



BIRDS IN LIMBO



Story based on a research by MeDiMi Research Associates
Adriana Kessler, Anna Arden, Jessica Klüger, Laura Goller, Mina Ibrahim, Slađana Branković, and Tasnim Jabaly

Artwork by Amro Okacha

Birds in Limbo: A Visual Living Archive

“Birds in Limbo” is a collaborative artwork by MeDiMi Research Associates in conversation with Egyptian comics artist Amro Okacha. Over five months, we met through a series of workshops to share experiences and shape the narrative of the project. The output brings together fieldwork and archival work, but it starts from lived experience. Drawing on encounters across different German cities, in streets, markets, institutions, and homes, the work reflects the many “limbos” that shape migrant lives. It is built as a collage of stories, some lived by MeDiMi researchers, others shared by the people we work with. What comes through are everyday realities shaped by violence, displacement, bureaucracy, and time, and by the constant work of navigating all of this.

Emerging from this collaboration, MeDiMi Comics is designed as a visual and narrative project that rethinks how migrants’ human rights can be documented and shared in vernacular terms (Merry 2006). It focuses on emotional, bureaucratic, and political encounters that unfold across both home countries and diasporic contexts (Saoud 2023; Brah 1996). In so doing, it proposes a visual, living archive (Sabi-escu 2020), which shows how human rights are not only claimed in legal or institutional frameworks, but constantly shaped through daily life, memory, relationships, and acts of resistance.

The project attends to spaces where migrant lives are regulated, interpreted, or overlooked, but rarely understood as complex human environments. At the Ausländerbehörde, for example, hours of waiting culminate in a single, long-awaited document, while the labor of anxiety, preparation, and quiet solidarities among different diasporic communities remains unrecorded. Everyday sites such as supermarkets or workplaces become charged with negotiations of dignity, language, precarity, and belonging. Through visual storytelling, MeDiMi Comics captures these moments as fragments of an otherwise unrecognized archive in an attempt to redefine what counts as an archive of migration, foregrounding forms of knowledge, memory, and experience that exceed institutional documentation (Parmar 2025; Finn et al. 2021; Maeding 2021). Each story traces how meanings of legality, dignity, and belonging emerge through encounters between people and systems, and among migrants themselves, across uneven landscapes of power.



“Birds in Limbo” has unfolded across three interconnected lines of work. First, MeDiMi researchers contribute visual fieldnotes and self-reflective drawings drawn from their ethnographic engagements, including sketches of gestures during interviews, impressions from archival visits, and attempts to visualize forms and processes that resist comprehension. Afterwards, Amro Okacha shared examples of comics projects that engage migration and human rights, including his earlier collaboration with the Nubian community in Paris, as well as work by Reinhard Kleist (2016) and Marjane Satrapi (2007). Third, MeDiMi researchers and Okacha developed the scenario together and exchanged multiple drafts of the storyboard. Accordingly, “Birds in Limbo” asks what it means to claim human rights not only through institutions, but through remembering, drawing, narrating, and archiving together. With the intention of displaying it on campus alongside reflections and comments by migrant communities in Landkreis Gießen and beyond, we hope to curate a community-rooted, affective archive in motion (Cifor and Gilliland 2016; Cvetkovich 2003), where migrant life is understood in its full narrative, sensory, and relational complexity, and where human rights are lived and negotiated, and re-imagined in the textures of everyday life.

