

THE BORDER IS CLOSED

حالا ملک محل
بدیار غم صحرایان

RONI (SYRIA)



SERBIA

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NORWAY

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7. Audio zapisi, izjave tražilaca azila u centrima u Srbiji.
(Medij prenošenja na izložbi: tablet + slušalice)

HELENA
I

SWEET





I'M SLEEPING UNDER
good tree

TO SEE THE SKY, SKY TO SEE ME

Marija Aleksić, PhD

Acting Director of the Museum of African Art

THE BORDER IS CLOSED, BUT THE CONVERSATION IS OPEN

The notion of refuge has been appearing and evolving in the consciousness and language of our people in a few phases. For a long time we could not find the most appropriate word to name the people whom poverty, fear, war or some other misfortune forced to leave their homes and to set off for the unknown countries and worlds. Serbian language used a few related but not exactly synonymous words: *emigrants*, *exiles*, *diaspora*, and *refugees* to denote that unwilling *departure* and *wandering* – each of them with certain social and cultural, psychological or political implications.

In the seventies, when thousands of people from the then Yugoslavia went seeking for better paid jobs and better lives in Western European countries, the following title appeared in one of the German newspapers: “We expected workforce, but instead came people...”

Children and grandchildren of this generation went through dramatic experiences of intercultural dialogue but, however, they somehow built communication bridges between “the self and the other” or “different”.

Recent bloody breakage of Yugoslavia faced us with the issue of refuge in a most dramatic way. According to certain statistics, one in five citizens of the former country had to change their place of permanent residence, implying that about four million people became refugees, and

some were given the status of “internally displaced persons” (from Serbia to Serbia), which essentially did not change the position of the people for whom a poet used the following metaphor – “no home, no grave”.

Today, Serbia is in the midst of migration crisis which it did not cause in any way. Moreover, it plays the role of a host to thousands of people who are victims of war and other kinds of violence, people similar to us two decades ago, people similar to all of us - eager for peace and freedom – running away from burnt, bombed or ruined houses.

They are arriving from Africa and the Middle East, from Eritrea, Somalia, Syria, Iraq, Afghanistan, and Pakistan... From everywhere. The images we had earlier seen only on television today became part of our everyday life. *People and nations on the move* are our reality, regardless of whether they understood Serbia – the country which many of them earlier could not even find on a map– as a transit country, as an incidental point on their way to a better life they dreamed about somewhere in the West, or as a country where they would seek asylum and status of economic or political migrants.

In any case, they are here, among us. Running away from the “firing line”, they found themselves in the environment which itself is not deprived of problems, but is at least peaceful. One of their salvation islands, real “Lampedusa in dry land”, is located beside the capital’s bus station. The old and the young, the healthy and the ill, mothers carrying babies in their arms and mothers to be in late pregnancy, barefoot boys who, instead of balls, chase after plastic bottles or anything that can roll, a girl with a

torn doll in her hand, all of them worried about what tomorrow would bring– are gaining their first impressions on Serbia and spelling out the first words in our language, not knowing whether they would stay here for a week or two, a year or two, or for their whole lives.

“It happens that children leave their homes at the age of twelve, and arrive to where they had initially set off for at the age of seventeen...” – witnesses Gorana Vukašin, pedagogue, who had numerous meetings and interviews with these unfortunate people. There where they set out to, and sometime also where they did not went to, but they anyways arrived. And “when they arrive, they are not children anymore”, records Dragana Pejo-
vić, NIN weekly journalist.

Thus, many of them found themselves in Serbia, although it was not on their migration map.

Our people, rich in their own refugee experience and the experience of loss from the transitional period at the time of clashes and intersections of different geopolitical strategies they could not significantly influence, expressed rather high solidarity level with this people, whom ever bigger disasters brought to this Balkan part of Europe.

Both our country and our citizens are doing everything to prevent this humanitarian catastrophe, which has already negatively affected refugee population, from further escalation.

The media have, with some exceptions¹, assisted in constitut-

¹ In “Danas” daily on August 13, 2015, there appeared a column written by Natalija Dević and titled “Strangers in Belgrade”. In the lines full with racist and xenophobic attitudes, the author writes about Knez Mihajlova Street where

ing an audience in which, as Duško Radović said, “our little can mean everything” – a view on the situation which does not imply that certain people are in worse condition in comparison to our, and therefore we should not meet them with despise, ignorance and, least of all, walls. We shall leave the walls to policy makers who forced this unfortunate people and some of our citizens as well, to leave their homes.

Although, actually, in our spiritual area there is no tendency to negatively color the notion of refuge, positive effects of this – in the beginning maybe unwanted – intercultural dialogue and communication bridge with other spiritual hemispheres are not visible enough.

From a certain viewpoint, our culture owes more profound and more sophisticated insights and analyses on the topic of refugees, which exclude risk of exceeding in acknowledgement of differences, otherness, and alternativeness of “our new neighbours”.

In addition to daily media and other images of distress, grief and hopelessness of thousands of people who had to leave their homeland, we have to pay attention to the outlines of a sort of “global culture of migrations”, which leaves permanent consequences to both geographical and

“Muslim women walk around” with their hands “covered in gold”. Strangers, writes Dević, “constantly speak into their mobile phones in some weird Serbian or in their languages, walk in groups, all through Belgrade”, making the walk of the author and her dog uncomfortable?! The text ends with the following conclusion: “The temperature is rising. And so is the number of weird strangers in Belgrade.”

At the same time, news with completely different content arrived from Germany, which almost immediately won the attention of all media, including Serbian. Answering the question whether there were many foreigners in his kindergarten, a four year old boy, directly to the camera, calmly and spontaneously said: “No, there are only children!”, and thus put an end to a debate on migrants.

spiritual environment that they pass through (in this case Serbia). Refugees are people who spread cultural and linguistic diversity and change the content of traditional cultural concepts; they have their own cultural needs and they are also the creators of certain recognizable cultural values, regardless of how different their places of birth and their places of residence might be. But, migrations do not imply simply movements of people and ideas, but also cultural notions. The flow of migrants in our environment may cause certain changes in both subjective and objective plans, especially because refuge has long tradition in the domestic terrain. Passing through Serbia, refugees, apart from other issues, leave also their mighty cultural trace, permanent cultural imprint.

