

BORN IN THE WRONG PLACE

By Alice Monica Marinescu and David Schwartz

CHARACTERS (STORY-TELLERS)

ESTERA – 74 years old

JAMAL – 26 years old

SAMIRA – 33 years old

SONIA – 38 years old

YAMEN – 38 years old

Text based on long term documentation in 3 communities: the community of refugees and asylum seekers in Bucharest; the retirement home of the Bucharest Jewish Community; the community of the Afghan refugees in Tajikistan.

A preparation guide-book for obtaining Romanian citizenship was also consulted and quoted.

Winner of Talking About Borders Prize 2012.

The international premiere of the play took place at Baadisches Staatstheater, Karlsruhe, Germany, in July 2013, directed by Manuel Braun.

The present version of the play has been developed during the rehearsals for the Romanian premiere (Platforma Contemporary Art Space, Bucharest, October 2013, in the frame of The Political Theatre Season) together with actresses Katia Pascariu, Mihaela Rădescu, Silvana Vișan and actors Alex Fifea and Andrei Șerban.

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Enter the five story-tellers –ESTERA, JAMAL, SAMIRA, SONIA, YAMEN.

YAMEN:

In the first lesson of Arabic language, the teacher told everybody to introduce themselves, to say the name, the surname and the country of origin. Everybody did so. When it was my turn, I told my name and that I was from Gaza. The teacher said there was no country called Gaza. I said of course there is, I know for sure, I've been there. I told them how I took the plane, how I got there by bus... The teacher said „no, think again”. I said again, very confident, that I was from Gaza. He said there was no country called Gaza, that it was called Palestine, Gaza was a city, a province, a strip in this country. I told him „that's not true, how can you know better than dad!”. And they called dad to school, and he explained me that Gaza was just the city he was born in, and it was part of a bigger country, Palestine. He told me that if someone asks from where I am, what I am, to say I am Palestinian. I said no, I am from Kuwait, I am born in Kuwait! For me home meant Kuwait. Then I started to follow the news, now that I knew I was Palestinian, when I heard something about Palestine, I would go watch the news... Unfortunately there were only sad news, every time.

YAMEN:

My name is Yamen. I am 38. I was born in Kuwait. I've been living in Romania for 19 years. My first confrontation with my identity was, well, it was when, being a Palestinian born in Kuwait, well, first thing was that I was not allowed to go to kindergarten, because that was only for Kuwait children. That time my mother was teaching at a kindergarten and then I went with her somehow unofficially, I was the only child that was not officially registered. This was the first thing, I kept asking my mother why I was not allowed, and, well, she was telling me it was a special kindergarten, just for Kuwait children. This was the first thing.

ESTERA:

Name: ESTERA Levi. Born on 27 of November 1937, in Romania. For the last two years I've been a resident of the Jewish Community's retirement home. I was 3 and a half by then, in June 1940. In Romania, the Second World War started with the slogan: against the communists and against the Jews! My father was both a communist and a Jew! So when the Bessarabia province was given to the Russians, the fascists were ruling, and my father the very moment he found out about the loss of Bessarabia he came home with a taxi, gathered some things in a suitcase and said: *“Dress up the girl, we are leaving!”* The taxi was waiting downstairs. And we left, leaving 4 furnished rooms, with sweets for winter, with everything needed, a 4-room-apartment. We left everything and went to Bessarabia. In 15 minutes. Maximum 15 minutes, just the time it took to put the stuff in the suitcase, because the taxi was waiting. That's how we ran away. With the first train. My mother had relatives in Bessarabia. She was Bessarabian. So we went to those relatives. We stayed there until 1941, when the war started in Bessarabia, when Nazi Germany and Romania attacked Russia. That moment father wanted to join the Russian army. And we left with everybody on the road of evacuation. A whole bunch of people went on that road, to run away from Bessarabia, because all the region was being bombed. Me and my mother ran away. But father wasn't allowed to join the army. So he came to look for us on this road. My very first memory is the yelling of my father towards my mother: „SARA! SARA!”. My father asked several people and he finally found us.

SAMIRA:

Me is SAMIRA. Age my - 33 years old. I was born to Iraq. Came to Romania 2003. I refugee. In Iraq war! Mother died, father died! Sister Holland, brother went America... Why remain?! I tell truth, not lie, I

doesn't know Romania, I come Romania, because want leave to Holland. But who with Iraqi passport, not go direct, not possible go direct to Holland. Brother know Romanian ambassador in Jordan, ambassador friend. And he said "Sister alone, please help". And he help. I go to Jordan, give Romanian ambassador 1000 euro, receive tourist visa. I come like tourist to Romania, for wanted go to Holland and I waiting 6 months. Holland visa did not get and after 6 months, passport finish, not good anymore. Iraq embassy did not help anything! Just for one month did passport, papers and then wanted send me back to Iraq! Not possible, not possible. I back to Iraq don't go! To Iraq war, no mother, no father, I better dead here, than dead there. And asked for asylum. I 2006 refugee. Received passport category A, blue passport, category A means international protection, category B means protection only inside Romania. I refugee have same rights as European citizen.. only can't vote. I back to Iraq don't go never. There war destroyed everything. Nothing left anymore to Iraq!

JAMAL:

I'm JAMAL. I am 26. I live in Herat. I have three jobs. A part-time job at a communication office. I also work for a company, computer science and I am English teacher for BA first year students at the University . So... I was born on December 24, 1986 in Mashhad, a big city in Iran. I consider myself Afghani. I first realized I was not Iranian when I was 6. I went with my mother to school to get registered. There, all the other parents were showing Iranian passports. Mine was different. It was a refugee green card. Then I asked my mother why was it different and she explained: my parents came to Iran as refugees in 1984. I have four brothers and one sister. My father, a construction worker, had no job in Afghanistan and had to join the army. The war with USSR had just started. And because he had three children they decided to flee to Iran.

SONIA:

SONIA Djukici is name. I am already pretty old, 38 years. I born in a town in northern Serbia. I came to Romania 11 years ago, together with my husband and my children. We received refugee status and I want to ask for the Romanian citizenship. **(reads)**

"OBTAINING THE ROMANIAN CITIZENSHIP. PREPARATION GUIDE.

GENERAL INFORMATION ABOUT ROMANIA.

Romania, democratic republic and member of the European Union from January 1st 2007, is situated in the South-East of the continent, neighboring several states such as Hungary, Serbia, Bulgaria, Ukraine and Republic of Moldova. "

We wanted immigrate to Australia, there was husband's brother. We went to Hungary to do the papers there, but asylum request was rejected and Hungary kicked out. They told to choose where to go: either Slovakia or Romania. I then thought, let's move closer to home, who knows what happen next, so we moved to Romania.

(starts reading again)

The Romanian state promotes and protects the fundamental human rights and liberties, pluralism, equality democratic values, minority rights, multiculturalism and the principles of open society."

(repeats the last part)

ESTERA:

We went to Ukraine by foot. Then we found a cart and went with the cart. I have this memory with my father looking for us in the crowd, and a second memory walking on this road and the road being bombed.. And when the bombs were falling I was carried on the side of the road and hidden in a ravine.

