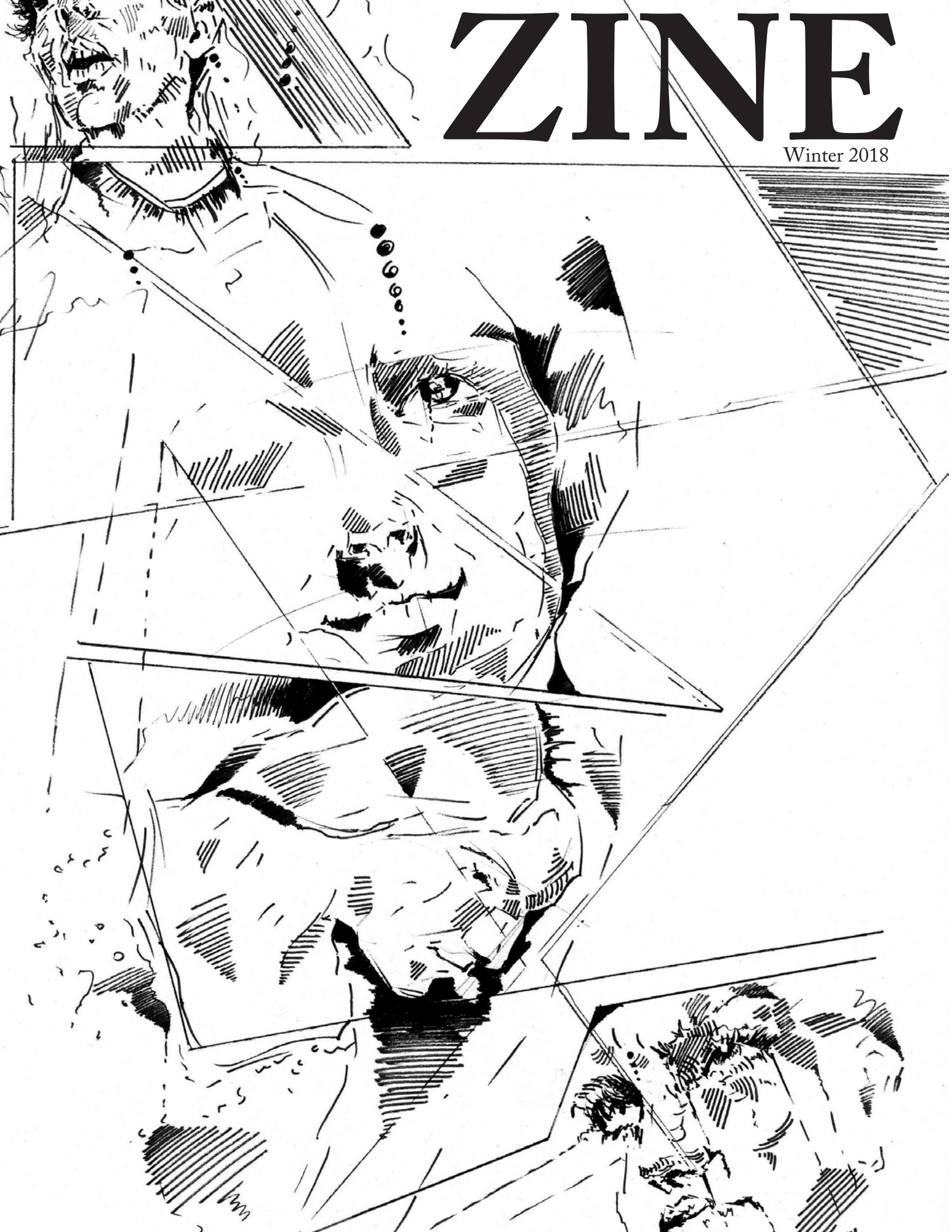


# ZINE

Winter 2018





# ZINE

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*Echo100Plus is a nonprofit organization supporting refugees and charities in Greece, primarily Leros Refugee Camp. The Hub is Echo-100Plus's response to the need for a united approach to provide educative and social activities for adult refugees on the Greek island of Leros. The Hub provides the resources for learning languages, for skills-based and social activities, and a boutique to offer a dignified distribution of clothing.*



Art by Shkar Hama Salh

# EDITORS' LETTER

January 2018

Welcome to the first edition of ZINE.

At the time of this writing, the contributors of this magazine all live in a refugee camp in Leros, a small Greek island off the coast of Turkey. Here they await their asylum decision, hoping to travel to Athens and beyond. They are teachers, tailors, mechanics, civil engineers, artists, activists, musicians, students, fathers, mothers, and siblings. Their lives are on hold indefinitely.

One is an aspiring journalist whose dream is to give “a voice to the voiceless”. We at Echo100Plus hope to do that with ZINE. We envision it as an ongoing vehicle, in the face of such uncertainty, to self-express and control one’s own narrative. We also encourage other groups, in other places, to amplify other voices.

ZINE is a written representation of The Hub, a global collective of cultures, languages, and forms of communication. As such, it challenges the refugee stereotype. It is a space where people from all over the world can share their stories, and in doing so, contribute to a much larger one.

Holly St. Lifer, Stefan Kaufmann, Maria Tetradi & Delaney Peterson

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# SEEING THE WORLD FROM BOTH SIDES

## FIRST I WAS A REFUGEE, NOW I AM A VOLUNTEER

Written by Mohammed Balkis

Illustration by Stefan Kaufmann



I am from Hama, Syria. I had been arrested a few times and my father was afraid for me. He arranged for me to leave secretly and meet my uncle in Turkey. I left my hometown and crossed the borders without telling anyone.

I was alone in Turkey for a week when finally I met my uncle. I hadn't seen him for five years but I was so relieved to be with him. We stayed in Turkey for around two months trying to find a way to cross the borders to Greece and then continue our journey to Germany.

When we were able to secure ar-

rangements, we waited for 14 hours near the port in the cold for the boat to arrive. Then, we were 57 men and women and five children in a small boat in the middle of the sea. It was freezing and dark. We were in the boat for two hours but it felt like forever. The smuggler left us on a small island called Farmakonisi. There were no residents on this island. It is just a rock in the sea. But the Greek coast guard located us and transferred us to Leros.

Once we arrived at the camp, it was late at night. I had no idea what was happening and I couldn't under-

stand Greek or English. I felt lost.

### Feeling Lost

People were being called to go inside and register. Eight hours later, only a few people were still outside, including me and my uncle. I was exhausted and furious as I felt like everyone else was getting a place to sleep but me. So I went to the office and tried to explain that I had been waiting for a long time. An official tried to assure me that they we would take good care of me and I shouldn't worry but I couldn't understand him.



Then another official asked me if I spoke Arabic and I said, "Yeah, I am Arabic." Finally a person I could communicate with! I started asking him lots of questions like: "Where am I going to sleep? When can I go to Athens? What will happen to us?"

He laughed and asked, "How old are you young man?"

"Seventeen," I said.

"Be patient my child," he replied.

While we were talking I finally heard my name called to register and I ran. It had been a long day but we finally got into a container and we were able to get some sleep.

My uncle and I stayed at the camp for about two weeks waiting to get our registration documents. After that, I was transferred to Pikpa, the accommodation facility for minors. My uncle left for Athens five days after that. I wasn't allowed to go with him since as I minor, I could only travel with an immediate family member. I felt happy for him. He would be able to continue his journey to Germany. But at the same time, I felt lost and lonely. What was going to happen to me now?

### Confusing Rules, Unfamiliar Culture

It was the worst situation I had ever been in. I had to follow so many confusing rules. For example, we had to have lunch at the same time every day and if you missed it you wouldn't eat anything. We had to be at Pikpa every night at 10 p.m. If we were late, they would lock us out. I shared a room with many other boys and girls and it was strange for me to see the girls undressing. I couldn't wrap my mind around all these cultural differences. It was a brand new world for me. It was exciting and terrifying at the same time.

The food was so bad, I refused to eat for a few days. We were yelling at the volunteers, because we thought it was their fault. Every day we were served macaroons so me and some other boys stood in the yard yelling, "Everyday macaroons, eya eya o."

Two of the volunteers were trying to explain to us that it wasn't their fault and they felt awful about it but we couldn't understand them. We thought they were against us. Then later, they brought us pizza and we all sat to eat together. So we became like one soul and we took the ball out and went to play football together. Afterward we were dancing and singing.

### From Refugee to Volunteer

I am good at massage so the next day I decided to offer to do massage at the camp. Catherina, one volunteer, had a problem with her shoulder so I began working with her a lot.

"Are you married? Do you have kids?" I asked one day.

"No," she said. "Then I'm going to call you "Mom" from now on."

She loved that and she later became my foster mom.

I also got to know Martina, who is the head of the camp and a strong woman. She fights hard to try and help the refugees. Her husband, Spiros, is a fun person with a child-like spirit.