We believe that the Museum of African Art – as an institution which preserves part of the artifacts of the African peoples and affirms their creative intertwining with the culture of our nation – is the place at which deeper, analytical talks about cultural implications of this type of meetings of nations and people, religions, customs, languages, cultures, memories should be initiated... In the drama of the present days, testimonies of the participants of this “great migration of peoples”, their memories or dreams about the uncertain future – which, maybe, awaits for them at who knows what geographical position of Europe – they are becoming a topic which requires quick human and artistic reactions and reflections. Apart from other issues, the goal of this program – which we realize in cooperation with “Group 484”, with the support of our founder, the Assembly of the City of Belgrade, and Secretariat for Culture, is a certain sensi-

tization of museum audience and diverse target groups in public towards migrants, refugees, exiles, asylum seekers and other people in distress.

We would like our Museum, the only one with this concept, to be recognized among all, including refugees – of course, and the researchers of the migration cultural phenomenon – not only as a spot where differences meet, but also as a place of valuable cultural osmosis, identification and acknowledgement of that which is common in the differences.

“The border is closed!”. Yes, but the conversation is open, in every meaning of this word.

Emilia Epštajn
Curator MAA

THE FUTURE IS A MYTH

about museums, travelling and various “others”

Exile / Progon

In silence / U tišini

**The overloaded canoe leaves our shores / Prenatran čamac napušta naše
obale**

**But who are these soldiers in camouflage, / Ali, ko su ovi vojnici u kamuflaži,
These clouds going to rain in foreign lands? / Ovi oblaci koji će doneti kišu
nepoznatom tlu?**

The night is losing its treasures / Noć gubi svoja blaga

The future seems a myth / Budućnost je, čini se, mit

Warped on a loom worked by lazy hands. / Istkan na razboju lenjim rukama.

**But perhaps all is not without some good for us / No, nije možda ni sve, bez
sreće po nas**

**As from the door of the shack a thousand miles away / Dok iz vrata barake
hiljadama kilometara udaljenim**

**The scaly hand of a child takes in greeting / Ljuspasta ruka deteta pozdravlja
The long skinny fingers of the rain. / Duge, tanane prste kiše.**

About museums

The exhibition “The Border is Closed” results as the collaborative work of the Museum of African Art with nongovernmental organisation – Group 484 and artists – Ivana Bogiević-Leko, Snežana Skoko, Luka Knežević Strika and ŠKART collective. It is through the exhibition, as form of communication inherent to museums, that we approach the urgent social issue of large-scale migratory movements from the Middle East and Africa, across the Balkans, towards Western Europe. Serbia is a transit zone, a stopover for hundreds of thousands of people fleeing from war and poverty-stricken countries. Therefore, our starting point is a highly relevant social phenomenon, which has triggered numerous questions crucial to understanding both the situation in our immediate socio-cultural environment and our positions in the global context.

What is clearly set from the very beginning is that the goal of this exhibition collaboration is to raise public awareness about the social phenomenon of migration through our country and the way we react to this global social phenomenon that has not bypassed our country. Consequently, what determines this collaboration (the first between the Museum and a non-governmental organisation) as well as its product is a highly activist social tone. This may have seemed “natural” to our partners in the project however the practice is relatively new within the framework of museums, especially in Serbia.

After the reconstruction of its building (2011) the National Mu-

seum in Liverpool started implementing a radically different approach to its programs and in relationship to the public. By asking much more from its audience – not only to develop awareness of a whole spectrum of social frameworks, but also to actively participate in the identification of the standpoints these contexts create – the Museum of Liverpool chose the profile of socially responsible museum that deals with human rights and social justice. The goal of almost all exhibitions and programs of this museum is to initiate debates about controversial topics. At the centre of this viewpoint is that although museums are filled with “objects” they must be people-oriented and deal with issues that occupy and affect lives in a multicultural society such as the United Kingdom. Another example that comes from Britain is the initiative for opening the Migration Museum (Migration Museum Project)¹. By travelling through the country, this initiative is a museum without walls, a mobile institution that speaks to different generations of immigrants and deals with various historical circumstances that incite migration. Another illustrative example of the socio-cultural immediacy behind the migration, immigration and refugee phenomenon in Europe as issue that needs to be actively monitored is evident in the work of German artist Tobias Zielony – *The Citizen*, representing Germany at the 56th Venice International Art Biennale (2015). Giving a voice to African

¹ This is really just one of the examples. UNESCO (UNESCO IOM) has published a list of museums, centres and initiatives across Europe dealing with immigration, immigrants, refugees and diaspora, among which is Serbia (Serbian Museum of the Diaspora and Migration - initiative). Among other things, the objective of the support is: “to facilitate transmission between generations as well as encounters between migrants and the host populations, by telling their personal story”.

immigrants to tell their own story through photographs and newspaper articles Zielony documents “the presence of the ‘other’ embodied in African refugees” in Germany today. It is precisely these centres in Western Europe, especially Germany, that are the final destination for thousands of migrants² passing through Serbia.

About “others”

The way in which we at the Museum of African Art in Belgrade will be dealing with this issue must be guided by the particularity of our context. Our task, dictated by museum theory and practice, is to examine the legitimacy of making an exhibition dedicated to migrants from Africa and the Middle East, in this Museum. This is an issue linked to both the genealogy of museums as Western institutions in general and the specific example of the Museum of African Art in Belgrade. Certain identity frameworks set at the level of “self” / “others” are inscribed in the Western model of museums and collecting. Since the 1990s museums have been

2 Since we began working on the exhibition, the beginning of this year, the term used for people coming mostly from Syria, Afghanistan, Ethiopia, Sudan and Eritrea has changed. Terminology in such a sensitive global issue has become a special field for the confrontation of different views and assignment of different identities. Briefly, an *immigrant* is a person looking for a better life who can, but does not have to seek the status of a citizen in a country other than the country of birth; an asylum seeker is often equated with the refugee status and it is a person who “claims to be a refugee” but has still procedurally not become one. This article uses the term *migrant* as a more adequate field of museology (and anthropology) connoting people coming from different parts of the world (cultures), either driven by war or poverty, seeking a better life and the ability to work in Western Europe. A migrant is a person in motion, a wider theoretical term which describes a marginalised identity emerging or becoming - a “wandering identity”.

actively engaged in finding ways to “correct” the narratives resulting from such binary coding; that is, from the fact that one side will always be privileged and the creator of knowledge and experience, and the other under-privileged, marginalised and determined by the designation of *otherness*. The problem lies in the fact that the first within this binary pair is in a position of power, and the “other” is not; i.e. the first speaks for itself, but also on behalf of “the other” – always.³

The Museum of African Art in Belgrade is to some extent an offshoot of the Western model.⁴ The work of the Museum has been largely based on the declared position that the task of this institution is to represent and promote the “art and culture of the African continent”. The Museum is defined as a place where “African art” [*sic.*] is presented, i.e. the creativity of the *entire African continent*. As the history of representation in the Museum shows, in order to meet this demand, interpretation relied on the recreation of certain “realities” in order to present different cultures/ethnic groups of Africa.⁵

3 There are numerous examples of museums in Western Europe, such as the mentioned museum of Liverpool, which had to re-examine the ways in which their contents (objects and exhibitions) supported imperial and colonial practices. However, giving voices to the “others” is an intermediate solution that also has its consequences. The determination within any identity of “the other”, even in the sense of self-empowerment confirms the status of “otherness” and thus (again) restricts and restrains.