And we were running to the ravine to escape the bombs above us. At some point we came across a truck with a Russian commander, a soldier and a driver. And I remember, my third memory, that the soldier looked Turkmen – his eyes were a little oblique and he gave me a pack of biscuits. So we got in

the truck and then in the train, and the train took us all the way to Serovo station in Uzbekistan. We got in the first train and travelled to the last stop. Serovo station was, how is it called... in Russian is *ziezda*... when several lines join... a railway junction! A railway junction - Serovo. And there we went to town and we received a home. And it was windy and the window was not closing properly and it made noise. A Russian woman came, gave us a blanket, a pillow and said „you just came, you don't have anything, we will bring you what is needed so you won't catch a cold”. The window was still making noise. I remember it was a very big yard and near the yard there was a field. And we were running to the grass field to escape earthquakes. At some point I fell asleep there, on the grass. And during my sleep I was bitten by a scorpion. I knew that if a scorpion bites you during May, you die. And it was May. I told my mother right away, she took an onion, cut it and rubbed the bitten spot. I was all right. I was around 5 years old.

YAMEN

Just before my first year of school, my father told me: „we are going out of Kuwait!” and I said „where?”, I thought the whole universe is Kuwait. And my father said „Like I am your father, now we go to meet my father” . I was 6 years old, and you know how it is, I never thought about who made me and how and from where am I, or from where are my parents. So it did not seem logical that my father also had a father. I only knew from my father that we will go somewhere in Gaza. I even called him a liar because we took the airplane and instead of Gaza got to Egypt. Also, I did not know what Egypt was, father explained me that there is no airport in Gaza, so I thought it is far or something, I did not know the situation. We went by plane and then by car for like 600 kilometres, I don't know, a long road. At some point I saw some tables in the desert. That was the first time I saw that image of the border guard, of the customs officer, they were soldiers and dressed in kaki, and fully armed... And the way they were searching us was like this: opening everything, if they found any food, they would throw it away, and putting their hands in absolutely everything, everywhere, including underwear, including... yeah... and then they would give you back all the suitcases messed up and you had to put everything together. I was a child, my mother told me not to be afraid, they took us, put in a room and they undressed us to the end you know, to...yeah. Eh, well I can't understand, even in that time it seemed to me very, how can I say, very painful and very humiliating. And then we entered Gaza, where I discovered that I had a bigger family, that my father also had a father, and brothers and so on, I met both my grandmothers and so on. But for me, my father was from here but I was from Kuwait, I did not believe and I did not understand that I didn't have any... for me the motherland thing was very clear, I did not know what passport was and what identity card was. After a month I told my father to go back home, ha, for me my home was Kuwait, the place I was born in. Also there were a lot of Palestinians in Kuwait, and that's why I didn't feel like a stranger, because the first teachers, the first doctors I had, were Palestinians like us. And also there were my mother's brother, my father's relatives, that were living in Kuwait with us, so we spoke the same dialect. I didn't notice any difference

SONIA:

I applied for citizenship especially for the children, I can live as a refugee a whole life. But it is not good like that. You have to know what you are, to belong to somewhere... Now we have a piece of land, a property, here in Romania, because husband is buried here. So we have land in Romania, we have his grave. You must have motherland. Now for me motherland is Romania.

SAMIRA:

I think of motherland, think of God. Iraq behind, in front of me is Romania, is God. Where God, there me also. I mean, if God leaves to Holland, I also go there, ha ha! Now, God here! Seriously, true! If you true

Christian, not what I want, but what God wants for me. Because you not know! Maybe I want like this, and this not good for me, I want Holland and this not good for me. And then why? Stay where God wants! If God wants to Romanie, stay to Romanie.

YAMEN:

At school we were taught what motherland is. Motherland is for everybody the place you are born, where you make your first steps, where you learn to speak, well, the place where you open your eyes... and I was taught the same way. That time I couldn't realize what kind of motherland was it, I mean I didn't ask myself „what am I?”. I think is the same with a Romanian born child, he wouldn't ask himself „Am I a Romanian or not?”. So he will have the impression that everybody is speaking the same language and all are, well the same as him.

ESTERA(reads):

„Every child is born with the right to have a surname, a first name and a nationality.”

When I say the word motherland, I speak about Romania, but of course I am very close to Russia also. When I was a child I wasn't asking myself if I was Romanian or Russian or what was I. Only now I am thinking and asking what was my first language. Of course now I know that initially I spoke Russian, even though, my mother also taught me Romanian poems. I grew up with both languages. Now at the national census, I wanted to write both languages, to mark as mother language both Romanian and Russian. And they said it is not possible to mark two languages. Well, it is very possible. I speak Romanian with barely any accent! Because I learnt it since childhood.

JAMAL:

I went to school when I was six. I liked it, but because we had a bad financial condition and my older brothers were also students, it was very difficult for my parents to buy everything I needed. All the time I was using my sister's old books and note-books and wearing my older brothers' clothes. When I finished primary school, I was very happy because I was eager to learn, to become very reach and help my family! In Iran, after 5th grade you need to change school. As everybody else, I got my papers and went to register at the new school. That's when I got my first big NO from Iran. There was a new law that forbid Afghan children to go to school unless they pay 100 euro. Of course we did not have those money and my mother was running from UN to UNHCR or other totally useless organizations, trying to help me go back in school. She couldn't. I couldn't go to school that year.

SONIA(reads):

*„„All the children are guaranteed the right to education.
All children are free to express...”*

JAMAL(interrupts):

...their own ideas and opinions and practice their own religion.”

Our family was very religious. My dad was also a Mullah. My brother also. That's why we were very well raised and educated. But the big problem in Iran was that we were Sunni and most Iranians are Shia. At school children are obliged to pray. But I did not want to because their prayers are so different from ours. I even had a very bad discussion with the director, when I was in high-school. These religious differences became very clear when I turned 13. That's when my parents explained me that we were Sunni. And this became a new reason for insults and jokes from my school mates.

ESTERA:

My father got a job in Uzbekistan. By profession, he was an accountant. My father is from Craiova. He worked since he was a small child, 8 years old. He was born in an impoverished petite bourgeois family. And in Serovo he got hired as an accountant. One day, he saw that his chief's Uzbek horse escaped. He went to catch the horse and the horse hooped him in the stomach and broke his small intestine. He had to go for surgery to Kokand, close to Serovo. But all the trains were heading to the battlefields and didn't take him. The surgery was delayed. But my father was very lucky that a famous Leningrad doctor was deported there, a famous professor, Petrov. After the surgery, the famous doctor told my mother: „you citizen must guard your husband day and night and wet his lips every two hours. I did everything I could. If he survives the first days, he will make it”. Because of the surgery, my father lost his job. So the only new job they could give him, was to scare the birds from the fields, so they won't destroy the harvest. My father was still convalescent, so my mother did this job for him. My mother was wondering around with the gun. And from time to time she was shooting up in the sky to scare the birds. This is how we managed to survive. My mother really worked a lot.

JAMAL:

Because I was not allowed to go to school, my dad decided to take me with him for his new job. He was going in the streets with a cart and gathering stuff people didn't need anymore . Then, he was selling it to other people.

