



**Monologues
across the Aegean Sea**

**The journey
and dreams
of unaccompanied
refugee children**

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Athens 2016



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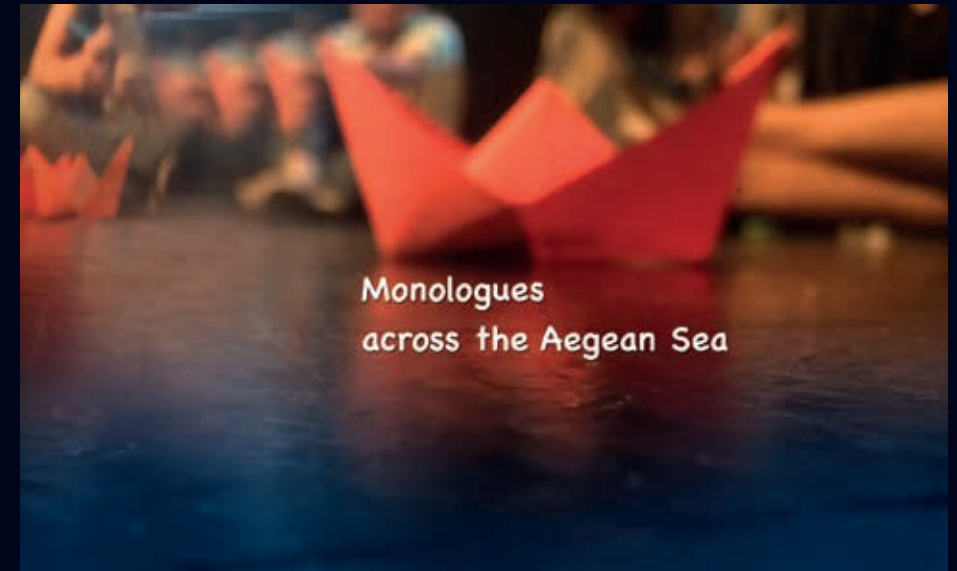
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The content of this book is the result of a series of workshops that took place in accommodation centres for unaccompanied refugee children in the cities of Athens and Patras in Greece, from April to July 2016, in the framework of the action “Monologues across the Aegean Sea”. This action is part of the project “It could be me - It could be you”, an awareness raising project on refugees and human rights using drama and theatre techniques. The project has been organized and implemented since 2015 in Greece by the Hellenic Theatre/Drama & Education Network (TENet-Gr) in partnership with UNHCR, the UN Refugee Agency.

CHILDREN MORE THAN ANYTHING ELSE

The number of people who were forcibly displaced around the world as of the end of 2015 hit a record high of 65 million. Among them, half were children, including children who might be traveling alone or were separated from their parents.

The image of these children has become familiar to us, as more than one million people have crossed the shores of the Aegean Sea seeking safety in Europe, since the beginning of 2015. The majority of these people were forced to leave their countries due to war, violence and persecution. What makes the book "Monologues across the Aegean Sea" so valuable is perhaps the opportunity it gives us to take a step beyond the dominant image, which might be emotional, irritating or even shocking. It is also one step beyond the statistics of displacement, but closer to the personal story of each one of these children.

Every story is unique and reveals with the most direct way the dead-end that these children found themselves in before, or even after, reaching our country. Dead-ends related to the long-standing root causes of displacement, still unaddressed by the international community; to the limited legal pathways available in order to reach a safe place without resorting to smugglers and risking their lives in the perilous Mediterranean crossing, that has cost 7,000 lives since 2015; to the high risk of their exposure to exploitation, violence and abuse during every moment of their journey; to the potential shortcomings of protection and reception conditions in the countries where they will eventually settle.

This is also the case for the protection framework for unaccompanied children in our country. It is a system facing long-standing and serious gaps in the field of reception and accommodation, largely resulting from the unavailability of sufficient facilities and support services. The National Centre for Social Solidarity (EKKA)¹ has registered 3,500 unaccompanied children in the country in 2016, mainly boys over 14 years old. Half of them are on a waiting list to be referred to one of the few shelters for unaccompanied children like the ones managed by NGO PRAKSIS. As a result, some of these children end up in highly inappropriate places such as police stations or sleeping rough, while lacking access to crucial psycho-social, medical and legal support services.

At the same time, the processes to apply for asylum or to reunify with their

1. The National Centre for Social Solidarity is the competent state body that coordinates referral of asylum seekers and unaccompanied minors to appropriate accommodation facilities in Greece. See: www.ekka.org.gr

family members in other EU member states, might be so lengthy, that children tend to confront their future with even more uncertainty and insecurity. It is thus of utmost importance that the EU reinforces and speeds up family reunification and relocation procedures for unaccompanied and separated children, while the national reception and asylum framework should also be enhanced.

It should be noted that many efforts are underway towards this direction by the Greek authorities as well as the UN Refugee Agency and other organisations. These efforts have led to the doubling of available accommodation places for unaccompanied children to more than 1,100, while more are already planned². However, more needs to be done, not only in this field but also regarding the long term reception and integration of the children that will remain in the country.

On the other hand, we couldn't stress enough the importance of our efforts as host community and the progress achieved through small but crucial steps. We are daily witnessing such efforts in the community, in our neighborhoods and schools through initiatives and groups that are trying to create safety and solidarity networks. It is also very promising that the children's stories highlight the support and strength they have found through the "significant others" in their life. It is through their testimonies that we can understand their high expectations from their studies – how happy they are when they are able to go back to school. How much they gain in empowerment and resilience when the others think positively of them. After all, these children are just teenagers who do not want to be treated with pity or suspicion. It is really important to hear a boy saying "I love Greece" and "people here are kind".

All these small but crucial steps that can make the difference in the life of unaccompanied children are described, among others, through the following stories. They remind us that these minors, regardless of their legal status and their country of origin, are first and foremost children. Whether they come from Syria, Afghanistan or Pakistan, they are children who need safety and a life in dignity; children who are entitled to protection, acceptance and support.

Eva Savvopoulou

Communications and Public Information Unit
UNHCR Representation in Greece
www.unhcr.org

October 2016

2. UNHCR has already supported the establishment of over 500 accommodation places for unaccompanied and separated from their family children and is planning to create more in the upcoming period. See more: data.unhcr.org/Mediterranean



Routes

Routes

Aegean Pelagos.
The open sea with its islands.
Images of tragedy,
images of horror.
Among them
images of children,
figures of unaccompanied refugee minors.
We saw them arriving
alone on the island shores.
Alone walking the roads of Greece
to reach the borders.
And because their eyes haunted us
and because there are many ways
to react to horror
we wanted
their thoughts, their memories, their journey
and their dreams
to find a voice.
And this voice,
through the voices of other children of their age
to be heard loudly,
so loudly that it reaches far, as far as possible.

This is how the idea of the “Monologues across the Aegean Sea” was born. An idea that with collective effort, persistence and love, evolved into action.

This action started in April 2016, as part of the project “It could be me- It could be you”. This project aims at raising awareness on human rights and refugee issues and has been implemented by the Hellenic Theatre/ Drama & Education Network (TENet-Gr), in collaboration with UNHCR Representation in Greece, since the beginning of 2015.

From June to April 2016, in the cities of Athens and Patras in Greece, a series of theatre/drama workshops was organised. The participants were unaccompanied children from Syria, Afghanistan, Pakistan, Iran, Morocco and Egypt. Boys between the age of 14 to 18, hosted in the accommodation centre of the Non-Governmental Organisation PRAKSIS¹.

1. PRAKSIS (Programs of Development, Social Support and Medical Cooperation) is an independent non-governmental organisation whose main goal is the design and the implementation of humanitarian programmes and medical interventions. Its main goal is the elimination of social and economic exclusion of vulnerable social groups and the defence of their human rights.



More specifically, in Athens the workshops took place in the accommodation centre STEGI PLUS (+), while in Patras, in the theatre venue "OroPaidio-Free Artistic Expression".

Twenty workshops were completed in each of these two cities. Each session lasted two hours and the participation of the young people was voluntary.

Six drama pedagogues-facilitators (Hellenic Theatre/Drama & Education Network), seven interpreters (UNHCR Greece, NGO PRAKSIS), seven social workers (NGO PRAKSIS) and three psychologists (NGO PRAKSIS) took part in total.

It was a difficult venture, unfamiliar to all of us. A venture that required continuous coordination and collaboration of many people having different specialities, different perspectives and coming from different paths.

But we managed to "meet" with each other. Because what mattered was our goal.

The goal was to record the stories of these young people.

The challenge was big. We moved on because we believe that theatre has the power and the magic quality to open up hearts, unlock feelings, revive experiences, bridge gaps. And thus, through workshops based on theatrical techniques, art and creative writing, twenty eight stories emerged; the content of this book. Teenagers that talk not only about the tragedy they have experienced in their countries and during their journey, but also about what they love and what they like; about their hopes and their dreams.

Like all teenagers!

A book from teenagers, a paper boat book
Is starting its voyage
hoping to meet many other boats
of teenagers, who long to create a world
tailored to their dreams,
a world where everyone will fit in
and will learn about life sharing the same desk
but also of adults, who may remember
those faded words
written on the paper boats' sails of their youth
"hospitality", "humanity", "solidarity".

