BUT THERE WAS NO OTHER SOLUTION.

I'M NAMELESS IN THIS STORY. I'M THE MASSES STRUGGLING TO ESCAPE THE INSANITY OF A WAR WHICH HAS NO REGARD FOR HUMAN LIFE.

I HAVE TO CROSS BORDERS WITHOUT A PASSPORT, WALKING OVER WILD EXPANSES OF LAND. IT'S BEAUTIFUL, BUT YOU CANNOT STAY THERE -YOU CANT LIVE THERE. NO, NO MATTER HOW TIRED OR SLEEPLESS YOU ARE, YOU HAVE TO KEEP WALKING...

ONE DAY WE RAN INTO ISIS MEN. THEY FIRED SHOTS IN THE AIR, CURSING AND SHOUTING SOMETHING I COULDN'T UNDERSTAND.

WE TRIED TO CROSS A RIVER.
THEY CAUGHT ME. THEY SAID I WAS AN OFFICER OR SOMETHING LIKE THAT...

THEY PUT ME IN A BOX.

I THOUGHT THE END HAD COME.

THE THOUGHTS IN MY HEAD SPUN LIKE A ROLLER COASTER.

I SAW THE FACES OF MY WIFE AND CHILDREN WAITING FOR ME TO TAKE THEM TO A BETTER PLACE.

BUT NOW... I DIDN'T KNOW WHETHER THEY WOULD CHOP OFF MY HANDS OR MY HEAD...

I WAS LUCKY.
THEY LET ME GO.

WE GOT TO TURKEY BY BUS.

THE SMUGGLER SAID, "GET IN, WALK SLOWLY AND DON'T MAKE TROUBLE.
WE'LL PAY OFF THE POLICE, DON'T WORRY."

THEN THEY STARTED TO SHOOT AT US.

TERRIFIED, WE RAN INTO THE WOODS TO HIDE.

IT WAS LIKE A JUNGLE.

WE STAYED THERE ALL NIGHT.

WE DIDN'T HAVE TENTS AND IT WAS SO COLD.

IT WAS AWFUL. THE BABIES KEPT CRYING AND WE WERE AFRAID THEY WOULD GIVE US AWAY.

IT WAS THE COLDEST SUMMER.

THE NEXT MORNING, THEY TOLD US THE COASTGUARD HAD GONE AND THAT WE COULD LEAVE BY BOAT.

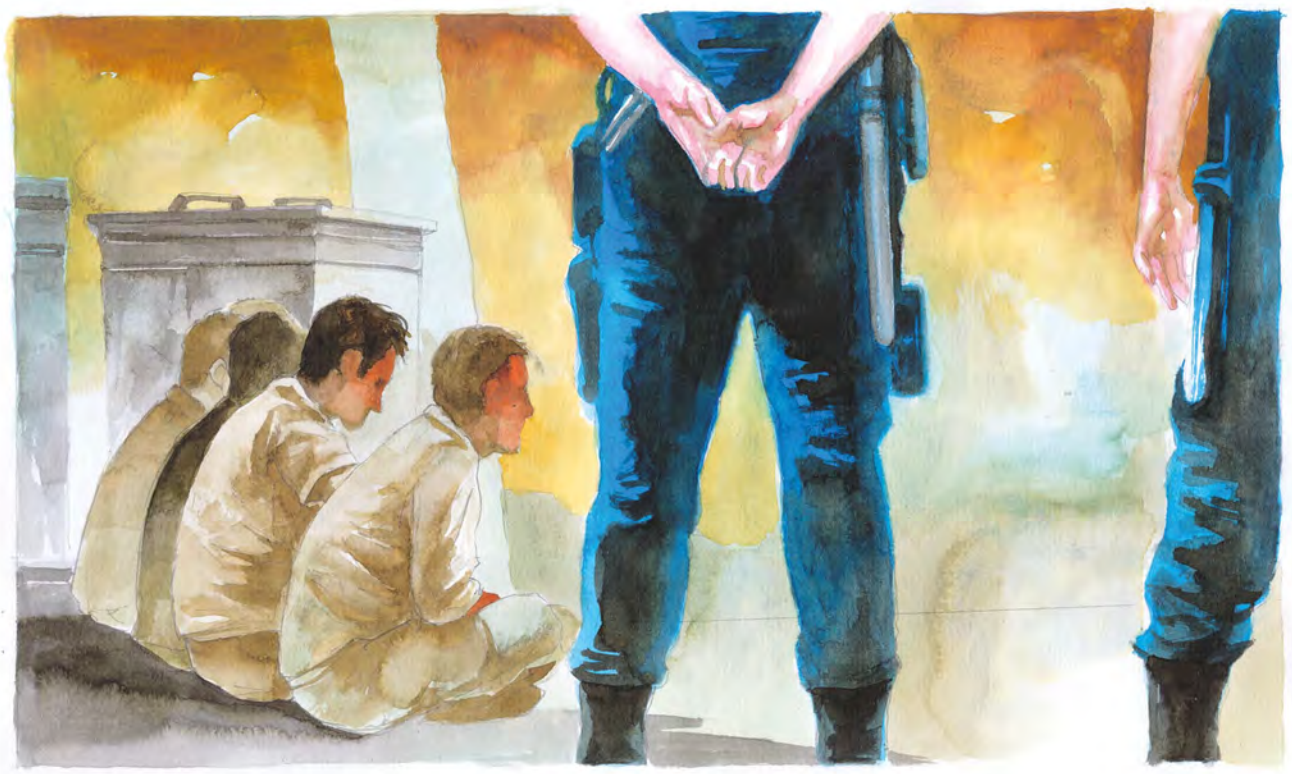
I KNOW, MANY PEOPLE LOST THEIR LIVES IN THOSE WATERS...

NOT I... IT TOOK ME 40 MINUTES. THE SEA WAS LIKE GLASS.

WHEN WE GOT TO LESVOS, I SAW HOW MANY PEOPLE HAD GATHERED THERE FROM EVERYWHERE.

THEY HELPED US AS MUCH AS THEY COULD.

THAT NIGHT, I SLEPT SOUNDLY FOR THE FIRST TIME IN A LONG TIME.



WE TRAVELLED TO ATHENS WITHOUT PAPERS.
WE GOT THERE AT NIGHT. IT TOOK US 14 HOURS.
THERE, I MET FRIENDS WHO HAD ARRIVED BEFORE US.

THAT NIGHT, I SLEPT OUTSIDE.
I HAD A DREAM..

I HAD ARRIVED IN A VILLAGE IN THE NORTH.
EVERYTHING WAS COMPLETELY CALM...

I WANTED DESPERATELY TO TELL SOMEONE THAT I WAS LOOKING FOR WORK SO THAT I COULD BRING MY FAMILY OVER. I FOUND NO ONE...

THEN THE DREAMED CHANGED: I HADN'T ARRIVED ANYWHERE AND THE POLICE WERE CHASING US BECAUSE WE WERE ILLEGAL...

WHEN THEY ARRESTED ME, THEY PUT ME IN A ROOM AND GAVE ME A LITTLE FOOD.

THERE WAS ONLY ONE POSTER ON THE WALL. IT WAS OF A DIVING HELMET.

IT WAS STRANGE.

IT WAS AS THOUGH I HAD NEVER BEEN LET OUT OF THAT BOX...

THEY TOOK MY FINGERPRINTS.

IT FELT AWFUL.

THEN WE FOUND OURSELVES IN A TRAIN STATION IN HUNGARY. THEY SAID THEY WOULD SEND US TO GERMANY BECAUSE WE WERE UNDESIRABLES.

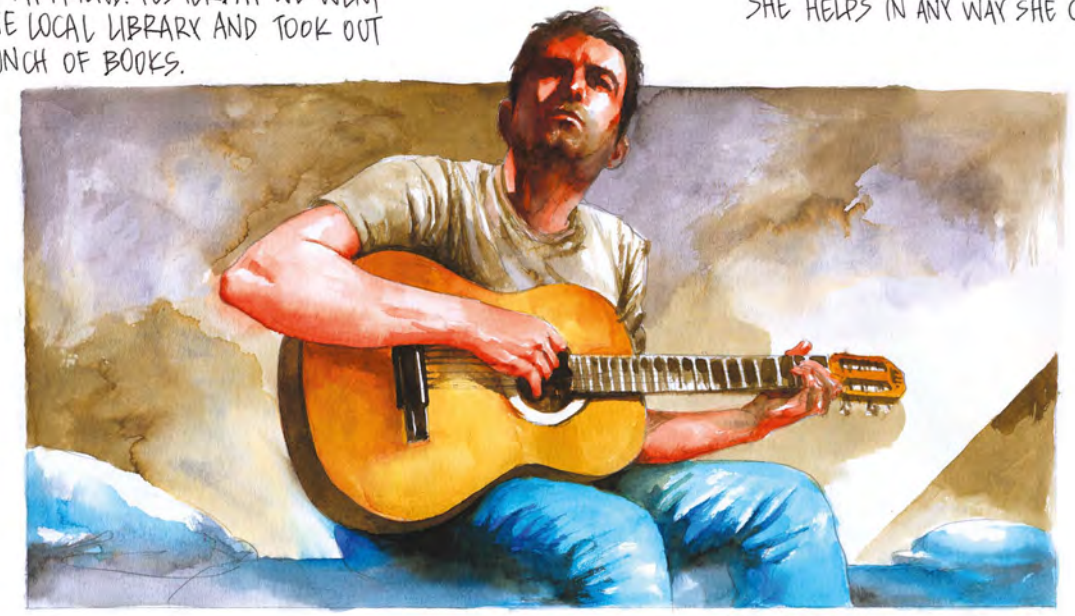
WHEN WE GOT THERE, THEY TOOK US TO A REFUGEE CENTER. IN THE STREETS, PEOPLE STARED AT US WITH HATRED AND DISGUST.

AND I WONDERED WHY THEY HAD PUT THE RECEPTION CENTRE THERE...

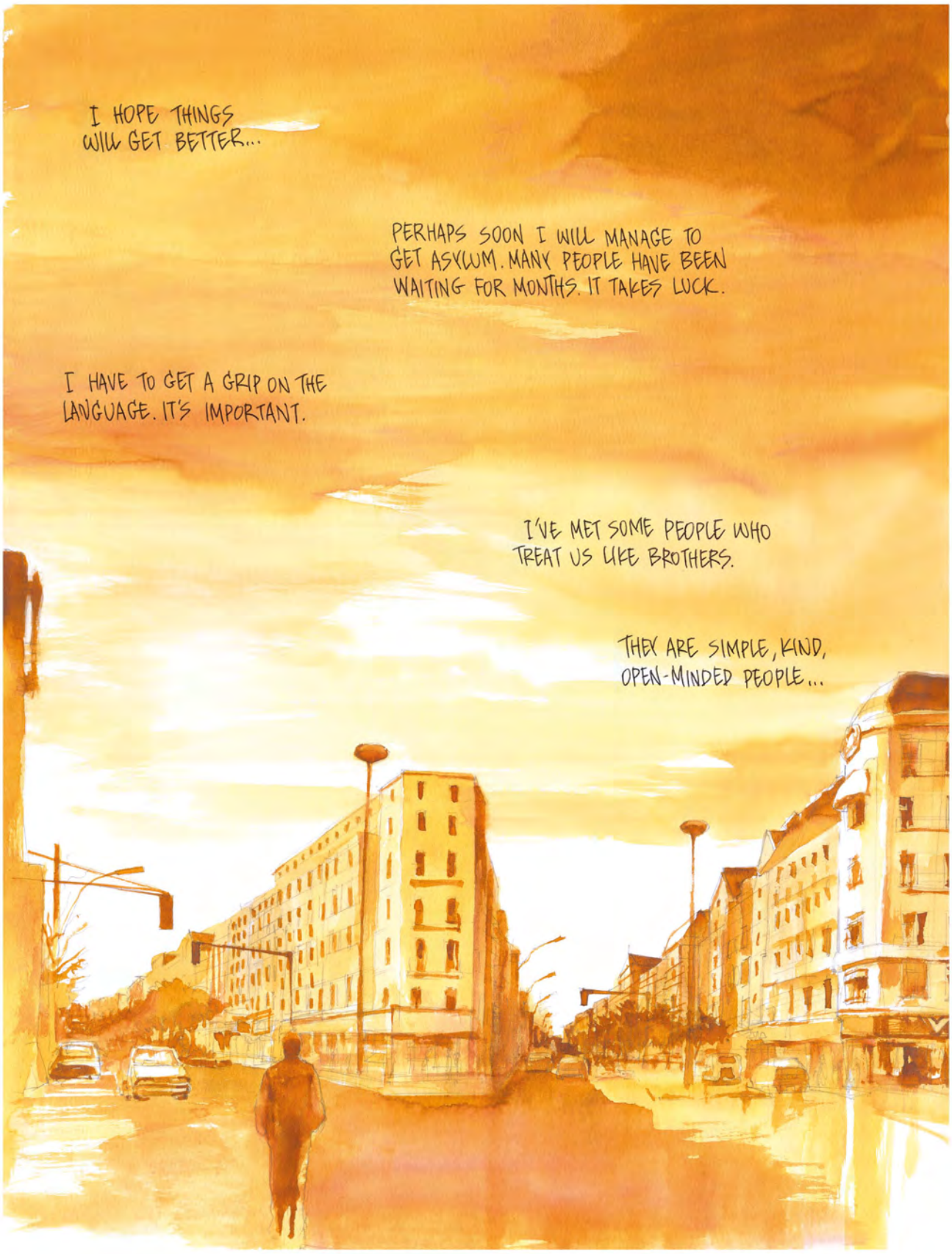
NOW, I'M IN EISENHUETTENSTADT, IN GERMANY.

I HAVE A PAKISTANI ROOMMATE. HE IS MY FRIEND. YESTERDAY WE WENT TO THE LOCAL LIBRARY AND TOOK OUT A BUNCH OF BOOKS.