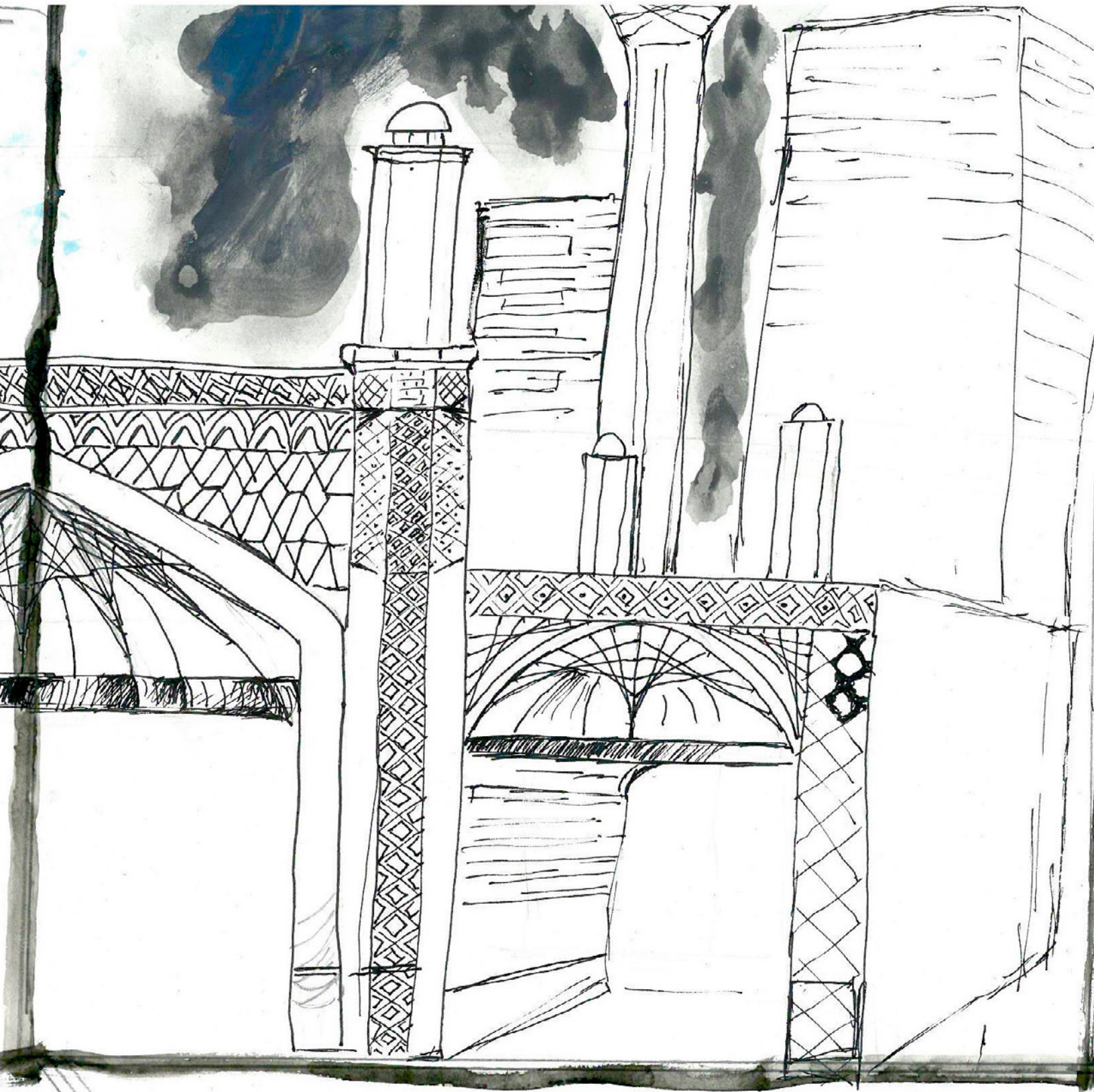
After a year and a half, officials told me I could continue my journey to Germany. But I felt safe in Greece and had good relationships. I decided I wanted to stay and work as a volunteer at Pipka. I was able to gain asylum and three years residency in Greece.

The organization at Pipka was happy I wanted to stay and work here. Most of my days involve helping with translation, organizing parties for the children, cleaning, cooking, and clothes distribution. It makes me feel proud to help the refugees. I also like establishing new relationships and helping the new volunteers. Often this means solving misunderstandings, and explaining to new refugees that volunteers are on their side and here to help. I was once a refugee so I know what they are experiencing and how they think and feel.

**"I shared a room with many other boys and girls and it was strange for me to see the girls undressing. I couldn't wrap my mind around all these cultural differences."**



Tehran - 1978



# Tehran Today

Art by Bahram Asadi

# MY JOURNEY

Written by Siamand Soutizideh

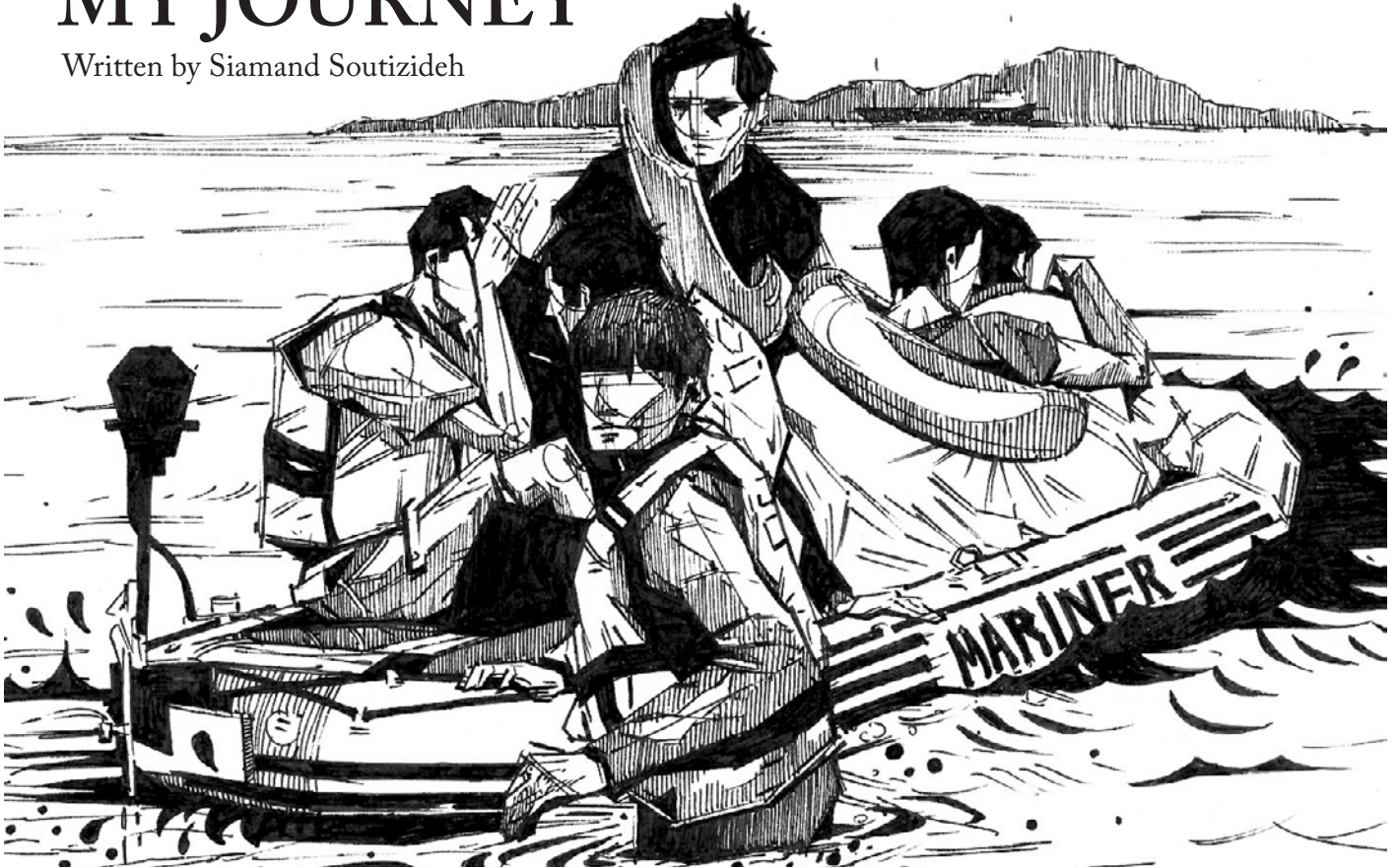


Illustration by Stefan Kaufmann

Four months ago, due to problems that I had, I left Turkey for Greece.

I found a smuggler to help me do this. He told me to go to Fataya, a small city in Turkey. He gave me a hotel address in Fataya and there were others there waiting to go to Greece also. They said I should expect to stay for one month but I left for Greece just two hours later. The smuggler told me the boat trip to Greece would take a half hour. I felt afraid.

Seventeen of us climbed into a fiberglass boat. We traveled during a moonless night. Silence dominated. Suddenly one man pointed to his feet; water was coming into the boat.

One of the smugglers used a water pump but after 15 minutes, more water had come into the boat. He kept pumping but water kept coming in.

I can swim but not for many kilometers. I was afraid I would die as the water kept coming in.

## Five Hours Not a Half Hour

After five hours we reached an unknown location on the coast of Rhodes. We were about two kilometers from the beach. I could see two lights in the distance.

But the motor had broken. The smugglers put their cellphones in plastic bags, put them in their pockets, and swam away, leaving us. Women and children were also in the boat. The children were crying and the women were saying, "Help!"

A few men got out of the boat to push it. I stayed in the boat because I had my papers and iPad and other important stuff I didn't want to get wet. We finally got to the beach. There was a man in a small shed on the beach. I think he was sleeping.

The sounds of women and children crying and yelling woke him up. When he saw us he immediately contacted the police. The police arrived five minutes later but two young boys and I had already run into the mountains and hid under some bushes. The police didn't find us and only arrested families.

### **On the Run**

We hid for another hour. Then we passed gardens and farms and made it to a long highway where we tried to get a taxi. But there was no taxi stand, just cars passing by.

Ten minutes later a police car pulled up.

"Where are you from?" one policeman asked.

"We're from Iran."

"Where are your passports?"

The smugglers had told us if we were stopped by police, we should say our passports were in our hotel, and they gave us the name of some hotels in Rhodes. So that's what I told them.

"What are you doing out here?"

"We came to have some fun with our friend from Rhodes but we lost him. He drank too much," I said.