Hara Tsoukala
Coordinator of the action "Monologues across the Aegean Sea"
July 2016

Facilitators' Note

Facilitators' Note



Children today are brought up in a world that is constantly changing, while basic concepts such as country, home, family, homeland and national identity are being redefined; in a world where populations and people do not have the right to move freely, and the words “refugee” and “migrant” are assumed to be an identity and not an attribute.

From April to July 2016, we took part in the designing and implementation of a series of workshops within the framework of the action “Monologues across the Aegean Sea”, in order to record the stories of unaccompanied refugee children. Minors that had to leave their country of origin and are in the process of moving to Europe. Having in mind the example of the “Gaza Monologues”¹, our intention was to create an open form with a particular content that would give the participants the ability to speak their own mind, thus opening a dialogue with themselves, with their peers and with the international community. In the designing phase of the workshops, we came across the following questions-challenges:

In what way should we approach these young people through a drama/theatre procedure that would respect and recognise their personal experiences?

In what way will their voice be reinforced, multiplied and transformed into action?

In what way will their dreams and hopes for the future be useful as an educational tool for their peers and as a tool that will raise awareness in the broader educational and artistic community?

The above questions, as well as the difficulties deriving from the coexistence of minors from different countries with their own culture, led us to a workshop structure that would take into account these particularities. Our primary goal was to reinforce the cohesion and the dynamics of the group, to empower these young people, and then to establish a relationship of trust with them. The emotional opening of the participants was gradual; through exercises and techniques we helped them “let off steam” and focus on their gradual exposure and expression. The activities were given in a symbolic way, so as to ensure that the children would share their

1. The “Gaza Monologues” were written by students 13 to 17 years old, with the initiative of ASHTAR theatre of Palestine, from November 2009 to April 2010, during the war in Gaza. In Greece, the Hellenic Theatre/Drama & Education Network took part in this international project, by translating the students’ writings in Greek and by organising a series of events with schools and groups of young people. (more information at www.TheatroEdu.gr)



experiences and dreams, unforced and without the fear of exposure. At the beginning of each meeting there was a “warm up” to activate the group. Then, the main part of the workshop followed, where we used theatre games, educational drama, theatre of the oppressed (A. Boal), Playback theater, psychodrama and shadow theatre techniques, so as to develop the subject for each meeting, as well as to introduce that of the next. The last part included creative writing activities and each time, the workshop ended with sharing and reflective activities.

The designing and the implementation of the workshops was in a framework of cooperation and feedback with the PRAKSIS social workers, the coordinators and other collaborators of the project. Our goal was to develop the process along with the participants, listening carefully to their needs and contributing to their empowerment.

During the whole procedure and despite the careful planning, we came across a few difficulties which we tried to face with flexibility, by adjusting the pre-planned activities even during the workshops. The changes in the composition of the group, the volatile psychological state of many minors, the absence of interpreters from certain workshops and the instability of the children’s daily schedule, made our project more difficult. In addition, the workshops coincided with the Ramadan², during which many youths abstained from our meetings. There were times when we wondered whether this project could finally be completed as we had envisioned, and whether we would finally succeed in bypassing all the obstacles mentioned above; however, one big teenage smile as a welcome and a sea of hugs for a goodbye, were enough to make all our doubts disappear. Because, as the artistic director of ASHTAR theatre in Palestine, Iman Aoun, characteristically says: “Theatre is will that becomes action and claims the victory of life”.

**Dionysia Asprogeraka, Giorgos Bekiaris, Vera Lardi,
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Hellenic Theatre/Drama & Education Network

². Ramadan is a religious celebration of fasting for the Muslims. The name comes from the Turkish word ramazan and the corresponding Arabic ramadan. It is also the name of the ninth month of the Muslim year, when according to tradition, the Koran was given to the people so as to guide them in life.



Written by

- Zolman
- Abdallah
- Ehsan
- Inad
- Haris
- Asraf
- Ibrahim
- Mohi
- Amar
- Mustafa
- Ahmet
- Tayab
- Tahar
- Aziz
- Irfan
- Ali
- Mohamad
- Wasif
- Farid
- Mohammad
- Salman
- Usman
- Sarvar
- Amir
- Sahin
- Nadil
- Raf
- Hamid

The names of the children have been changed for protection reasons.

Zolman

My name is Zolman. I am 15 years old, from Afghanistan.

In 2015 I was forced to leave my country because of the Taliban attack in my hometown.

This was not a normal journey. It took three months until I managed to reach Greece. There were many days when I had nothing to eat or drink. I almost drowned in the Aegean Sea.

Maybe it was my parents' blessings, maybe some miracle happened, and I finally made it here. During the journey I got along with everyone and tried to keep a clear mind. This helped a lot.

Many of the people I travelled with drowned in the sea or died of hunger and thirst.

What saved me was Allah and my parents' blessings.

I was asked to draw my life and I drew a line of trees. The story of these trees resembles my story. Ever since I remember myself I was like a small green tree. I grew up, like all small trees. My parents, like the earth, watered me and gave me whatever I needed. But suddenly everything changed. Destruction took the place of good times. The war started. And I found myself like a small, weak tree in the middle of the storm. I had to leave, there was no other choice.

So I set off for an unknown destination.

After a long time and many difficulties I arrived in a foreign, but fertile land. I want to start a new life and grow up here. I want to give fruit and, along with other people, make good use of these fruit. I hope I will never, ever have to face such a storm again.

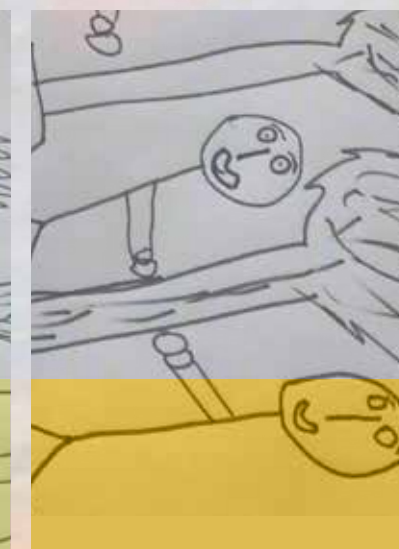
Now, here in Greece I feel better. I can walk out of the house and go to school without fear. When I see my classmates I feel very happy. Little by little I see the future with hope. My dream is to practice Taekwondo on a professional level. I imagine myself as a Taekwondo Murabbi; which means a coach! If this happens I will be very proud.

I am trying to learn your language because I have so many things to say and share with you. I want to learn to speak Greek well. I want to finish school and find a job.

I would like to learn about the life of the children my age who have similar problems. To help them, along with other people, live in peace and go to school.

One last thing I would like to tell you is about a magic flower. This flower gives off a magnificent fragrance. Whoever touches the flower bears its fragrance and smells beautiful forever. But if it stops being watered, the fragrance is lost and the flower dies from sorrow. I never want this flower to fade. I wish it could live forever. Because I want to enjoy its fragrance forever.

July 2016



Abdallah

My name is Abdallah. I am 17 years old, from Syria.

I come from a poor family of eight; my parents, three brothers and three sisters. Despite our poverty we lived a joyful life without problems in Damascus.

My neighborhood is poor. Good people live there. In Syria I was happy because I was with my family. Every morning when I woke up and saw my mother and father, we would laugh. Then I would go to school and do all sorts of things with my friends. I know we were naughty in school, yet we were happy.

Everything ended suddenly when the war broke out. The beautiful squares and parks became war zones and the market was full of weapons and thieves ... Lovely places, archaeological sites were destroyed and sold. There are still people there who resist death and hunger.

But I had to leave my country. I arrived in Turkey where, with some friends, I worked hard thirteen hours a day for five months. Time passed fast while working. I decided to seek a better life so, on the 5th of March 2016, I left Smyrna and headed off to Europe.

We embarked on the ships of death and arrived on a deserted island. From there, with a small boat, they took us to the island of Kos. I was planning to go to the Greek-Serbian borders and from there to Germany but I met a translator from Syria who advised me to get help from NGO PRAKSIS. After a few medical tests I stayed in a refugee camp, where I met a few guys who became like brothers to me. We had good days together. Later they sent me to Patras, a nice touristic city. There, they introduced me to an art teacher who helped me organise an important art exhibition; the best thing that has ever happened in my whole life!

So now I am in Greece. There are times that I feel like a beggar in the gutter. But I believe that with effort and a lot of patience, I can be an important person and be able to offer to society. I have met a lot of friendly people and it is very important for me to be surrounded by them.

I owe it to myself to improve my life and follow my dreams. I will continue trying to make them all come true.

Syria, we will come back!

July 2016



Ehsan

My name is Ehsan. I am 17 years old, from Afghanistan.

I send my regards to everyone my age who is reading this letter. I wrote this for you, dear friends.

My life seems like a wobbly ladder that always loses its balance. Just like the war in Afghanistan. There has been war in our country for 34 years now. Our houses have been knocked down. Many of us lost our parents and siblings in the war and in terrorist actions by bad people.