4 The first genealogy of the Museum of African Art was conducted within a doctoral thesis of Ana Sladojević (2012), i.e. e-book “The Museum of African Art: Contexts and representations” (2014). It deepens the issue of specificity of the Museum in Belgrade, which relied (and partly still does) on the ideology of *nonalignment* of the Yugoslav period, but also the Western model of collecting and representation of non-EU (African) art and culture.

5 James Clifford (1997) thinks on the subject of an anthropological problem: how in the history of ethnography certain temporally and spatially restricted units (remote villages, non-EU communities) were equated to “culture”.

However, the “African” in question goes beyond the framework of *otherness* that has been attributed to him/her. The “other” we have been dealing with through the project “The Border is Closed” is a *migrant*. The “African” as “other”, trapped in the *myth* of ideology, falls within the scope of a fluid “identity in the making”, a *transit*, mobile, changing identity inherent to the margin, crossing and *passing*. His/her ethnicity, culture, is no longer temporally and spatially infringed within the confinements of various subordinate narratives. He/she becomes a part of a large-scale trans-ethnic group made up of different cultures and places of origin, but also, together with them, he/she refuses to be placed within the concept of the “other”.⁶ Guided by the idea of becoming a full-fledged “citizen”, this “African” goes beyond the framework of his/her ethnic and cultural identity. He/she continues to cross *borders*, real and imaginary, that force the subordinate position of the “other”. He/she is “illegal” in every sense of the word because he/she breaks the boundaries of identity and the framework within which the “privileged” West places him/her. Approaching the

The author primarily reflects the relationship of ethnologist / traveller versus indigene / informant in the process of creating a written record of a particular culture, but what I would highlight from the author’s theoretical emphasis is that the museums themselves treated spatially limited group of objects as expressions of a particular culture. Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett (1991) talks about the almost surgical slicing of segments of cultures (through objects, events, performances, festival, and even people), aspiring to recreation and interpretation of cultures and identities of the “other” in the museum context. Inevitably, based on we take these fragmentary knowledge outside the museum. Creating the standard of experience: “museum exhibitions [...] transform how people look at their own immediate environs. The museum effect works both ways. Not only do ordinary things become special when placed in museum settings, but also the museum experience itself becomes a model for experiencing life outside its walls”. (p. 410)

6 This is not romanticising the state of emergency in which migrants are, however, because they are in the condition a transition / passage, the identity of the migrant has a potential of a new beginning, a new way of life.

Promised Land, he/she also becomes aware that the *future seems a myth...* and that the attainment of social justice and equality are slipping away before their eyes.

About travelling

Every visitor will have a personal impression and different experience of this exhibition space and materials. However, part of our task is to suggest certain paths of thought around which exhibition visitors can develop their own impressions and feelings.

Immigration, among other things, is the story about *travel*. Travel is something that defines European engagement in Africa and the rest (i.e. “other” part) of the non-European world. The collection of Zdravko and Veda Pečar, the founders of the museum, is the result of their diplomatic work on the African continent, but also their love of the material culture they collected in West African countries. Travel is also the backbone of the Museum of African Art’s programs; sometimes it is the foreground, but it is always the underscore that sets the tone to almost all of its contents. Moreover, travel is in the very essence of what defines the life of a migrant. However, the travel in question differs essentially from the romantic notions set in the 19th and 20th centuries, which marked the formation of a number of non-European collections, and thus the collection of the Museum of African Art in Belgrade. Finally, travel as (i)migration and escape from one’s own country, differs from modern “nomadism” or tourism of the privileged.

I would like to refer to British anthropologist James Clifford who looks at travel as a phenomenon dependent on “cultural/historical location and privilege”. Many, unprivileged “others” were not able to acquire the status of traveller in the history of recording travel writing, i.e. in the domain of knowledge creation. The case of migratory movements – *travel*, changes the paradigm of travel guaranteed only to the privileged. According to Clifford, various “others” who travel break the *myth of travelling*. Privilege remains where it has always been, but it is necessary to make room for perceptions that refer to *migrants as travellers* who create certain marginal knowledge. Migrants travel in order to survive; they travel to save themselves and their families; they travel because they cannot stay in the place of origin any more. Thus, travel turns into *flight*. Migrants are forced to travel. The motivation is different, however, we are talking about people who are not travellers by their own will, but who have to find a way to start their journey at all material and metaphorical costs. According to a young immigrant from Eritrea, who was quoted within Zielony’s exhibition at the Venice Biennale: *...when you are born in a poor country, always at risk of conflict, life takes another path, that of fear and desperation and you fight to change all this. And so the time comes when you decide to take THE JOURNEY OF HOPE.*

The focus of the exhibition “The Border is Closed” is the migrant as “wandering identity”. Migrants, because of the movement to which they are forced, are not able to create their own culture *per se*. It is because of the life on the move that the museum lacks its basic instrument of work

and representation – the object. According to our project associates whose experience in working with migrants has been conducted over the course of several years and which is fundamental, the most valuable object that migrants possess are their mobile phones. The outcome of travelling depends on a mobile phone. Everything else, all of the fragments of personal and collective identity of the country of origin, were left behind. The only traces migrants leave in the countries of transit are worn out clothes and footwear, mats on which they have slept, or remains of the food they have eaten. Here we depart from romanticised ideas of the division of traditional African communities into sedentary and nomadic, whose only possessions are easily movable objects like the calabash, colourful rugs, decorated stools and headrests. More than ever, working in museums we are faced with the fact that objects “do not speak”. The creators of these objects inhabit remote areas and domains of history that are almost impossible (and also questionable) to recreate. However, this poses a challenge: it puts us in a position to invert our own practice and instead of telling stories about objects, we begin to develop the sensitivity to listen and, more importantly, to hear stories about and of people, here and now. Therefore, again with reference to Clifford: “If contemporary migrant populations are not to appear as mute, passive straws in the political-economic winds, we need to listen to a wide range of ‘travel stories’ (...).”