He asked how we got to Rhodes and I told him we had flown from Athens and then flew to Rhodes.

I had all of this prepared in my mind in case the police stopped us. He instructed us where to get a taxi.

We were able to deceive the police.

At the hotel, I had another story prepared about how I had a room but my friend had the room key so I was able to get on to their WIFI. I called my family back in Iran and told them I was OK.

### **Leaving Rhodes**

Then I went into town to buy a sim card. But there, in the center of town, two people from the boat saw me and called out in Farsi.

So again, I was approached, this time by officials in plain clothes, and asked what I was doing in Rhodes.

They checked my passport and when they saw that I was here illegally they took me to the police station. Given that Rhodes does not have a refugee camp I was taken to prison where I had to stay with drug traffickers.

Many refugees were sleeping on the floor in the prison. I stayed for 15 days. I got sick because it was so unhealthy there.

Then we were moved to the camp on Leros. We arrived at 7 o'clock at night and I did not feel well.

I thought I would be forced to stay for a long time. So I tried to escape. I got to know someone in the camp. He instructed me how to get on a ship. But I was scared to go to jail again. Someone told me to drink to avoid fear. So when I went to the port that night, I was drunk. But I was still afraid.

On the way, three policemen passed me but they did not ask me for identification.

I sat at the port, waiting for the ship. I was scared. Suddenly the head of police at the camp called out, "My friend!" but I did not look at her. I pretended to be talking on the phone. I often helped her with translation and she recognized me. She took me back to the camp.

After that I did not try to escape. I started going to The Hub and met a lot of teachers. I would like to thank them for their greatness because it makes me feel good to be there. I am able to do a lot. I have my little dreams at The Hub, dreams that were unattainable in my country. I became a singer, a musician, and a fashion model in a magazine. None of these ways of expressing myself are possible in Iran.

So although I am still a refugee, I feel I have some freedoms here. I am not a world famous superstar but I feel like one.





Art by Basel Alsheakh Ali







Art by Shkar Hama Salh

# TWO PENS AND A POEM

## How I Survived in an Iranian Prison

Written by Ebrahim Ghadirfar

He took me through a maze to a basement. I was blindfolded. He said, "Take a seat and take off your blindfold. How are you?"

"I'm good."

"Tell me about yourself," the leader asked.

He was fat, average height, with a short haircut. He had a glass eye.

"I have lived here for nine months and my fate is unclear."

"Why are you here?"

"I don't know," I answered. "You know better."

It was 2010, and I had been arrested eight months before for teaching. I taught Kurdish and Arabic and lessons about the Koran. When I was arrested, I was told I did not have permission to teach the Koran. I was awaiting sentencing and being held in Evin, a detention center in Tehran.

"Who did you write the letter to?"

"I wrote it to myself."

"I don't believe you."

"I have been here for nine months and I don't know anyone. Also, I have not been able to speak my native language. Do you know what that's like? So I wrote a letter to myself to feel less alone."

I was scared. He started to threaten me. He said I might be sentenced to an extra month for writing this letter because it is a crime.

He asked me if I was afraid.

I told him I was used to being threatened by people like him and all I wanted was my freedom.

Then he took me to my cell. I hoped he might put me in solitary just to change up the monotony. I fought boredom every day.

Although I was afraid that if they did move me, it

would mean I had to stay longer, I still couldn't help but long for change.

### How I Stole the First Pen

I had actually stolen two pens although the guards only knew about one. I got the first pen after three months of living in solitary confinement. They moved me into a bigger cell with other prisoners. One was a member of Iran's Green Movement and another was arrested for financial crimes. A guard came in and asked me to sign a court document granting me bail. "Sign here and you will be free soon," he said. So I signed, but he didn't ask for the pen back and ultimately forgot about it.

Maybe they won't lie this time and I can drown in the warm love of my mother's love, I thought. But they did lie and I was not freed. I was moved to solitary confinement again. I put my blankets on the ground and sat on them.

But I had the pen. Writing with it was delicious. My pen gave me freedom. It was a valuable gift to write.

### My Unseen Friend

About three and half months in solitary I heard a man in the next cell say,

"Assalamualaikum" (peace be with you).

I answered the greeting.

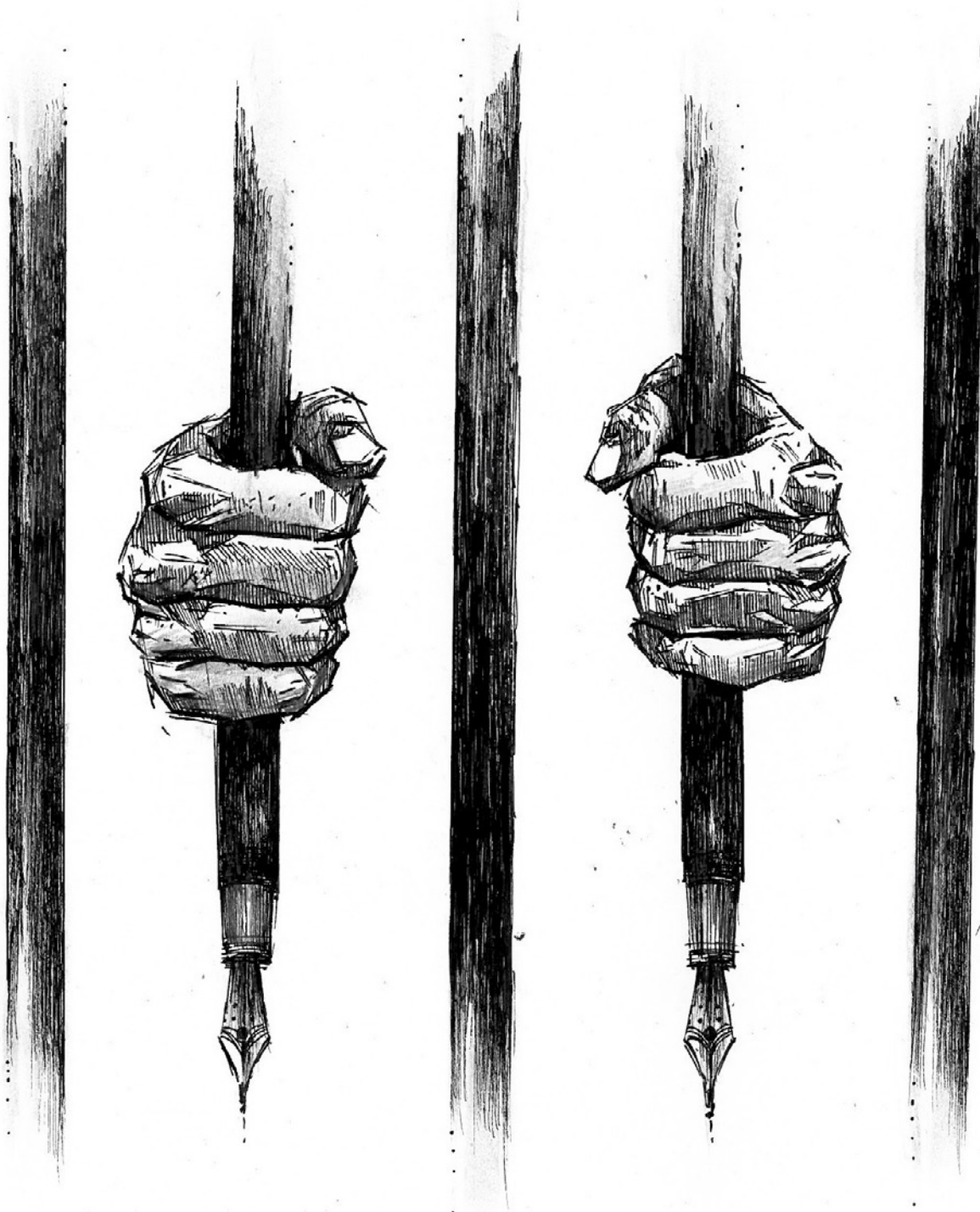
"Where are you from?" he asked.

"I'm Kurdish, from Mahabad. Do you know about Mohabad?"