I lost my father and mother in Afghanistan. It was very difficult for me. After the death of my parents I didn't have anyone and couldn't live there anymore. I was too young to work, so I had to leave. I went to Iran. I had relatives and friends there. As I grew older though, after a few years, I couldn't stay in their house anymore. So I found a job to cover my expenses. I was still young for such a hard job. Construction sites! I worked there for a few months and always tried to save some money from the little I earned. Three years passed ...

Many Afghans live in Iran. But in this country, nobody pays attention to us, no one respects us. They insult us. They treat us horribly. The way we are treated forces us to leave their country. I realised that with a difficult life like that, I could never finish school. That's why I decided to come to Europe. I traveled a long way, so that at last, I can study and change my life.

I reached Greece and I am still here because the road to other countries is closed for refugees.

I would like to explain to you the reason why we leave our country and

come to yours. We came to countries like yours because our life was in danger. Some of us don't have a home, a mother, a father or siblings anymore. We haven't come here to have fun, we were forced to. We would like you to help us learn the language and get to know your culture. When you see older kids in a lower grade at school, don't make fun of them. Help them, support them!

I hope that in about six years from now I will reach a country where I will be able to fulfill my dreams. I dream to study. To finish school, marry the person I love and live the life I want. A happy life. In my house I will hang a photograph of me as a child that my parents gave me. This photograph is of great value to me because it is all I have from them. My house will be my hope. I wish to forget the war and the hard times I've been through. I want to live the good days of the future.

July 2016



Inad

My name is Inad. I am 16 years old, from Egypt.

I'm yearning for my country and the pyramids.

I like playing football, PlayStation and drinking coffee.

In my country we could do whatever we wanted with my friends. We went for walks in the evenings; we went to the seaside and teased the girls; we climbed up on the roof and smoked secretly from my father, and when I came back home I walked barefoot not to wake him up.

I loved a girl. I loved her a lot. I loved her since school and she loved me back. A lot! All the boys wanted her, but she wanted only me. We talked every day. But when her father found out and told mine, my father scolded me. I never saw her again and this made me very sad. I love Greece. I go to the workshop every week. There, I made new friends and we also went for a nice excursion.

But there are times I don't love anything in my life ...

I often have dreams. In one of my dreams I am walking in the desert for a long time; the sun has worn me off. At one point I meet a dog that is dying from thirst. I take off my shoe, I fill it up with water and give the dog to drink. After a long time I find some people to keep me company. I continue the journey with someone and we find a carriage pulled by donkeys. We ride on it. Then we meet two people fighting. We separate them, we take them with us and arrive here.

I dream of going to Italy to find my brother. I also dream to unite with my family again in Egypt.

I love you a lot.

July 2016



Haris



My name is Haris. I am 16 years old, from Pakistan.

Hello! On this piece of paper I write about the good and the bad times of my life.

When I was a child I didn't like school. I hated studying, although I knew that learning requires effort and hard work. One year I failed three courses and I had to take the exams again. Eventually I studied hard, I took the exams and passed. As I grew older I started to like school. One of the best days of my life was when I finished studying the Koran in the Islamic school.

We had a lot of problems back in Pakistan. One day my parents decided I should leave home and go to Europe. They thought this was the only way for me to be safe.

I've been walking for three years now ...

I started the journey to Greece with some friends of mine. It took us a long time, but we finally made it with the help of God and my two strong feet ... I am a fast runner when needed.

Now I live here, in Greece. It may sound strange to you, but the hardships I confronted in Athens were greater than the ones I faced during the journey. When I arrived in Greece I didn't know the language and I

couldn't speak to anyone. I didn't know the way of life and I couldn't deal with basic problems. At first I stayed with some people I knew and then I applied for accommodation in a shelter. Now I live here. I go to school, I learn Greek and hang out with the other young people. Almost everything is fine. After eight months in Greece I can speak the language quite well. I have a strong mind and will. So it's easy for me to learn quickly how to read and write in a foreign language. I am happy that little by little I can communicate with the people around me. The day they selected me for the local volleyball team I felt even happier! People here are good and offer their help. This helps me to start thinking about the future ...

I dream of having two houses. One here and one in Pakistan. I would like my house here to be in Voula, South Attica. It would be a detached house by the sea and the hills with four or five rooms. I would like to have a white dog and a cat and be able to live with friends. I would also like to "bring" a volleyball court from the past. But unfortunately this cannot be done. So I would like to build one like the court we used to have back in my hometown in Pakistan. How can I forget my favourite place on earth? The place where I met my friends and had a great time? Oh, how I miss them! Will I ever see them again? At times like this I wish I had wings ... this way I could fly and meet my friends again. That would make me feel so happy and free!

You are living in Europe, so you have never faced problems like these.

July 2016



Asraf

**My name is Asraf. I am 15 years old,
from Afghanistan.**

I left my country to come to Europe.

The greatest problem of the journey was the sea in Greece. As we were crossing the Aegean Sea from Turkey our boat broke down. Everybody was desperate apart from me. I never gave up hope. In the end the police boat came. At first I thought it was the Turkish coast guard. I feared they would send me back. But these were men of the Greek police. It was they who helped us and brought us to Greece.

This is what happened. Now it is over.

And I keep on hoping.

July 2016



Ibrahim

My name is Ibrahim. I am 17 years old,
from Syria.

I lived with the time and the people. Time is a liar,
I heard them saying. But I saw that the traitors
and liars are the people. Life is a pint of beer and
a cigarette, so we can forget ...

My favourite place is the sea. With nostalgia and
love I remember the days I was swimming in Tartus,
in Syria, and in swimming pools in Damascus. When
I swim, I feel the blood run fast in my veins.

My dearest person is my mother. Sometimes it's
like I can see her with tears in her eyes; her tears
dripping in a glass jug.

In Greece my favourite time is when I am in the
drama workshop with the other young people.

July 2016



Mohi



My name is Mohi. I am 17 years old, from Afghanistan.

My favourite season is the summer because I have time for vacation, I feel free and I can go swimming that I like so much.

My story starts in a maternity hospital in Afghanistan. I remember my family moving to another city where I started going to school. I was the best football player in our school. I also remember my mother's illness that lasted two whole years. Luckily she recovered. But then one more difficulty arose. My father's business wasn't going well and we had financial problems. Once more we made it.

But a big war broke out in my country! I had to leave the city. This journey is the most important thing that happened in my life. It changed all of my goals and hopes. I travelled for a long time through Iran and Turkey on any means of transport you can imagine. What helped me was my strong will, along with the hope that I will finally arrive at a safe place. This is how I went on despite all the difficulties. Oh, also the English language! Many times in this journey I thought of my older brother; I am grateful to him because he taught me how to speak English, even though it's such a difficult language. And something more; I was very kind with my co-travelers, and always kept my parents' blessings in my heart. Finally I reached the Greek island of Chios.

One year ago such a journey hadn't even crossed my mind.

Now, despite the hardships I am facing, I have started a new life. I learn German because I want to study in Germany and then work in a bank. Or become a football player! I would so much like to be a professional football player and have my name heard all around the world! To run like

the wind and nobody outrun me, like the super-hero that I have created in my mind. And, as all super-heroes, I would also have a weakness. When I'd see a beautiful girl in the crowd ... eh, then I would lose it ... the ball, I mean.

Now I dream of the future and I am making plans ...

I dream of a house in Frankfurt. It has glass walls and a very big garden with a lawn. It has a swimming pool by the garage and my car is a KIA Motors. I want to build a special room in this house where I will put my mother's laughter, a remembrance I always want to have by my side.

There is also something I want to say to you, to the young people my age: always appreciate the peace in your country. Oh, how I wish I could be in my city and live in peace! How I wish I lived and went to school there!

I have so many memories, so much nostalgia for my country!

There is one place on earth that I love most of all. It's my uncle's garden; a garden full of trees and fruit and a spring with crystal clear water. That's where I went when I felt blue. If I could speak to this garden, I would say: "I wish all your vines were loaded with fruit, now in the summer. I miss you so much! I'd like to sit by your spring. I'd like to be there, with my feet in the water and just listen to the birds sing, nothing more. I would like to speak to the "elderly" trees; if only they were still alive".



Amar

**My name is Amar. I am 15 years old,
from Syria.**

I love my country and I wish to
return to my city, Aleppo.

Now I am in Greece. I feel great
loneliness at this point of time.
I feel as if I am nothing.

I would like to go to Denmark to meet
my brother who is already there and
stay with him.

My dream is to be a famous swimmer.

Regards to all my loved ones.

July 2016

Mustafa

My name is Mustafa. I am 17 years old, from Afghanistan.

I was born in Kabul. My father and mother were also born there. I will never forget how good it felt to be in my country. Now the only thing left, is that feeling and me ...

My favourite place on earth is Maidan Wardac in Afghanistan. My ancestors were born there. And so was I. I love this place and I will never stop loving it.

However, it was impossible to continue living in Afghanistan. There was no hope, no light, no progress there ... Only invasions, war, terrorism, the Taliban ... That's why I had to leave.