I MET A REALLY KIND GERMAN WOMAN. SHE REALLY CARES ABOUT US. SHE HELPS IN ANY WAY SHE CAN.



SHE BROUGHT ME A GUITAR.


I HOPE THINGS WILL GET BETTER...
PERHAPS SOON I WILL MANAGE TO GET ASYLUM. MANY PEOPLE HAVE BEEN WAITING FOR MONTHS. IT TAKES LUCK.
I HAVE TO GET A GRIP ON THE LANGUAGE. IT'S IMPORTANT.
I'VE MET SOME PEOPLE WHO TREAT US LIKE BROTHERS.
THEY ARE SIMPLE, KIND, OPEN-MINDED PEOPLE...

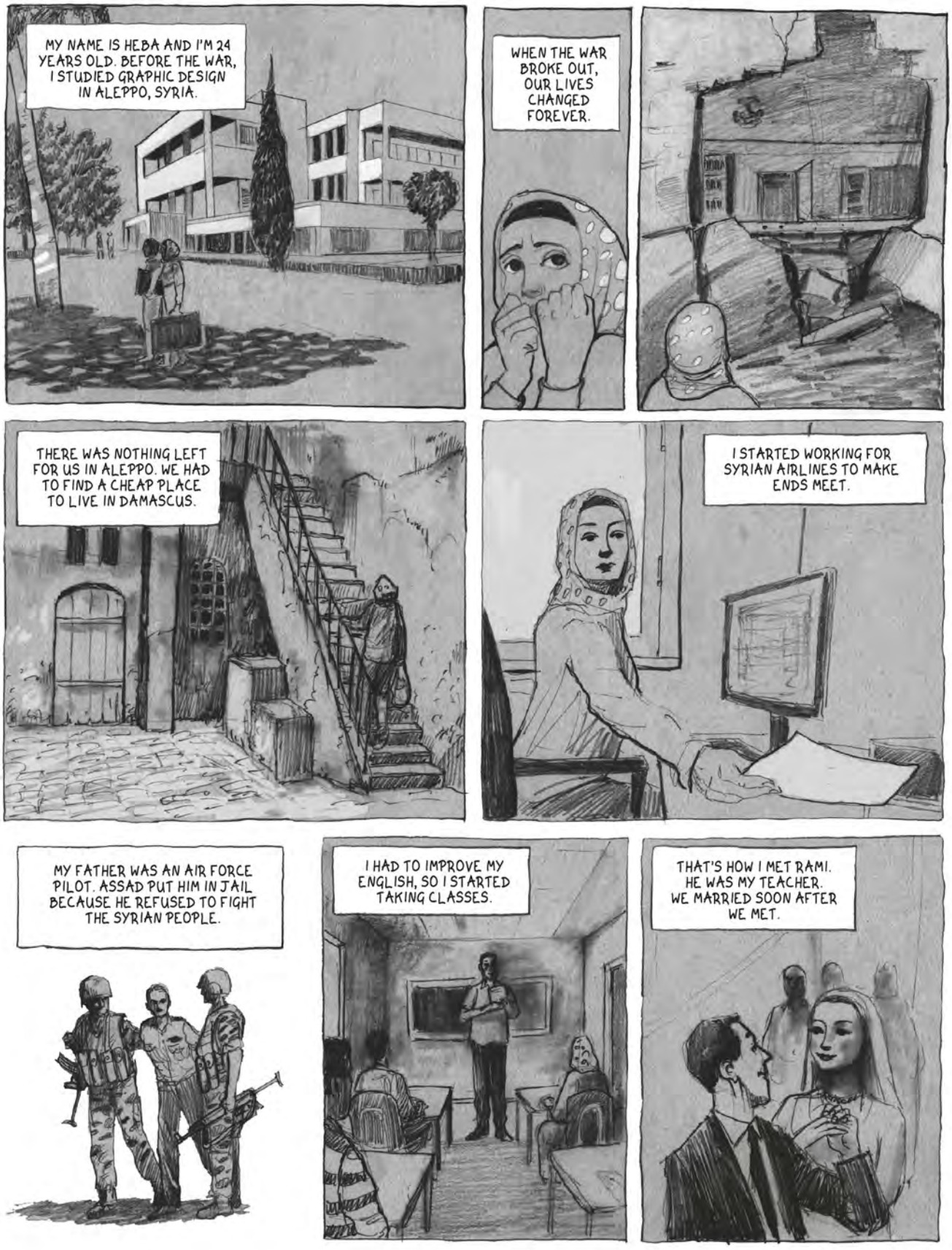
A FEW MONTHS TO GO

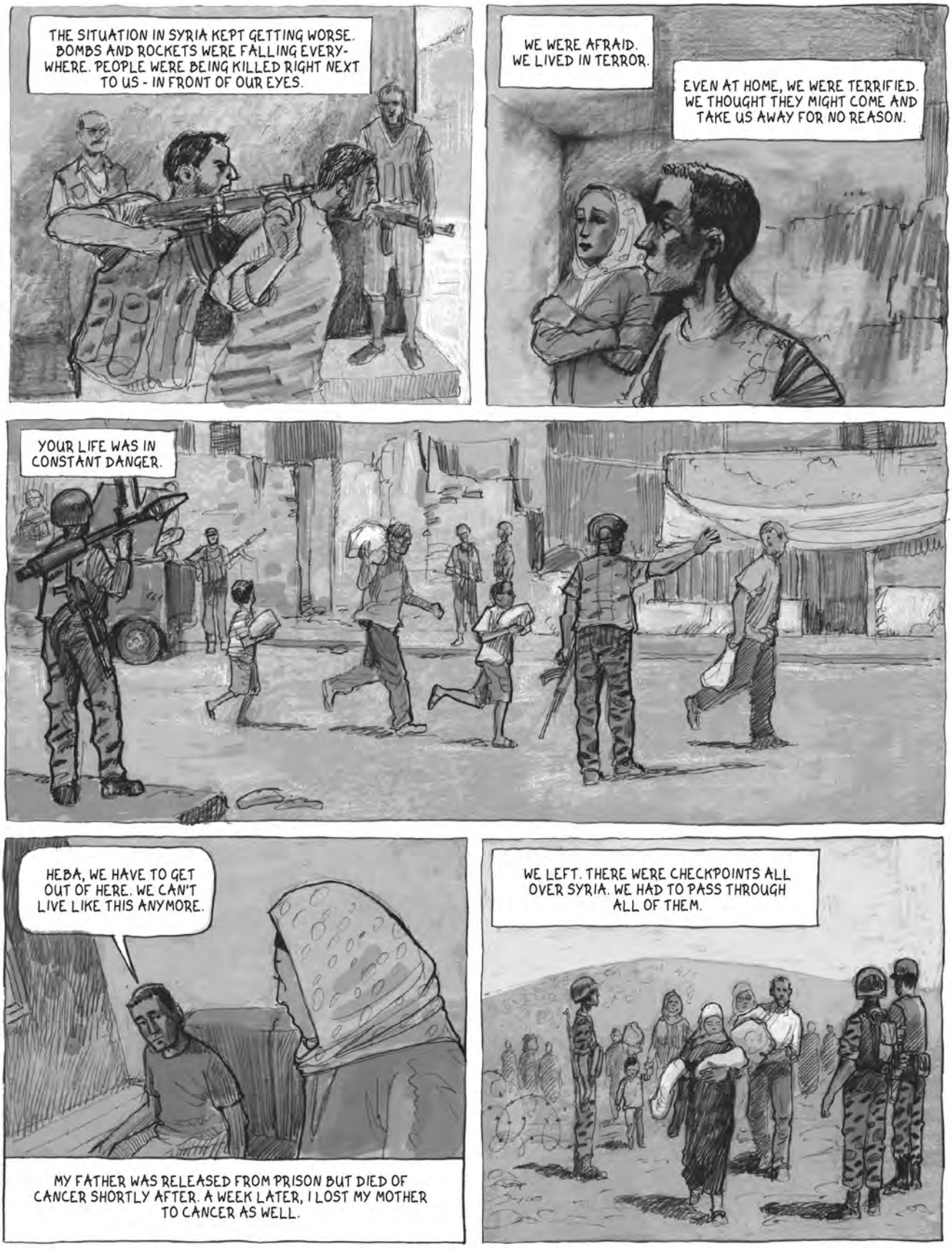
INTERVIEW: Myriam Klapi (Berlin)
SCRIPT/ART: Thanasis Petrou

Berlin, autumn 2015. People crowd outside the LaGeSo. They sleep in the park, waiting to be assigned a number in the queue. At times, they wait outside the building from five in the morning to six in the evening. They wait for the coveted "Registrierung" - their registration. They are given a little blue bracelet with a number embossed on it; they have to wear it. Simple people, ordinary Berliners, show up carrying whatever they have to share: clothes, food, toys. Volunteers offer them water and a simple meal. When it rains, they bring umbrellas; people rush to secure one. Sometimes, their patience depleted, they start fighting. There are thousands waiting outside the LaGeSo every day; the German authorities are struggling and failing to cope with the workload. After their long and terrible journey, the refugees are left exasperated by German bureaucracy, which seems unable to offer solutions to the simplest issues.

Hiba has just turned 24. She entered Germany through Munich. Though refugees are forbidden to leave the city in which they were first registered, Hiba and her daughter left in secret for Berlin, where her husband was waiting for them. All they wanted as a family was to live together in the same city and to start a normal life. While still in Syria - in Damascus - they were convinced that everything would be better in Germany; that everything would be easier. They heard that people in Germany were kind - that the state had resources to offer. They dreamt of living in a country in which bombs would not wake them at night. Reality has failed them.

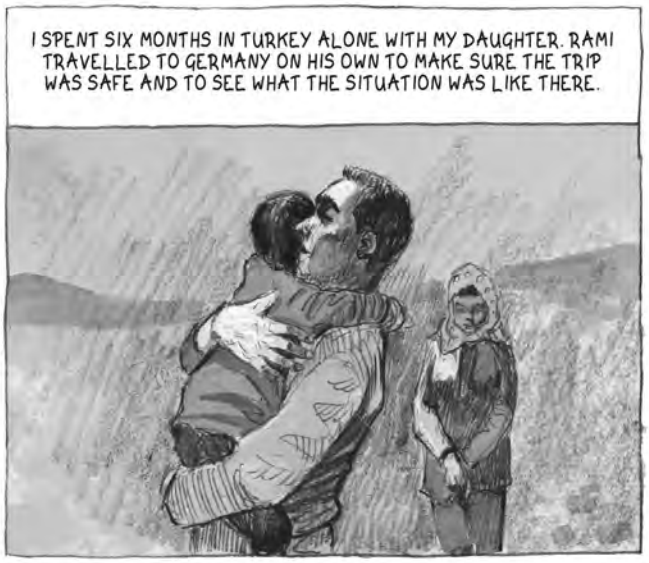
AAAA
MUMMY, MUMMY! HELP! WE'RE DROWNING!
SHHH SHHH
DON'T BE AFRAID. I'M HERE. DON'T BE AFRAID!


MY NAME IS HEBA AND I'M 24 YEARS OLD. BEFORE THE WAR, I STUDIED GRAPHIC DESIGN IN ALEPPO, SYRIA.
WHEN THE WAR BROKE OUT, OUR LIVES CHANGED FOREVER.
THERE WAS NOTHING LEFT FOR US IN ALEPPO. WE HAD TO FIND A CHEAP PLACE TO LIVE IN DAMASCUS.
I STARTED WORKING FOR SYRIAN AIRLINES TO MAKE ENDS MEET.
MY FATHER WAS AN AIR FORCE PILOT. ASSAD PUT HIM IN JAIL BECAUSE HE REFUSED TO FIGHT THE SYRIAN PEOPLE.
I HAD TO IMPROVE MY ENGLISH, SO I STARTED TAKING CLASSES.
THAT'S HOW I MET RAMI. HE WAS MY TEACHER. WE MARRIED SOON AFTER WE MET.


THE SITUATION IN SYRIA KEPT GETTING WORSE. BOMBS AND ROCKETS WERE FALLING EVERYWHERE. PEOPLE WERE BEING KILLED RIGHT NEXT TO US - IN FRONT OF OUR EYES.
WE WERE AFRAID. WE LIVED IN TERROR.
EVEN AT HOME, WE WERE TERRIFIED. WE THOUGHT THEY MIGHT COME AND TAKE US AWAY FOR NO REASON.
YOUR LIFE WAS IN CONSTANT DANGER.
HEBA, WE HAVE TO GET OUT OF HERE. WE CAN'T LIVE LIKE THIS ANYMORE.
MY FATHER WAS RELEASED FROM PRISON BUT DIED OF CANCER SHORTLY AFTER. A WEEK LATER, I LOST MY MOTHER TO CANCER AS WELL.
WE LEFT. THERE WERE CHECKPOINTS ALL OVER SYRIA. WE HAD TO PASS THROUGH ALL OF THEM.

... ONE MINUTE ASSAD'S SOLDIERS ARE CHECKING YOU; THE NEXT MINUTE IT'S THE REBELS.

FIRST, WE WENT TO TURKEY. THE JOURNEY WAS SO DIFFICULT.


I SPENT SIX MONTHS IN TURKEY ALONE WITH MY DAUGHTER. RAMI TRAVELLED TO GERMANY ON HIS OWN TO MAKE SURE THE TRIP WAS SAFE AND TO SEE WHAT THE SITUATION WAS LIKE THERE.