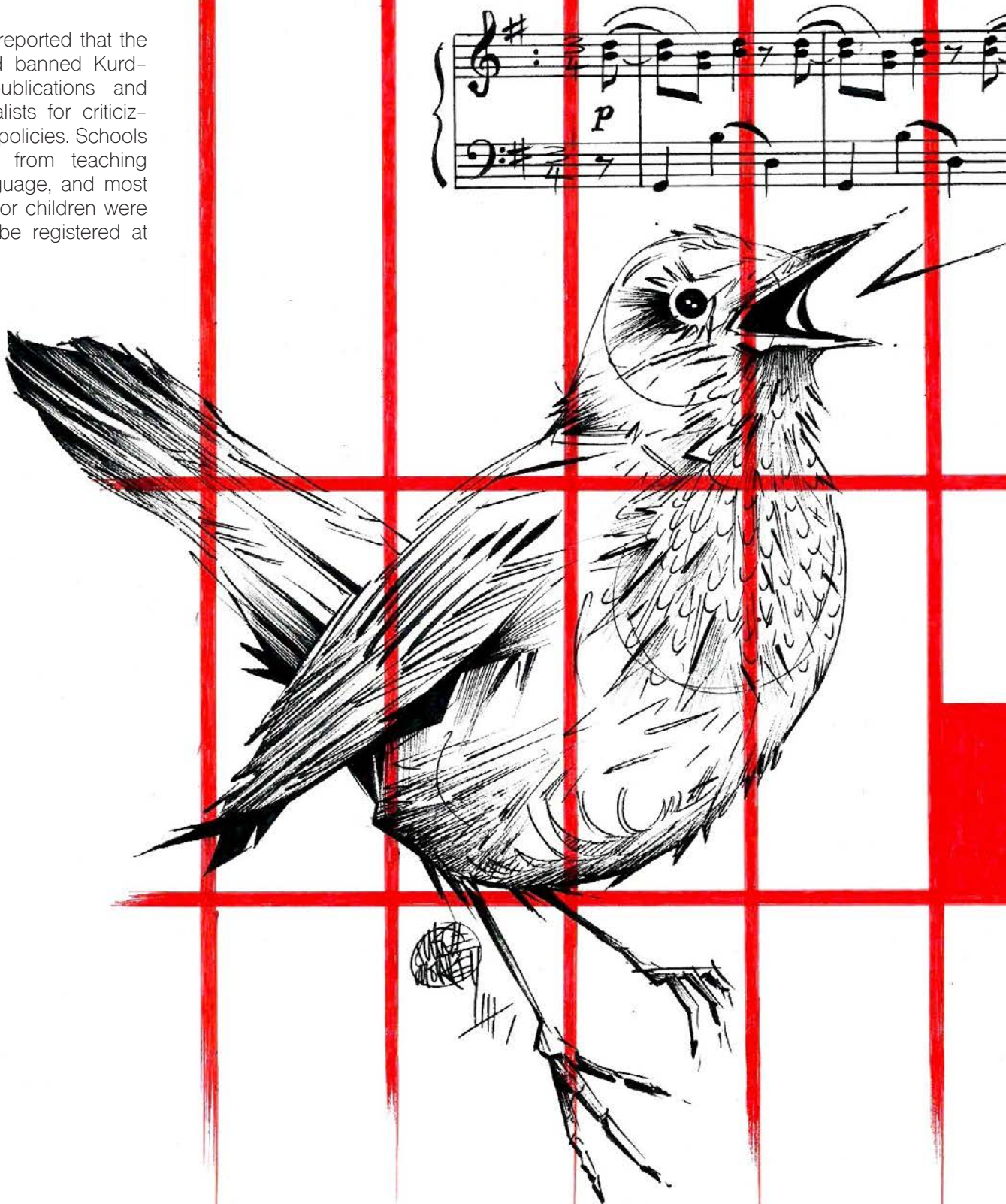
"No."

"Why were you arrested?" he asked.

"I am a Sunni Kurd. Isn't that all I need to be to be arrested?"



In 2014, it was reported that the government had banned Kurdish-language publications and penalized journalists for criticizing government policies. Schools were forbidden from teaching the Kurdish language, and most Kurdish names for children were not allowed to be registered at official registries.





We talked like that back and forth and became friends through the wall. He wasn't in solitary.

"When I slam my fist on your cell wall, that means we have hid something in the bathroom for you," he said.

He put biscuits and notes in there for me and we communicated back and forth. And this unseen friend also gave me my second pen. The bathroom became like a post office. We wrote in Arabic in case we got caught; the guards didn't understand Arabic. They spoke Turkish and Persian.

But the communication in Arabic wasn't enough to gratify my soul completely. It wasn't enough for my heart because I wasn't speaking Kurdish, my native tongue. So I often recited a childhood poem to myself. Although it is a poem about Palestine, it speaks to the Kurdish problem of not having our own country.

به لام که وی کام کوئستان

بالندهی کام دارستان

به زمانی خوئی ناخین

بو خوئی بال ناوه شیخی

*"But which a patridge of mountain and which a bird of which woodland doesnt sing in its language and doesnt flap its wings for itself."*

## I Take the Bait

Whenever the guards felt like it, I was taken to the prison yard to get fresh air. Sometimes this wasn't for a month, then sometimes twice in a week. I noticed everything and one day I saw they had put piles of garbage in all corners of the yard. I knew this was bait for me; I smelled a plot against me. I didn't care because I was so bored. I had already been living in solitary confinement for four months. When I knew the cameras were on, I threw a letter in one of the corners.

After, they brought me to court where I was finally sentenced to three years in prison. I was in court for three minutes. Every minute I was in front of the judge was an extra year. But other friends of mine were hanged, so I can't complain.

I didn't try to steal any more pens or to write. I was afraid of having my sentence extended. But I read the Koran and I talked to myself a lot. I had conversations with myself about my feelings and the Kurds' future in Iran. Most importantly, I thought a lot about how best to continue to try to help my people.



Art by Basel Alsheakh Ali



# PERSONAL MONOLOGUES

As part of the English language program at The Hub, students were given an assignment; they chose from a group of photographs and were asked to create a story about the photo. Who were the people? Where were they from? What were they thinking? Why were they in that location? What was their secret? They were encouraged to use their senses and imaginations and to focus on conjuring up details. Also, some of the writers paired up and created stories where their individual photo characters meet each other.

ART CLASS DECEMBER 1946 '17





# THE MAGICIAN MEETS A MONKEY

Written by  
Mohammed Balkis



Illustration by Stefan Kaufmann

**B**ulr is 20 years old and a magician who performs card tricks. “I am performing in London. My life in London is exciting!” he says.

He moved to London from Somalia because of his talent. “I got a job offer from my friend’s father; he is a businessman and cares about me. He is one of the few people that understands that without magic, my life has no meaning. He introduced me to some producers and club owners there and that’s how I was able to start my career in this amazing city.”

Once, while he was performing, one of the children in the audience started laughing at him. Suddenly everyone in the audience started laughing. Bulr, panicking, dropped all his cards on the stage. He froze, not knowing what to do. People were shouting and throwing bottles and tomatoes at him. He ran off the stage, crying and feeling angry.

Bulr was used to being laughed at. “When I was younger, growing up in Mogadishu, I hid my card trick talent from my family. I practiced in secret. My father thought it was silly and ridiculous.

Although I am continually laughed at, I don’t care. I will follow my dream no matter what they think.”

Many years passed and Bulr became skilled and famous. One day he was performing in a circus. A monkey from the circus stood next to the stage, watching Bulr’s show. The monkey was impressed by how fast the magician’s hands were. The monkey was a good performer too but these were the best card tricks he had ever seen. Afterward, the monkey approached Bulr and asked him if they could work together. The card trickster got excited with this idea and he said yes at once. They started dancing together. Both of them instantly knew this partnership was for life.



Freedom is painted  
with music

Dark  
way

# FREEDOM

Written by Siamand Soutizideh Illustration by Basel Alsheakh Ali

*In June of 2009, a young university student named Neda was shot during a demonstration in Tehran. She was allegedly joining the thousands of other Iranians voicing their disapproval over recent election results. According to CNN, witnesses saw a Basij militia man on a rooftop shoot and kill Neda. Although Soutizedeh's story is a work of fiction, it is based on this true story of Neda.*

The character of my story is a 25-year-old girl. Her name is Maryam. She is from Tehran, Iran and she attends university.

One hot summer day, Maryam goes to an organized protest against the government. There are a lot of people there demanding women's rights and freedom of speech. It is very loud and it smells like gunpowder. A gun has just been fired. Everyone is terrified. Police hit protesters with batons and a wounded girl cries out for help. She asks Maryam to take her to a safe place because she is injured. Maryam helps the girl and leads her to a back alley away from the crowd.

While she is walking back to the protest, she remembers a time when she was 15 years old and at the zoo. She saw a bear there. It was caged and poorly treated by the zookeepers. Maryam and the bear looked into each others' eyes and communicated without words. Both saw the longing for freedom in the other's eyes.

Maryam begged her father to buy the bear.

In fact, Maryam wanted freedom for all the animals at the zoo. Now she thought, I want freedom for people. She felt caged like the animals and hated cages. But, she felt, every cage can be broken.

As Maryam returns to the protest, she sees there is a police rebellion. She gets scared and hails a taxi. As she gets in, she is hit by a bullet. She dies while protesting her right for freedom. She is like many Iranians who die in their fight for freedom.

She lived for freedom. She was killed for freedom.



# George

Illustration and Text by  
Haydar Caragoli



She said,

“Ya baby my son your dad told me to take care of you. You’re a good boy. I love you my son”

“I love you too, my mom”

“Why you drink wine every day?

It is dangerous for your health.”

George was good when his father was alive but he started to steal

“My mother, I’m good.”

money and drugs.

“You are a brave man just like your father and stubborn”

George was nicer when his father was alive.

“why you don’t go to school?”

After his father died george got into problems.

“Mom please its enough”

“Please. Okay.

It’s your choice, but you are the only boy I have.”

“Mother please, leave my alone”

George comes everyday to the house drunk, and he destroyed the house.

“Baby you are weak now.

Why.”

And shouting

crying for his father.

George has health problem

George hated all women

because of smoking.

George was drunk and getting angry if they didn’t love him.

For that reason his mother explained to George,

“you are the only son I have, listen to me.”

**And he rejected that.**

**George became bad,**

**was quiet and confident.**

**He loves to make trouble.**

George met a nurse.

They had a good relationship. He was with this nurse for five years.

They loved each other.

The nurse’s name was Fanita.

or Manita.

She comes from America and sits with him in the hospital to help treat him when he is sick. He buys a car and a supermarket and gets a good job. George didn’t drink alcohol. He goes to the gym everyday. And he goes swimming everyday.

He loved her from his <3

He loves a good life, he has a good life now.

He makes free business.

His mother is happy and smiling.

And her status became very good.

**And the life becomes beautiful.**

# WHY ARE LEROS BUILDINGS WHITE AND ROOFLESS?

The color and architecture of the buildings of Leros are designed for a hot island near the sea.

While black absorbs heat, white color sends out heat. This keeps the interior temperature cooler. Greek designers and architects also chose white because it represents purity and cleanliness. It also symbolizes spirituality and nobility, and is one of the two colors on the Greek flag. It's also inexpensive.