I went to Turkey but when we left for Greece our boat broke down in the middle of the sea. It was 3 a.m. Everyone was desperate, everyone said we were going to die ... A quarter of an hour later the police came and they put us in their boat. They took us to an island. I had hope. I knew that somehow we would be saved.

I came to Greece but couldn't go any further because the borders were closed. I am disappointed. But I still hope and believe I'll finally reach the place of my dreams.

I love Afghanistan and I want to ask the government to unite so that we can rebuild our country. Oh, how I wish it would stand again on its own two feet! I wish we, the Afghan people, were not obliged to migrate to other countries where everyone sees us as terrorists!

This happens because some people who are in Europe take part in acts of terrorism. So now everyone thinks we are all the same. No one sees Afghan people with sympathy.

I didn't have the chance to live very long in my country; and now I have



become a visitor ... a visitor ... a visitor ... Of course, all this time that I am in Patras, I feel great joy. I have found many friends. I enjoy holidays and birthdays. I feel I am experiencing something new, something liberating. I feel I am getting the most out of life. I want to thank you and all the organisations that are helping us. I want to thank you because you taught us a lot.

There are also a few things I would like to write for those people who think we are lying. To you, I want to say that each finger of a hand is different, they are not the same. We are all human. We might do something wrong ... if so, the other people should show us what we did wrong, so that we realise it and not do it again.

I left my country for a better future. I feel calm because I know I did the best I could.

I hope I will go to the country I want. To be a person of value for my homeland. I'm still very young but, if life is on my side, I would very much like to do something good for my country.

I also hope that someday there will be peace and I can go back ... No place on earth is like home.

I have only one thing to ask you. Forget me not.

July 2016





Ahmet

My name is Ahmet. I am 17 years old, from Syria.

I wish this pencil could express the hardships that the people of Syria face in their lives.

I long for freedom and I love my homeland deeply. Freedom has planted hope in the souls of the children that shed their blood for it. This hope is what the forces of war tried to ravage.

Now I feel like a street child because I don't know where I will be next. I hope that in the future I will see better days; that I will be a doctor, a surgeon. I wish to make a name for myself and be loved. But in order to make my dreams come true, I have to bear the difficulties ...

I dream that someday I will return to my country and see my parents and friends.

July 2016

Tayab

My name is Tayab. I am 17 years old, from Pakistan.

"Fellow countrymen who return to our beloved country". This is my favorite song. Back In Pakistan I lived a happy life with my parents, my brothers and sisters and my relatives. I went to school and played with my friends. At first I went to a small school and then to a bigger one. I was a very good student and I loved school. My dream was to finish my studies and join the army. I like the army a lot and I wanted to be a Faoutzi¹. But I didn't make it because I had to flee Pakistan. There was terrorism in my country. This is the reason I left. The terrorists destroyed the schools and didn't allow us to continue our studies. I don't like war and fighting. So I left school, I left my country. My life was in great danger.

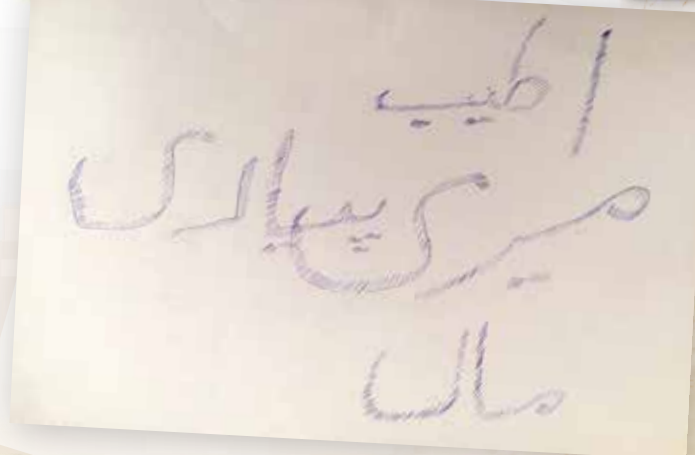
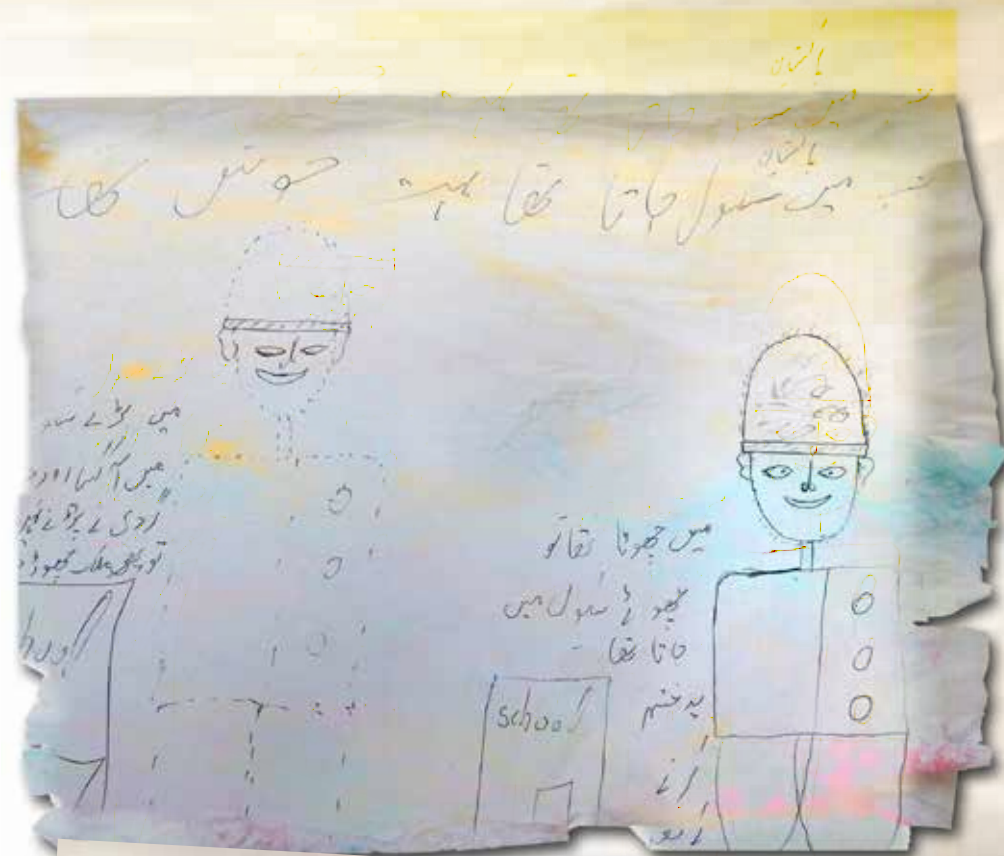
Now I am in Greece and I ask you to help me, so that I can start going to school again and live a normal life. First I want to finish my studies and, God willing, find a job. I dream of the moment when I will be with my family. My family, and especially my mother, is my very first thought when I wake up in the morning.

I want to thank the Greeks. They are very kind.

Thank you.

July 2016

1. Faoutzi: an army officer



Tahar

**My name is Tahar. I am 18 years old,
from Morocco.**

The worst time of my life was when I left my country. I left because of poverty. I crossed the desert to reach Turkey and from there I arrived in Greece. At the borders of FYROM I found huge difficulties.

In the end I didn't manage to cross.

Now I feel homeless, I feel like a beggar.

I dream of becoming famous and successful.

This is how I imagine myself after all this pain and hardships.

It seems to me that we must suffer in the beginning. We have to be patient. Nothing comes easy. And as the saying goes, "I see a good future that is giving me the finger".

July 2016



Aziz

My name is Aziz. I am 16 years old, from Afghanistan.

I was born in Afghanistan and that is where my childhood memories come from. There is no place as beautiful as my country. For some time I traveled with my friends, I went to Kabul and had a good time.

I dream, I long for my country. I hope someday I will be able to go back and live there. Afghanistan means everything to me. I will never forget it. My parents live there, my home is there. There is no home in a foreign land.

My loved ones are my parents. I want to see them again.

I've missed them so!

My favourite place on earth is the football field. Also I love the place where I can meditate and relax.

Our biggest problem in Afghanistan is safety because we belong to a certain tribe. We are Hazara, and the Taliban cut heads off saying: "You are Hazara, you are Hazara!" I was forced to leave my family and travel with a thousand hopes to reach Europe. But the FYROM borders were closed.

For three years I was traveling and was away from home. I felt as if I weren't alive. I didn't enjoy life. These three years cannot be compared with one single day in Afghanistan.

Here in Greece I am almost happy. I like living in your country and I feel safe but I still don't feel well since I haven't found what I'm looking for. In the meantime, my life is not getting better, it's even worse. Every day in the foreign land feels like a thousand days. Unfortunately, it seems there is no other way.

"Homeland, your love is my pride ...

Homeland, for you I will sacrifice ...

For you I give body and soul ..."

It makes no difference if I write or not. No one can understand me anyway. My writings show how nostalgic I am.

My Afghan friends, I hope you won't read these words. But if you do, do not translate them for anyone else.