Guided by these ideas, the artists exhibiting at the “The Border is Closed” exhibition materialise (or even object-ify, to use a more contentious term) the experiences of migrants providing us with the much desired

musealia – objects by which we learn about (or identify with) another kind of experience. These are messages written by migrant hands and then embroidered on textiles; stories inscribed in migrant travel maps. Their journey is almost incomprehensible and finds adequate expression in the virtuality of a computer game (application), which stands in chilling contrast with the *reality* of documentary audio recordings from centres for asylum seekers. All this, merely in traces, as a reflection of a reflection, however in full force, depicts the transient condition of this “wandering identity”.

Finally, the exhibition invites us to reflect upon the notion of identity as a “given” or choice. Our identities are constantly changing, multiplying, sometimes being complementary and adaptable, sometimes conflicting within ourselves, but also in relation to the world around us. Often, almost always – being givens, they are not a matter of choice (a decision or will). Throughout our lives we can experience the potentials and restrictions of many identities, therefore we, as human beings, should always be watchful regarding our positions, and how from identity positions we treat those described as “others”, because we never know what the future has in store. Where there is a will there is not necessarily a way; there may more likely be a wall (or a border).

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**“Ignorance is bad,
it is even worse than
wanting to learn.”**

Nigerian proverb

SERBIA

NORWAY

X	1	2	3	4	5
12					
11	10	9	8	7	6

10	12	X
10		1
9		2
8		3
7		4
6		5

9	4	3	6	10	11
5	4	3	2	1	X

5		6
4		
3		8
2		7
1		10
X	12	11

SLEDNA

I
SOMALIA

Ivana Vojt
Museum of African Art Curator

ESCAPE INTO GAMES

In the Centre for Asylum Seekers in Bogovada, migrants play a game that resembles one we know, but the rules differ slightly and the name is different. In a situation where they hardly have anything to wear and eat, far from their families and homes, after walking thousands of kilometres, sleeping under the open sky, tired of constant risks, they – play. In tremendously difficult life circumstances, somewhere in a foreign land, a person develops the fundamental need to play.

Man as being that plays was first the subject of Dutch historian and culturologist Johan Huizinga who in 1938 published the work *Homo Ludens*¹, a study about the importance of play for culture. Already by 1961, the French sociologist Roger Caillois published his work *Man, Play and Games*², which further developed Huizinga's teachings. Both ground-breaking works conclude that play is at the core of man's existence and that we cannot live without it.

Board games are primarily a fun and entertaining way to pass the time and fight lethargy or boredom. The invented board game played among migrants in the Centre for Asylum Seekers in Bogovada is more

1 In: Johan Huizinga, *Homo ludens*, o podrijetlu kulture u igri, Naprijed, Zagreb 1992.

2 In: Rože Kajoa, *Igre i ljudi*, Nolit, Beograd 1965.

than a pastime activity. In this case, through the game, migrants articulate their current position, status and aspirations, experiencing a dose of relief and a more positive view on their circumstances. Generally speaking, board games are a means to facilitate communication among people who do not know each other before the game starts, leading to the faster adaptation to given circumstances. It often happens that during the game people share personal anguish and dilemmas, exchange information and communicate. People from different cultures meet on the common road to a better life, in centres for asylum seekers. Board games produce universal excitement. Rules and visual solutions vary from nation to nation, but the spirit of the game is what everyone quickly recognises no matter where they are from.

Depending on the content, board games can be divided into several categories. The basic division is into those that involve luck and those where this factor is excluded: these are so-called games of chance and cognitive games. As a rule, games of chance contain a die whose accidental fall on a specific field determines the further course of the game, i.e. victory or defeat. With cognitive games the winner has to have a good strategy and the ability to think in advance, so that the luck factor is not decisive.

Moreover, there is a division between thematic and abstract board games. Thematic board games are based on specific topics from everyday life, i.e. “Monopoly” or “Risk”, which literally and very methodically address the issue of stock exchange or territory conquest; in “Monopoly” there is money, dividends, shares, purchasing; in “Risk”, however, there

is the army, a map with territories, specific tasks. Abstract board games approach different topics at the level of symbols. These are games such as chess or mancala in which there is an abstract story about the war between two armies or about sowing and collecting crops.

Following these two basic categorisations, the game designed in the Centre for Asylum Seekers in Bogovada falls under the category of abstract games of chance. This game about travelling is reduced to a series of symbols: steps taken, relying on luck, in order to reach a targeted destination. In essence, it is a variation of the famous game, originating in India, locally known as “Don’t get angry, man”, which is played almost all over the world under different names. Thus, in Sweden this game is called “Fia” (“So be it”), in Denmark and Norway “Ludo” (“I play”), in Estonia, “Reis ümber maailma” (“Around the World”), while asylum seekers call their variation of the game: “The Border is Closed”.

Games transform actual situations of everyday life, and so does the game created in the Centre for Asylum Seekers in Bogovada, which constructs new rules, transposing the current life experiences of migrants. “The border is closed” is a game that illustrates the path from starting position to the finishing line, which is called *home*. Migrants set four countries as their starting position: Somalia, Serbia, Norway and Sweden. Two of the four countries have additional symbols that mean “I love”: Somalia and Sweden – in the real world outside the game these are actual starting points and desired goals.

The rules of the game “The border is closed” repeat the rules of the popular game “Ludo”, with one alteration: there is the possibility for a

player to block the passage of another player. In fact, when a player places two of his counters side by side on a field, a wall is formed, which blocks the path of another player and then the two counters can neither be eaten nor jumped over. When the other player casts a die number that allows him to skip the counters or to eat them, he/she is not able to do so because two counters next to each other implies that the border is closed and that he/she cannot continue. In this way, players can block each other's paths, the game cannot be continued and the players cannot reach *home*.

This alteration in the rules shows that, even unconsciously, the players know that not everyone can reach their destination and that some of them will be blocked and forced to stop their journey. In the migration wave that brings thousands of people to Europe every day, the ultimate destination will be reached only by those who have the most luck. What is particularly interesting is that they prevent each other from moving further in the game, which shows that the biggest obstacle to their safer life is the fact that so many of them have headed to the same goal, with the same or similar desires and intentions.