A whitewash is used on buildings, streets, and trees, and is made of burnt lime. It is a natural disinfectant which destroy microbes and is also waterproof.

The buildings are not constructed with roofs because the sea has different salts and gases which impact buildings on the island. For example, when salt combines with metal, it causes the metal to rust. Also, the high winds in August can destroy the roofs. Instead terraces collect the rain for everyday use.



**Written by Desire Makuku**

*The author is a civil engineer from Burundi, Africa, where buildings are painted different colors and roofs are made of metal sheets. Upon arrival here, he was fascinated by the white-painted homes, schools, hospitals, and other buildings that also had no roofs.*

Illustration by Stefan Kaufmann

# MIXED

*A Noble Sport*

Written by Hamed Soloki

Illustration by Stefan Kaufmann

# MARTIAL

# ARTS

Many people think mixed martial arts is violent. But that's not true. The fighters who compete are placid and kind. When you are watching a match, maybe you think it's a battle between two people. But if you pay attention you will see it is really a form of exercise. Sportsmanship is also involved. Before bouts, fighters wish each other good luck and after, fighters hug each other.

Fighters spend a lot of time practicing. Unlike a street fight, they don't punch or kick without using control. The moves require much strength and endurance.

Mixed martial arts is also an effective way to defend yourself against thieves or other people who might want to hurt you. This is a particularly good form of self defense for women because it makes them less vulnerable.

But what I love most about mixed martial arts is that it is a metaphor for life. It is based on principles like if we work hard and put in a lot of effort, we'll get a great result. At the same time, if we fail, we can still get up and rise again. It teaches you to be strong but that falling down and getting yourself back up again is a kind of strength.







I am student I'm refugee

It is freezing cold

I have a cold and I cough a lot

proud of you

my teachers

Maria and Savana and Tor

Ashly and.....



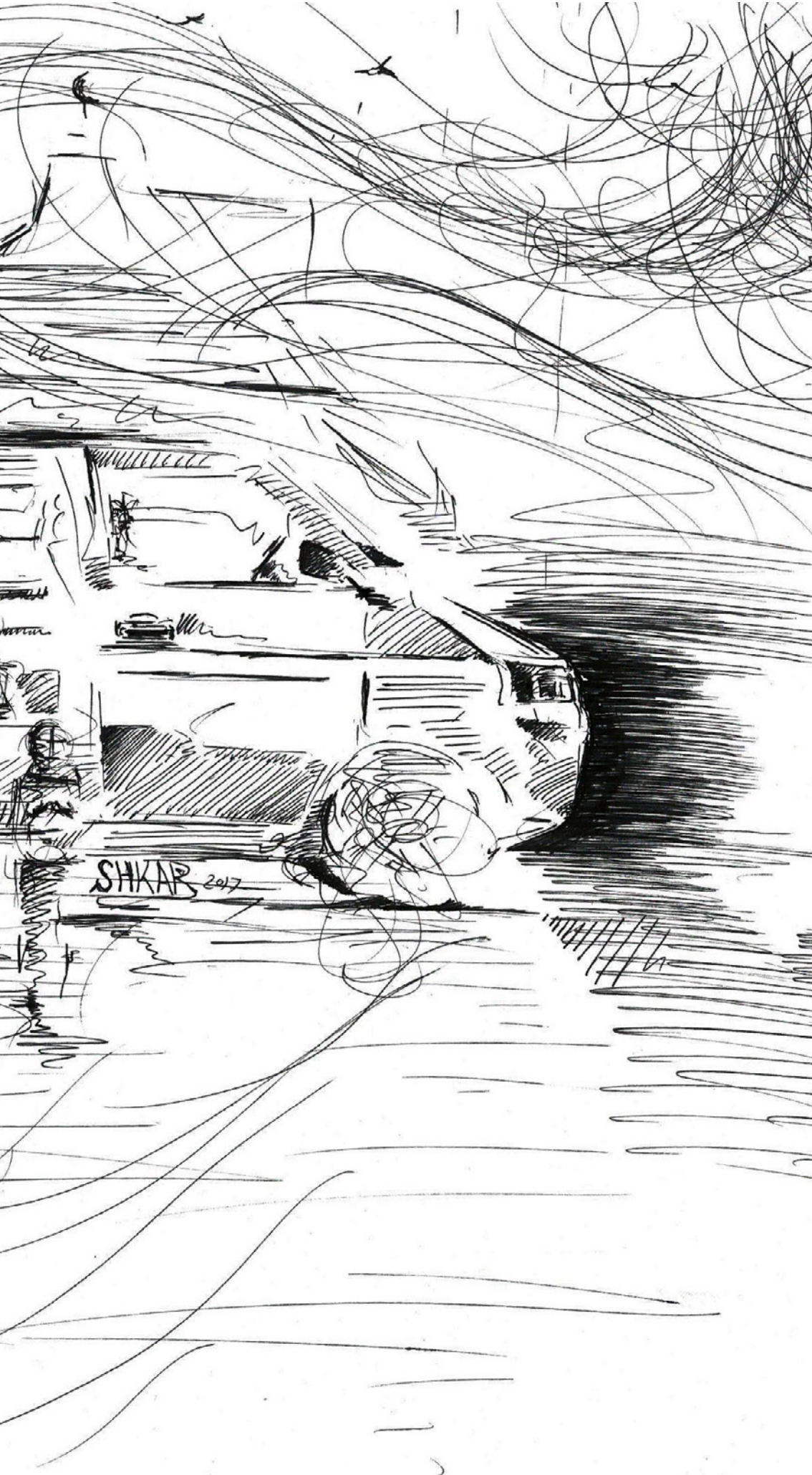


Illustration by  
Shkar Hama Salh





Illustration by  
Basel Alsheakh Ali



# SCHOOL OF DREAMS

Written by Noora Hussein

As a young five-year-old, going to school was part of my daily routine. It was something I believed all children in the world did. The fact that my school had students from different parts of the world didn't help my little mind comprehend that "the world" wasn't all that I was seeing.

I am a Somali who was born in Mogadishu shortly before the civil war broke out in 1991. I say with gratitude that my family was among the privileged Somalis who managed to resettle in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia before the reality of the war set in.

Jeddah is the commercial capital. It had been previously perceived as most open in Saudi Arabia although it is still restrictive for women. For example, we can't move freely and must get the written consent from a male family member to work, travel, or process any documents from any public office. Still, the opportunity I had to meet a lot of different people there is one that I hold dear to my heart.

Then five years ago, under unfavorable circumstances, I ended up back in Mogadishu. The saying, "every cloud has a silver lining" came to me as I tried to make the most of my situation. I started working with a non-government organization (NGO) that provided free medical services to pregnant women and newborn babies. It was there that I discovered that having an education was a privilege not enjoyed by all.

One evening as I was sitting in an overheated consultation room tallying the number of pregnant women seen earlier by the consultant, I realized that some of them were as young as 14.

The next day I asked a couple of them if they had gone to school. All said they hadn't considered it because it wasn't an option. Learning that so many had no formal schooling was astonishing to me.

When I told them about my education, one 17 year old mother who was expecting her second child was shocked that a young woman like me could speak English and Arabic. (Their native language was Somali.) In her world, marriage was all they were expected to attain, not an education or to achieve professional success.

I hadn't realized that the fact that I spoke three foreign languages was something extraordinary. Everyone I grew up with was multilingual.

My experience with young women who were disadvantaged due to the civil war and the cultural belief that young girls are only to be wed to be seen as valuable in society, has made me want to work toward establishing an all-girls school. There, they can learn multiple languages and study other cultures. I see the curricula as loose, where classes are more like discussions and workshops. For example, I envision a lesson surrounding accomplished women in history such as Amelia Earhart and Megawati Sukarnoputri, Indonesia's only female president and the sixth woman to lead a Muslim-majority country. I want to offer young women an education where they will be able to broaden their thoughts and see the endless possibilities the world has to offer.

*"I want to offer young women an education where they will be able to broaden their thoughts and see the endless possibilities the world has to offer."*


# FASHION AND FEELINGS

by Siamand Soutizideh

photography by Savanna Stern

A photograph of a man with dark hair, wearing a black leather jacket, leaning on a white ledge. He is looking off to the right. The background is a clear blue sky. The lighting is bright, suggesting a sunny day. The man's hand is resting on the ledge, and his shadow is cast on the surface below. The overall mood is contemplative and stylish.



A person wearing a black leather jacket is leaning their right arm on a white ledge. The background is a solid blue wall. A small, black, lantern-style light fixture is mounted on the wall to the right of the person. The lighting is bright, suggesting a sunny day.

“I’m looking ahead as that is where my future lies.  
I’m looking forward to a better life.”



“I’m smiling but I’m not really happy because I used to have a good life in the past but not anymore. I am here now trying to find the courage to take the first step towards my new life. I have to be strong. Fear will not stop me from meeting my destiny, one step at a time.”

“Getting ready for the battles of life. Preparing to hit the hardest targets. It won’t be easy. The path I chose is full of obstacles. I might stumble and fall but I will stand back up.

I am a survivor.”





“She meant the world to me. This used to be our meeting point. My memories brought me back here. There is still hope inside me that I will see my love again.”

“How can I find spring in the middle of winter? How can I find warmth in the cold? I must stay strong, like the grass growing in the frost. I must choose hope and believe that everything is possible.”



# Travel Diary

Written by  
Desire Makuku

**I**t was March 2016, when I started my journey from Juba, South Sudan. I was given a fuel tank truck and I was asked to deliver it to Bamboli, Central African Republic. Little did I know how much I would learn from this trip.