Dad was gathering and selling everything: – *“Shoes! Windows! Cardboard! Bread! Plastic!”* Anything! He was selling the bread as animal food to paysants. The other stuff was sold for recycling. We had this big cart and my father and I were yelling that we gather stuff. It wasn't to pleasant. Actually it was awful. I was very shy and I was ashamed to yell at people. Now I understand that it was just a job like any other.

Most children in Iran are not working. Only a few of them, mainly Afghani children. People felt bad and guilty for the absurdity of the government. They kept asking my father why isn't he sending his child to school and dad would explain them that the school doesn't allow us.

After working for one year, with my dad, with the cart, at 11 years old, I understood better than anybody how important it is to study.

SONIA (reads):

„Minors have the right to be protected against exploitation; they cannot be forced to work because it is considered that education and health will be affected.”

JAMAL:

“The minimum hiring age is 15, but the minors between 15 and 18 years old, are given specific protection, when hired.”

SAMIRA(reads):

ROMANIAN CONSTITUTION. ARTICLE 41. THE RIGHT TO WORK.

The right to work can not be restricted. Choose of profession or occupation, and choose of the place to work is free.”

Here in Romania is no work! I sent CV everywhere! Sent to Arab school, sent to computer, sent to computer classes and everybody promise but nobody help! Everybody promise, says “Yes, Samira, is solved” and then give working place to somebody else! But why?! I came first, I told first want this job, I did everything good! If you don't have connection, you can do nothing, nobody helps! I asked Romanian neighbour call for me. But when people hear Iraqi citizen, people don't hire. People don't hire foreigners. People don't know refugee same right as Romanian. People afraid of Iraq. Think all Iraqi terrorists! But Samira not terrorist! I big need work! I went college Iraq. Can work secretary, can work papers. I work

everything! I prefer work library, Xerox... or McDonald's in the back, cooking French fries, not to speak, because Romanians said I speak badly Romanian. I can work also computer... But these days Romanian don't give work to Romanian, how can Romanian give work to me?!

SONIA (reads):

„All employers are entitled to social protection.

For equal work the women have to be remunerated equal to men.”

Husband worked without official papers, so did I, we tried to work things out from the very first day we arrived in Romania. In the meantime, we fought for refugee. They did not want to accept. We went to court for three years for the asylum request. Had three different trials. The first two we lost, and the third time we obtained the refugee status. Had all sorts of problems. The first interview went fine, but, by the time we got to trial, there was a different judge, so he rejected us. Had big problems with translation, the translator was no good. Then, the second time had problems with our lawyer. Finally, the third time we asked for asylum, we got back to the judge who knew us from the first interview. She just couldn't believe it. That after three years we still hadn't get the refugee status.

SAMIRA:

I stayed one year at the home for asylum seekers, the home helbed one year, made assurance, everything, and then year pass and they say: „Go rent!”. But how can I go rent if I have no job?! How get money for rent? This year sister gave 300 euro every month, to pay 200 for rent, 50 for hous expanses and 50 for food. I very upset! I big shame with sister! Sister gave money from Holland and I couldn't do nothing, couldn't find work! Now one year over and sister don't give money! And what can I do? **(each performer utters a sentence of the following, borrowing Samira's accent):** *“I go to the street!”*, *“Like the black refugee who lives to the street!”*, *“ Yes, here in Bucharest there is one Somalis refugee.”*, *“Don't have house, don't have rent, don't have work!”*. Is homeless to the street. I be the same. I go to the street!

SONIA:

We also stayed at the home for asylum seekers at the beginning. We made many friends there, from all over the world. There was this family from Afghanistan, with 8 children. Every Saturday their girls stayed with us and we taught them make cookies. There was a boy from Pakistan who was eating together with us all the time. He didn't have anybody else here. We were cooking together, children were playing together, we were helping each other a lot. Here in Romania, at that home, I learnt what it means to help. In Serbia I didn't know. On September 11th 2001, we were here already for 3 months, the asylum seekers' home was locked after what happened in America. For 3 days, nobody was allowed to get in and out of the building! They was scared! The director called me and my husband, we were the only Christians in the home, and he allowed us to go out and buy bread. So me and my husband go out and buying bread and food for everybody. Only we was the ones allowed go out!

YAMEN:

In the summer I was preparing for university, I had a very unpleasant surprise. One night at 4 o'clock I heard, well, airplanes noise, something I'd never heard before in Kuwait. And we started to hear strange noises, like gun fire or rockets, but we didn't know what it was. We didn't hear nor see very well. Anyway, I had to go to the preparation for university, it was sort of a private summer school. That day we had a sort of exam. The teacher, Egyptian, told us: „the learning process never stops, not even in times of war, so have the exam”. By the end everybody left the room. When dad came to pick me up, the streets were empty. We went on the main street, on the sea shore, and there were only tanks, tanks, tanks and soldiers. It was August 2. I can't forget it, it's the date that change my life. August 2, 1990. The

Iraqis attacked Kuwait, that morning, and all the Kuwait army ran away. Including the pilots, they ran away with the airplanes. All the Kuwait citizens left also, the country was almost empty. Only we couldn't leave, also not run away. Why? Because we didn't have any country. And we just remained kept in a huge prison. The Palestinians with an Egyptian traveling document, as ourselves, had nowhere to go.

JAMAL:

After a year the law was changed back and I was able to go to school for free. During high-school I had a lot of fun. Even though as an Afghan there were also all sorts of unpleasant situations. People were making fun of you for being from Afghanistan. All kinds of stupid jokes: - *"Afghans are stupid!"*, *"They are all workers!"*, *"They are stuck in the past!"* And the most stupid thing – when an Iranian child cries or he is not nice, his mother scares him by saying: - *"If you keep crying I'll give you to the Afghani to eat you!"*. Ha ha. In the last year of high school, I could hardly wait to reach the University.

In the third day of school, the director came to our class room and called my name: - *"Jamal, take your school bag and come to my office"*. And what followed was another big... NO!

I started again to go with my mother from one office to another, from one organization to the other, to beg them let me go to University. It was in vain. Afghans were not allowed to go to University. Other foreigners were allowed, but not the Afghani refugees. That was the new law.

One of my brothers had already left for Afghanistan. And he told me that in Iran I couldn't become anything but a construction worker. *"Come with me to Afghanistan and there you can continue your studies"*.

I had a very strange feeling to leave Iran, for a country that, besides the war and everything, is called already Afghanistan!

SAMIRA:

I wanted go Holland. Go Holland stay at sister, but Holland don't allow, don't stay as long you want, once every 3 months, go to Romania. I asked Holland allow me, transfer refugee, but Holland said: *„You refugee to Romania, you stay to Romania!"*. And I came back to Romania, but I here nothing! Parents no, husband no, house no! Job not found, I little money. If woman no money, man look not at her. I see young man, like 35 years old, married with woman 75 years old. What for? For this: 3 cars, 3 house. Friends here, is today, tomorrow run away. When rent comes, need for money, friends all run away. When I get sick here, who helbs me? Why I stay to Romania?! Why make rent?! I pay electricity, I pay water, I pay and pay and pay to Romania and Romania what are you doing?