July 2016



Irfan

**My name is Irfan. I am 17 years old,
from Pakistan.**

I am very sad and worried, because I have left my country and family behind; my parents, my brothers and my sisters.

This is my life's big problem!

I have come here because life in my country had become very difficult. I was forced to leave. Of course, I feel very happy that I have overcome the great obstacles of the journey and managed to arrive in Greece.

I would like to find refuge in your country. To seek asylum here and be given the chance to go to school in order to become a good and useful person.

In the future I imagine myself arriving in a refugee reception centre in Germany. I don't know how life is in that country and I don't know its laws either. But I will gradually learn. I have heard that the German state gives you the chance to study. My studies will last three years. When I finish I will be an electrician. I will find a job and I will be happy. I will be able to support all my family.

The happiest day of my life will be when I return to my country.

July 2016



Ali

My name is Ali. I am 15 years old, from Afghanistan.

The first memory of myself is when I was five years old. I don't remember much, but I remember I had a good, pleasant life. Only a year passed when the war broke out. My family and I were forced to leave the country. We belong to the Hazara tribe you see, and for that reason we are persecuted in Afghanistan.

When I set out for my journey I didn't know where it would end. Till then I had a different view about journeys. I wanted so much to travel. But after all I went through, I changed my mind. This was not a normal journey. We didn't know what to take along and we didn't have what was needed. We hadn't arranged for a ticket beforehand, since we didn't know our destination.

I completed the journey alone, with Allah's help. It wasn't important to me where it would end. The only thing that mattered was to leave from Afghanistan safe and live in a world without war. War brings great misery; it is a great obstacle. I told myself that I will overcome all difficulties and I won't let tiredness bring me down. My endurance helped a lot. But others didn't make it. The journey was too hard. Many nights I

slept without water and food. I saw and I went through things you can't imagine.

Once while attempting to cross a country's borders, the police caught me and I was put in jail for twelve days. I didn't know what would become of me. I was alone among seventy five people from other countries, jailed for various reasons. Even for serious crimes. I had to go on a three day hunger strike in order to be freed.

I continued my journey until I arrived in Greece. The fact that today I am here with you is either the result of a miracle or of a strength I didn't even know I possessed.

I want to learn German. I would like to learn many languages, like our interpreter in this workshop. This way I will be able to communicate with everyone. However, I don't want to forget my mother tongue. I feel relieved in Europe and I hope I will be able to live here. I feel I have arrived at a peaceful and safe shore. But there are still some obstacles I must overcome, before I am able to make my dreams come true. With patience and persistence I will make it!

July 2016



Mohamad

**My name is Mohamad. I am 15 years old,
from Syria.**

I was born in 2000 in Aleppo. In 2012 we left our home and went to a village. We stayed there for a month and then we went to Turkey. Then my father died. My brother and I worked there for four years. Then we left from there too and came to Greece. We've been living in the PRAKSIS accommodation centre ever since.

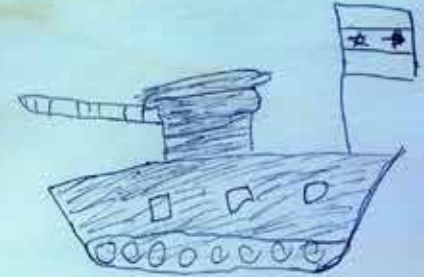
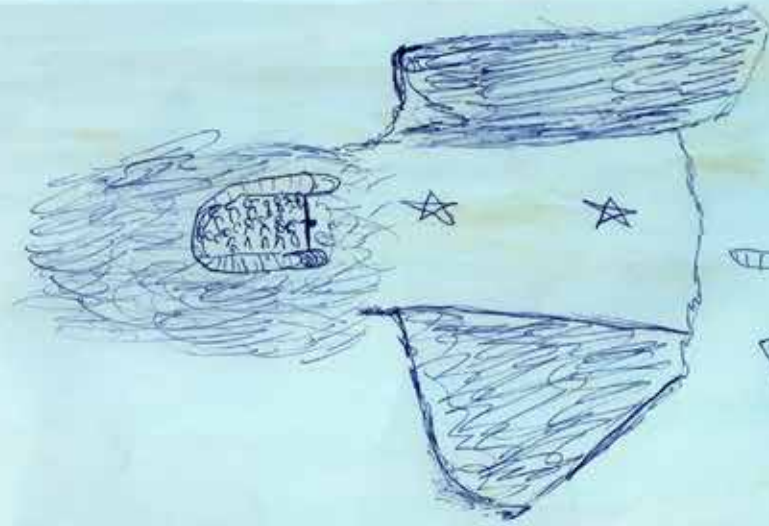
I like driving a motorcycle.

The most beautiful place for me is Syria. I remember my mother cooking in the kitchen of our home.

I remember my school.

I dream of going to Denmark to my brother who lives there with his wife.

July 2016



Wasif

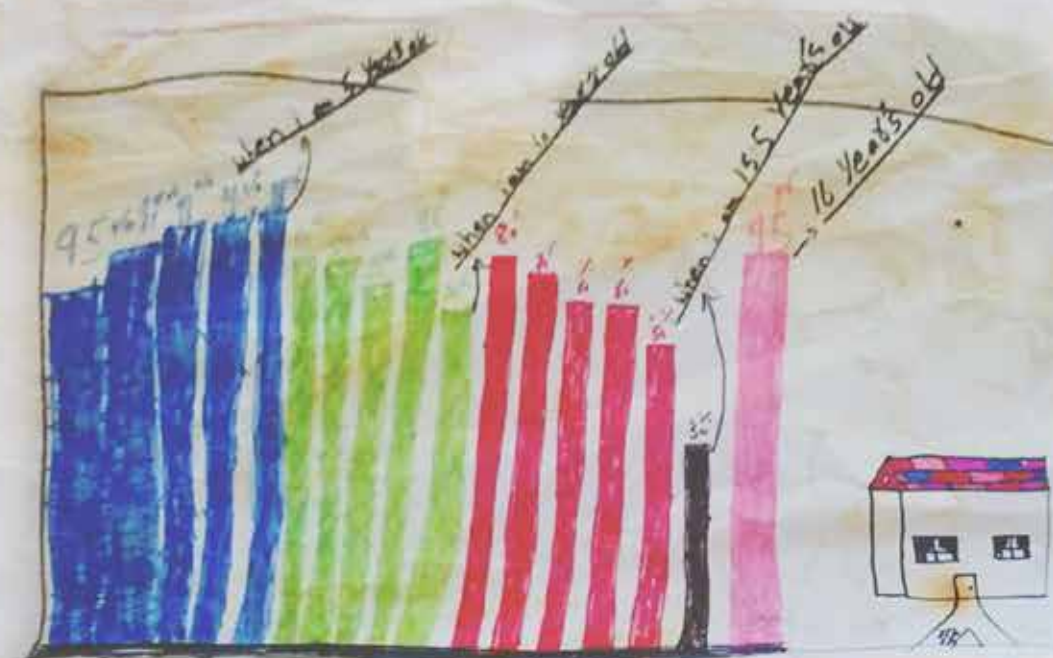
My name is Wasif. I am 16 years old, from Pakistan.

The first five years of my life were very nice. When I became seven years old I went to school in a beautiful town, Gujranwala. A little later my family moved to Islamabad where I continued school. But my father's business wasn't going well and my parents didn't have the money to pay for my studies. These were difficult years. Many times I thought how nice it would be if I had a magic stick to make all peoples' wishes come true. For myself, I would ask for a lot of money! When I grew up I started thinking about real solutions to our problems. I decided to leave my country and go to another in order to work and continue my studies. To start a new life.

So I set off for Greece. The journey was difficult; my life was threatened many times. There are still marks on my feet ... But I made it, first of all with the help of God. The fact that I am tall, I run fast and have a strong mind, also helped. I could quickly decide which way to go in order to reach my destination faster. Finally after three months, I arrived in Greece. The people here helped me. They gave me water, food, a house to live.

Now I go to school. I want to finish my studies, to find a job, to settle and help my parents back in Pakistan. I want to stay in Greece and become a tour guide. I have already begun to study foreign languages. Greek, English, German ... I like History and in school I learned about Alexander the Great. I imagine myself guiding tourists in the museum and telling them about Alexander the Great, the first President of Greece! Alexander the Great was a very important man who conquered a lot of cities where people with different civilisations lived. And he managed to unite them. But then he died and these cities started fighting one another and were finally destroyed. This is the reason why Greece is so small.

I believe that in three years I will have succeeded. I want to make a



lot of money from my work and earn the respect of others. I would like to have a girlfriend but even if I don't, it's okay.

I dream of a house on a Greek island, where I would go to with a helicopter. It will be a detached house with a big garden for my dog and my horse. It will have a pool and a parking lot for my car, a Nissan. From my previous house I will take my bed, a few clothes and all necessary things for the kitchen. It will have a space where I will hang a lot of pictures with pigeons. In my town in Pakistan we have a lot of pigeons. My friends and I used to gather and play a game. Each one of us would let his pigeons fly free and then call them back. The one to whom most pigeons came back to was the winner.