In crisis situations, playing games has an important function. The role of imagination is extremely powerful in a game allowing a person to, if only for a moment, escape from their unpleasant reality and, in this way, rise above current struggles. People entirely surrender to playing games. By involving them in their contents and leading them through different levels of excitement, games restore people's dignity and raise them to a sphere beyond mere survival. At the same time, the game itself is a prepa-

ration for the possibility of failing to reach the goal (in the case of loosing) or else the unconscious encouragement that the goal is attainable (in the case the game is won). In addition, the value of retries becomes clear and tangible in the game: if victory is not obtained in the first round, it will be in the next one – people only need to persevere and stay in the game. The role of games in crisis situations is to help players deal with their obstacles in the real world.

Each game is an act of free will, a game under pressure is not a game. The game can be continued or terminated whenever the player wants it to. Players voluntarily agree to the rules of the game. It is this feature of the game that liberates in times when in everyday life we cannot make independent decisions but are exposed to coercion of any kind. The element of freedom in the game restores confidence, strengthens the independence and awareness of the viability of one's own decisions.

In the game created by migrants in the Centre for Asylum Seekers in Bogovada, the closed border cannot be penetrated. However, in the real world, by virtue of being able to get to Serbia from distant countries, they have proven that it is possible to win over not only physical borders but also the boundaries of patience, endurance and will.

Dorđe Balmazović, Škart

Maps

In 2013 Group 484 invited several associates, artists, to work with asylum seekers in an asylum centre near the village Bogovada, in the vicinity of Valjevo. Several years before Group 484 had in many ways collaborated with that and other asylum centre in Serbia. The idea was to expand cooperation and introduce different research methods in working with asylum seekers that would bring new contents in their everyday life.

At that time, the number of migrants in Serbia was not nearly as large as it is today, and that issue, except in the narrow circles of activists and individual organizations was neither visible nor topical.

In Bogovadja we met people from Afghanistan, Pakistan, Somalia, Eritrea, Guinea, Senegal, Syria ... people were spending days in the centre resting from their difficult journey. They reached the centre near Bogovada by reporting to the police station upon entering Serbia illegally and expressing their intention to seek asylum.

In our work with migrants we primarily did not want to perceive them as victims, through the prism of humanitarian paternalism, which is often the case in art projects, but as courageous people who, by the very fact that they had decided to set out for such a journey made a radical change in their life fleeing from wars, conflicts and poverty.

Therefore, we were interested when, how and where they had been travelling before we met them in the asylum centre. We asked

them - why they had embarked on such a journey, what troubles they had survived, how they had crossed the borders, how much they had paid the smugglers, about their experience with the police, with people of the countries they had passed through.

Together with them, we sketched the answers in the form of maps, in order to piece together their routes, which in some cases lasted up to 7 years. Sometimes the maps lack details, sometimes they are unclear, and sometimes they would skip parts of the journey. We wanted to avoid pathos and the illustration of their sufferings. We wanted to show them their routes factually, by facts, and thus draw attention to the lack of humane asylum policy in Europe, which has been especially evident in the last few months of extremely dramatic situation, when the amount of racism and ethno-nationalism of the “Christian Europe” has been increasingly present.

We also found the maps extremely helpful later, during our work with high school students in Serbia, where we talked about the topics of migration, asylum seekers and our attitude towards them.

It is extremely important that the documents of our work with asylum seekers were displayed at the exhibition “The border is closed” at the Museum of African Art in Belgrade. Today, more than ever it is necessary to pose critical questions in different spaces about the current geopolitical situation in Europe and the changes this situation brings, which will have a major impact on our future. The museum is no exception, in fact, a museum as a common space where specific knowledge is created also becomes the space of active reflection, which may not only emancipate people, but also affirm perhaps somewhat forgotten ideals of humanity and solidarity

Robert Kozma

**Steps to be taken in relation to migrants
from Africa and from the Middle East**

Group 484 has for twenty years been assisting forced migrants, refugees, and asylum seekers, but it has also performed theoretic and practical work and advocated the development of more humane policies for forced and voluntary migrants. We have been working on the development of a functional and fair asylum system through the visa liberalisation topic ever since the mid of the last decade, and much more intensively since 2010 when people from the Middle East and Africa started asking for the protection against the persecution. Ever since, we have been insisting on the establishment of an asylum system that would fully protect the rights of migrants and asylum seekers. Simultaneously, according to our possibilities, we have been providing humanitarian assistance to those for whom there has been no room in asylum centres owing to the shortcomings of the existing policies.

In the mid-2013, within its Educational Programme “We and the Others”, Group 484 and its associates started visiting asylum centres and meeting and talking to asylum seekers from the Middle East and Africa. Our intention was to introduce and explain, in cooperation with the asylum seekers, their experience to the citizens of communities in which they were accommodated, even temporarily, and to the citizens of other towns

in Serbia. We wanted to change the mainstream approach (of the public in Serbia) to migrants as to the 'statistics' which is costly and thus endangering us. For this reason we tried to show their desires, concerns, adversities, problems and their previous life experience: what they used to do in their towns, what they had studied, what the situation had been like in their countries before, and what it was like now, whether they had relatives and where they were currently, what they had been doing in various towns where they had stayed for a shorter or longer period of time during their journey.

At the time, there was a covert debate in our society about who deserved the assistance from the state and citizens - whether all the migrants or just some of them, e.g. refugees, and whether someone was trying to misuse our 'good will'. There has been an ongoing debate on these issues in the European countries for the last twenty years or so, but it is quite new in our society because fewer than 500 people annually sought the asylum protection before 2011.

When we were working on this issue and preparing the exhibition, we did not follow the categorisation of migrants according to the legal approach to migrations. Shortly, according to the legal approach, the main difference is made between voluntary (economic) and forced migrants depending on the motivation of a migrant to migrate, and there are different areas of law relating to each of the migrant category (in line with appropriate international law). The motive of economic migrants is to improve their own life conditions, which most frequently involves running away

from scarcity or poverty, while forced migrants in another country seek the protection against persecution since they estimate that they are not able to protect their own lives in the country of residence. When an asylum application is filed for justified reasons, the migrant is provided with an appropriate type of the international protection (refugee status). The difference is made between those for whom there is a positive (founded) assumption to be refugees (e.g. at this moment, there is such an assumption for the migrants from Syria) because it is considered that due to the war there are full legal grounds for these people to enjoy protection in another country, and those who need to prove whether their asylum application is justified.