Like now, I wanted make medical assurance, without assurance, no ID card, not possible leave. Medical assurance very important Samira! And there they make me pay 30 millions assurance. Why make me pay 30 millions?! Because I didn't have assurance 2007 and 2008. But I was not here 2007-2008, I was to Holland! Why assurance here when I was to Holland?! And from where 30 millions?! If I have 30 millions, I pay assurance and go straight to Holland!

I gave everything to Romania and Romania gave nothing to me!

ESTERA:

We never begged!

We worked what we were offered. If mom even learnt to fire the gun... we were looking for frogs in the ground and eating frogs. And for heating, we used to go on the road and grab the animals' shit, dried shit and put it on fire to worm the house. We were adapting as we could. But we weren't begging. Even if it was very hard and we had hard times. Very hard. But we didn't make fools of ourselves.

There, in Uzbekistan, father couldn't join the communist party. My mother was Bessarabian, so she was considered a USSR citizen. But me and my father were considered foreigners. We had the status of political refugees.

SONIA (reads):

„History of Romania. World War II:

Romania took part in the second world war, aiming to gain back the lost territories. Started the war on Germany's side, fighting against the Soviet Union, but after several defeats, on August 23 1944, Romania changed sides, and fought together with the Soviet Union against Germany, until the end of the war.

ESTERA:

In 1944, after August 23, my father was very-very happy when he found out about the change of Romania's politics, so he asked for repatriation. He wrote a personal letter to the communist leader Patrascanu. My father was a friend of Patrascanu.

In 1948 my sister was born and we still didn't have any answer about repatriation. And there, in Uzbekistan, it was terribly hot, there were 50 degrees Celsius, and many children got sick of dysentery and other infectious diseases. Very often babies would die. My mother got really scared for my sister. Before she turned one year old, we moved to Pokrov. Finally, after 10 months spent in Pokrov, our repatriation was approved. So, we came back to Romania in '50. I care very much about Romanian language, about Romania. I think my room-mate is so right when she hears people talking against Romania, she says: „These guys use to spit up in the air, and the spit comes back on their faces”.

YAMEN (reads):

„SYMBOLS OF ROMANIAN CULTURE:

One of the classic figures of the Romanian literature, together with Mihai Eminescu, Ioan Slavici and I.L. Caragiale, Ion Creangă is renowned for his stories, fairy-tales and short stories. The writer became famous mainly for his autobiographical work „Childhood memories”.

ESTERA:

When we came back to Romania in 1950 I couldn't speak any Romanian. I remember we bought a book of Ion Creangă and I learnt after it. It took 6 hard working months to catch up. I used to feel very well in Uzbekistan, I was enjoying myself there. I even thought „Why are they getting me out of here? Why are we going to Romania?”. That's what I was thinking.

YAMEN (reads):

„UNIVERSAL HUMAN RIGHTS. THE RIGHT TO INTEGRITY OF THE INDIVIDUAL.

The right to integrity of the individual is the right of all human beings, without discrimination, to have their physical and psychic integrities respected.

This implies that no natural or conventional person and no state authority can act to harm or mutilate the human body or the mind of an individual.”

YAMEN:

Now the Iraqis were staying in the abandoned houses of Kuwait people, started using their cars. There was also a very profitable trade going on. Trucks from Iraq and Jordan came to Kuwait and took all the luxurious furniture from abandoned houses to sell it to Jordan.

Then the Iraqi army started to execute everyone who was caught stealing. They were knocking the doors every night, inviting everybody to the executions. They were saying everybody had to learn what stealing and being a thief meant. You don't mess with the Iraqi army. After the executions, they used to hang the dead bodies to the nearest bridges and write on them „thief”. And the family received an invoice with the price of bullets shot in the thieves' bodies.

Then, the Iraqis changed the names of the streets and schools as they wanted and they declared Kuwait a province of Iraq. The Kuwait people hated the Palestinians, also because Yasser Arafat declared that in such a problem, as the war with Iraq, no foreign intervention was needed, that it was a local problem, that should have been solved locally, between them. For that the Kuwait people hated The Palestinians.

But actually, it was very wise what this man said, because any foreign intervention comes with an interest, not with friendship. Look at Iraq, it is not good at all now... and in Libya everybody wanted to intervene, and why, for the friendship or for the oil? Cause they all wanted to intervene, France, US, everybody. If it was for friendship why didn't they intervene in Yemen?

ESTERA:

When we returned in 1950, they wanted to give an important job to my father. But they asked him to change his Jewish name. My father refused. So he remained a regular functionary at the Archive of the History of the Communist Party Institute for the rest of his life.

My father never denied his name and his affiliation to the Jewish community and religion. He didn't change his religion, he was very convinced in all his actions. Since his school years my father was attracted by the revolutionary ideas. My father went to Bucharest very young in 1925 or 1926. That time in Bucharest a Jew was murdered. And my father organized a protest and wrote a manifesto against the murder of this Jew. And for that my father was jailed. In prison he joined the illegal communist party. I still have a picture of my father taken in Doftana prison. It is a picture of him hit and mutilated. My father was a very active protester. He was jailed 50 times. A police officer wrote about him: „He was jailed 50 times and still resists“. He was condemned for communist and revolutionary activities. But my father wanted very much to return to Romania. When he saw a picture from his native city Craiova, his heart started beating fast. He was *Oltenian*. A true *Oltenian*. The *Oltenians* are a different sort of people

SONIA (reads):

„Oltenia is a region situated in South West Romania, between the South Carpathians, at the North, the Danube, at the South and Olt river at the East. Craiova is considered to be the capital city of Oltenia, an important economical centre, with several monasteries and churches.“

YAMEN:

Then they announced that the war starts again, that Americans will attack Kuwait. At some point they bombed and fired the oil derricks and we couldn't tell if it was day or night. We woke up and check the clocks, but it was night all the time. No sun, no moon, no stars, nothing. Just that smoke. I don't know how everything ended, I don't remember. I just know that Americans at some point entered Kuwait and shot some gun fires in the air, and we knew it was over. Actually it was the end for some people, but the beginning for the others. The Iraqi were gone but now the Kuwait people came back and started the repression. If a Palestinian went alone outside he could get back home killed. Every time I went out I needed to go together with somebody from Kuwait – our neighbour was pretending I was her nephew. Once this guy wanted to get me out of the car and my neighbour hit him with her shoe to defend me. We were excluded from schools, all Palestinians were fired from their work places. Palestinians were forced to leave, they couldn't even get their pensions unless they left the country. They cancelled our Kuwait visas, even though they were available for 10 years, especially for me because I was born there. Without a visa, I was not allowed to attend University. At any moment I was risking being arrested and being deported at the Iraqi border: *„Go to your Iraqi friends!“*.

SONIA (reads):

„The 1989 Revolution:

With the background of the International context, of collapse of the Soviet Union, but also because of the impoverishment of the Romanian population, on December 16 1989, protests started in Timisoara and the following days the revolution began in Bucharest. President Nicolae Ceausescu on December 25 was tried and executed in Targoviste city, together with his wife, Elena."