I often think of my school in Pakistan where I used to meet my best friend. I trusted him a lot. He was the only one who knew about my journey. I will never forget the day we chatted on messenger after a long time. He told me that when I left he quit school because there was no point in him going without me. I scolded him! I told him that he must continue and finish school. Otherwise how will he get the student visa he needs in order to come and visit me?

Farid

My name is Farid. I am 17 years old, from Syria.

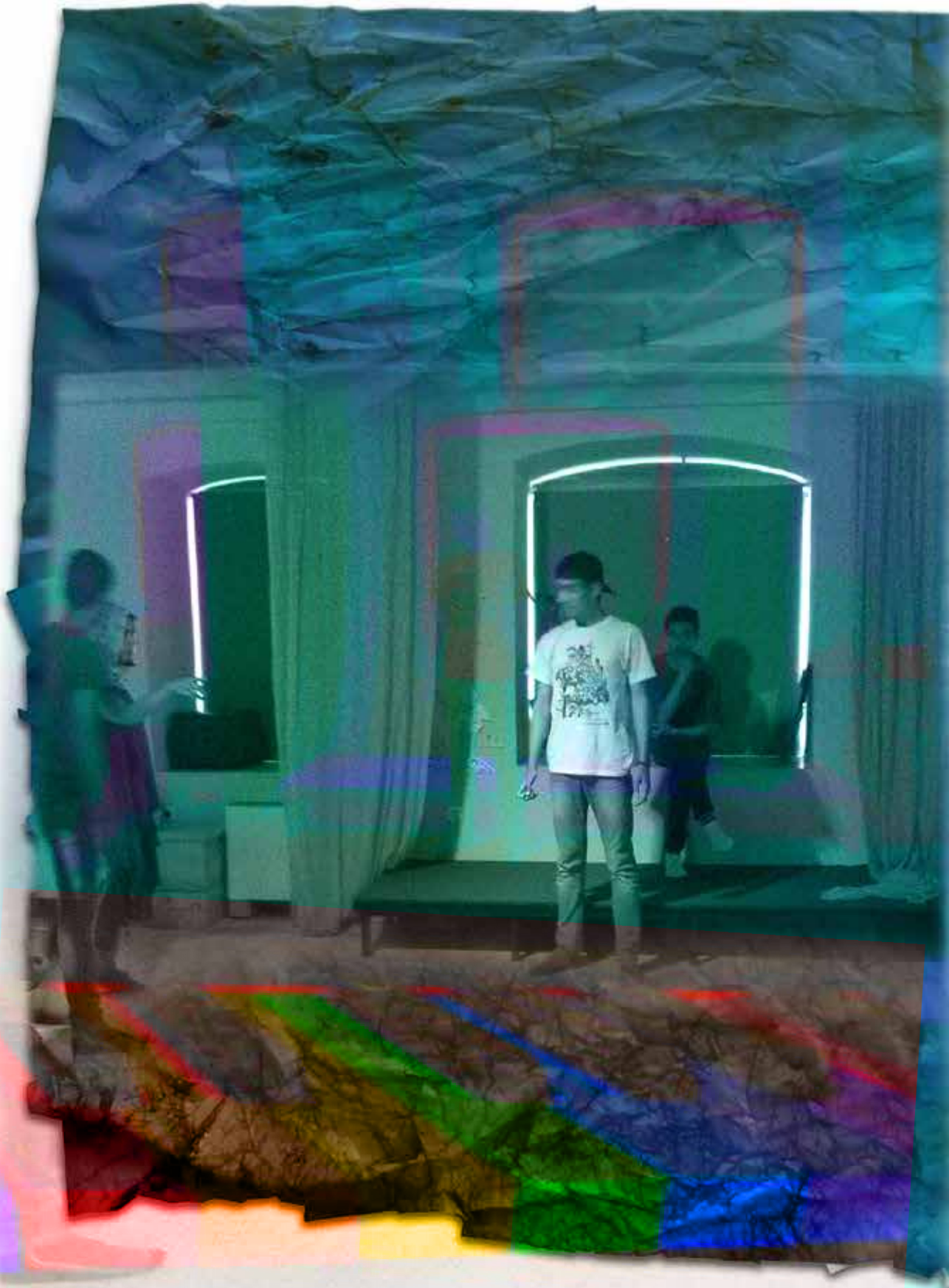
They asked me which is the most beautiful place for me; the answer is my city in Syria, the place where I was born and raised.

The best memories I have from Syria was when all the family gathered together and we would eat and laugh. I long for Damascus and the old neighbourhoods. I hope to return someday and revive my memories; to meet my friends, drink and smoke.

In the beginning of 2016 I left Syria for Turkey where I stayed for three months. There I met someone to whom I gave money to get me to the island of Lesbos. Then the Red Cross sent me to Patras. Here I feel happy with my friends and have fun with the members of the group.

The most important thing for me is to be able to meet my brother in Austria and live there with him. I dream of becoming a pilot, so I can come back to Greece and see you again.

July 2016



Mohammad

My name is Mohammad. I am 15 years old, from Afghanistan.

I left my home and my country because of the war and the political instability and fled to Europe. Forests, roads, mountains and then roads again; this is the setting of my journey. The first country I went to was Iran, but I couldn't study there because of my nationality. I couldn't be a football player either, which is my big dream. My parents helped me to continue my journey. I walked all the way to Turkey and then the sea brought me to Greece where I am now.

Most of you may think: "Why do these people go to a lower grade in school?" The reason is that we, in Afghanistan, couldn't go to school because of the war. This is why we came to your country. I hope we don't bother you. I am here so that I can study, in order to become a useful person for society. I want to learn many things from you and maybe, you too, will learn something from me. I hope we can become friends and not fight each other.

I want my future home to look like my family home, so as to live up my memories. I want it to be close to nature, among the trees, to live there with my family and breathe fresh air. On the wall I will hang a picture of my family in Afghanistan. I want to marry a cultured and virtuous woman, have a good life and face life's challenges together. I hope my children like this house and never feel deprived of anything. I also want my children to go to school and manage to get along with other people.

My dream is to be a successful civil engineer. I want to go to the United Kingdom. I also want to visit countries with a rich history, to study their civilisation, culture and customs. I would also like to go to countries in a state of war and poverty in order to learn even more ...

July 2016



Salman



My name is Salman. I am 14 years old, from Pakistan.

I love summer! In the summer the weather is good and you can go swimming every day. Schools are closed and I have three whole months to play with my friends.

Since I was a small kid I wanted to come to Europe. I have an uncle in Germany. I asked my parents to send me many times, but they couldn't. Finally they made the decision and I set off on my journey from the village I lived, together with a cousin from my mother's side. He is 16, a little older than me. We travelled together.

I can run fast, even in difficult conditions. I am also very strong! A bus took us to a big city, Karachi. Then we passed to Iran in small boats. And then on a bus again to Tehran. From there we changed vehicles many times in order to reach a village at the border of Iran and Turkey. Next destination, Istanbul. Then again buses and cars. Then we crossed the sea and landed on a Greek island that I don't remember the name of. Afterwards with the help of God, we arrived in Athens. We travelled for two months. I am very happy that I am here. From now on I'll see what I can do.

I want to go to Germany to find my aunt. My aunt is already there. But for now I am in Greece and I can't leave.

In any case I have to learn the language of the country I am going to, so that I can quickly find a job. Then I will find a girl and marry her. The truth is that I don't feel ready yet because I don't speak German. I am afraid I won't be able to communicate and that will create many problems.

I dream of becoming a manager, a businessman! To live in Germany and run a computer company.

I dream of a house, a detached house with three bedrooms and a pool. It will have a big garden and, of course, a garage with four cars ... two old and two new. I'll have a cat as well. If I could bring something from the past to this house ... let me think ... that would be my little dog and the birds I used to have in Pakistan. I think I will always remember the park close to my parents' house. I love that place.

It is very important for me to be a good person and that is what I am trying to achieve. For me a hero is a boy who shows and expresses his love for his country. A boy that gains power by saluting Pakistan's flag. A boy that ... somehow, once, a dog ate his ear! But this is a different story. If I ever meet this boy I will ask him to tell me how his life is and how he feels. I don't want him to do anything for me ... ok, if he insists I'll ask him to send me a lot of girls!

I am a little teaser, I know! I joke around a lot and I get into trouble!

July 2016

Usman

My name is Usman. I am 16 years old, from Pakistan.

Pakistan is a big country. I love my homeland very much. The scenery and its surroundings are of great beauty. The food is delicious.

The people in my country belong to different religions.

Most of them are Muslims. They come from many tribes. The women and the girls have no rights. But children respect their mothers.

In Pakistan the state gives no rights to the simple citizens. There is violence, terrorism and the Taliban do a lot of ugly things. The simple people, despite being blocked by the police, abandon the country because their lives are in danger. They go to other countries and seek asylum. This is the reason I left too and came here, to Greece.

Worst of all is politics. I don't like politics. I hate politicians; they have destroyed the country. Day by day my homeland takes a step back. In Pakistan the only thing you hear is about poverty. We produce a lot of goods but people consume British products. The only positive thing is that we are an independent country.