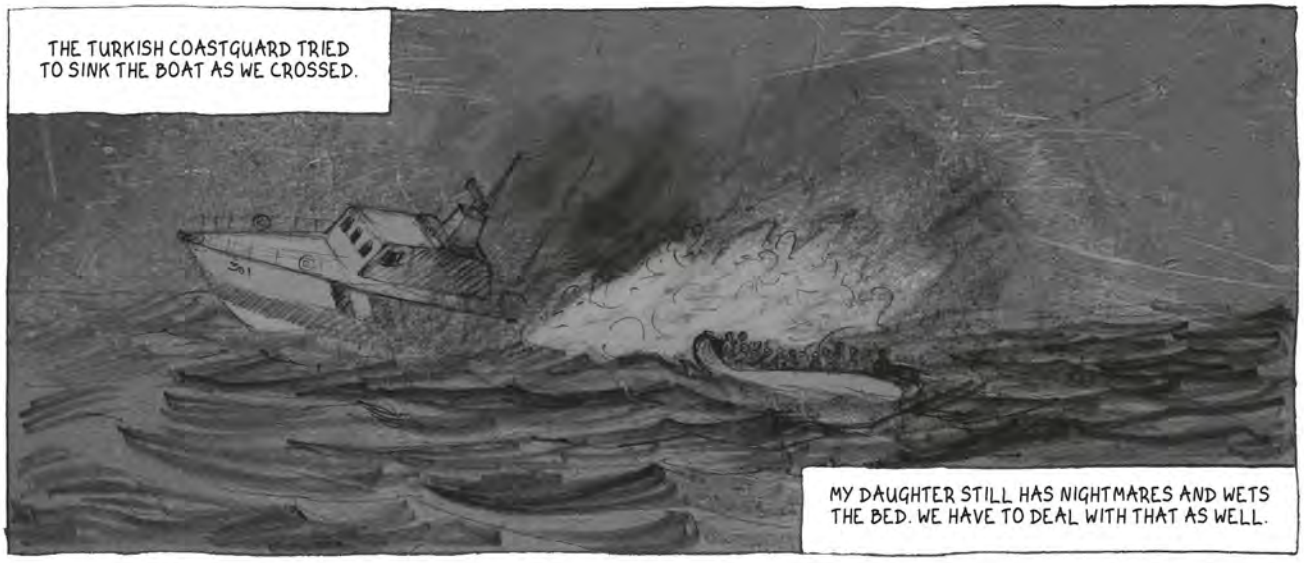
OUR TIME THERE WAS VERY DIFFICULT. I WAS ALONE IN A HUGE, STRANGE PLACE. I DIDN'T KNOW THE LANGUAGE AND I HAD VERY LITTLE MONEY.

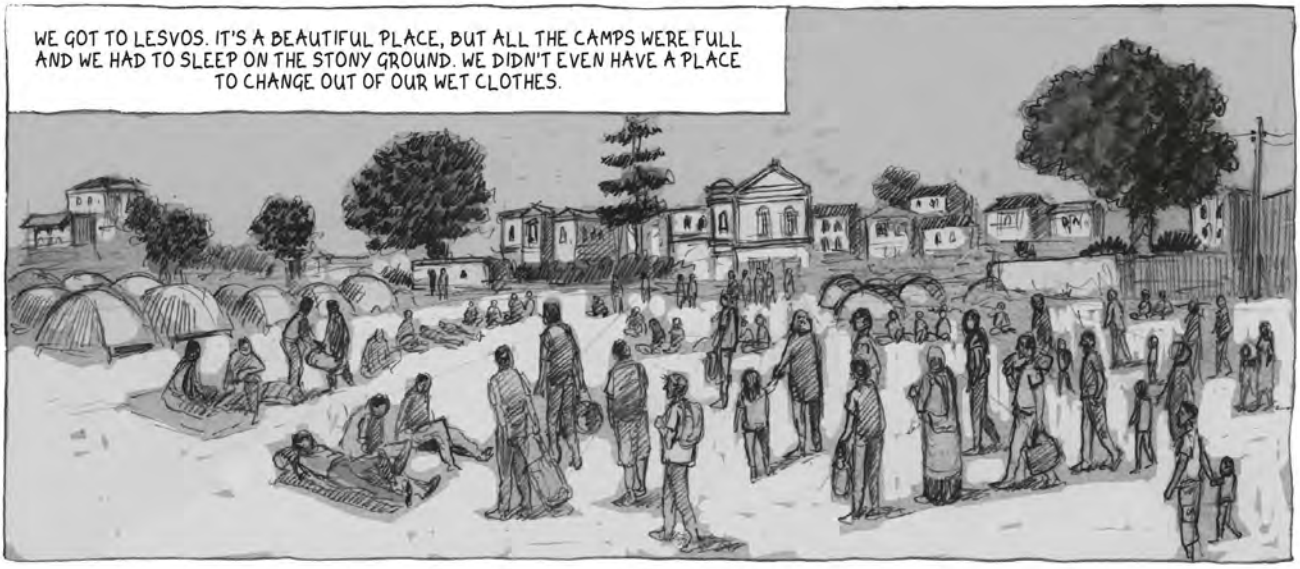
RAMI, HOW ARE WE GOING TO GET TO GERMANY? I'M DESPERATE.
THE GERMAN CONSULATE GAVE US AN APPOINTMENT FOR JULY 2016...

I HAD TO TRAVEL ON MY OWN WITH MY DAUGHTER AND MY IN-LAWS. THEY LENT ME SOME MONEY.

NO ONE WOULD TELL US WHERE EXACTLY WE WOULD GET THE RUBBER DINGHY TO GREECE.
TURN OFF ALL YOUR MOBILES. OTHERWISE THE POLICE WILL GET YOU.

FIRST THEY TRANSPORTED US BY BUS, THEN BY CAR. FINALLY, WE HAD TO WALK 4-5 HOURS TO GET TO THE BOAT.
MUMMY, I CAN'T WALK ANY MORE...


THE TURKISH COASTGUARD TRIED TO SINK THE BOAT AS WE CROSSED.
MY DAUGHTER STILL HAS NIGHTMARES AND WETS THE BED. WE HAVE TO DEAL WITH THAT AS WELL.


WE GOT TO LESVOS. IT'S A BEAUTIFUL PLACE, BUT ALL THE CAMPS WERE FULL AND WE HAD TO SLEEP ON THE STONY GROUND. WE DIDN'T EVEN HAVE A PLACE TO CHANGE OUT OF OUR WET CLOTHES.

FOR HOURS, WE HAD NO FOOD OR INFORMATION OR MEANS OF TRANSPORT. THANKFULLY, SOME VOLUNTEERS SHOWED UP TO ASSIST US. EVEN THE POLICE REFUSED TO HELP US GET TO THE RECEPTION CENTRE.

WE STAYED IN LESVOS FOR TWO DAYS. ON THE THIRD, WE GOT A SHIP TO PIRAEUS.

RAMI HAD FIGURED OUT HIS WAY AROUND ATHENS AND DIRECTED US ON THE PHONE. HE TOLD US WHOM TO TALK TO, AND WHOM TO FIND TO TAKE US TO THE BORDER.

THERE, WE WAITED AN ENTIRE DAY BEFORE THE AUTHORITIES LET US THROUGH.

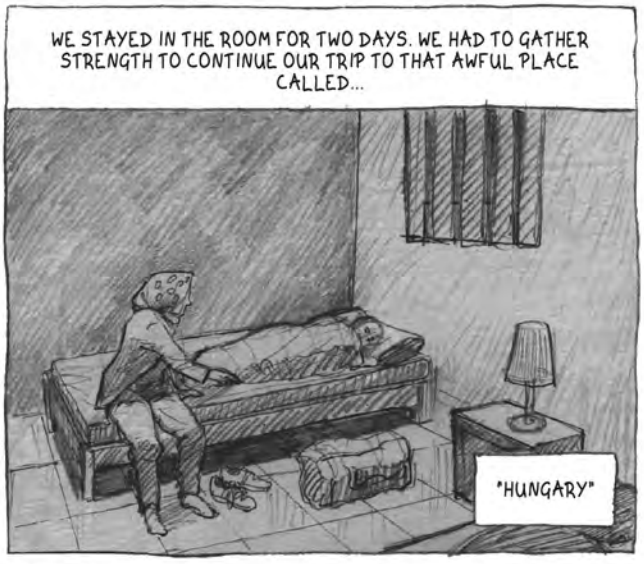
BELGRADE WAS DIFFICULT. THERE WAS NOWHERE FOR US TO SLEEP SO WE HAD TO STAY OUTSIDE IN A PARK.

THE SERBIAN AUTHORITIES MADE US WAIT FOR HOURS BEFORE THEY GAVE US OUR TRANSIT PAPERS.

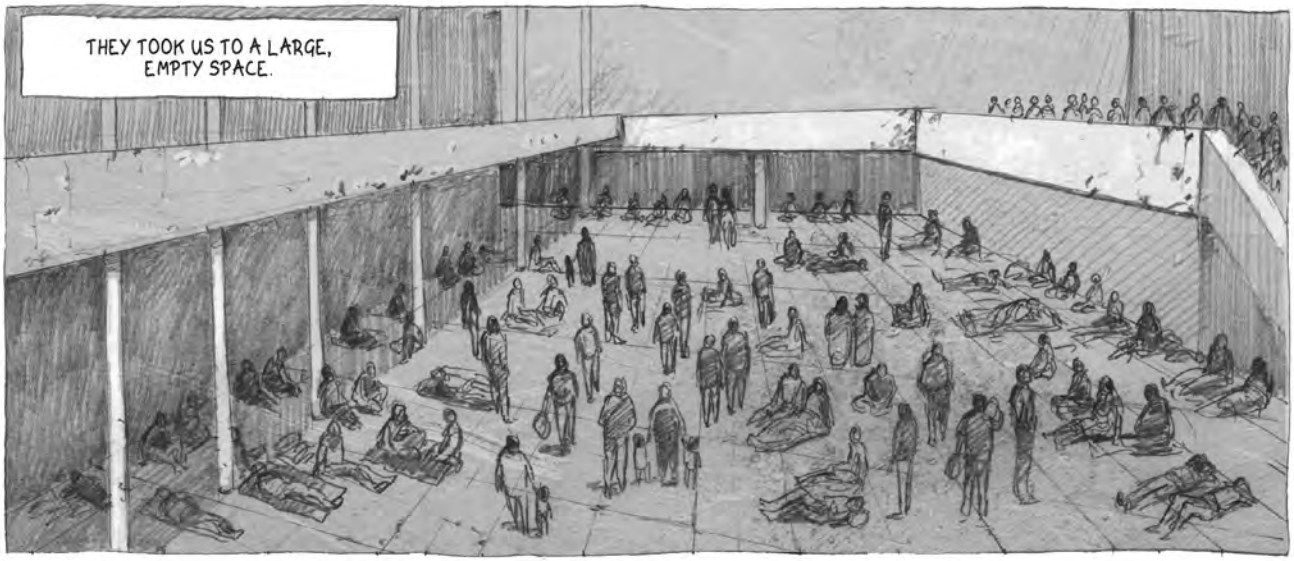
THE COMPUTER IS BROKEN. WE'LL HAVE TO FILL OUT THE FORMS BY HAND. DON'T WORRY – THEY'RE LEGAL.

WHEN WE FINALLY GOT TO A HOTEL, THEY REFUSED TO GIVE US A ROOM.
WHY ARE THE FORMS FILLED OUT BY HAND? THEY'RE ILLEGAL. WE CAN'T ACCEPT THEM.
BUT THE POLICE TOLD US THAT...

RAMI, I'M GOING CRAZY! THEY WON'T ACCEPT THE FORMS THE POLICE GAVE US.
I'LL TEXT YOU THE ADDRESS OF A HOTEL. THEY'LL TAKE YOU IN THERE. I'VE SPOKEN TO THEM.


WE STAYED IN THE ROOM FOR TWO DAYS. WE HAD TO GATHER STRENGTH TO CONTINUE OUR TRIP TO THAT AWFUL PLACE CALLED...
"HUNGARY"

ON THE ROAD, THE POLICE HELICOPTERS FOLLOWED US WITH THEIR SEARCH LIGHTS. WE FELT LIKE HUNTED ANIMALS.
POLICE


THEY TOOK US TO A LARGE, EMPTY SPACE.

IT WAS MORNING WHEN THEY TOOK US THERE AND WE WERE LEFT WITHOUT FOOD AND WATER UNTIL THE EVENING.

MUMMY, I'M THIRSTY.
BE PATIENT, MIRIAM, BE PATIENT.

NOTHING HAPPENED UNTIL WE STARTED TO PROTEST. PEOPLE USUALLY TRAVEL IN GROUPS OF 20. THERE WERE HUNDREDS OF US THERE.
WE'RE THIRSTY! WATER!
WE'RE NOT ANIMALS!
GIVE US SOMETHING TO EAT!

THEY FIGURED THEY HAD TO DO SOMETHING. FINALLY, THEY BROUGHT BUSES TO TAKE US TO A RECEPTION CENTRE.

IT WAS NIGHT BY THE TIME THEY GAVE US FOOD: SOME TINY SANDWICHES, WHICH HAD GONE OFF.
THIS SMELLS WEIRD.

THEY PUT US BACK ON THE BUS AND TOOK US TO THE POLICE STATION TO TAKE OUR FINGERPRINTS.

WE SPENT THE NIGHT AT THE STATION.

WHEN THEY WERE DONE WITH FINGERPRINTING, THEY TOOK US BACK TO THE RECEPTION CENTRE, WHERE THEY GAVE US EACH A SMALL BOTTLE OF WATER AND MORE ROTTING SANDWICHES EVERY MORNING AND NIGHT.

THE HUNGARIAN POLICE HOUNDED EVERYONE – EVEN THOSE OF US WHO HAD BEEN FINGERPRINTED. ANYONE OUTSIDE WAS IN DANGER.
RENDÖRSÉG POLICE

AT THAT TIME, HUNGARY WAS CLOSING ITS BORDERS. YOU COULDN'T GET IN, BUT YOU COULDN'T GET OUT EITHER.

A WOMAN TOOK PITY ON US. SHE CALLED A FRIEND OF HERS TO SMUGGLE US OUT OF THERE IN HIS CAR.
COME WITH ME. WE'LL HELP YOU.