YAMEN:

I tried to go everywhere outside Kuwait. My father had a friend who knew the Romanian consul from Kuwait. And he told me, „Why don't you come to Romania?". I hadn't heard about Romania before. I only remember the newspaper frontline with the picture of Ceausescu shot dead and the words: „The last dictator from the communist block was shot". The consul showed me some extraordinary leaflets, with mountains, stuff, I thought Romania was heaven on earth. I was very much into cars that time, I wanted to learn more about cars. So the guy told me: „We have, oh, we have 3 car factories, Renault, Land Rover and Citroen". He was talking about the Romanian Dacia, Aro and Oltcit. So I thought wow I have the opportunity to see a car factory! So I thought „Let's go!". The consul told me: - „Dude, in Romania you obtain citizenship in 5 years and can travel where you want". This encouraged me. I thought: „let's go!". Later, the wife of the Romanian consul began some serious business. She started to send Palestinians students in Romania for the cost of 1000 dollars each. I was the first one, and the consul was our friend, so I got a discount: only 700 dollars, to register me at the University. It actually cost 100 lei to register the University. When I arrived at the Kuwait airport, the border guard checks the passport, sees the Romanian visa and stamps the interdiction for Kuwait. He says: „What are you doing in Romania?". „Studying". „You don't have a Kuwait visa! Good by, don't ever come back to our country!".

SONIA (reads):

„VOCABULARY: Migration=displacement for changing working and living place, determined by social, political, economical or natural factors".

JAMAL:

I left for Afghanistan in October 2003. I remember that at the border there was an office for registering travellers. There I was asked the most stupid question. The question I didn't know the answer. For this question there is still a war in Afghanistan. The office man asked me: - „What is your ethnicity?". I have never heard that question before, I had no idea what should I answer, so I said: „I am Afghan". And he says: - „Well, of course, we are all Afghans, but what is your ethnicity?!".

I asked my brother and he said that we are Turkmen.

We arrived at 10 pm in Herat. It was just two years after the fall of the Taliban regime. It was very dark and very quiet.

I went with my brother at our uncle's home. I met relatives that never heard of. It was great. The next day, when I went out in the streets, I was surprised! All the women were wearing something blue, covering all their body. It was so funny that you couldn't tell who is who. That's why I called them: „blue chocolates".

SAMIRA:

Me had boyfriend, blond with blue eyes...Romanian. Met at the elevator and that was it, gave honest heart, true love! Seriously, he also loved. He loved myself very much. Said it, felt it...everything. And I go to church and waited him to come with ring. And he not come! Together with priest from the Arab church I waited...seriously, for engagement. And he not come because he not have money to buy ring. And then my old brother said: "Nu! If he no money to buy ring for you, not have gold, not have houses to give to you, not respect you, shame on him! No marriage! That's it! True, he works one day yes,

another day not, but not like this - everyday... And then, where can get money from to pay the rent? No! That's it! No need anymore! Me not slept with him! It's not aloud in Arab law! If me slept with him, big shame on God! Me respect God! Seriously! Me not Moslem! Me Christian! To Iraq very few Christian! I Sunday go church, go two church in Bucharest. Go to Orthodox church and to Catholic church. Here to Romania good - few Moslem, many Christians... I not like Moslem religion, where is Moslem religion, there is problem!

SONIA:

When we were living at the home for asylum seekers, we met a pastor from Sudan. A black one! He's a pastor at the Baptist church. That's where we are going. We come there from every country and we are of all colours. In Romania I learnt to meet God. In Romania I learnt what it means to give and to get back. I was baptised in Serbia, when I was 11 years old. At Orthodox church. My husband was not baptised at all. He just didn't want to. I kept telling him, I am baptised, the children are baptised, come and be like us. He kept saying no. And one day, after one and a half year of attending the Baptist church, he said „I want to get Baptised”. I said, howcome, you didn't want anywhere so far... he says: „I want now. I want here”. So I went with him and told him: „Where you are, I also want to be”. I baptised again even if I was already baptised. After one year and a half, our boy said: „mom, I want to be like dad, I want to baptise too”. He baptised and then, in the end, my daughter said – I also wanna be the same as you... So now we all are Baptists!

YAMEN:

And if you want a human touch... me and my cousin I grew up with, left Kuwait the same day, at the same hour, with the same situation... She went to Jordan because her father had a Jordanian passport. We grew up together. I haven't seen her since. When we were kids I didn't understand how valuable she was for me, how dear. And that moment she started crying because she was going to miss her parents.

And that moment I didn't want to leave anymore, I didn't know what to do, I wanted to stop time passing, it was the time of the separation. I wanted to tell her „Come with me! Or I will come with you!”. Her mother was crying, her father was crying. My mother didn't know for whom to cry first, because she considered my cousin like her daughter. I couldn't look my mother in the eyes as she kept crying and crying. There is this moment I will never forget. My father was pretty tough on me when I was a child, so I was expecting, in a moment like this, when everybody else was sensitive, crying, I was expecting him to act tough again, to teach me a lesson. So I went to my father to say good bye. I was almost 19 years old and thought „ok, you need to bear your father for the last time”. And I just stood in front of him, with my head down, waiting for him to start his speech. And a few minutes past. And he was silent. The moment I looked at him again I was totally surprised. I think it was good that I didn't look at him, because he cried a lot. When I saw this, I myself started to cry, now he had stopped crying and I had just started. And I asked my father to tell me what he needs to say, because I was waiting for that. And he said: „I have nothing to tell you. Everything I told you so far was because I knew some day you will leave”.

SONIA:

My husband was the best husband in the world. After I lost him I didn't remarry, and I not interested in that and don't want to. I haven't been with another man except my husband. It is not only about me. I thinking about the kids. Their father was one and only and that's how it should stay. And the children are everything I got. I have nobody else, no parents, nothing. It's for the kids that I am struggling every day. For me it would be easier to have a new husband, but I know I would harm the kids. My husband die 5 years ago. He went to Greece to work. He was working on the black market, because it is very difficult as a refugee to work legally in Romania. But he never came back. He fell down and hit his head

to the floor. I don't really know what happened. Cerebral edema, so they said. Then I wanted to go back, because I didn't know if I could make a living here alone, but the children asked to stay in Romania, so I remained here to fight for them. I have big dreams for my children. I want to give them everything even before they ask. I was never able to get what I wanted. Father said: „You will get married so you don't have to do anything, all you need is a husband”. I always wanted so many things, to do something on my own, to have a meaning in this world!

YAMEN:

It was a very weird moment of my life. I was happy to get away from all the stress in Kuwait, but there was also my cousin whom I felt like seeing for the first time. I was like - very confused. Our parents knew we were leaving for good, that we won't come back. It was like a sort of death, because you don't know when you will see that person again. That moment I thought I won't go anymore, I wanted to quit going to University. On the other hand I wanted to leave faster, so I wouldn't see my father like that. I wanted to remember the tough father, not the vulnerable one. Anyway it was impossible to go back! I had the interdiction for entering Kuwait on my document. 5 minutes before they had stamped the interdiction. At that very moment I realized that what I always used to consider my motherland, didn't exist anymore, because my entry was forbidden.

Some time ago I was reading the Romanian constitution, and a Romanian citizen cannot be expelled from his own country, no matter what he has done. I also thought I couldn't be thrown out of the place I was born in, they cannot forbid me to go there. So that was the moment of detachment, when I finally understood that Kuwait is not my motherland. And it was very natural, clear. I understand - my parents were expelled from Gaza by a different people, by an occupier, but I was thrown out by Kuwait. So I left.