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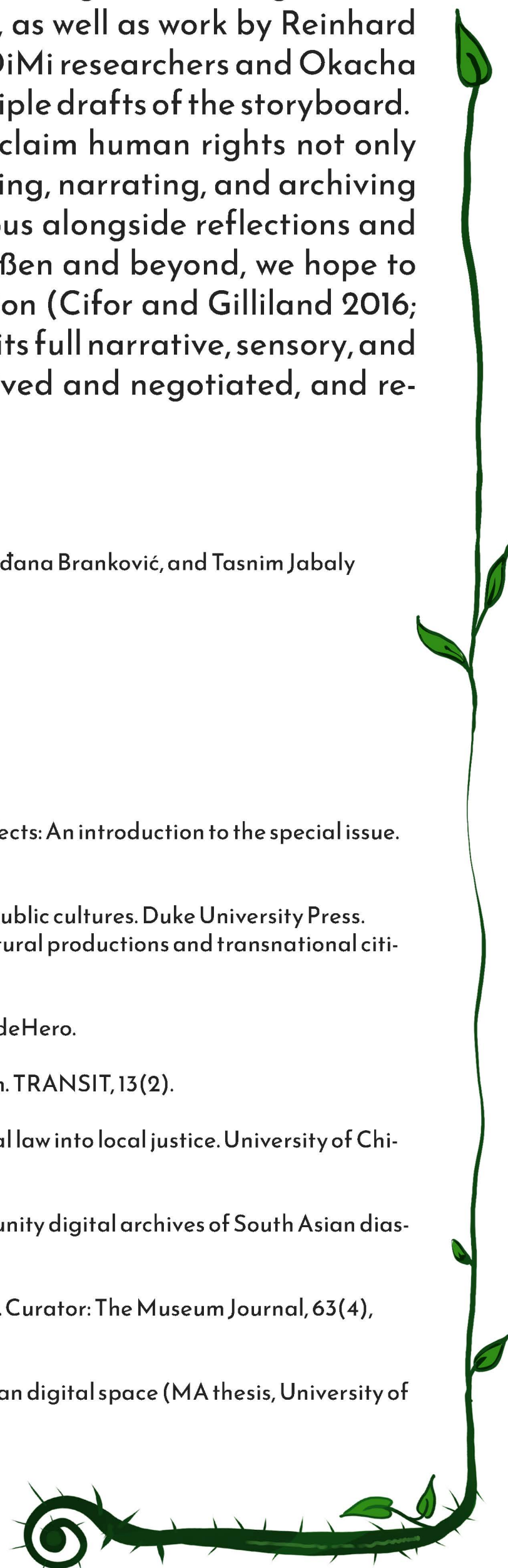
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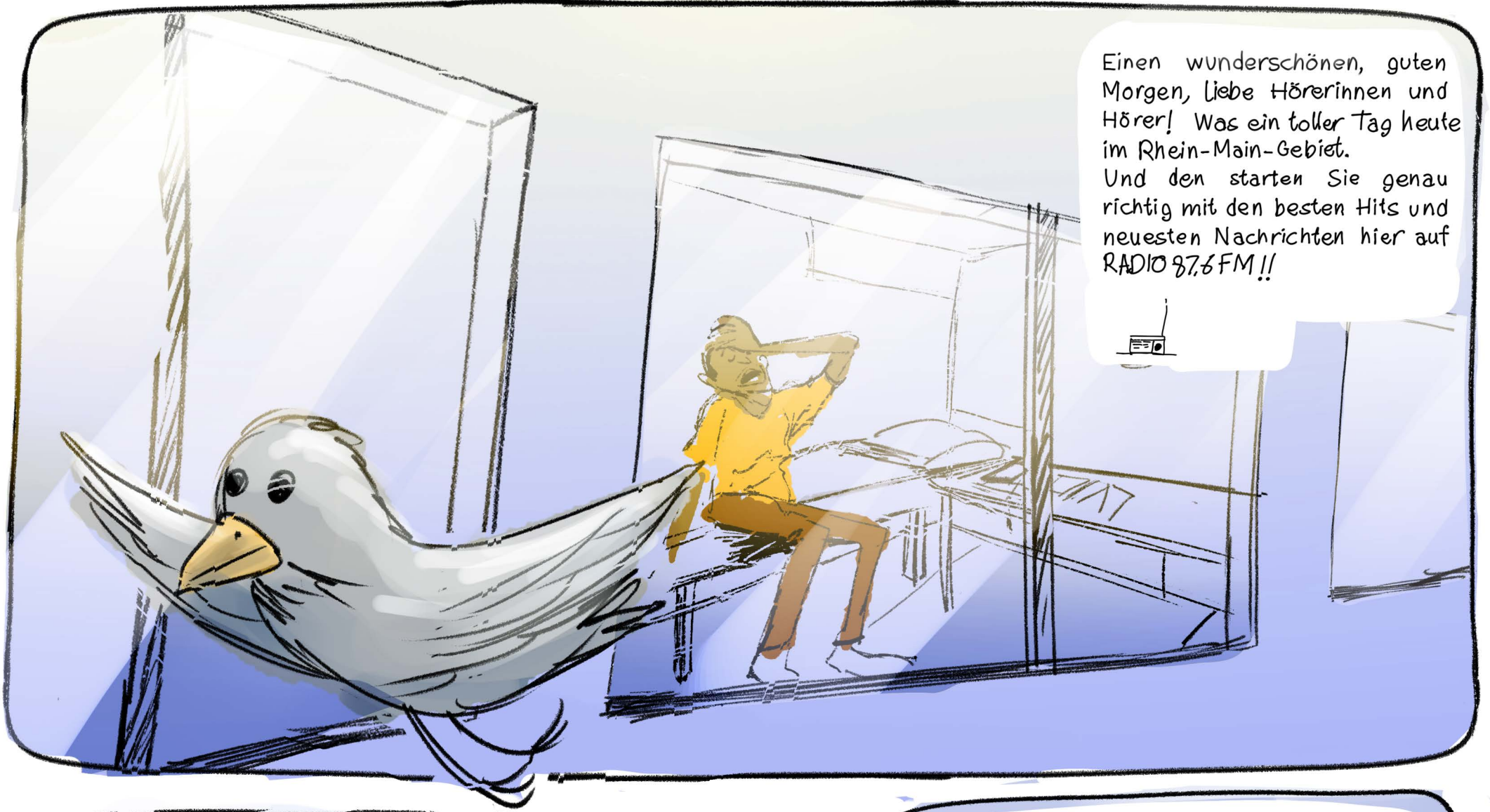
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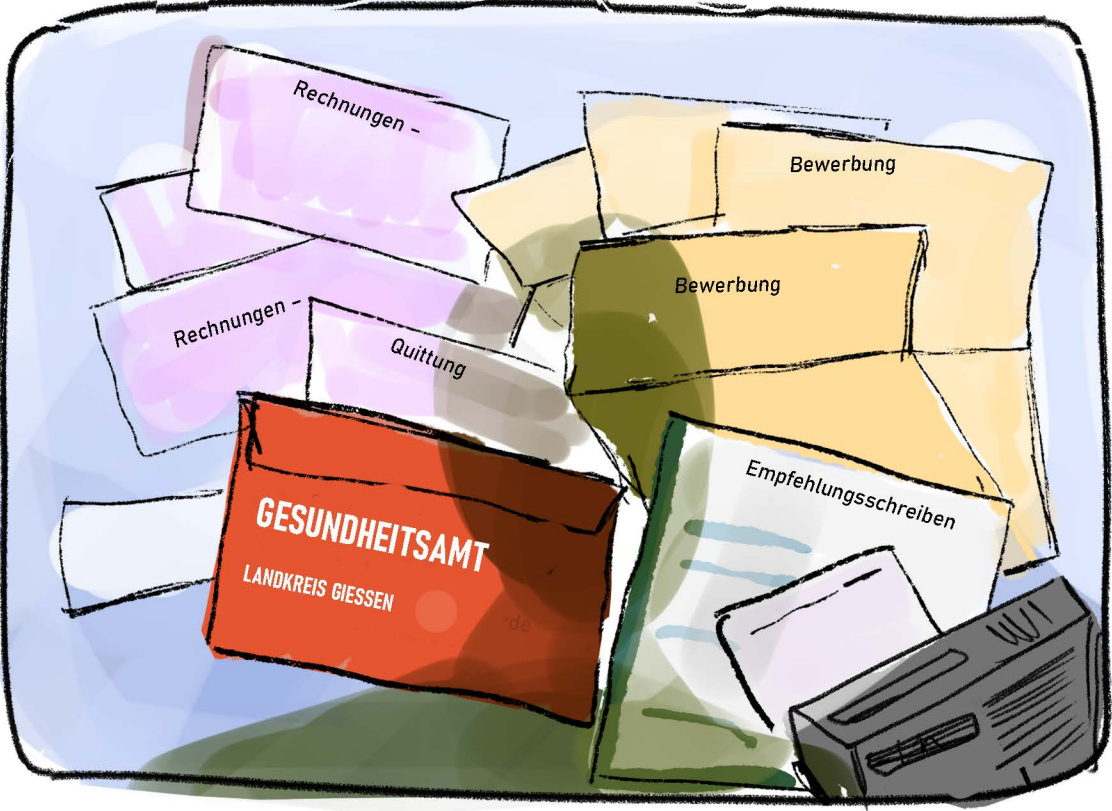
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Einen wunderschönen, guten Morgen, liebe Hörerinnen und Hörer! Was ein toller Tag heute im Rhein-Main-Gebiet. Und den starten Sie genau richtig mit den besten Hits und neuesten Nachrichten hier auf RADIO 87,6 FM!!