AND SO, AMONG THE HUNDREDS THERE, I AND FIVE OTHER PEOPLE MANAGED TO ESCAPE.

THE DRIVER LEFT US SOMEWHERE NEAR THE BORDER. WE HAD TO WALK A LONG WAY TO GET TO AUSTRIA.

THERE, ANOTHER WOMAN TOOK PITY ON US AND HELPED US. WE HAD NOTHING, SO SHE GAVE US FOOD AND CLOTHES.

THE POLICE TOOK US TO ANOTHER RECEPTION CENTRE. IT WAS AMAZING. THEY GAVE US EVERYTHING WE NEEDED – SOMETIMES MORE.

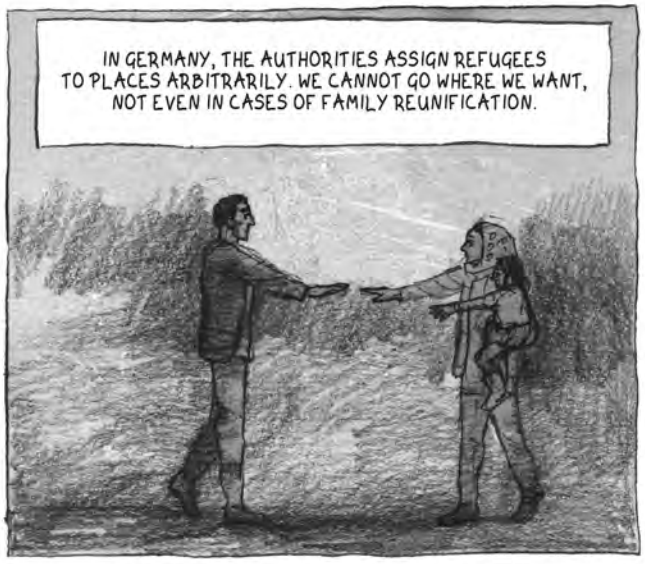
FROM THERE, WE TOOK THE TRAIN TO MUNICH.

RAMI AND HIS BROTHERS CAME TO MEET US IN MUNICH.

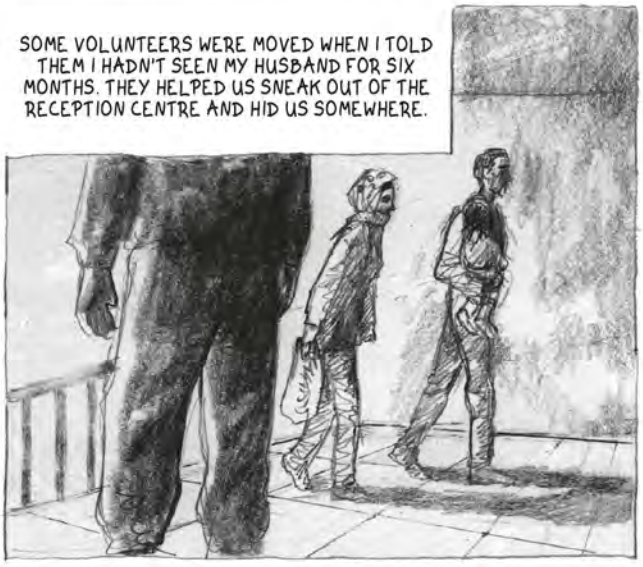
WHEN PEOPLE FOUND OUT THAT OUR GUYS WERE COMING DOWN FROM BERLIN TO MEET US, THEY STARTED CLAPPING AND CHEERING. WE HUGGED EACH OTHER AND CRIED – WE WERE SO HAPPY.

A MAGAZINE EVEN TOOK A PICTURE OF US AND POSTED IT ON FACEBOOK.

IN GERMANY, THE AUTHORITIES ASSIGN REFUGEES TO PLACES ARBITRARILY. WE CANNOT GO WHERE WE WANT, NOT EVEN IN CASES OF FAMILY REUNIFICATION.



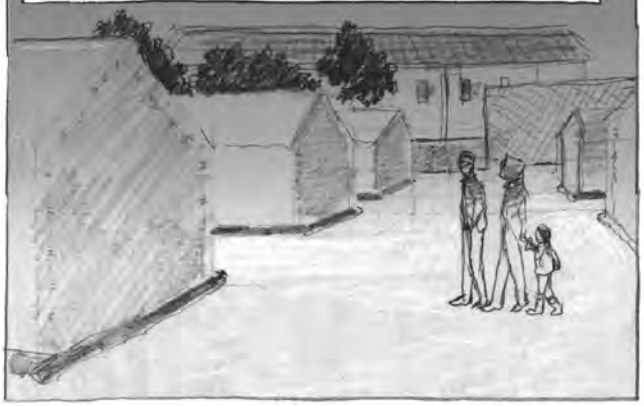
SOME VOLUNTEERS WERE MOVED WHEN I TOLD THEM I HADN'T SEEN MY HUSBAND FOR SIX MONTHS. THEY HELPED US SNEAK OUT OF THE RECEPTION CENTRE AND HID US SOMEWHERE.



WE ARE FOREVER GRATEFUL TO THEM.

BERLIN

WE THOUGHT ALL OUR PROBLEMS WOULD END IN BERLIN AND THAT WE WOULD START A NEW AND HAPPY LIFE...



... BUT IT DIDN'T TURN OUT THAT WAY EXACTLY. OF COURSE, WE WERE TOGETHER. WE WERE NO LONGER SEPARATED BY THOUSANDS OF KILOMETRES. BUT WE WERE STILL STAYING IN DIFFERENT PLACES. IT TOOK MY HUSBAND AN HOUR AND A HALF TO GET TO US IN THE MORNING. THEN HE HAD TO DO IT ALL AGAIN TO GET BACK.

MEANWHILE, MY DAUGHTER, WHO HAD SPENT THE PREVIOUS MONTHS SLEEPING IN BUSES, ON THE GROUND OR IN TENTS, WAS STILL EXHAUSTED.

GET UP, PLEASE. YOU HAVE TO EAT SOMETHING.

MUMMY, LET ME SLEEP SOME MORE.

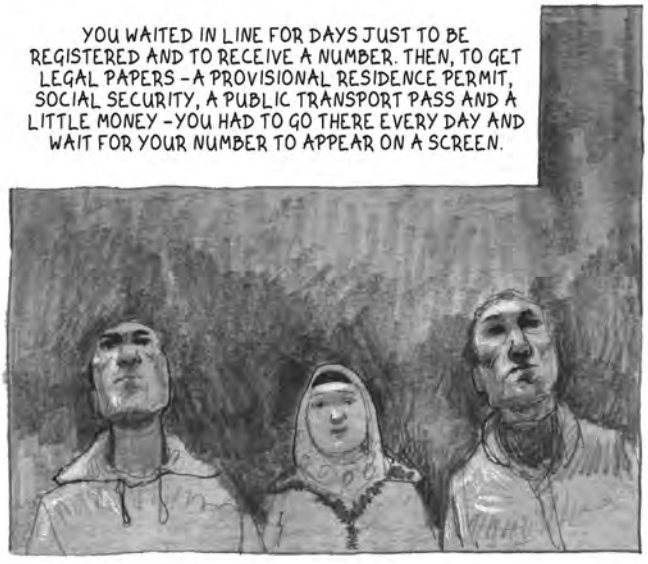
BUT I WAS RELATIVELY LUCKY. AFTER A MONTH'S WAIT, I MANAGED TO REGISTER WITH THE LAGESO, THE BERLIN AUTHORITY RESPONSIBLE FOR REFUGEES. BUT I STILL HAD NO MONEY OR HEALTH INSURANCE.

MY IN-LAWS WERE STILL WAITING. THE OFFICIALS AT THE LAGESO CLAIMED THEY HAD LOST THEIR PAPERS. LUCKILY, THOUGH, THEY STILL HAD THEIR NUMBERS, THE LITTLE BRACELET AND THE SMALL GREEN PAPER.

ONE DAY WE WAITED IN LINE FOR OUR NUMBER FROM NOON TO MIDNIGHT. IT WAS DIFFICULT AND SO COLD.

THE VOLUNTEERS THERE WERE VERY GENEROUS; THEY WERE GOOD PEOPLE. THE EMPLOYEES AND GUARDS, ON THE OTHER HAND, WERE AWFUL. THE LAGESO HAD ONLY SIX STAFF FOR ABOUT 3,000 PEOPLE.

YOU WAITED IN LINE FOR DAYS JUST TO BE REGISTERED AND TO RECEIVE A NUMBER. THEN, TO GET LEGAL PAPERS – A PROVISIONAL RESIDENCE PERMIT, SOCIAL SECURITY, A PUBLIC TRANSPORT PASS AND A LITTLE MONEY – YOU HAD TO GO THERE EVERY DAY AND WAIT FOR YOUR NUMBER TO APPEAR ON A SCREEN.

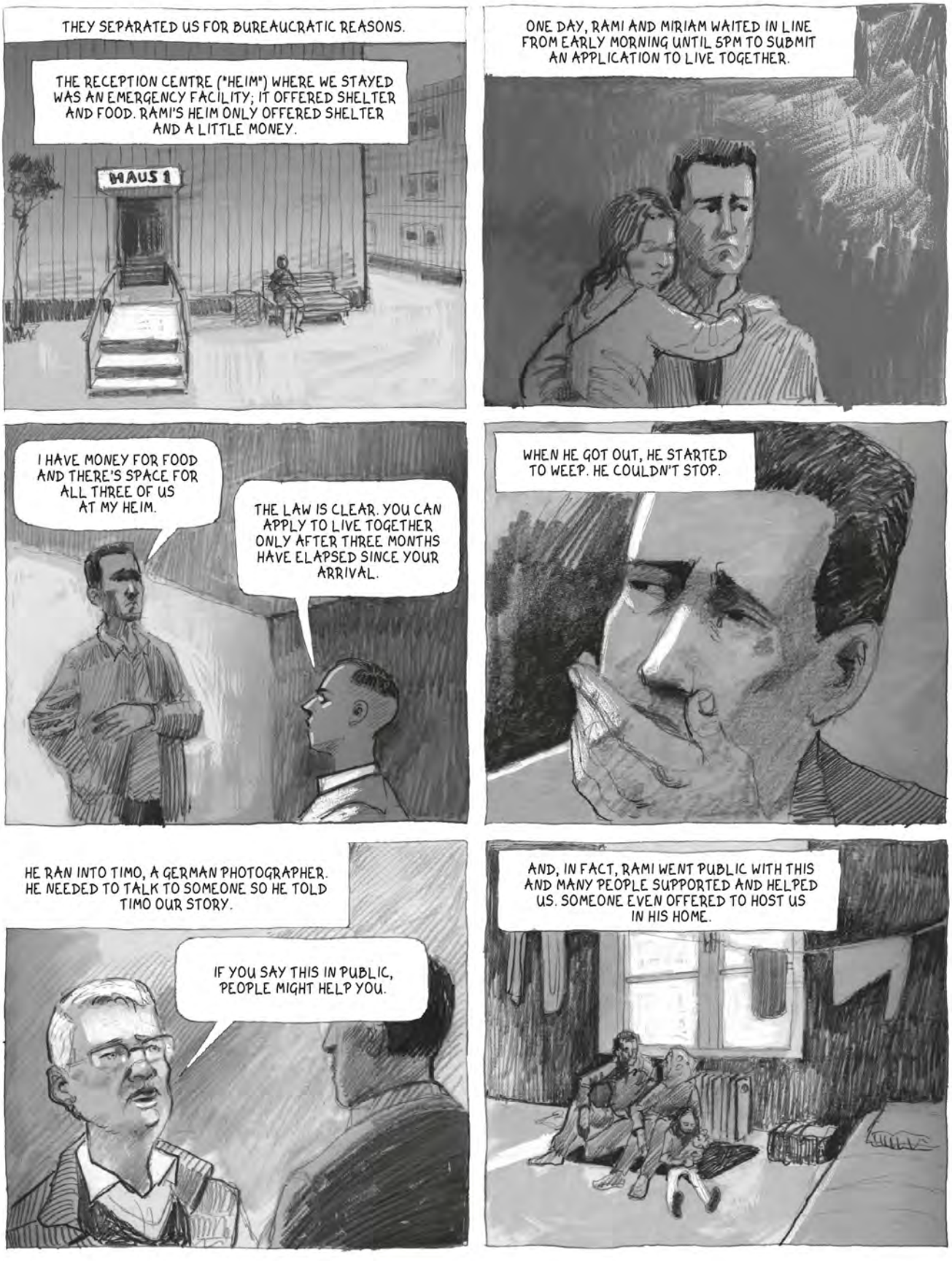


WE WENT EVERY OTHER DAY BECAUSE WE COULDN'T GO EVERY DAY. BUT NOTHING HAPPENED. I WAS DISTRAUGHT WHEN I FOUND OUT THEY HAD LOST SOME PEOPLE'S NUMBERS AND APPLICATIONS.

I GOT SICK AND DIDN'T KNOW WHAT TO DO. LUCKILY, A FRIEND HELPED ME.

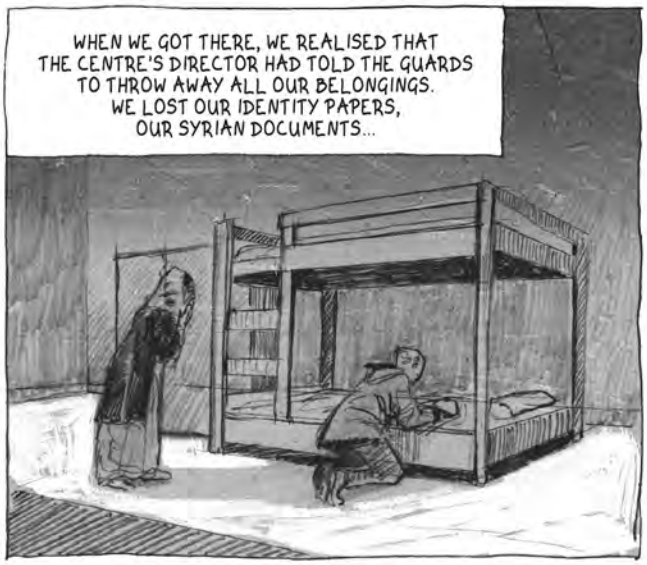
I'LL GIVE YOU THE ADDRESS OF A DOCTOR WHO DOESN'T ASK FOR MONEY.