JAMAL:

In December I passed the final high-school exam. I decided to go to Herat Technical University.

In the second year of university I had the chance to go to the Technology University in Berlin for a semester and study about networks and pedagogy. It was amazing! Germany opened my eyes in some way and now I had a totally new perspective on Afghanistan. I could hardly wait to get back and change things here. That's why I didn't stay in Germany or run to another European country, as my colleagues did. But when I came back to Afghanistan, came also the shock. How come there everything is possible and in Afghanistan, nothing, absolutely nothing is possible?! You're asking yourself everyday: - "Why?", "Why?", Why was I born Afghani?!

YAMEN:

When I arrived in Bucharest... Otopeni airport at that time was very-very small, like a kiosk, I've never seen anything similar, built of wood.

A man in a suit was waiting for me, he was from the foreign affairs agency. He took me and when we went out I had a surprise about the cars, they were all the same. And only 3 colours: creamy white, red and light blue. And there were some Trabants. I was already shocked after what I had seen in the airplane. And I also felt the cold, Siberian weather, the cold air, I saw people wearing fur caps, like the Russian soldiers in the movies. On the road, it was autumn, there were all the colours possible in the trees, but there were also pits, lots of pollution. I wanted to open the car window and the guy said: „No, you better don't". That terrible polluted air remembered me of the black smoke from war time. Yes. And I saw a bear-foot beggar, a gypsy. The consul in Kuwait had warned me to beware of „gypsies": „Those are not Romanians, he said, don't trust any Gypsy!"

SONIA (reads):

„CONSTITUTION – ARTICLE 4, PARAGRAPH 2:

Romania is the homeland of all its citizens, no matter the race, nationality, ethnicity, language, sex, opinions, political affiliation, wealth or social origin."

YAMEN:

So... this was the first things I've seen, the gypsies and their carts. And the gypsies were approaching us and this guy, the driver, was swearing at them, and driving them away. And I saw them, the gypsies, gathering scrap iron with the carts. And I thought: where am I? I was supposed to come to Europe. But the first picture I had in mind when I saw Bucharest, the streets, the pollution, it was Cairo! The same-same-same. This made me smile. So he found a cheap hotel in downtown area, around 10 dollars per night. And again, the hotel resembled those wretched, dilapidated Cairo hotels. Then again, we saw gypsy money-changers close to Intercontinental and the driver also warned me: „be careful, these are gypsies! Never change money with them, you give them 100 dollars, they give you 1 dollar..." Then he said: „let me show you the city – here is University square, the revolution started here, a man was killed here, another one there". Then he said just a few months ago the miners came to Bucharest and hit students. And I thought - home wasn't good but here is worse. He told me: „I think it's better you stay in your room, for a few days, you never know what can happen, they might confuse you for a terrorist or something", because he told me there were also terrorists. I said I wanted to call my family. The first thing I told my parents was: "I wanna come back home! Where have you sent me?! I was such an idiot... that miserable consul, lied to me and encouraged me. I'd better get jailed in Kuwait than live here!"

SONIA (reads):

„CONSTITUTION: ARTICLE 47 – LIVING STANDARD

The state is obliged to apply measures of economic development and social protection, in order to provide all the citizens a decent living standard.

All citizens have the right to pensions, maternity leave, medical assistance in state owned hospitals, unemployment rent and other forms of public and private social assurances. All citizens are also entitled to social assistance according to the law."

SAMIRA:

I thought you can help me, you can help refugees, so I thought, don't mind me please... I think there is one thing you can help! Maybe you know a boss or you know a boss **(points out different people from the audience)** from McDonald's or somewhere else, and you help Samira! Or you can help me something else! Do you know 30 true persons? Think! If you know 30 true persons, every one person give Samira 1 million lei and Samira makes assurance and goes Holland! Or maybe here in the public, is here 30 true persons who wants to give 1 million? Only 1 million lei! And then I give money back! Seriously! **(picks someone else from the audience)** You help 1 million? After one month I give million back! **(talks to the person sitting next the one she just talks to)** You help 1 million? After one month I give another million back! 30 true persons, that needed! And 1 million, another million, another million help Samira!

YAMEN:

Well... I finally got back to the hotel and saw there this guy looking like Tiger Woods. I was sitting downstairs in the lobby, asked for a place to have a coffee, there wasn't any. I saw that the door from my hotel room was like a biscuit door, very fragile, with the lock broken. I asked if they had a safe deposit, there wasn't any. So I was guarding my room most of the time. I thought I should have a break sometimes and go downstairs. And this guy was downstairs, he was speaking a very bad English, talking to a curly-haired girl. I barely understood what they were talking about. And the girl comes to talk to

me: "Hallou, my name is... Do you smoke, you don't..." but I didn't understand what she wanted; her English was also bad... So this woman was a prostitute, but I didn't get it at first, actually I only understood what she wanted when she drew it for me. I said: „I'm sorry, I'm a student". And that I ran upstairs in my room, I was shocked – soldiers outside, prostitution... I was sitting in my room with no TV, with no proper bathroom, and at some point someone knocks the door. It was the prostitute. She came to negotiate, from 100 dollars, to 80, then 40, 20 and she still didn't get it that I was not interested. Finally she left and told me: "You are a stupid baby!".

SONIA (reads):

The state is obliged to apply measures of economic development and social protection, in order to provide all the citizens a decent living standard."

ESTERA:

In my opinion it is immoral to call the 50 years of communist regime illegal. Even though I suffered a lot during communism. But comparing my suffering back then, with my problems and suffering in the present day regime, that was nothing.

On April 4 2009 I've been evacuated from my apartment in Roma Street no. 8. At 4 o'clock in the morning, the owner entered the house, together with a few big guys. They pulled me out of the house, took all my stuff and threw it away outside in the street. They pulled me out in my sleeping clothes. The next months I've been living in the streets. I went to the neighbours to wash myself. I used to sleep in the hall of the building, downstairs, or on a bench in the park. A girl offered me a blanket and something to eat. She was Transilvanian. After two months of wandering I was transferred to the Jewish retirement home. I managed to save some stuff from my house, my bookshelf, I lodged it at an acquaintance. A big bookshelf, a whole wall full of books. Everything else was lost. All my belongings were lost in the street.

SONIA (reads):

*"VALUES OF THE EUROPEAN UNION.
THE HUMAN DIGNITY.*

The dignity of the human being is a fundamental right, emphasized by several international treaties and conventions for human rights, among them The Universal Declaration of Human Rights and The Document of Fundamental Rights of European Union.

ESTERA:

This right stands as the base for all the fundamental rights recognized by the EU and constitutes a warranty that these rights will not be used to harm the dignity of another individual.

I haven't found any of the stuff thrown in the street. I have no idea who took them or who used them. And I asked the owner: at least let's get the stuff to the basement. I had the right to use the basement! But he refused. I heard my belongings laid in the middle of the street for a couple of days and then disappeared. I tried to call people, to do something, but I didn't get any support. Now, after I came to the retirement home, I hired a lawyer. She is very smart and capable. We'll see what she can do.