I love my homeland but there is a lot of terrorism. Destruction and dangers are so extreme, I cannot live there anymore.

July 2016



Sarvar

My name is Sarvar. I am 16 years old, from Afghanistan

I love autumn because the leaves on the trees turn red and orange, even though my favourite colour is sky blue. I like to observe the trees because they remind me of my life and my family. Tall trees with lots of fruit bring back memories of the good life I had as a child. They remind me of my sister's birth and the new light she brought into our house. Barren trees without leaves remind me of the difficult times of loss that caused the withering of our family.

I had to leave my country and come to Europe because of the war. There was nothing I could do back in Afghanistan. I couldn't go to school like you do. I couldn't even play football, I couldn't do anything ...

Now I am in Greece and the first thing that comes to my mind when I wake up is a better future. I imagine that in seven years from now I will be in Austria. I will have been granted asylum and I will have started my studies. At the same time I will be working as a tailor with a good salary. I will finish university studies and I will be a lawyer. The day I graduate I will show the diploma to my parents and make them proud. My brothers will also be studying in order to be successful. I will help them. I hope that one day I will be able to go to Iran and Afghanistan for vacation to see my friends and relatives who still live there.

For this reason I am asking you not to see me only as a refugee from Afghanistan, but to accept me as one of you. I want to be your friend and get to know your country's customs and traditions.

I want to be like you, to live like you.

I ask you to be kind and friendly to each other.

War can only bring sorrow.

July 2016





Amir

**My name is Amir. I am 16 years old,
from Afghanistan.**

My greatest problem is war and poverty in my country. Forty years of war, insecurity and poverty have made Afghanistan a country with a lot of problems. This is why I decided to come to Europe, seeking a new life.

The greatest part of my journey wasn't easy. I faced a lot of obstacles. But I managed to come to Greece. Now one more obstacle I have to face is closed borders. I hope I will overcome this one too. I also hope peace and serenity will come back for good to Afghanistan.

July 2016

Sahin

My name is Sahin. I am 15 years old, from Iran.

If I made an advertisement about my country, I would surely show Iran's famous rugs, the Milad Tower –where the radio station is located– and the new airplanes bought by the state. But I would also show a photograph of the ruined monuments and I would speak for the people of Iran ... the simple, humble people.

I belong to the Kurdish minority and there, in our country, we are very restricted. We don't have freedom, nor do we have the civil rights that the rest of the people have. I wanted to study in a military school, but the Kurds that live in Iran are not allowed to study. At one point my parents got politically involved and from then on my life was put in danger. So I left Iran and travelled all by myself.

I made this journey with the help of my parents. They were the ones who gave me the right to keep on dreaming. I was also supported by my relatives that live in Norway. I would very much like to live with them.

During my journey the people in Greece and in Turkey helped me a lot. You see I didn't have anyone. Luckily I spoke English! This way I could easily communicate and gather information. I proved to be very strong and endured all difficulties.

I remember I once made up a woman superhero in my mind. This woman has very long hair and a special gift: whoever touches her hair remains young and strong forever. But as all heroes, she also has a weakness. If someone cuts her hair, it never grows back again. And she stays forever sad.

When I arrived in Greece I was filled with joy. I almost forgot all the obstacles I encountered in my journey. The Greek people were very kind to me. They still help me. Here I feel free and I am not afraid of anything and anyone.

I want to tell you more ...

If I drew my life on a piece of paper, I would put down my worst experiences. But I would also put down the best. You would find everything

on this drawing. I would do that so you could see it too. My best memories are from the time I lived in Iran with my parents. I remember the time when my father, my friends and I would play, go to the beach and the gym. I also had a dog that I loved a lot. But even then not everything was all right. My worst memory is when my mother separated from my father and I never saw her again.

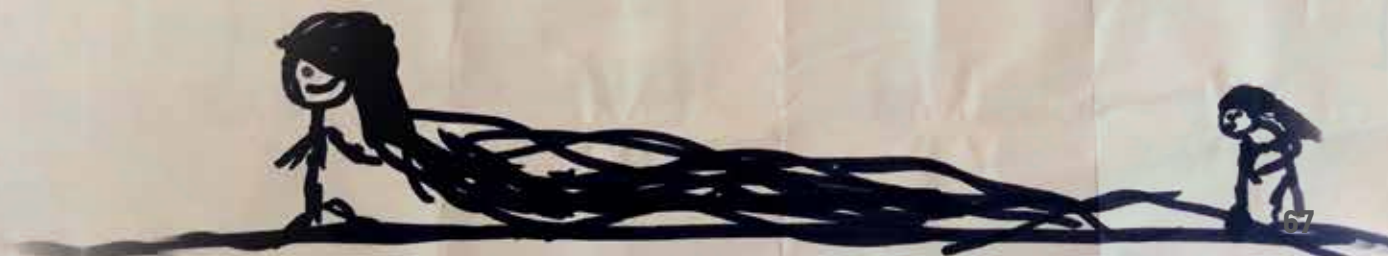
Fortunately there is a place where I always went when I wasn't feeling well and needed to calm down. It is in Iran, in the town that I used to live, up on a mountain. On top of that mountain there is a cafe. It is not very crowded, it is always quiet and you can sit and think. I liked to sit on a table in front that has the best view of the city. I miss that place a lot. If that table could hear me, I would say to it: "I wish you were here. Will I ever come back to find you? Will I ever find a table like you?"

From now on I want to keep exercising and go to school. I also want to start learning Norway's language and customs. I want to find friends that already live there, so that I'll be ready when I manage to get to this country. I want to meet a girl, a European girl.

For the future I dream to have a good job, a big house and kids, younger and older. I imagine myself to go on vacation to Greece as a Norwegian citizen! I will go on excursions to the seaside with my friends. I will lie on the beach and drink juice under the sun.

I would like to be like the rest of the children ... I'd like to be like you.

July 2016



Nadil

My name is Nadil. I am 16 years old,
from Afghanistan.

My favourite place in my homeland
is a forest.

You can find a vast valley with no water
there. My favourite person is
my younger brother.

I travelled illegally, but I managed
to come to Greece. Now I am in Patras
and when we have the drama workshop
I have a good time.

I made I paper boat.

It is an image I have from my sea voyage.

I wrote some words on it about my
country. I also love other countries.
But 70% of my love belongs
to my homeland.

I long for peace, for tranquility to come.
I dream of going back ...

July 2016

هیلن که افغانستان آرام بشه من برمیگریم.

70% از خاطرات من با آن افغانستان هست و برای همین
افغانستان رو دوست دارم و میخوام برنگردم.

Raf

My name is Raf. I am 15 years old, from Syria.

Syria weeps.

The land that used to be paradise on earth, the land where there was always peace.

The land whose inhabitants were proud to be called Syrians.
Just like I was.

The war turned this paradise into hell.

My friends, I am writing a few words with a blue pencil. I write this letter because I want to speak. To speak not only to those I will meet someday, not only to those I have already met in my journey, but also to the young people in Europe that I will never meet! I also write to the friends with whom, once, we lived together back home.

Dear friends, my people die every day. When the war started we got separated and scattered everywhere, each one of us going to a different

place. Families came apart; many people died. Most of us live far away from our family and friends. Some still struggle. Some are at war still.

Dear ones, we were forced to leave Syria seeking a life in peace. We went through a lot until we arrived in Europe. We trekked through woods, we were imprisoned, we crossed the sea. It was exhausting. It was cold. Icy cold. Unfortunately some didn't make it. They were lost on the way, in the sea ... Children, adults, fathers, mothers. When we arrived in Europe we faced hatred once more. But my friends, we must take care of each other. Love is above all. Because today we are in our home, but nobody knows tomorrow ...

I hope whoever reads this letter, understands. I hope my voice reaches everyone, I hope it reaches all people. The Syrians are going through hard times and the wounds are not forgotten.

Syria weeps ...

July 2016



Hamid

My name is Hamid. I am 16 years old,
from Pakistan.

I write this talisman letter.