A MONTH WENT BY BEFORE WE ACTUALLY GOT OUR PAPERS.


THEY SEPARATED US FOR BUREAUCRATIC REASONS.
THE RECEPTION CENTRE ("HEIM") WHERE WE STAYED WAS AN EMERGENCY FACILITY; IT OFFERED SHELTER AND FOOD. RAMI'S HEIM ONLY OFFERED SHELTER AND A LITTLE MONEY.
HAUS 1
ONE DAY, RAMI AND MIRIAM WAITED IN LINE FROM EARLY MORNING UNTIL 5PM TO SUBMIT AN APPLICATION TO LIVE TOGETHER.
I HAVE MONEY FOR FOOD AND THERE'S SPACE FOR ALL THREE OF US AT MY HEIM.
THE LAW IS CLEAR. YOU CAN APPLY TO LIVE TOGETHER ONLY AFTER THREE MONTHS HAVE ELAPSED SINCE YOUR ARRIVAL.
WHEN HE GOT OUT, HE STARTED TO WEEP. HE COULDN'T STOP.
HE RAN INTO TIMO, A GERMAN PHOTOGRAPHER. HE NEEDED TO TALK TO SOMEONE SO HE TOLD TIMO OUR STORY.
IF YOU SAY THIS IN PUBLIC, PEOPLE MIGHT HELP YOU.
AND, IN FACT, RAMI WENT PUBLIC WITH THIS AND MANY PEOPLE SUPPORTED AND HELPED US. SOMEONE EVEN OFFERED TO HOST US IN HIS HOME.

AT SOME POINT WE HAD TO GO BACK TO MY HEIM FOR A FEW DAYS TO HELP AN ELDERLY WOMAN SORT OUT HER HEALTH INSURANCE PAPERS.

WHEN WE GOT THERE, WE REALISED THAT THE CENTRE'S DIRECTOR HAD TOLD THE GUARDS TO THROW AWAY ALL OUR BELONGINGS. WE LOST OUR IDENTITY PAPERS, OUR SYRIAN DOCUMENTS...



WE REPORTED IT TO THE POLICE.

YOU WILL HAVE TO GO BACK TO THE LAGESO AND ASK FOR YOUR MONEY AND INSURANCE PAPERS.

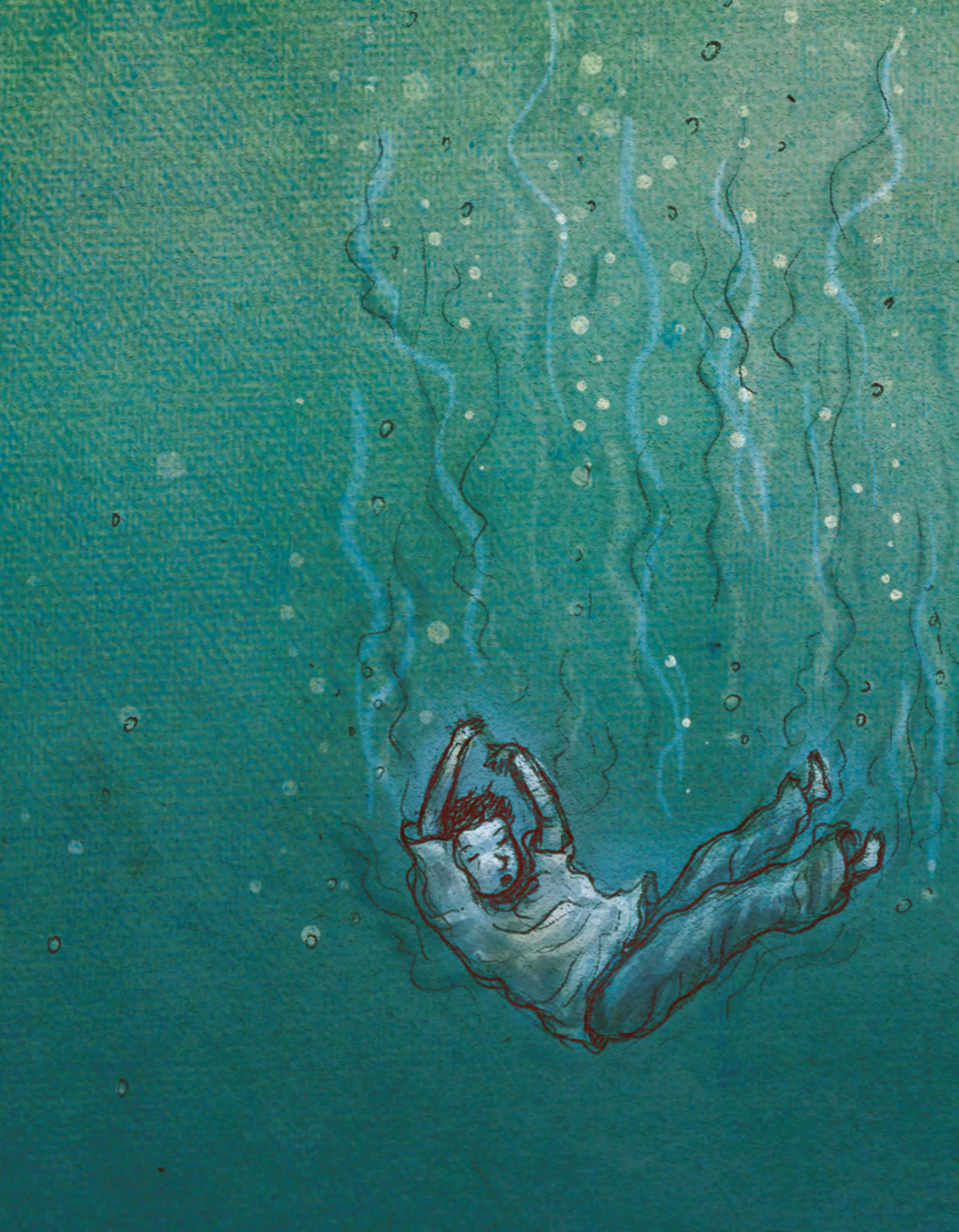
BUT...

AS REGARDS YOUR IDENTITY PAPERS, YOU'LL HAVE TO GO TO THE EMBASSY. WE DON'T HAVE THE AUTHORITY TO OFFICIALLY REGISTER THE INCIDENT.

AND SO WE LOST EVERYTHING.

WE GET CONFLICTING ADVICE ABOUT OUR DAUGHTER'S SCHOOL: SOME PEOPLE TELL US THAT WE HAVE TO GET PAPERS FOR HER FROM THE LAGESO, OTHERS TELL US THAT WE CAN JUST TAKE HER TO ANY SCHOOL AND REGISTER HER. WE DON'T KNOW WHAT TO DO ... OTHERS SAY SHE CAN'T GO TO SCHOOL YET BECAUSE SHE HASN'T TURNED SIX...

... SHE STILL HAS A FEW MONTHS TO GO.



JOURNEY TO THE WEST

INTERVIEW: Electra Alexandropoulou, Aliki Kosyfologou (Athens)
SCRIPT/ART: Dimitra Adamopoulou

Syed and Alamdar arrived at the open welcome shelter at Eleonas, in Athens, from Afghanistan. They had walked for a month and a half to get to the Turkish coast. They are minors: 16 and 17 years old. They have never been to school because they could not afford tuition. They are Shi'a Muslims and belong to the Hazara ethnic minority, which is persecuted by the Taliban. A few days after they had begun their journey, the Taliban attacked Ghazni, their native city. The city was deserted once again. Terrified, many people fled to Kabul. But Syed and Alamdar were lucky: they had already reached Athens, where they stayed for only two days. They were calm and happy in Eleonas. They wanted to rest before continuing their trip. It never occurred to them to stay in Greece. Greece does not exist for them. Only Germany and the rest of northern Europe exist; central Europe is no more than an afterthought. They want to go to the north. Syed now lives in a reception centre for children in Frankfurt. Because he is a minor, he receives special treatment from the German state. He studies German in school every day. He gets 15 euros in pocket money every week.

"What are you going to buy with your money?"

"Internet credit."

He no longer feels as lonely as he did at the beginning. He has made a few friends and is waiting for his cousin (who is also 16) to join him after tracing his steps.

Alamdar has shown no signs of life from Norway. He has not communicated with Syed or with us.

Syed doesn't know what awaits him in Europe. On Facebook, he writes: "Perhaps I'll stay in this camp forever."

HI! I'M ALAMDAR.
MY NAME IS SYED.

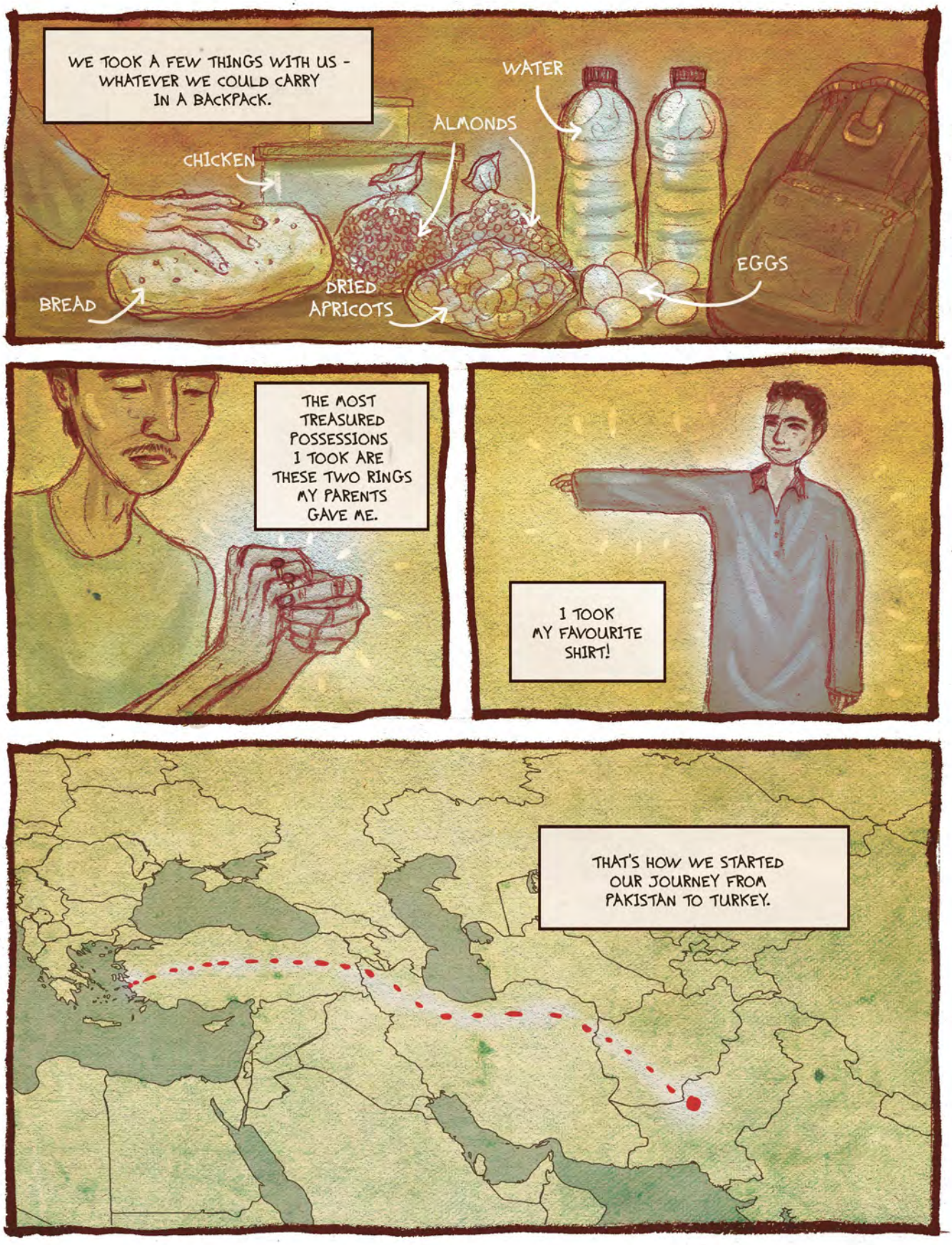
WE'VE KNOWN EACH OTHER SINCE WE WERE KIDS. WE GREW UP TOGETHER IN GHAZNI, ONE OF THE MOST IMPORTANT CITIES IN AFGHANISTAN! WE USED TO PLAY FOOTBALL TOGETHER. WE WERE POOR, BUT HAPPY.

WE MADE A FOOTBALL OUT OF OLD RAGS.
BOOT!
SYED, OVER HERE! PASS!

I SPENT ALMOST ALL OF MY LIFE IN AFGHANISTAN.
I LEFT AFGHANISTAN WITH MY FAMILY WHEN I WAS FOUR. WE MOVED TO PAKISTAN.
I HAVE THREE SIBLINGS. ONE OF THEM IS IN IRAN.
THERE ARE NINE OF US, INCLUDING ME!
HE SAYS THINGS ARE DIFFICULT THERE AS WELL...
THE TALIBAN STAGE ATTACKS IN MY CITY ALL THE TIME.
TWO YEARS AGO, THERE WAS AN ATTACK ON QUETTA, WHERE WE LIVE.
THEY TARGET US BECAUSE WE ARE SHI'A AND PART OF THE HAZARA ETHINC MINORITY.
OUR HOUSE WAS DESTROYED. ABOUT 150 PEOPLE DIED.
THE TALIBAN HATE US FOR IT.
AND THE FOREIGN FORCES DON'T EXACTLY HELP THE SITUATION...
LUCKILY, WE SURVIVED.