Deeply convinced that poverty is also caused by some political acts and that it endangers human beings as much as the persecution on the basis of ethnicity, race, religion or personal identity of any kind, and that everyone has a legitimate right to a better life, we cooperated with migrants and worked with them during “their transit” considering that there are no illegal migrants and that their desire to live in a fairer society is legitimate. Furthermore, authentic solidarity and empathy are the feelings that are related to all people and not just to members of one or another group. For this reason, the word ‘migrant’ in our work and in this exhibition refers to all the people in the migration process, regardless of whether they belong to the category of ‘legal’ or ‘illegal’ ones. The categorisation is one thing, and life experience is something completely different.

MY WAY
ERITREA 2 year
↓
SUDAN
↓
TURKEY 3 day
↓
GREECE 1 week
↓
MACEDONIA 2 week
↓
SERBIA 1 week
until Today

MICHAEL (ERITREA)

Ivana Bogićević Leko and Snežana Skoko

Normal life

“As a woman I have no country. As a woman I want no country.
As a woman, my country is the whole world.”

Virginia Woolf

Behind the general and somewhat alienated term “asylum seekers”, there are people with real lives, destinies, joys, hopes and sorrows. In pursuit of their stories, we talked to about a hundred people from Syria, Eritrea, Nigeria, Congo, Cameroon, Somalia, Sri Lanka, Iraq ... in asylum centres in Banja Koviljaca, Bogovadja, Sjenica and Krnjača, who headed mainly to Western European countries, towards a better and safer life. For them, Serbia is a stopover destination and a place to rest.

We talked to them, over coffee and Turkish delight, about the little, ordinary, things in life, so that we could get to know each other better. We asked them what they thought about, what they hoped for, what they wanted, what they dreamt about, what life they aspired to, what they missed ..., what their customs were, how much we were differed and how much we were alike. And we are much more alike than it is often believed. All the interviews were dominated by only one thing: a normal life. They all appreciate and want peace, health, family, love, friends, work, safety, respect, dignity...

We compared, among other things, recipes, proverbs and sayings, ways we have fun, sew, dress up, realising how similar we are ... They do

not only need a normal life, but they also have a strong desire to hold to and defend the normal life even in the most critical and difficult situations, even only in its traces and segments.

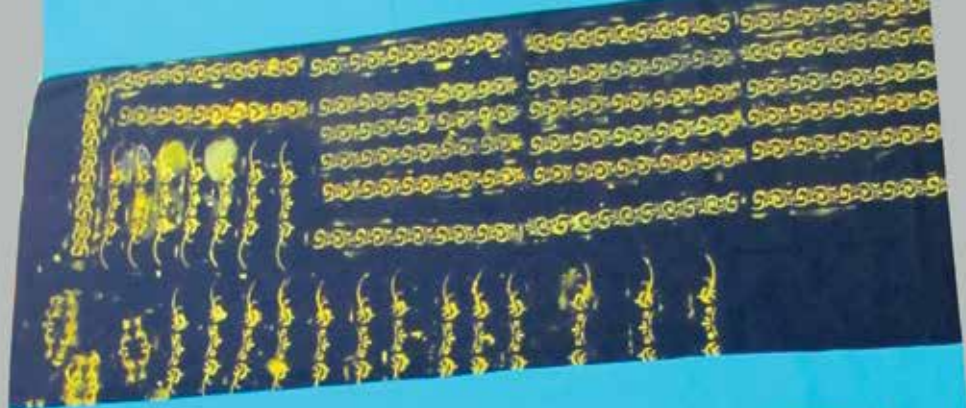
We have abstracted the collected stories through the most remarkable but simple, everyday life sentences, and showed them through the “everyday life aesthetics”.

The everyday life (and the rituals it implies), which we often fail to notice but live it spontaneously, is the best indicator of the normal life everybody is striving for, no matter where we come from.

During the visits to people in asylum centres, we worked with groups of women and children on textile: they first wrote their thoughts about love and their loved ones and we then embroidered their words on pillowcases. A pillow is an object for daily use, familiar to everyone, linked to dreams, rest, love, cosiness and safety of home. This encouraged us to think beyond – about the home they had left behind looking for a new home, security, happier life ... When they first took a piece of paper and markers, many children drew a house, and in the playing area they would usually make “their own little house “- a place they could feel protected, tranquil and safe. Above the safety there is a clear, blue sky and the sun - a space of freedom. With minor differences, the same is drawn by children who have their homes, and children who have been on the road for months, or even years.

We decided that the term house / home were a framework for a variety of work related to their stories, desires, feelings and hopes...

١- انظر الى
 ٢- انظر الى
 ٣- انظر الى
 ٤- انظر الى
 ٥- انظر الى
 ٦- انظر الى
 ٧- انظر الى
 ٨- انظر الى
 ٩- انظر الى
 ١٠- انظر الى



مدرسة أهالي الدار
أخا أهلب بلدي
أهالي الدار
ما في أهلي
منك

Zagorka Aksentijević

Group 484: From museums – to schools?

Exhibition “The border is closed” focuses on forced migrations taking place here and now. It is a sort of (always curved?) mirror of our cities, parks and streets (Bogovadja, Preševo, Belgrade, Subotica, Kanjiža, summer – autumn 2015). We have been prompted in numerous ways to think about the Others, to sympathize, to act decently and generously.

We feel that this exhibition is an activist, political move, in the positive meaning of the word. Behind the (tragic) destinies of migrants on the route “North African countries and the Middle East – Western Europe” there is a tremendous political and moral responsibility. We believe that this exhibition asks the following questions: who is responsible for this exodus? What is our attitude towards these people? We respect artistic and museum’s sensibility to the quality of exhibited material and the worry that trivially understood political implications should not enter, not even through the back door, to an institution such as a museum. We believe that this has not been the case.

For Group 484, this exhibition is more than successful cooperation between a museum, an artist, and an NGO. It is a realization of an educational concept we are dedicated to: we find that a product created in this way (in this case an exhibition) is an excellently “packed parcel” for entering schools (regardless of whether the initiative comes from our or their side) as this exhibition, with flexible showpieces it has, is mobile and adaptable to conditions in schools. We also planned visiting exhibitions in city museums in a number of Serbian towns. In this way, it gains a new

dimension and opens new possibilities for influence: it becomes encouragement to introduce the ideas of responsibility and humanity, as moral and political issues, to classrooms, where these questions should be timely asked!