SONIA

I want to obtain Romanian citizenship for the kids. For them it's important, if they want to visit their grandparents in Serbia. As refugees, we are not allowed to return to our country of origin. But it's a long way until you get to the exam. Everywhere is so much bureaucracy, just to deposit a brief, you need to go three times. They always ask for something else. They mocked me, all these ladies from the offices. First time I went to register for the exam, they saw that my boy is almost 18 and they said we need a separate file for him, to get the citizenship. And I told them as always, write down on a paper

everything I need. And they got upset that why I ask them to write. I just wanted to be sure, to ask for everything and when I come back with the documents to show them the paper. So, after she said the boy needed a file, I came back with the boy. They said that why did I come with the boy that he is not needed. Then, I went without him and they said that where is the boy, that he needs to register all documents in person... the third time I sent the boy and he called me: „Mom we need another document!“.

JAMAL(reads):

“BUILDINGS AND MONUMENTS OF BUCHAREST

The House of People is quoted in the Guinness Book of Records, as the second biggest administrative building in the world after the Pentagon.”

YAMEN:

Later I discovered the beautiful part of Bucharest, I discovered the House of People. Then my image of Bucharest started to change. I went to Unirea universal store, it was the first Romanian store I entered. There I bought some boots very cheap. I used those 50 dollars for a month and a half, eating every day, going by taxi every day, buying boots, I even bought a fur jacket and the money still didn't finish... And like this I slowly started to fall in love with Bucharest, especially that I discovered the underground. You know how I discovered it? I saw everybody going down and thought it was a passage. And then I went down and saw the metro! And I started to travel by metro from one end of the line to the other. I was very pleased. So I loved Bucharest, didn't ever want to leave.

SONIA (reads):

In Romanian society are appreciated, encouraged and shared values such as: tolerance, generosity, education, good manners, sociability, perseverance, hospitality.

YAMEN:

Then, I moved with a Palestinian colleague This guy told me: „Dude let's stop eating at restaurants, let's cook at home!“. And if my colleague said let's buy eggs and cheese, I had learnt how to say „bread“ and „cheese“ and I used to say all the time „please not pork cheese“. And once a vendor mocked me and she said: - „No, the pork milk and the pork cheese are grey, so if you see at some point grey cheese you'll know that it's pork!“.

And I really believed her, I thought that if everybody eats pork here it's impossible they don't make cheese also. Like you make sheep or beef cheese, I was sure they also make pork cheese. Once I event had a fight with a woman, because I kept asking, I was not sure that it's not pork, so I remember she told me: - „So what, if you eat pork cheese? Do you think it will get stuck in your neck?“. Not to mention that they were packing the food in newspapers, or in book pages. So after I was coming home, I was starting to cut all the edges of the cheese, to get the ink spots off. But those were beautiful days! I'd seen worse, I mean I had just come from wartime.

SONIA (reads):

*„The fundamental duties of the Romanian citizens:
Article 54 – the fidelity towards the country is sacred.*

Article 55 – all the citizens have the right and obligation to defend their country“.

My husband went to war twice, in the two Bosnia wars, so the third time when they called him for Kosovo, he refused. And then we said: what can we do, we are leaving. The war destroyed our souls, destroyed our country! We went through so much fear, through so much pain and what for? There were

no problems between us, Serbians, Croatians, Muslims, we lived together very well in big Yugoslavia. Some time ago they called me to be a translator for a Bosnian asking for asylum, and I really cried a lot for him. We never wanted to fight against each other, the people did not even know why they were going to war and who are they killing. I refuse to think about Serbia anymore. I know what terrible things happened in Bosnia and how many children died. I told my husband back then, when he joined the army the second time. If an American soldier steps his foot in Serbia, I am taking my children and going wherever I can. I was ready to leave, with the food and the luggage in the car!. I was sleeping with all my papers close. And the third time, with Kosovo, we actually left.

SAMIRA:

Muslims knows something about God, Americans don't know nothing God. They know money, not give money, beating! Like this America, seriously! You have oil and not want to give oil like Iraq, beating, war! Down, another presidente! They not respect, like Syria now, America start war to Syria. And Libya... Where is oil, America beat you up! Seriously, true! Wait, now they find to Romania, they find gold, tomorrow or after tomorrow comes America. Where is gold, there is America too. This is Americans: "God for you, the money for me!"

JAMAL:

I am sick of war. I was 20 years old when I went to Germany. I thought things will change, I thought it's gonna be different. Most Afghans are eager to escape this country, nobody returns after going abroad. I returned... it's been 10 years since 9/11 and nothing changed. Before 2007 we all thought that the war will be over soon, but the Taliban reunited and came back even stronger. Americans came here for 10 years and the situation hasn't changed at all! It's even worse! And not only Americans, but all the countries that sent armies here and spend a lot of money on those paradises they built for their soldiers in Afghanistan!

All the military bases of the Germans, Americans, NATO, ISAF and so on! You need to see with your own eyes to believe! They have night clubs in those military bases, with all kinds of drinks, with alcohol, with everything they would have in their own countries. I'd like to film with a hidden camera and post on you-tube so everybody can see how are they going through the war! It's like they live on islands of luxury in the middle of hell! What the fuck are these people doing in Afghanistan?!

If all these armies from all over the world would give the money they spend on their military bases to the poor people, I can guarantee that no Afghan would go to work for the Taliban for 100 dollars a month! If they would give this money to help Afghanistan, I think Afghanistan would be the second Dubai.

JAMAL:

Now if I could I would ask for political asylum in Germany, but there is no way I can get there. I have the right to ask for political asylum in Europe, but no country would give me the visa. I should just wake up there and say: "I don't know how did I end up here, illegally, obvious, but I want a refugee status". I can't even go back to Iran, where I was born and where my parents still live

I also have a girlfriend. And this is another problem. She is also born in Iran, from a family of Afghan refugees. But here in Afghanistan very few people accept being together with someone without getting married. So have a lot of trouble because of this. We started singing together. She was already singing together with her father. I also have been rapping but not very professional. So we decided to write songs and sing them together. In Herat there isn't really any place to sing, there aren't any conditions.

The city is dangerous and being a singer is actually very dangerous for a girl. And there are no opportunities. And being together is another problem. So what the fuck are we doing in Afghanistan?!?! We decided to leave the country!

SONIA (reads):

"REFUGEES

European Union protects persons who seek for asylum in one of the member states, by adhering to the Geneva convention in 1951.

ESTERA:

The truth is that wherever there is war, citizens should have the opportunity to refuge, at least for a while. You cannot just let people live under bombings. But, at the same time, they should go back, like we repatriated, came home, they should also go back. But not like that, not expelled. I think it is important that intellectuals gather that they ask themselves what can be done with this world? My father said what should be done. He said there is no other way but to think of the person near you. Every individual should think of the other individual. He told me this: "you are not allowed to upset even an animal!". You need to know how to get close to people. Look at this Arab Spring also. It is so hard to maintain. They are heading towards civil war. But the people, the refugees, they also need to work what they are given to work! Not to beg! We never begged like these guys are begging now. In France, everywhere. These gypsies...

YAMEN:

The worst experience I had... there was a problem that we registered for University to late and there were no more places in Bucharest. So they sent us to Pitesti. I can't even talk about that train, how miserable it was. It didn't even have a toilet door. Everything was... miserable, the leather from the benches ripped off, dirty. And all the passengers were, well, gypsies!
It was... shocking. Especially that, you know how they are, I mean you cannot stay close to them because of the smell and because of other stuff...