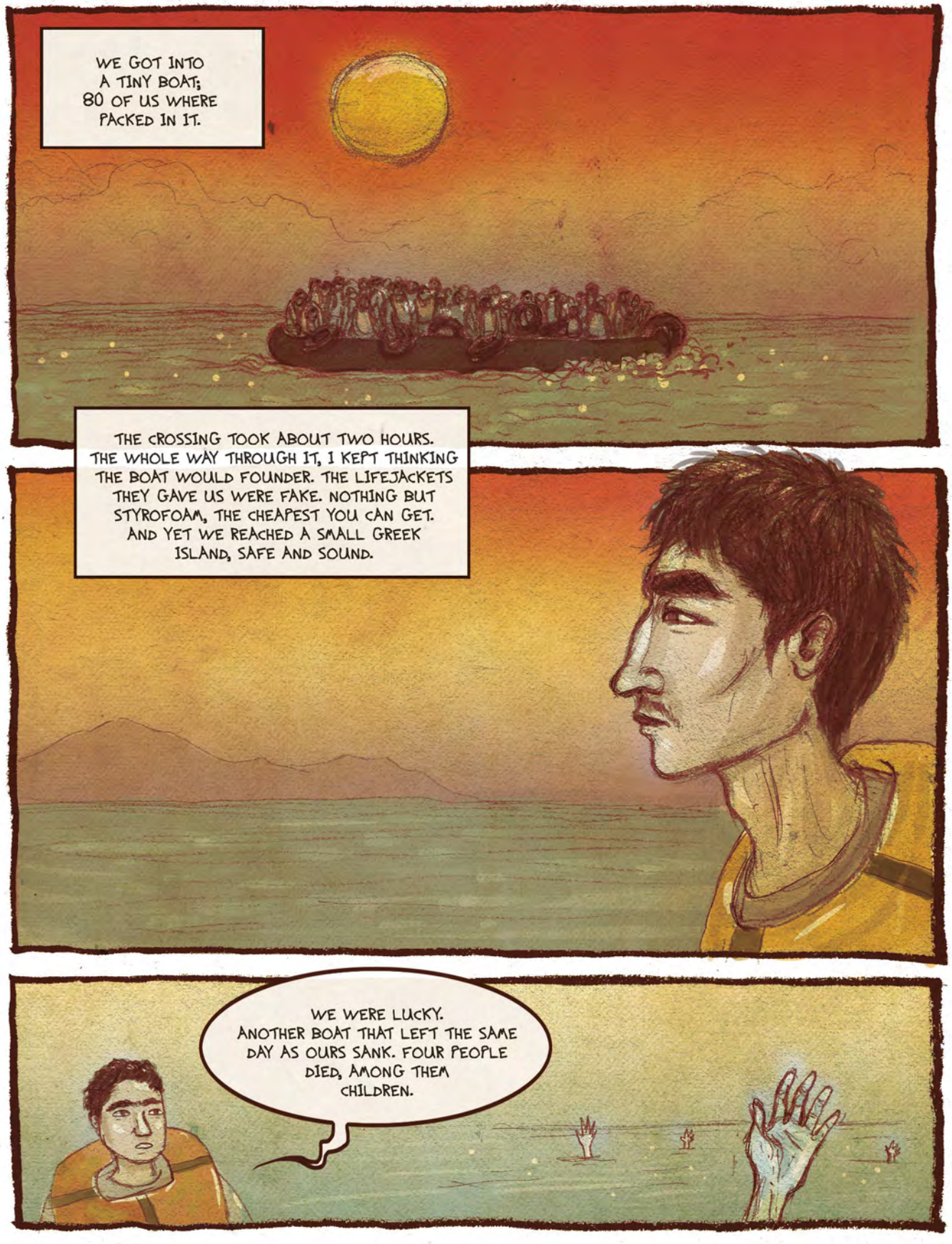
I DON'T GO TO SCHOOL, OF COURSE.
I DON'T GO TO SCHOOL EITHER; IT'S TOO EXPENSIVE.
THOUGH WE DON'T GO TO SCHOOL, WE'VE LEARNT SOME THINGS BY OURSELVES. LIKE ENGLISH!
THAT'S RIGHT! WE LEARNT IT BY WATCHING FILMS ON TV. WE DON'T KNOW HOW TO WRITE IT WELL, BUT WE CAN DEFINITELY SPEAK IT.
I DO VARIOUS ODD JOBS TO SUPPORT MY FAMILY.
AND I WORK IN A CARPET FACTORY.

THE MONEY ISN'T GOOD, BUT I HAVE NO CHOICE.
I GET 2,000 RUPEES A MONTH.
IT'S ENOUGH TO LIVE ON IN PAKISTAN, BUT NOT ENOUGH TO PAY TUITION, WHICH IS ABOUT 1,000 RUPEES - AROUND 9 EUROS.
LIFE IS DIFFICULT WHERE I LIVE. I DREAM OF A BETTER FUTURE.
I WANT A NEW LIFE. IN A BETTER COUNTRY, WITH MORE OPPORTUNITIES FOR ME.
SO WE FOUND EACH OTHER AGAIN IN PAKISTAN, AFTER ALL THESE YEARS.
TO START OUR JOURNEY TO THE WEST TOGETHER.


WE TOOK A FEW THINGS WITH US - WHATEVER WE COULD CARRY IN A BACKPACK.
WATER
ALMONDS
CHICKEN
EGGS
BREAD
DRIED APRICOTS
THE MOST TREASURED POSSESSIONS I TOOK ARE THESE TWO RINGS MY PARENTS GAVE ME.
I TOOK MY FAVOURITE SHIRT!
THAT'S HOW WE STARTED OUR JOURNEY FROM PAKISTAN TO TURKEY.

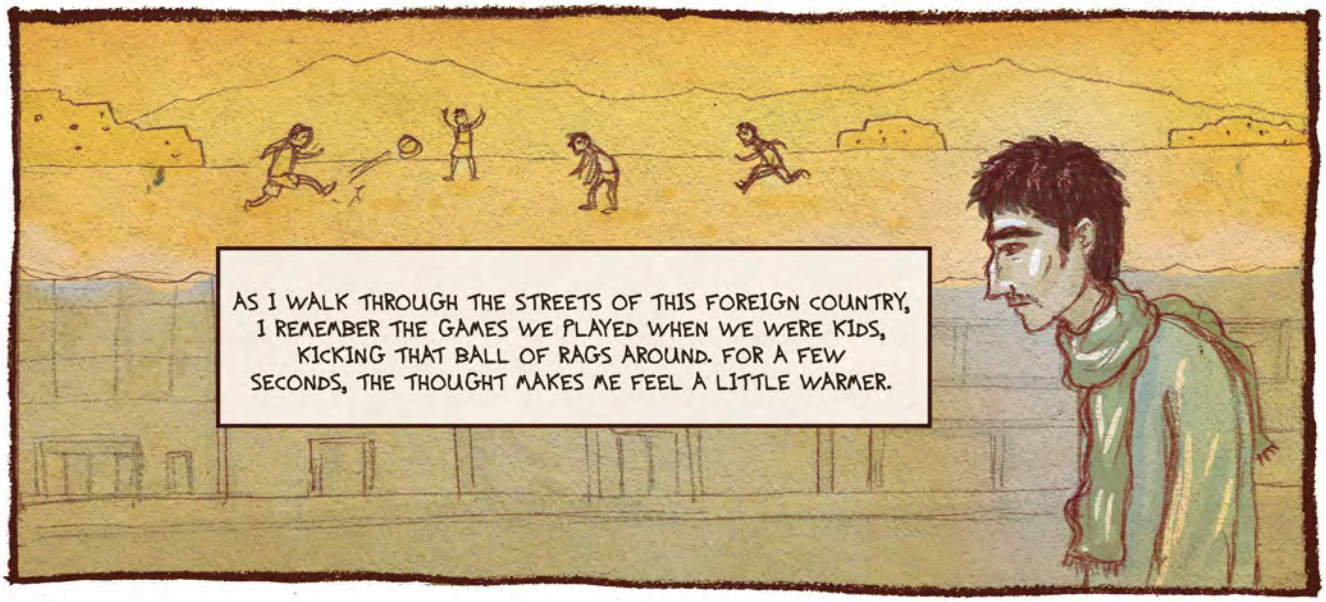
THERE WERE AROUND 36 OF US.
WE WALKED ON ROADS AND SOMETIMES ACROSS MOUNTAINS.
MOSTLY AT NIGHT, SO THEY WOULDN'T CATCH US.
WE STAYED IN VARIOUS ROOMS OUR SMUGGLERS FOUND FOR US.
SOMETIMES THERE WERE UP TO 60 OF US IN A ROOM.
SOMETIMES IT WOULD RAIN AND THE CHILDREN WOULD GET SICK. THEY RAN A FEVER. THEIR PARENTS HAD NO MEDICINE; THEY JUST WAITED FOR IT TO PASS.

WE BOUGHT SOME THINGS FROM THE SMUGGLERS. THEY WERE SO EXPENSIVE!
5 EUROS!
THAT MUCH?
ESPECIALLY THE MEDICINE!
WE HAD TO WATCH ANYTHING VALUABLE WE HAD WITH US.
THE SMUGGLERS BEAT US AND TRIED TO TAKE OUR THINGS. LUCKILY, I MANAGED TO HIDE MY RINGS.
AND SO, WE REACHED THE TURKISH COAST.
NOW WE JUST HAD TO CROSS THE AEGEAN TO REACH GREECE AND ENTER EUROPE.


WE GOT INTO A TINY BOAT; 80 OF US WHERE PACKED IN IT.
THE CROSSING TOOK ABOUT TWO HOURS. THE WHOLE WAY THROUGH IT, I KEPT THINKING THE BOAT WOULD FOUNDER. THE LIFEJACKETS THEY GAVE US WERE FAKE. NOTHING BUT STYROFOAM, THE CHEAPEST YOU CAN GET. AND YET WE REACHED A SMALL GREEK ISLAND, SAFE AND SOUND.
WE WERE LUCKY. ANOTHER BOAT THAT LEFT THE SAME DAY AS OURS SANK. FOUR PEOPLE DIED, AMONG THEM CHILDREN.

WE WERE VERY LUCKY. IT WAS A SMALL ISLAND, SO WE WERE REGISTERED QUICKLY. TWO DAYS AFTER OUR ARRIVAL WE GOT ON THE BOAT TO PIRAEUS.
OTHERS ARE LEFT TRAPPED ON THE ISLANDS FOR MONTHS.
A LITTLE LATER, WE REACHED ATHENS!
DON'T MOVE, THEY'RE TAKING A PICTURE OF US. I'LL SEND IT TO MY PARENTS ONCE I GET A PHONE!
I'LL POST IT ON FACEBOOK ONCE I FIND A COMPUTER AND GO ONLINE!
GOODBYE, SYED!
GOODBYE, ALAMDAR! GOOD LUCK!
WE'LL TALK SOON, ONCE WE'VE SORTED OUT OUR NEW LIVES!

SOON AFTER...
I MADE IT TO FRANKFURT, IN GERMANY. I HOPE I'LL MAKE IT. I STILL FEEL LIKE A STRANGER.
I MADE IT TO OSLO, IN NORWAY. I STILL HAVEN'T FOUND A JOB. I'M COLD ALL THE TIME.


AS I WALK THROUGH THE STREETS OF THIS FOREIGN COUNTRY, I REMEMBER THE GAMES WE PLAYED WHEN WE WERE KIDS, KICKING THAT BALL OF RAGS AROUND. FOR A FEW SECONDS, THE THOUGHT MAKES ME FEEL A LITTLE WARMER.

I PHOTOGRAPH EVERYTHING AND POST THE PICTURES ON FACEBOOK, TO REMIND MYSELF THAT I MADE IT. I GOT HERE.
GERMANY AT LAST!

EVERYTHING WILL BE OK, SYED! SMILE!
CHEEEEEESE!
Dimitra Adamopoulou
THE END

Ten points on the geopolitics of the refugee crisis

Mihalis Panayiotakis
Journalist, analyst

1. THE ORIGINS OF THE REFUGEE crisis cannot easily be situated in space and time. Refugee migration has been in constant flow since the Second World War; the current refugee crisis in Greece and Europe is merely an exacerbation of a pre-existing phenomenon born of collapsing states and wars in central and western Asia.

2. THE CURRENT REFUGEE CRISIS cannot be abstracted from the phenomenon of mass economic migration – a crucial development in geopolitical history which, in its own turn, has significantly shaped the post-Cold War geopolitical landscape.

The collapse of Syria and the flight of millions of people from the country have added numbers and momentum to mass migration currents that began 20 or 30 years ago, as the populations of geopolitical zones torn by political and economic destabilisation moved towards capitalist metropoles and points of concentrated wealth around the Second and Third Worlds. One could argue that the causes of the refugee crises include – in a similar but less prescriptive form – the causes that drive the migration movements. Indeed, it is often difficult to distinguish a refugee from an economic migrant, given that the motives for migration may be related to both political and military instability and economic collapse. Characteristic of this ambiguity is the playing around with the administrative terminology applied to refugees, who may come from countries where a war – civil or otherwise – or a natural disaster has led to economic decline and stagnation. Moreover, although areas of Afghanistan and Somalia might be described as relatively "peaceful", their ravaged economies have forced people to leave in order to escape financial ruin. Environmental pressures in Bangladesh have led hundreds of thousands of people into "internal environmental displacement" and refugeehood – even though these reasons do not guarantee them recognition as refugees or the legal status that accompanies such recognition.