I am from Burundi and until 2015, I worked as a civil engineer there. Then I moved to South Sudan hoping to find more jobs there. I worked on construction sites for about a year, but when the currency in South Sudan became practically worthless, construction work decreased and I was out of work. To survive, I decided to become a truck driver; you get paid in American dollars for such jobs.

I was paid \$1,500 for my expenses in advance but I knew I had to spend wisely. I had heard that often that amount is not enough. I had to transfer 35,000 liters of diesel to Bamboli in an old Scania trailer truck. When the guy who hired me gave me the keys, I was nervous; I had no idea how long it would take me to get to Bamboli. The bosses supposedly lied to drivers about distance and potential dangers, downplaying these things. Still, I thought the trip would take about five days.

Before I set off, I had to prepare my vehicle and buy some supplies for the trip. I got two extra tires and two pipes, one for air and another for diesel, plus 1000 liters of mazut (low quality fuel) reserved in the second tank. I also got a truck repair toolkit and some heavy duty work clothes.

Food provisions were spaghetti, rice, cooking oil, salt, tomatoes, canned fish, sugar, tea, coffee, honey, a cook-

ing pot, cooking gas, and six dozen bottles of water. I also brought a coat, a blanket, a small mattress, aspirin for headaches, air time, a phone charger, a power bank, a small radio, and a knife. My friends reminded me not to forget to buy condoms.

## Tips for the Road

Drivers from the company I was working for gave me some tips for the road. Several had made this same trip a few times. They told me that other drivers are not usually eager to help you if you have a problem. If I stopped on the side of the road, everybody would drive past me. Instead, they advised me to stop in the middle of the road. This way drivers would be forced to stop and help me.

I listened to them carefully and tried to remember everything they said. A few of the guys had leaves from Kenya called mila. They told me these leaves can keep you awake for three days straight and this way they could reach their destination faster. They eat them with gummy bears as the leaves are bitter and Coca Cola. They offered me some but I was afraid to try them. I had heard they can have dangerous side effects.

## Stopped by Rebels and Thieves

On a Sunday, I set off from Juba with 10 other trucks in the late afternoon. We had six additional helpers but I was driving alone. The road was unpaved but fortunately it wasn't raining. Juba is a secure city with a local government and police, but there were still a lot of police on the road. We got stopped every

200 meters for checks. Then we got stopped again by policemen as we got out of Juba and had to pay 50 pounds for each vehicle. They asked me for my waraga, which means ID in Arabic. I had to pay another 100 pounds because I was a foreigner and didn't have one.

This scenario of being stopped occurred many times throughout the trip. Besides police, there were rebels and thieves who would put barriers on the road to force us to stop so they could ask us for money. They had guns. We paid them all so they would let us go, and we moved on. Communication was difficult, as they only spoke Arabic and other local languages. The other drivers and I could only understand French, English or Kiswahili. On that first day we drove until 1:00 a.m. We spent the night at a town called Yei. It was a good town and we could find something to eat and drink there. I also found some people who could speak English. Later we went to the police station and asked a policeman if it was safe to continue travelling.

We bought him some beer and we gave him some money for this information. We slept and then we set off again at dawn.

## A Violent Encounter

The second day we saw a Land Cruiser stopped on the side of the road. We stopped to check if they needed help. The driver had been shot twice and he was badly injured. He told us that the rebels abducted eight people who were in the Land Cruiser and took them to the forest.



He didn't know if they were still alive. We couldn't help him and we got scared so we stopped for two days in a small town between Yei and Maridi.

When we reached Maridi, the boss told us not to continue. He had information that there were many rebels on that road so we stayed there for a week. We left with a United Nations security escort team. They escorted us until we passed that dangerous area.

We got from Maridi to Yambio in three days. One of the drivers had an accident and his trailer fell under a bridge so we had to stop again.

We spent two and a half days near that bridge between two towns. After Yambio we went to Tambura, a town near the border of South Sudan and Central Africa Republic. We stopped there for a few days as we had to wait to get some papers in order to cross the borders.

### Finally I Can Speak French

Finally, we reached Bamboli after driving throughout the night. It had taken us 17 days. I felt deceived when I realized that this trip was much longer than what I had originally been told. Still, it felt good to be in a place where people were friendly, there wasn't a lot of military or police, and we weren't asked for money. We enjoyed staying there. Plus the locals spoke French along with other local languages so I was happy that I could communicate with somebody at last. It took us about five days to unload all the trailers.

I started my way back alone and my truck was empty until I reached Tambura. My job was not done yet. There they gave me a different type of trailer and 20 cows and told me to transport them to Yei. The other drivers showed me how to load and

park the vehicle and they told me to drive slowly while transporting livestock. I got paid well for this so I bought a goat and some honey to give to my friends.

Four days later, I delivered the cows at Yei and then I drove non-stop until I reached Juba in a day. The vehicle wasn't loaded so I could drive fast. The boss was relieved and happy to see his truck returned since as I discovered, a lot can go wrong.

I had been on the road for 26 days but I had made it. It wasn't easy. I felt sick and exhausted. I had to go to the hospital. Doctors told me I suffered from severe exhaustion and I would be fine after I got some rest.

I will never forget this trip, which was my first and only driving job. Every minute was an adventure and I learned a lot. I made some good friends. Many on the driving team liked me because I was tall and thin and look like a Somali. An old Somali driver named Hasan taught me how to cook spaghetti.

I came across rebels, thieves, and police, and I learned how to deal with them. There were moments when I felt terrified and others that I felt desperate because I couldn't communicate with these threatening people.

In the end, I thought I was going to die from exhaustion but I survived. I have been through several difficult situations but this one was the most challenging. To make matters worse the bosses didn't pay me my full fee. I had to wait awhile for the rest of the money. That's a strategy they use so you come back for work. But I didn't go back. I used part of my earnings to go back to Burundi. Fortunately, I was able to get a job as a site engineer, which I am far-better suited for, and it's a lot safer.