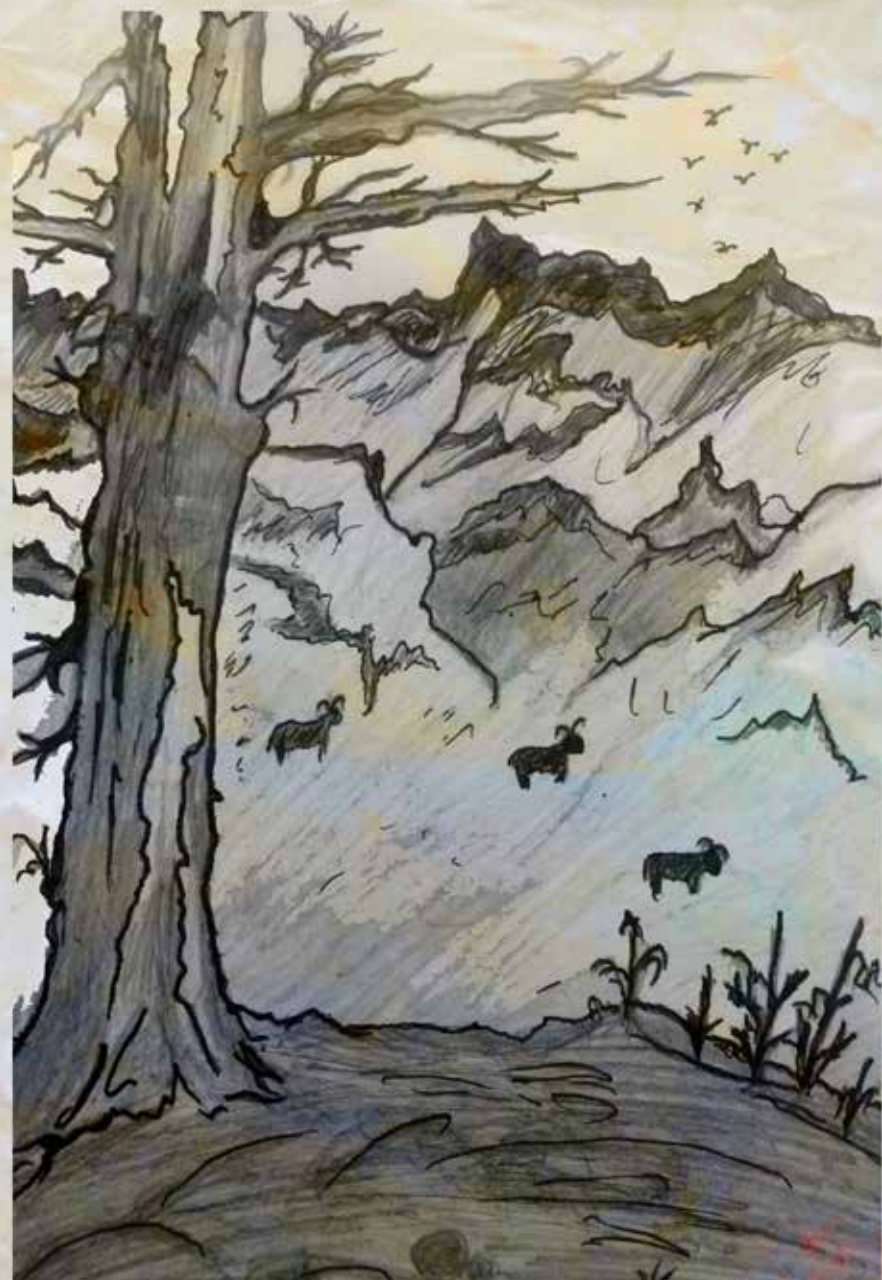
And I write it with freedom,

not because I have to.

If I live, I will see you.

If I die, you will have my talisman ...

July 2016



The series of workshops that were implemented within the framework of the action “Monologues across the Aegean Sea” offered security to the children, a fact that allowed them to express their thoughts freely.

My feelings were mixed when listening to and translating the stories of these young people. Memories from the past surfaced, since I myself come from a country that for many years was at war and lived through civil unrest; even today there is neither freedom nor democracy. I was moved when the children talked with so much love for their country, where they wish to return some day and build it from scratch. Their dreams for education and a better life made me feel that there is still hope. I identified with these children; with their experiences, their thoughts, their worries, their dreams, as well as with their will to change the world; thoughts that I also had and still have today.

I feel honoured for taking part in such a project because, by offering my services as an interpreter, I realised that I gained a lot as a person!

Asef Farjam

Interpreter - Translator
UNHCR Representation in Greece

July 2016

I feel lucky for having lived this experience!

Through drama and art activities I learned a lot from these children who lost their childhood in the war, on the mountains, in the sea. They opened up my eyes, they made me think deeply about life and remember once again the real human needs. Their stories were deeply touching. They brought back images from my own homeland that I was forced to leave many years ago. Beautiful images, hurtful images.

I took part in these workshops as an interpreter, but the process followed by the facilitators helped me to approach and really get to know these young people. I met remarkable teenagers, full of emotion, gifted with talents and strong will.

I wish them with all my heart to find “open roads”, so as to make their dreams come true. They deserve it!

Eliane Choucair

Interpreter - Translator
UNHCR Representation in Greece

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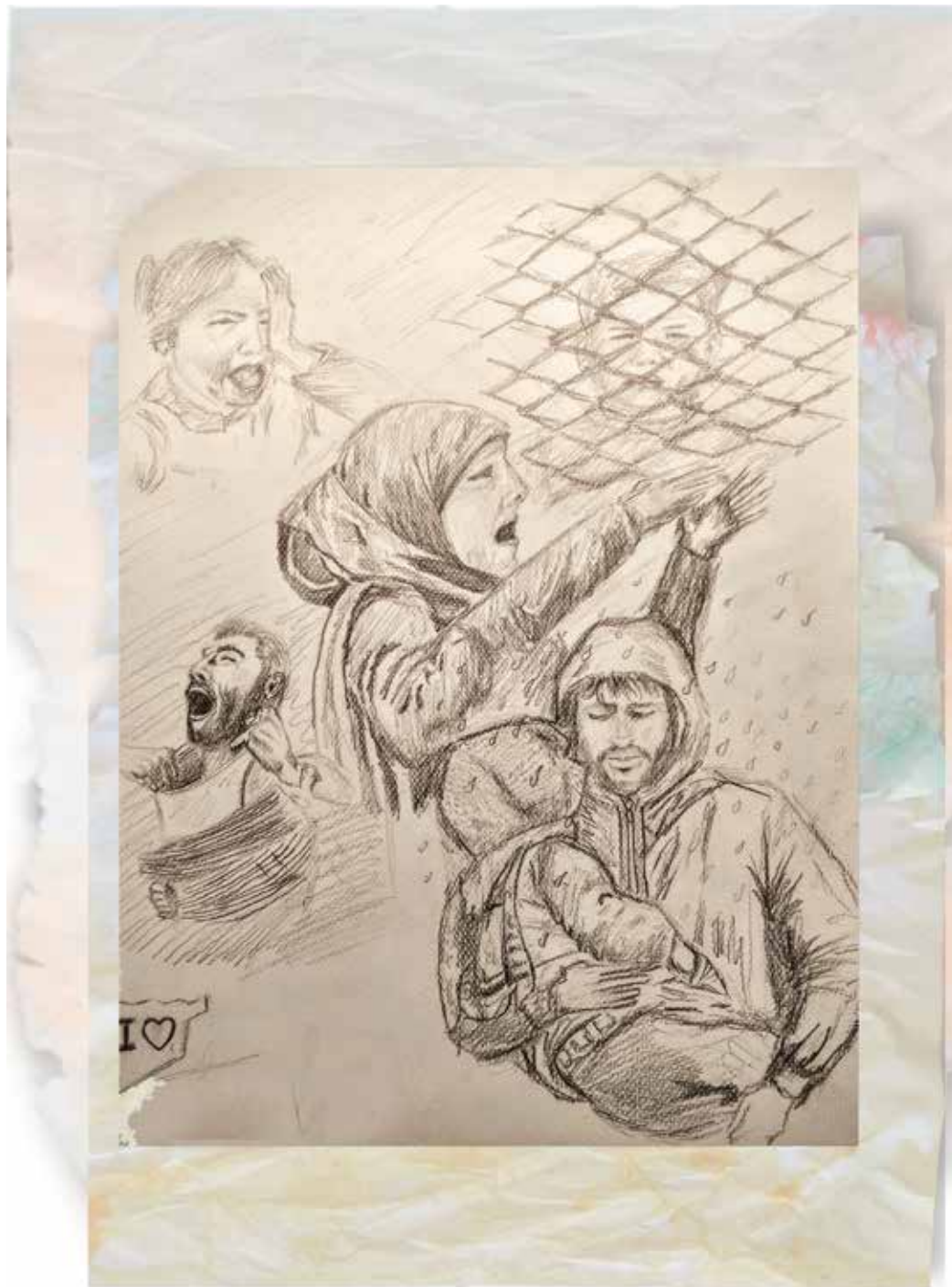
My participation in this series of workshops was an important and touching experience.

The fact that I was not a mere spectator, but was included as an equal member in the whole procedure, allowed me to share feelings and experiences; to expose myself! This helped me to come closer to the children, to bond even more with them and maybe put myself for a while in their shoes.

What impressed me was the fact that the children, although they had no theatrical experience and no common language, cooperated so eagerly. Gradually they started expressing their thoughts and speak about their values and hopes. I could see scenes from their lives and their journey in front of my eyes, as they easily connected the workshop activities and their personal experiences. The "life map" activity was of great interest to me. While all of us were sitting on the floor and were drawing the most important events of our lives, I realised the similarities between the human stories, the common values and needs. But at the same time I realised the "burden" of these young people who, so early in their life and through no fault of their own, were forced to leave their childhood behind and grow up abruptly and forcibly.

Time passed quickly. It was a unique experience. Powerful moments, powerful feelings. I cherish the emotion and the love. I am grateful to them all; the children as well as the facilitators.

Lida Murloukou
Psychologist
NGO PRAKSIS
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The project "It could be me - It could be you"

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