3. THOUGH OTHER CRITICAL REGIONS remain active (notably Ukraine, Kosovo, North Africa, Sub-Saharan Africa, Horn of Africa, Yemen), the hot spots of today's refugee crisis are Syria and Iraq, but also, on occasion, Afghanistan – regions marred by foreign intervention, primarily by the US's dual intervention in and invasion of

Afghanistan in 2001 and Iraq in 2003. Meanwhile, areas between the Himalayas and the Atlantic have also become politically, economically and socially unstable due to:

- Continuous military and economic interventions spearheaded by the west – namely the USA – and conflicts among large and regional powers through proxy wars in the context of a post-Cold War global redistribution of power.
- Sectarian violence, which consciously and strategically mobilised the American occupation of Iraq and which is financed by reactionary and fundamentalist Sunni/Wahhabi absolute monarchies in the Arab peninsula. This conflict has spread out across the region, carrying with it Sunni fundamentalist extremism, which has extended its influence across an area that stretches out far as Central Africa and Indonesia.
- Climate change causes ever more frequent and more devastating meteorological events which, in turn, lead to food crises, natural disasters and the loss of resources necessary for survival. These phenomena provoke and foment political turmoil, intensifying internal and external migration flows.
- The social and economic consequences of neoliberal globalisation – driven by programmes devised by the World Bank and IMF – on social cohesion and discontent in the poorest countries in the region and the intensification of global and regional socioeconomic inequality.
- The defeat of the Arab Spring as a democratising movement whose reach spanned almost the entire Arab world. This defeat was both caused by and resulted in the substitution of political protest by armed civil conflict. These wars have paved the way for further interventions by third countries and have allowed for the most hardline traditionalist and Quranically literal jihadism to come to the fore as a rallying point for Sunni populations.

Within this climate of general instability and state collapse, refugee and migrant flows reflect the regional balances of power and cast the shadow of regional conflicts over an ever-greater geographic area.

4. HAVING ESTABLISHED THAT MIGRANT and refugee currents are the result of wars and geopolitical instability, a further question arises: given these have, for years, been problems in the global capitalist periphery and in particular in the Middle East, why this sudden mass exodus now? The answer is twofold and concerns the effects of globalisation in different ways.

- First, the dynamics of neoliberal globalisation themselves make population movements a reasonable response to permanent states of economic (and often political) emergency. Moreover, these movements themselves function through a degree of capitalist rationality: they complete the "market deregulation", not only as concerns capital but also in terms of the labour market itself. A cheap workforce is permitted to "sneak" into the west (and in that capacity only) as "illegal immigrants", who can be easily managed and cajoled into encouraging the migration of cheap labour from the Third World to the

metropolis and to powerful countries in the region. There has long been a demand for Third World workers in the west. Their integration, however, was hampered by the spread of antimigrant panic that served as a tool to exclude foreign workers from labour rights won by the "natives" and also as a means of labour discipline.

- Second: globalisation and the era of telecommunications have given rise to a vastly interconnected world. Each immigration wave carves out a "settlement" in the First World in anticipation of the next wave of arrivals – friends and relatives who will follow, making migration from countries in crisis an ever-more accessible solution. Moreover, the internet and constant telephone contact with residents in migrant destinations allow people to research the conditions in those countries and to assess the hazards and benefits of migration. Finally, each successive wave of migration establishes precedents, carving out trajectories to the First World and creating a demand for more expansive networks of illegal smuggling and transporting of people to all sorts of destinations.

5. THOUGH THE NUMBER OF REFUGEES and internally displaced persons (IDPs) has increased in recent years – and especially in the last decade – the bulk of this increase is made up of IDPs: refugees in their own country. This demonstrates that the major problem emerging now is not quantitative, but qualitative: refugees become a global "crisis" only where migration flows begin to directly affect the west. As long as migration is confined to the region, refugee flows remain "invisible" and the responsibility of neighbouring countries and of international humanitarian organisations such as the UN and Red Cross. So, Europe is convulsed politically under the burden of less than a million Syrian refugees, even though four million refugees have, for the past three years, been living in Turkey, Jordan and Lebanon, a humanitarian crisis which does not, however, qualify as a "major" geopolitical issue. As regards Jordan and Lebanon, this is the umpteenth wave of refugees these countries have received since the Second World War and its aftermath, when they became destinations for Palestinian and Iraqi refugees. Afghanistan, Pakistan and Iran have served as landfills, literally, for human waves fleeing their countries. And yet these crises were never judged to be "major" ones except where these non-western countries, either by choice or necessity, ceased to act as buffer zones for the reception and management of the problem.

6. CURRENT REFUGEE MOVEMENTS are the elements of a crisis whose reach and influence goes far beyond the confines of the war zones. In Europe in particular, the refugee crisis manifests itself as a political crisis for two main reasons:

- The political and economic conditions in Europe, the preferred sanctuary of refugees, have made it ill-equipped to manage a new mass migration influx. This is largely due to the austerity-bred economic disasters and uncertainties that have marked the past six years, but also to Europe's recent migration policies, which have strengthened xenophobic and racist social discourses and have been incorporated by mainstream political parties.

- As these refugee movements primarily involve Muslim and Arab populations, they are deemed to be opponents and enemies of the west. Following the end the Cold War and the collapse of the shadow of the Soviet threat, the west sought a new global rivalry in the performative narrative of the "clash of civilisations".

7. THE NOTION OF A CLASH OF CIVILISATIONS, has, over the past decade, been central to the political narrative that set out to destabilise an area spanning the entire Asian and African region, as well as the ghettos of the west. When coining the notion of a "clash of civilisations", Samuel Huntington was not describing an imminent direct confrontation. Rather, he predicted the development of a new Manichean opposition that would emerge from the ruins of the spectre of communism and would function as ideological fuel for war machines and for a geopolitical bid for the uncurbed expansion of US (or more generally, western) hegemony, posited as essential for the maintenance of global order. The demonisation of Islam and its ideological constitution as a global rival found a receptive audience which, in turn, participated in and strengthened the said demonisation. The geopolitical turmoil that developed following the attack on the Twin Towers has been sustained and reinforced by a dialectics of mutual support between Western/imperialist narratives of a "backward and fundamentally hostile" Islam and feudal Salafist aggression which has assumed the role of the opposition with, however, the sponsorship of fundamentalist US allies: Saudi Arabia and the Gulf emirates. This vicious cycle of reinforcement and other similar polarising dynamics (see, for instance, the rivalry between Assad and Isis) and the total destruction wrought by military interventionism has bred a series of escalating conflicts in which balance is not easy to find. Barring a radical rupture with the current geopolitical status quo, it seems we are bound for the normalisation of destruction, for a permanent and bloody refugee crisis, for the mass export of the Afghan model of permanent war crisis and for the continuous production of refugees and internally displaced persons. If more sides show a willingness for a solution, the bridges that would be needed to stabilize the situation would totally rearrange the Middle East in ways that will challenge, among others, the borders as we know them.

8. EVEN THOUGH recent developments suggest that the crisis in Syria is entering a phase of effective negotiations with the potential for peace, it would be premature to expect a truce or a cessation of the flow of refugees or for their repatriation to Syria and Iraq. Regardless, the EU's failure to adequately receive refugees and the exhausted capacity of neighbouring countries will allow all warring parties to use the refugee crisis as leverage for pressure and blackmail. Meanwhile, almost all third countries engaged in Syria and Iraq maintain a grossly cynical and irresponsible stance – as demonstrated by the near-arbitrary bombings of Syria, a symbolic gesture executed with no particular strategic goal or coordination among forces or parallel negotiations for the stabilisation of Iraq. Meanwhile, the "collateral damage" to civilians is accepted without qualms. All of this can only mean a further increase in refugees from the region.

9. THE DEGREE TO WHICH THE COUNTRIES and forces engaged in the region, and thus are involved in the production of refugees, are already feeling the secondary effects of the crisis is worth noting.

This is true particularly as regards EU political responses to the reception (and repulsion) of refugees: the explosive growth of the far right across the continent, arguments over "what should be done" at EU level, the openly xenophobic and literally fascist reactions of central European governments and others, and the detrimental effect that the inability to successfully manage refugee influxes has had on the EUs "soft power".

These "secondary effects" of the crisis in the Middle East include damage to an already-compromised democratic establishment on the continent. Examples of denial include an EU scheme for the lawful return of political refugees and persecuted ethnicities. Such rulings seem arbitrary and their limits unclear: the fact that many Sudanese and Somalis (that is, citizens of countries ravaged by civil war) were denied further passage into Europe at the Fyrom border because they "did not qualify for refugee status" is both illogical and hypocritical, both a byproduct and further instance of the ways in which Europe's inadequacy in the face of refugee influxes runs against the grain of the spirit of democracy and, as a consequence, of the democratic constitution and integrity of our continent's countries.

It is likely that the indefinite settlement of large refugee populations in EU countries will further exacerbate incidents of racism and xenophobia, especially given that a second- and third-generation of European Muslims has, to a small but significant and dangerous degree, been radicalised by fundamentalist Islam, as demonstrated by the Paris events.

10. UNSTABLE REGIONS AND COUNTRIES in which migration emerges as the only means of survival have multiplied: Yemen, where Saudi Arabia's military intervention in the civil war has bred disastrous results, is already in ruins, becoming a new host for Isis and a site of expulsion of streams of refugees who just "happen" not to reach Europe. A number of sub-Saharan countries are in open civil war, a battlefield for power bids often involving parties advocating extremist Islam. Massive numbers of people have been displaced from their homes, and civilians are struggling to flee their country forever to seek better lives in the west. Libya no longer seems to be under any centralised control. The situation in Afghanistan can again, at any moment, spill over into Pakistan, which is unlikely to agree to continue to absorb refugees. Egypt lives under a brutal dictatorship. Ukraine has also recently gained fame as a refugee-producing area and the course of Turkish–Russian–EU relations may affect refugee flows from there. The refugee crisis has, at this juncture, engulfed the whole of Europe. It may well be the crisis that will come to determine Europe's fate.

Immigration policies in Greece and Europe: Do we know what we (don't) need to know?

Kostis Tsitselikis
Professor, University of Macedonia
President of the National Commission for Human Rights, Greece

1. INTRODUCTORY COMMENTS

The new powers acquired by the European Union through the 2009 Lisbon treaty created the need to develop common and binding migration policies. A component of this was the common asylum policy, which was already predetermined by international law (Geneva Convention, 1951). While EU member states continue to enjoy significant flexibility (or discretion) in the exercise of their EU responsibilities, the establishment of an open and common area without border controls in which freedom of movement is guaranteed has played a key role in determining the form and content of immigration policies. External borders with neighbouring third countries now function as a common and unyielding dividing line, impermeable to those without an entry permit (Schengen Agreement, 1995). Given this condensed description of the statutory landscape, the main challenge remains: settling on the political aims and content of migration policy. Was the EU ready to implement a uniform set of policies and laws across its territory in order to face such an elusive, "human" phenomenon – a phenomenon which, by its very nature, cannot be mastered by recourse to strict management norms?

The current migrant influx to the EU is closely linked to international geopolitical changes, especially those related to the collapse of the bipolar Cold War system in 1990, to the more recent armed conflicts in the Middle East and Afghanistan, to international intervention in Libya, to environmental disasters in Asia, to famine, poverty and political instability in many neighbouring regions. Greece became home to many migrants who could not continue their journey westward. Apart from during the 1990s, few of the migrants who settled in Greece intended Greece as their final destination. But in enforcing dissuasive or admissive EU policies on migration and asylum, Greece adopted measures that inevitably entrapped migrants within its borders. Under certain conditions, it opened the path to legalisation – and even naturalisation, to many of those migrants. However, those measures, and in particular those that trapped migrants in Greece, demonstrated the limitations of EU policies and the need for greater solidarity and social cohesion among member states.

2. THE UNCERTAIN COURSE OF EUROPEAN IMMIGRATION POLICY

It seems almost impossible to outline the objectives of European immigration policy. The European Commission has pointed to the pressing need to devise "initiatives aimed at establishing a comprehensive European migration policy which is better able to meet the challenges presented by migration. This policy must respect the European tradition of asylum and protection, while preventing illegal border crossings" (European Commission 2011). In reality, however, concealed beneath the delicate balancing act that underlies this carefully phrased statement, EU immigration policy is more concerned with protecting European territory from the "influx" of unwanted migrants – by force, if necessary – than it is in integration policies or, at the very least, in a rational management of the phenomenon and resources at hand. In 2011, the European Commission agreed that EU immigration policy would rest on four pillars:

- Facilitating legal migration, mobility and residence within the Schengen area. Visa policies would be used as a means of controlling migrant mobility, social inclusion and skilled immigration as a source of human resources for the EU.
- Combating clandestine migration and human trafficking, through controlling the EU's external borders; cooperating with third countries (readmission agreements) and fighting human smuggling.
- Establishing a common European asylum system and standards of entry, including controlling and returning asylum seekers to the country of entry to the EU (Dublin Regulation III and a uniform identification system, Eurodac).
- Maximising the development impact of migration and the mobility of workers.

Whatever the effectiveness of these policies, the importance of the human rights of migrants and the rule of law constitutes another field that cuts across the above. Admittedly, the conception and implementation of European policy remains marred by weaknesses in this regard. The failure of the Stockholm Programme and the clear insufficiency of the European Commission's Agenda on Migration (European Commission, 2015) demonstrate the inability of EU politicians to face migration as a continuously changing but inescapable reality. Although the European Agenda raises legitimate concerns regarding the effectiveness of EU policies and means in the management of the refugee crisis, it has not been able to spur the European institutions into action. As of December 2015, no substantial centralised institutional effort has been made to develop adequate migration policies and laws. Rather, European institutions have confined themselves to feeble chatter.