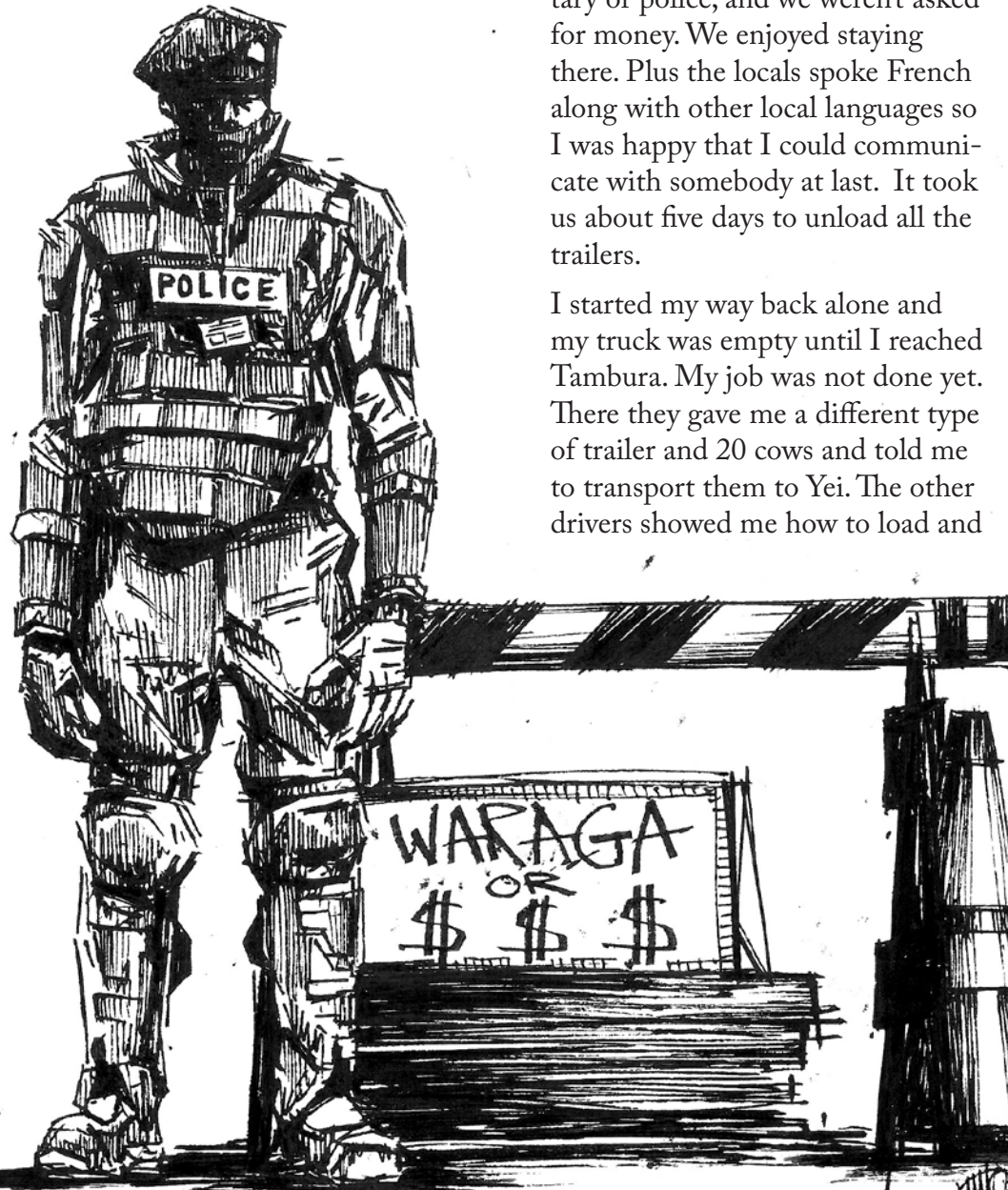


Illustration by Stefan Kaufmann

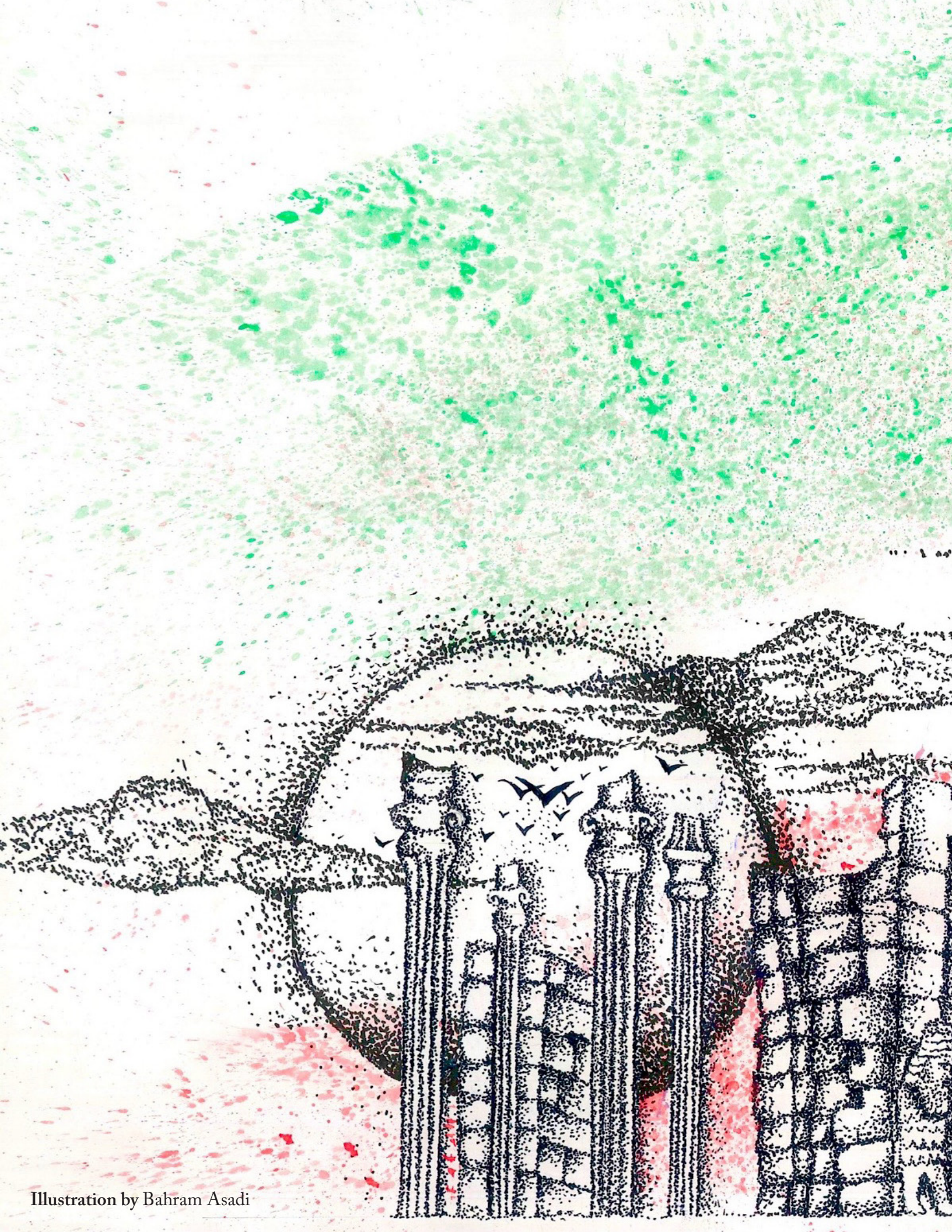


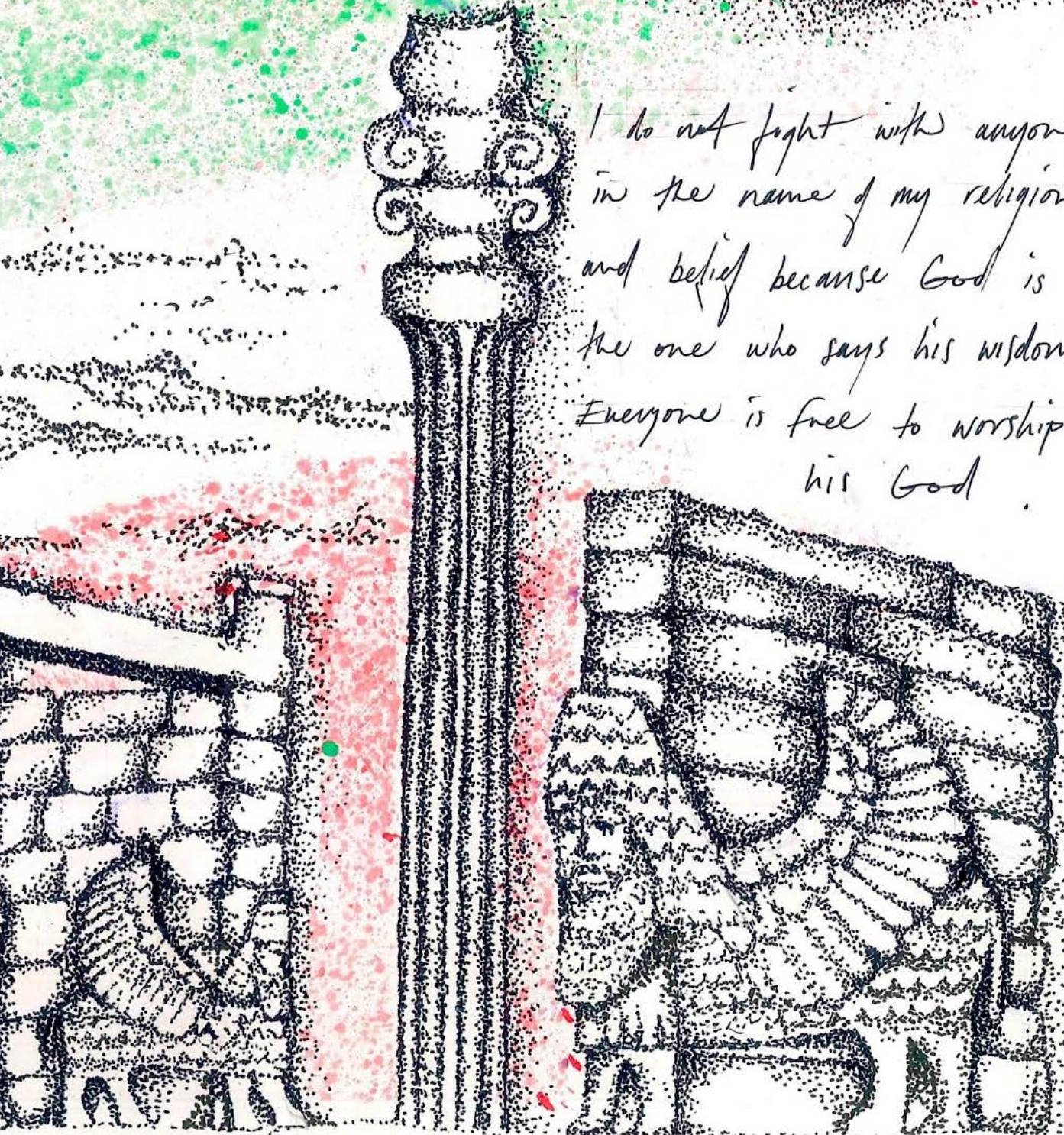
Illustration by Bahram Asadi

Cyrus Cylinder

539 BC



I do not fight with anyone  
in the name of my religion  
and belief because God is  
the one who says his wisdom.  
Everyone is free to worship  
his God.



# MY FIVE FAVORITE

Written by Hadi Baraei

My homeland, Iran, is a country with remarkable history and breathtaking landscapes. You can feel the burning heat of the desert, the mountains' cold and refreshing breezes from the forests. The world's first ancient empire exists there alongside the spirit of contemporary Iran.

Although I am only 22 years old, I have been to many extraordinary sites in Iran. I would work and save my money for travelling. When I was working at a hotel on Kish Island, a lot of foreigners told me about their favorite destinations. I was the only one in the hotel who spoke English, so Americans and Europeans used to ask for my help and I enjoyed giving them tips about where to go and what to do to get the most out of their trip in my country. The same thing happened while I was working as a manager at a cafe in Tehran.

Since fleeing my country, I have realized that the mere mention of the Middle East and especially Iran, causes unease among Americans and Europeans. I understand this is driven by the headlines and breaking news about bombs, suicide attacks, and confusing, endless conflicts.

As the months go by and I am trapped on a small Greek island, I have longed for an opportunity to write about the beauty of my country, and to try and undo the stereotypes about it and its people. My goal is to show Europeans and Americans that not all Iranians are radical or dangerous.

From my point of view, Iran should be included in everybody's travel bucket list, to experience the delights of our ancient Persian civilization. It goes without saying, that all travellers should seek objective information and advice in order to make better-informed decisions regarding foreign travel. You can find such information by contacting the appropriate government website in your country.

Here is a short travel guide of my five favorite spots in my homeland:

## **Takhte Jamshid (Persepolis)**

Takhte Jamshid, also known as Persepolis, is no doubt the main attraction that lures tourists to Iran. Located about 70 kilometers outside of the modern city of Shiraz, these ancient ruins once served as the capital of the Persian Achaemenid Empire, which spanned across Northern Africa, India, and southern Europe at the height of its power between 500 and 350 BC. The ancient name "Persepolis" derives from Greek and it means "City of Persians." UNESCO declared the ruins of Persepolis a World Heritage Site in 1979. This world of ancient mystery is definitely worth a visit.