Taking into account its multiple educational capacity, this exhibition is a continuation of long-lasting working method implemented within the Group 484 program “We and the Others”: museum doors are open to topics from real life and museum professional standards remain untouched; topics related to migrants, incorporated into exhibition showcases, are given necessary (artistic) persuasiveness: new moral and political topics are opened and not only socially engaged viewpoints but also value judgements which we see as educational foundations are being profiled.



درد او وادیا آمل
را اللہ رافع

محبوبہ
محبوبہ

Thank you

مولانا
یا حبیبی

via ljubav prema tebi je
besmrtne

آن آواز

أحب بيت منزل
سقت مشعر في المسقط
لا يصبروا أظالي مشربهم في المسقط

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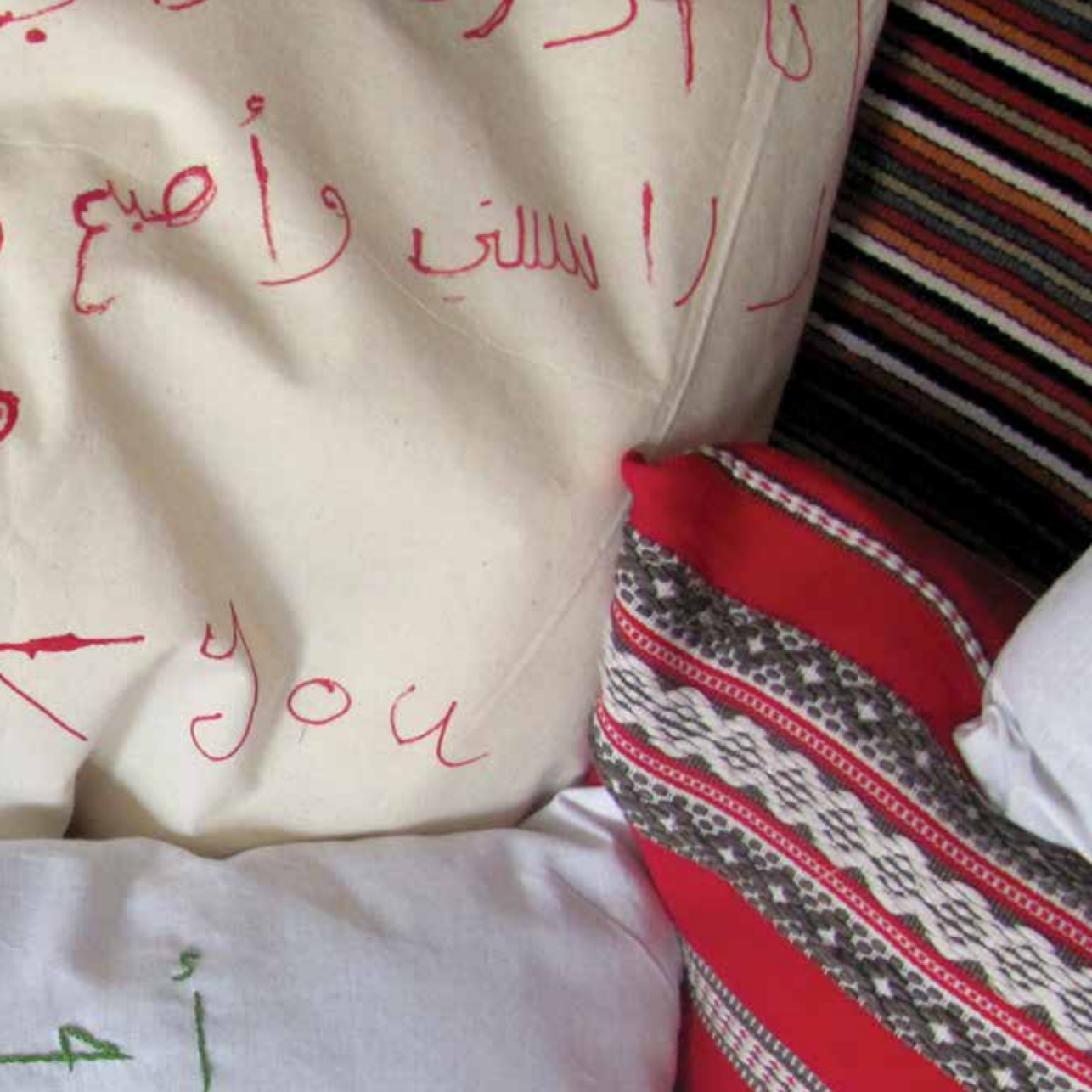
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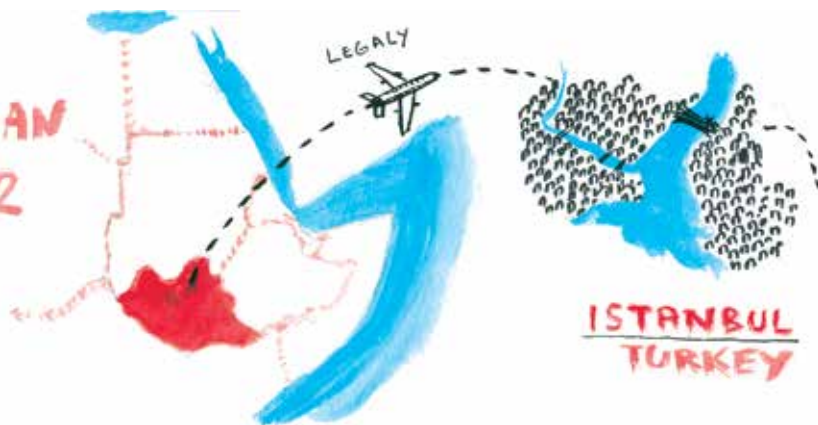
prima tebi ip
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Poverty is

slavery.

Somali proverb

N. 33
SOUTH SUDAN
JUNE 2012



SAMOS ISLAND



BY RUBBER BOAT,
TO SAMOS ISLAND,
2 HOURS ON THE SEA,
IT WAS MOST DANGEROUS PART,
THERE WERE ABOUT 20 PEOPLE
IN THE BOAT, 4 CHILDREN,
2-3 WOMEN.

SAMOS ISLAND

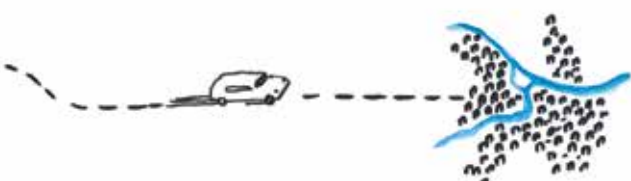
~~GET~~ ARRESTED.
SPENT 1 MONTH IN
DETENTION CENTER.
GOT 1 MONTH TO
LEAVE GREECE.