SAMIRA:

I also had problem with gypsy. Gypsy is dirty. Samira is correct, is good, gypsy think Samira stupid. I had problem with them. In 8 years I had no problem with Romanian-Romanian, but problem with gypsy. Because... you know how gypsy is... how behave like everybody stupid and they smart. They behave... behave bad. I had gypsy neighbour and he was very bad and I prayed a lot to God. And God listened to me, had mercy to me. And gypsy moved away. And now have Romanian neighbour and we understand very good. Transylvanian! Remus. Remus is called. Very good. I friend with him.

ESTERA:

Well, it's true that the gypsies don't have a country either. They have no place to go. They have no country. That's right. But what can we do, transform Romania in Tiganiada, in Gypsyland?

JAMAL:

Romania is the homeland of all its citizens, no matter the race, nationality, ethnicity!

YAMEN:

Anyway... right after I graduated university I found out I was officially a stateless citizen. Before, I did not know.

So I asked for asylum and then, after I went to court twice, I finally won and obtain refugee status. It was very difficult. The interview is very important, but I already spoke very good Romanian so I paid a lot of attention on what the man was writing. Because they, the police, are very manipulative, try to fool you. They insist very much on this idea – if your life was threatened in your own country. I told him that in

Kuwait my family had a special situation, that our neighbours protected us. And the man wrote: „the asylum seeker suggests that his life was threatened”. I checked and told him: „Please, I know very well the different meanings in Romanian language – I didn’t „suggest”. I „confirmed”..., and so on, other stuff like that. But I finally won, anyway they couldn’t send me anywhere. Now many years have passed, I even got the Romanian citizenship. I am a Romanian citizen now. So I can go visit Kuwait. I can even go to Israel if I want to. The only place I can’t enter is Gaza. If Palestine would be officially recognized as a state, I would like to go and live there. There in Gaza is my country, my language, those are the places where my parents and my grandparents come from, so I would love to live there.

ESTERA:

Me and my parents never wanted to go to Palestine, or to Israel after ‘48. There is also a climate that is not suitable for me. And I didn’t want to leave my parents. So I settled here. I always felt that I belong to a country, that Romania is really my country, but the country never felt me as a citizen. Now all my hope is in this lawyer. We have papers that could help us get the house back. All I want now is to work at my home. I am a translator. I want to continue doing translations, and personal writings. Something like that. Creative work.

JAMAL:

America is my dream! But it is very difficult to get there. I discovered America through Google Earth. Sometimes I google different countries, I visit them. In 2005 I found out about Google Earth and I was astonished. You can see the whole world! You know, for an Afghani is almost impossible to get a visa for another country. But with Google Earth is super-easy, you don’t need any visa to travel! I visited many countries. I’ve been to Paris... I mean, I haven’t really been, I went ONLINE to Paris. I also travelled to several cities in Italy – Roma, Milano. And I also went to New York. There I loved the buildings, the people, the culture. I wouldn’t like to stay just in one country because I want to connect with different types of people. But in America, especially in New York, there are so many emigrants, so you don’t feel like you are settled in only one place. That’s why I would choose America!

SONIA (reads):

“GEOGRAPHY – BLACK SEA

Our country is open to the Black Sea, fact that allows us to navigate on all the worlds seas and oceans.”

JAMAL:

We will get fake Israeli passports. With them we will get to Turkey in some trucks. There are networks that will help us at the borders. We checked. From Turkey, we go by boat, hidden in containers. On the Black Sea. We go across the Sea. And then we’ll arrive to Romania. Romania – “state member of the European Union”. We’ll be in Europe! 4000 euro. For each of us. Now we are looking for the money. Those containers are 4 square metres wide. With the height is more difficult, they are not higher than one metre. That’s it. We’ll roll up. One, two, three days, how long can it take. I heard some people died in those containers. Of course you can’t really be sure. But we talked to these guys that are experienced in this business. With this amount of money, pretty big, I guess they won’t throw us over board. We will get to Europe! We will make music! We’ll get European citizenship and we’ll travel everywhere! We will even be able to go back to Iran to see our parents again - we haven’t seen them since we left! It won’t matter anymore, that we’re Afghanis!

SONIA (reads):

“BEHAVIOUR LAWS

It's wrong:

To break public silence. (to make big noise in public places or in inappropriate moments)

To eat or smoke in the street.

To throw papers or garbage on the road.

To speak disrespectful..."

Why do I have to learn about all this? I wonder how many Romanians know the constitution by heart?! I have to work, if I don't work I don't get citizenship, I have to take care of the kids, I have to cook, I have to clean, I have to do everything, and, on top of this, I have to learn all the constitution by heart! And the laws of the European Union! And Geography and History and everything! And I also have to run with the papers from one office to the other! But I started to learn for a long time. And I learn easily. I study when I have time... during the night. I have to! And I want to pass this exam! For the children! As long as I can, I will struggle! And study!

"Romania is a state of law, democratic and social. As a social state, Romania has to provide social protection of work, of living standards, of the population in general."

SAMIRA:

God wanted this...all my family around outside in the world, brother – Germany, sister – Holland, brother – America...I the 10th child, the youngest. Why all my family outside and I to Romania? I give everything to Romania, I want Romania give something back to me. I here not job, not house, I nothing. If you know history – bible: God has 100 sheep, 99 like this behind him...and one where? Me!

SONIA:

. I don't want to return to Serbia. I have nothing there. No parents, nobody. At some point it used to be our time there. Now it's probably someone else's. Now I don't know anybody there. I want peace for my children.

My grandmother was born in Serbia in 1905. She faced the most terrible wars, the Balkan wars and the World Wars. My mother was born in '38. She faced the Second World War. I was born in '75, I faced war. My children faced war. For how long will we go on like this... What generation should we stop at? Look what a beautiful heritage we leave for our children!

YAMEN:

NATIONAL SYMBOLS:

The Romanian flag has 3 colours: the colours are disposed vertically in the following order, starting from the spear: blue, yellow, red.

ESTERA:

Vocabulary: Spear=the stick that supports the flag.

JAMAL:

National day of Romania is December 1st.

SAMIRA:

National anthem of Romania is Wake up Romanian.

SONIA(reads):

A foreign citizen or a person with a form of protection can obtain the Romanian citizenship if he knows the Romanian Constitution and the national anthem.

*Awaken thee, Romanian, shake off the deadly slumber
The scourge of inauspicious barbarian tyrannies
And now or never to a bright horizon clamber
That shall to shame put all your noxious enemies.*

*It's now or never to the world we readily proclaim
In our veins throbs and ancestry of Roman
And in our hearts for ever we glorify a name
Resounding of battle, the name of gallant Trajan*

*Do look imperial shadows, Michael, Stephen, Corvinus
At the Romanian nation, your mighty progeny
With arms like steel and hearts of fire impetuous
It's either free or dead, that's what they all decree.*

*Priests, rise the cross, this Christian army's liberating
The word is freedom, no less sacred is the end
We'd rather die in battle, in elevated glory
Than live again enslaved on our ancestral land*

-END-