## **Kish Island**

I dare say that this resort island in the Persian Gulf off the southern coast of Iran is the most beautiful place in the world. If you want to take a break from the historical sites of the mainland and experience Iran from a different perspective, come to Kish Island to enjoy the crystal blue waters, the sandy beaches, and the warm touch of the sun. It is considered to be one of the quietest places in the world, as motorcycles and horn-blowing are not allowed. It's the place to be if you want to get away from it all.

## **Lahijan**

This magnificent coastal destination is situated on the Caspian sea, in the north of Iran. If I had to describe this place with only two words, they would be "warm" and "green." Its mild climate, with warm winters and cool summers along with the evergreen vegetation create an idyllic scene. Lahijan is also famous for its tea cultivation, so don't forget to enjoy a cup of this local treasure.

# SITES IN IRAN

## Uraman Takht

This remote village located in a beautiful green valley, is known as “the heart of Kurdistan.” It is ideal for mountaineers and nature lovers. The traditional stone houses built on graduated terraces look like a giant staircase cut into the mountain. Sirvan River, Kurdish for “roaring sea,” flows through the valley and is known for its beautiful banks blanketed with walnut, pomegranate, fig, and mulberry trees. It eventually joins the Tigris in Iraq.

## Dasht-e Lut

This salt desert located in the provinces of Kerman and Sistan and Baluchestan, is one of the hottest and driest places on Earth but this shouldn't be a reason not to visit -- just visit in the winter, when the sun is not as scorching. Spend the night under canvas and don't forget your telescope: The cloudless sky is ideal for stargazing.

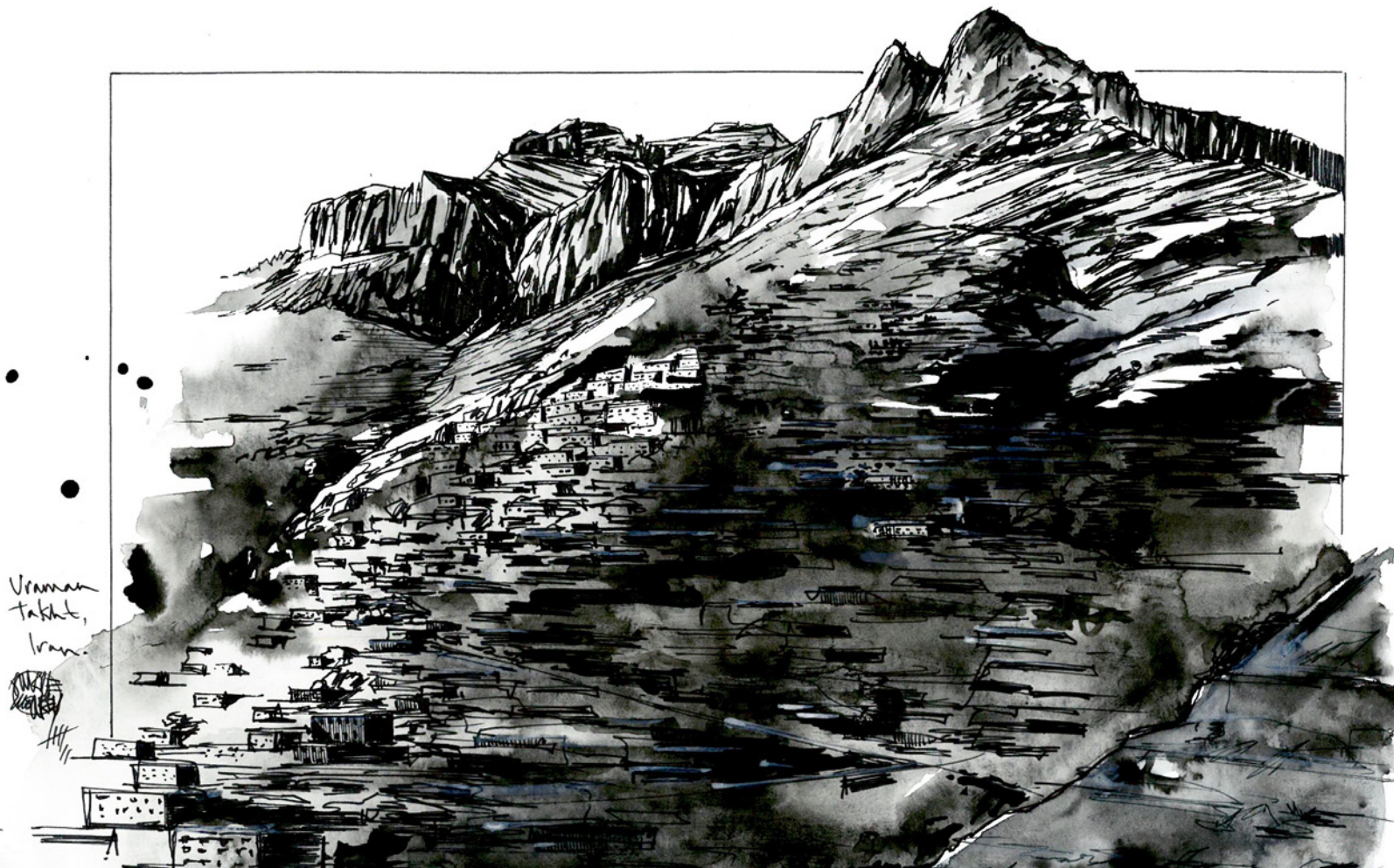
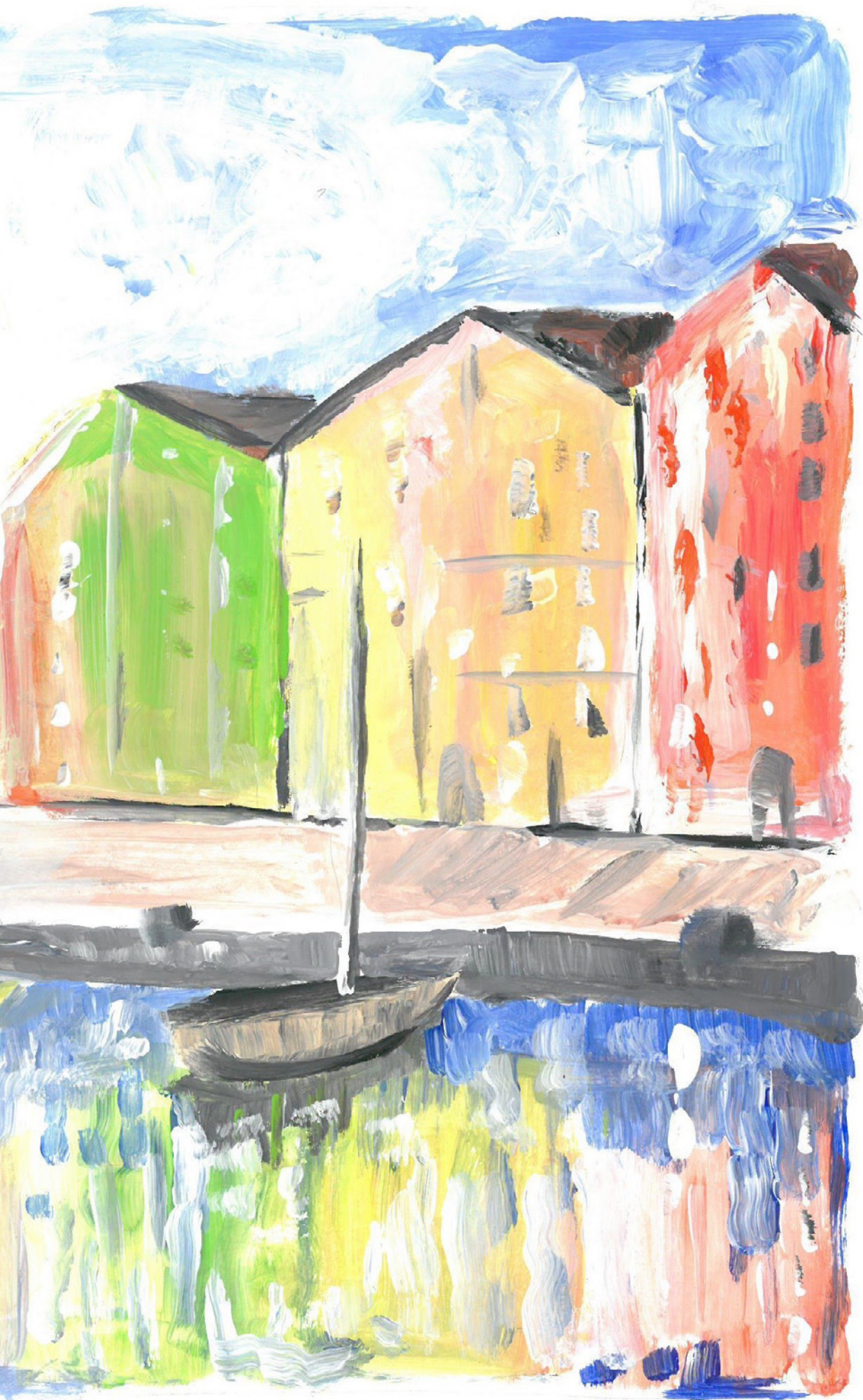


Illustration by Stefan Kaufmann



BASEL

2017



“When you come to this place, you don’t want to connect with it. It’s a temporary place, and you just want to leave it. Eventually, and without realizing, you begin to embrace it. Memories color this place. What is temporary? You’ve been here so long it’s no longer temporary. No place is temporary. Even if you’re only there for a day, you carry the memories with you forever.”

Illustration and  
Text by Basel  
Alsheakh Ali



music  
love

**BUZZ**

**ECHO** 100 PLUS