ATHENS



1 YEAR IN ATHENS.
MY BROTHER WHO WORKS
IN BIRMINGHAM, UK, IN
BARBERSHOP, SENT ME
MONEY AND VISITED ME
ONCE.

I DIDN'T SOCIALIZE,
EXCEPT ONCE WHEN I WAS
IRRESPONSIBLE AND WENT
CLUBBING WITH
BROTHERS MONEY.



BELGRADE

CAPTURED BY POLICE
AND SENT TO ROGOVADA

WISH TO
GO TO
BIRMINGHAM,
UK

NN

DAMASKUS,
SYRIA

MARCH 2013





H, 21
HARGEYSA
SOMALIA

23. OCTOBER
2013.



ISTANBUL, TURKEY

6 MONTHS

MACEDONIA



DURING DAYTIME
HIDDEN IN JUNGLE.
ALL THE WAY
FOLLOWED BY SMUGGLER.



WALKING THROUGH
MACEDONIA 7 DAYS.



~~ARRIVING~~
DEPOSITED MONEY TO
THE RELIABLE PERSON
IN ATHENS.
AFTER GETTING TO THE PLACE,
GIVE A PHONE CALL TO FRIEND IN
ATHENS TO CONFIRM THAT ARRIVED



Exhibition catalogue:

1. “Migrant maps” (total 15)

9 maps (dimensions 60 x 86 cm)

6 maps (dimensions approx. 300 x 20 cm)

Technique: digital print on textile

2. Stickers with proverbs

“Look before you leap.” (Somali proverb)

“To be without a woman (wife) is the same as being without a life.” (Somali proverb)

“A woman makes a man successful, there where others fail.” (Somali proverb)

“Too much talk won’t fill a jug.” (Somali proverb)

“Not all that shines is a diamond.” (Somali proverb)

“Poverty is slavery.” (Somali proverb)

“Ignorance is bad, it is even worse than not wanting to learn.” (Nigerian proverb)

“What eventually kills us, starts as an appetite.” (Nigerian proverb)

“If you wait for tomorrow, tomorrow shall come. If you don’t wait for tomorrow, tomorrow will also come.” (Nigerian proverb)

“Camels continue to walk, dogs continue to bark.” (Eritrean proverb)

“A clumsy daughter teaches her mother to raise her children.” (Ethiopian proverb)

“A kind conversation breaks the bones of the sole.” (Ethiopian proverb)

“If love is an illness, patience is the remedy.” (Ethiopian proverb)

“The dust blows back into the face of the one that blows.” (Cameroonian proverb)

“In a hundred attempts, even a monkey learns how to jump of a tree.” (Cameroonian proverb)

“To each his own – when a shepherd roasts a potato, he shares it with his flock.” (Cameroonian proverb)

“If you understand the beginning, the ending shall be no problem.” (Syrian proverb)

“Even a small house is enough for a thousand friends.” (Syrian proverb)

“First food, than religion.” (Afghan proverb)

“Observe each man with the same eyes.” (Afghan proverb)

“How you see yourself, so you see the world.” (Afghan proverb)

“What is mud for one, is a remedy for another.” (Afghan proverb)

“Move yourself, and blessings will come on their own.” (Afghan proverb)

“God forbid even a mountain should be alone.” (Kurdish proverb)

“Bread is like faith: when there is not enough of it, man is a Christian one day and a Muslim the next.” (Kurdish proverb)

“Rulers are like snakes: they possess the poison and the cure.” (Kurdish proverb)

“What is from the heart, let it remain in the heart.” (Kurdish proverb)

“A small debt grows like a child.” (Kurdish proverb)

“If you want to tell a man you love him, be quiet and give him a nice meal.” (Iraqi proverb)

“A man is a man only if he has a mustache.” (Iraqi proverb)

“If you dig a hole for a friend, you will fall into it.” (Iraqi proverb)

“Rise early and you will be happy all day.” (Iraqi proverb)

3. Badges

“I want to live normally”

“Future for the children”

“There, where freedom is”

4. Works on textiles “Woman’s side of migration”

Pillow covers:

“Yellow text on natural colour background” / contour paste/ 370 x 560 mm

“Thank you” / green text on natural colour background / contour paste/
390 x 590 mm

“Thank you” / brown text on natural colour background / contour paste/
530 x 610 mm

“Thank you” / red text on natural colour background / contour paste/
400 x 540 mm

“I miss you” / text on natural colour background / patchwork / 330 x 560 mm

“MAWADA” / text on orange background / contour paste/ 480 x 660 mm

“A” / blue text on orange background / contour paste/ 500 x 600 mm

“Red and green text on orange background / contour paste/ 520 x 680 mm

“28” / red text on dark blue background / contour paste/ 350 x 520 mm

“Red and white writing on a dark blue background” / contour paste/
390 x 530 mm

“I miss you my love” / text on white background / patchwork / 375 x 535 mm

“My mother is the light of my life” / text on white background / patchwork / 355

x 530 mm

“CAMEROUN / text on white background/ patchwork / 520 x 655 mm

“My love for you is immortal” / text on white background / patchwork /
365 x 530 mm

“Mother forgive me” / text on white background/ patchwork / 365 x 520 mm

Covers:

“Orange and yellow contour paste”/ patchwork / 1325 x 2380 mm

“Dark blue and light blue contour paste”/ patchwork / 1375 x 2375 mm

5. “Board game for 4 players “The Border is Closed”

- One game: digital print on a type of plywood
- Two games: digital print on awning

6. Interactive application “Virtual fences”

(TV + laptop)

7. Audio files – statements of asylum seekers

(tablet + earphones)

Thank you!

**Mirjana Bokšan, Milena Ristić, Ivana Jakšić,
Dragica Lakanović, Alobaidi Safaa Aladin, Vladimir Sjekloća,
Jana Danilović i Darko Čačić.**

SERBIA

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11	10	9	8	7	6

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10	



11	12
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SUEDAN



11	12
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SOMALIA



impressum

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Belgrade 2015



SOMALIA

My
Way

↓
YOMAN

20

↓
SOUDI ARABIA

5M

↓
URDUN

10

↓
SERIA

25

↓
TORKY

1M

↓
GREECE

6M

↓
MACEDONIA

?

↓
SERBIA

8

(TODAY)

ABDUL KADEL