Indeed, EU member states and institutions have engaged in blatant doublespeak: on the one hand, they generally consider migrants – and now refugees – to be undesirable and they focus their efforts on their repulsion or removal. On the other hand, they wish to meet the demand for cheap labour, accommodate the highly skilled personnel who will "willingly" come to offer their services to the European labour market, and to see new

blood injected into this greying continent. This utilitarian perspective sees in migrants a means to bolster the European workforce and contributions to social security funds but, on second thoughts, perceives this as a threat to the "purity" of European ethnoreligious identity. This line of thought finds its ultimate expression in the xenophobic appeal of the extreme right to save the homogeneity of "white Christian Europe". The shallow rhetoric of charity has offered no substantial rebuttal to such discourses; it has also obscured the key issue at stake, namely the political consciousness of European citizens and their awareness of the power dynamics at play in the distribution of rights and privileges – dynamics which do not concern the relations between the "old" and "new", the local and foreign residents of our continent, as much as the dynamics of socioeconomic participation, domination, exclusion or inclusion.

Though some migrants will be "removed", either intentionally or unintentionally, many will remain and live in Europe, with or without their families. In what ways and to what extent have migration policies been (un) successful and how should they be revised or redrafted? As much as the answers may veer in different directions, it is difficult to establish a reliably balanced approach to the prospect of an enlargement of the European community with "new blood". If we consider the original objectives of the policies, there appears to be an overwhelmingly disproportionate emphasis on securing borders as well as the European interior, at the expense of respecting the rule of law, protecting rights, the content of democracy and internal burden-sharing among member states. The result of this has been the consolidation of anti-EU political parties (in France, Hungary, Greece and the United Kingdom) which, citing the failure of immigration policies, systematically delegitimise the EU itself, in the hope of dismantling it.

The notion of "security", particularly concerning refugees but also any human being in danger, has acquired ambivalent significations:

- *as regards people*, especially as concerns rescue and safe passage, and
- *as regards the border*, marked by a series of operations and special agencies created with a view to monitoring the (primarily sea) borders of southern and southeastern Europe (see, for instance, the Poseidon and Sophia operations, and the Frontex, Rabit and EU NavFor forces), which have been continuously allotted more and more EU funds, often beyond any rational accounting and political control (Fotiadis 2015).

The massive expansion of structures geared towards securitisation and the confusion about the content of these security measures have an immediate and negative impact on the targets of these policies, given it is clear that national and European borders *are not under threat.* Rather, they are being traversed by mass groups of people with legitimate claims to asylum or who, more generally, desperately seek safer and better living conditions. Ultimately, prevention policies cause serious harm to the democratic plans to consolidate European rights standards (Takis 2015, 19).

The issue of safe passage and the guarantee of safe settlement remain, perhaps, the most intractable issues since they require long-term policy analyses of migrants' needs

and involve securing the means for their reception, support and welfare. Moreover, they require the formulation of long-term integration policies, given the international community (including the EU) remains unable to mitigate or contribute to ending military conflicts in the Middle East – especially where powerful political and economic interests benefit from access to oil and arms trading. Though pushback practices are not being systematically applied, the Mediterranean countries have left the stormy sea to do their "dirty work". Elsewhere, they have erected barbed wire fences. Moreover, European and international security policies are stuck in a war on smugglers, who, given the absence of alternative means of migration, often act as "facilitators" to migrants. For instance, UN Security Council decision 2240 of 9 October 2015, approved the possibility of EU military intervention in the southern Mediterranean.

But are social integration policies successful for those who manage to remain in Europe? The demonstrated weaknesses of policies geared towards the socioeconomic integration of migrants typically concern their lack of information as regards their rights and responsibilities, their acquisition of the language spoken in the relevant state and their access to education, healthcare, social security and the labour market. Building structures aimed at facilitating participation and providing opportunities is a precondition for the social integration of people typically viewed as a necessary evil, whose permanence is determined by what is expected of the migrant as well as by the intentions of state/EU policies. The situation described above covers the Greek case as well.

3. THE LIMITS OF GREEK MIGRATION POLICY IN THE EU CONTEXT

One of the policy areas of greatest concern to the Greek government has been securing the border and Greek territory. Up to early 2015, such policy discussions featured the migrant/refugee as an aggressor, a carrier of diseases and an intruder. Often, no distinction was made between refugees and migrants. Both were presented as enemies in order to prevent their entry or to facilitate their deportation. Greece, both alone and in collaboration with Frontex, is charged with managing an extremely busy external border, which has gradually acquired particular importance for Europe's *security*. The national border has been transformed from a line to a European multiple border zone, within which the passage from "entry" to "settlement" is subject to the arbitrariness of often conflicting or fatal policies.

Greek immigration policies are integrated in the relevant EU legal frameworks, with some differences determined by the specificities of the geography of migration and by the elaboration or narrowing of EU laws during the period of their incorporation into the Greek policy framework. Thus, Greece is now bound by common laws on returns and deportations, detention, family reunification and asylum, after two decades of wavering and delays in transposing EU legislation. Migrants are declared legal or illegal following continuous shifts in the definition of "legal" and "illegal". Ultimately, what has often been condemned as the "lack of a migration policy" in Greece (Hellenic League for Human Rights 2012) reflects a profound reality. "Making [immigrants'] lives unbearable" was, for

a long time, the guiding principle of Greece's central immigration policy regarding "undocumented" migrants and others. The alternation between "integration" and "repression/exclusion" or, in other words, between the "recognition of rights" and "securitisation" may be observed in three areas: legal migration, irregular migration and refugees, both for refugees settling in Greece and those in transit.

The history of Greek immigration policy can be broken down into the following key periods: the initial period of denying the existence of the phenomenon (1990–1997), a period of temporary toleration and fear of the criminal "other" (1998–2000), the period of rudimentary organisation and rationalisation (2001–2004), a positive shift towards acceptance of the reality of migration (2005–2011) and a period of hardline securitisation within and without Greece's borders (2012–2014). In 2015, a new phase was inaugurated that began with complying with basic legal principles as regards administrative detention, the inclusion of second-generation immigrants (see, for example, the decision to open up avenues to citizenship) and a desperate but unsuccessful attempt to address the refugee issue.

However, the future is likely to see ever-harsher measures being taken in conformity with EU policies on refugees as well as the deportation of undesirable "nonrefugees". The EU's stance has assigned Greece the position of Europe's "warehouse", a repository for those (non-) refugees who do not manage to complete the Balkan route to Germany and for whom the next checkpoint and any other filter aimed at reducing migrant mobility will remain intractable. The informal hybrid of an EU policy crafted as an attempt to reconcile the unilateral initiatives of individual member states has dealt a heavy blow to EU legitimacy: if the formal breach of the Schengen agreement (opening the Balkan route) was in line with providing safe passage to asylum seekers under the Geneva convention, then subsequent restrictions and constraints imposed on refugee mobility, justified by citing the purportedly unmanageable scale of the influx, undermines the very foundations of an EU anchored in rights and democratic standards. At the same time, references to non-refugees are in the spirit of their deterrence, even with violence.

Trapping migrants and refugees in transit in Greece is largely the outcome of the EU legal framework, which is now being expanded territorially, with Turkey emerging as the new geographical territory (European Council 2015) for the enforcement of policies pursued according to the logic of fortressing the EU. The geography of death may become a geography of "closed doors", where borders are opened and closed for certain people only. Others will enjoy temporary (?) immobility with an uncertain fate thanks to EU funds and bilateral agreements. Fences and natural barriers, operating in unprecedentedly complex and unpredictable ways, will facilitate the control of the mechanics of migratory movements.

Greece will likely experience a sudden and significant change in its migrant population, resulting in a social, cultural and political shock at both the small and large scale. The issue of the position of migrants and refugees as *human beings* in Greek society will arise. The fostering of relationships through work, socialisation beyond the narrow social confines of the community, family and participation in political life all constitute gradual steps

towards integration. The absence of such relationships breeds social exclusion, isolation and marginalisation – a phenomenon that does not just apply to migrants but rather to anyone in a similar situation. But migrant integration is a highly visible process, during which migrants are potential targets for ethnoreligious stigmatisation and racism. In instances of social marginalisation, such stigmatisations pose even greater risks (even to migrants' lives) and ultimately lead to the complete exclusion of migrants from social mobility. Furthermore, successful integration does not preclude racism. Thus the coupling of migrant integration with a political culture of acceptance of and respect for the "other" is a precondition (Christopoulos 2013, 72) for an immigration policy committed to social cohesion for all citizens/residents.

BY WAY OF AN EPILOGUE

The spreading of jihadist terrorism on European soil intersects with the migrant-refugee issue, in as far as there are attempts to associate the latter with Islam and xenophobia. The current juncture favours the cultivation of scaremongering policies targeting "foreigners" and Muslims. As has often been done, hiding the actual dimension of the problem, coupled with the ineffectiveness of institutional attempts to deal with it, facilitates the spread of anti-immigrant sentiment across the political spectrum. The Greek case is no exception in this regard, though it may take on different qualitative aspects, such as the slow but sure association between Islamophobia and xenophobia.

But how will migrant and refugee policies focus on the human dimension of their subjects and accept it as a nonnegotiable guiding principle? Is there a simple and fundamental concept that links the imperative to protect the dignity of every human being, and thus of every migrant, regardless of his or her legal status, classification and legal treatment (Suvin 2009; Tsitselikis 2014)? The EU and Greece's now closely interrelated policies must grant and protect the rights that are the legal privilege of all human beings, from the long-term legal migrant to the migrant deported to his or her country of origin against his or her will. Legalisation, that is, the alignment of the reality of the situation with the recognition of rights and obligations, is a prerequisite for a realistic immigration policy free of political manipulation and the myths of public discourse (Papastergiou and Takou 2014).

Debates on immigration often focus on the *rational management* of migratory movements as a *development tool* in economic terms, obscuring the real dimensions of and the causes leading to the mass expatriation of people. These debates are indifferent to what is happening on the other side of the border and to the ways in which security policies are drafted and implemented. The degree to which relationships arising from immigration are regulated "humanely" or "inhumanely" is inextricably linked to explicit or implicit aspects of the distribution of wealth and to the presentation of individual national identities as "under threat" and therefore in need of "protection". Can, then, the ideological normalisation of the misrepresentations of reality and the dominant prejudices be reversed in order to inaugurate a novel notion of "safety for all"? A safety that will guarantee an open Europe (and Greece), that respects its own founding principles, that actively contributes to international peace and sustainable development for all, both within and outside its borders?

BIBLIOGRAPHY AND REFERENCES

Christopoulos, Dimitris. 2013. *Στο ρίσκο της κρίσης* [At the risk of crisis]. Athens: Alexandria.

European Commission. 2011. "A comprehensive European migration policy," http://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=URISERV:jl0059 (4 May 2011).

European Commission. 2015. "A European agenda on migration," http://ec.europa.eu/dgs/home-affairs/what-we-do/policies/european-agenda-migration/background-information/docs/communication_on_the_european_agenda_on_migration_en.pdf (13 May 2015).

European Council. 2015. "Meeting of the EU heads of state or government with Turkey, 29 Nov 2015," http://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/meetings/international-summit/2015/11/29/.

Fotiadis, Apostolis. 2015. *Έμποροι των συνόρων* [Border merchants]. Athens: Potamos.

Hellenic League for Human Rights (HLHR), Greece. 2012. *Μια (άλλη) στρατηγική για το μεταναστευτικό* [A(nother) strategy on migration]. http://www.hlhr.gr/index.php?MDL=pages&SiteID=799.

Papastergiou, Vassilis and Eleni Takou. 2014. *Migration in Greece: Eleven Myths and Even More Truths*. Athens and Brussels: Rosa Luxemburg Foundation.

Suvin, Darko. 2008. "Immigration in Europe today: apartheid or civil cohabitation?" *Critical Quarterly* 50/1–2: 206-233.

Takis, Andreas. 2015. "Πρόλογος: Μετανάστευση, ασφάλεια, δημοκρατία, Ευρώπη [Introduction: Migration, security, democracy, Europe," in *Έμποροι των συνόρων* [Border merchants]. Edited by Apostolis Fotiadis. Athens: Potamos.

Tsitselikis, Kostis. 2014. "Greece," in *Transnational Migration in Transition: State of the Art Report on Temporary Migration, Collected Working Papers from the EURA-NET project*. Edited by Pirrko Pitkänen and Sergio Carrera. University of Tampere: Tampere. www.uta.fi/edu/en/research/projects/eura-net/publications/State-of-the-art_EURA-NET.pdf.

Published by the Rosa-Luxemburg-Stiftung
Office in Greece – Brussels Office

EDITOR-IN-CHIEF
Ioanna Meitani

TEAM
Electra Alexandropoulou
Antonis Bougias
Myriam Klapi
Aliki Kosyfologou
Eftychia Kotini

TEXTS
Electra Alexandropoulou
Mihalis Panayiotakis
Kostis Tsitselikis

SCRIPT/ART
Dimitra Adamopoulou
Thanasis Petrou
Giorgos Tragakis

TRANSLATION FROM THE GREEK
Chloe Howe-Haralambous

COPYEDITING/PROOFREADING
Damian Mac Con Uladh

LAYOUT/COVER
Erifili Arapoglou

PRINTED IN GREECE BY
KETHEA SCHEMA+CHROMA

The publisher would like to thank Marios Lolos for his permission
to base the cover design on a photograph of his of the Lesvos coastline.

This publication is free of charge.
Athens/Brussels
December 2015

This text is also available on the internet:
http://rosalux.gr/publications

For copies, please contact:

Rosa-Luxemburg-Stiftung, Office in Greece
Kallidromiou 17, 10680 Athens, Greece
Tel: +30 210 3613769
www.rosalux.gr

Rosa-Luxemburg-Stiftung, Brussels Office
Avenue Michel-Ange 11
1000 Brussels, Belgium
www.rosalux-europa.info

This publication was funded by the German Federal Foreign Office.