Und Jetzt zu den Nachrichten am Morgen....

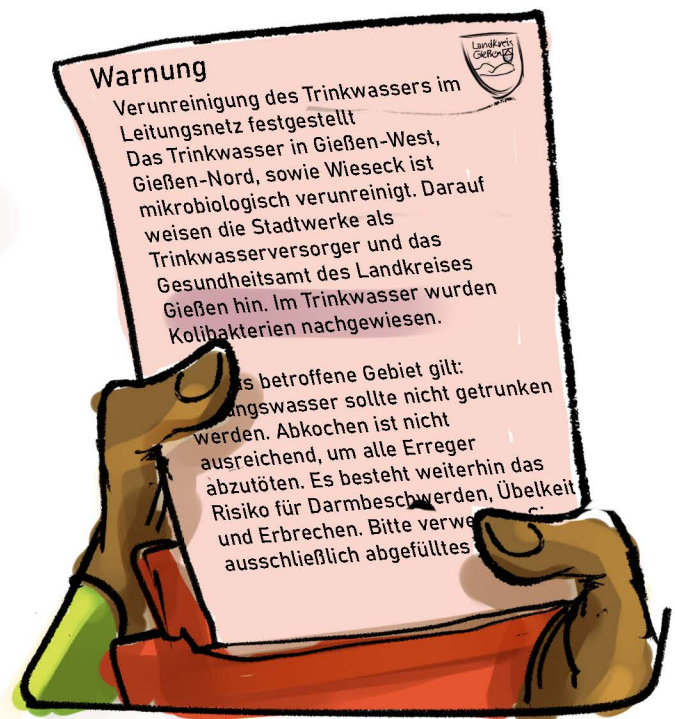


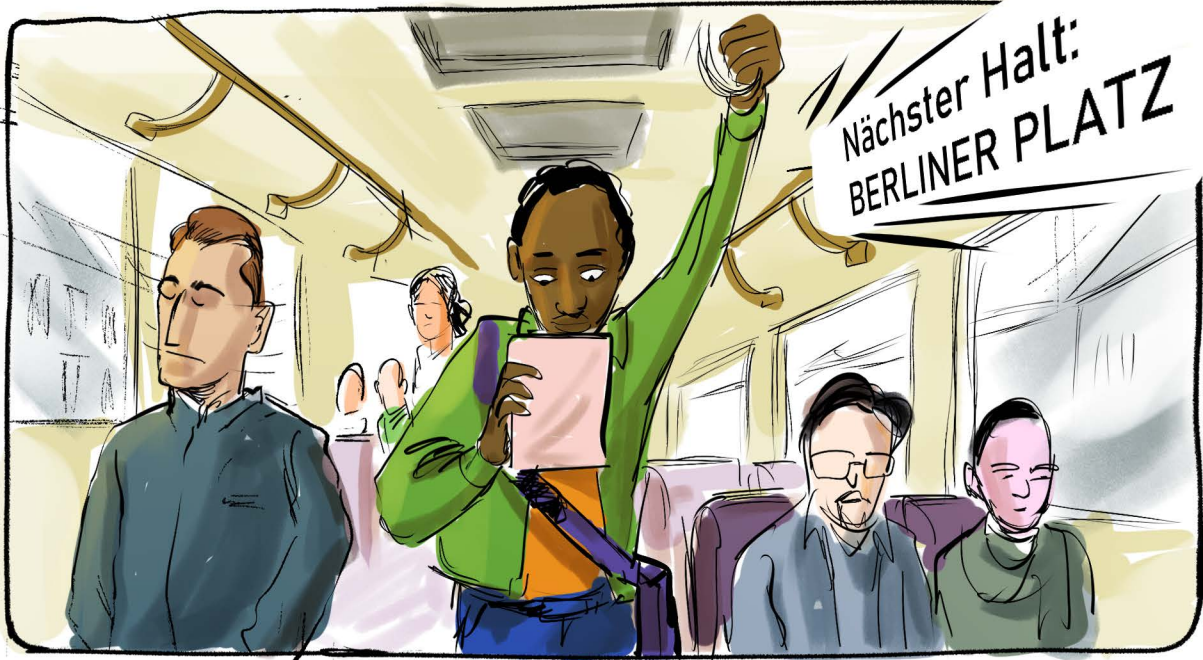
Die Zahl der Erstanträge auf Asyl ist in diesem Jahr im Vergleich zum Vorjahr deutlich gesunken.
Innenminister Dobrindt sieht den Rückgang als Erfolg einer restriktiveren Migrationspolitik der deutschen Bundesregierung...



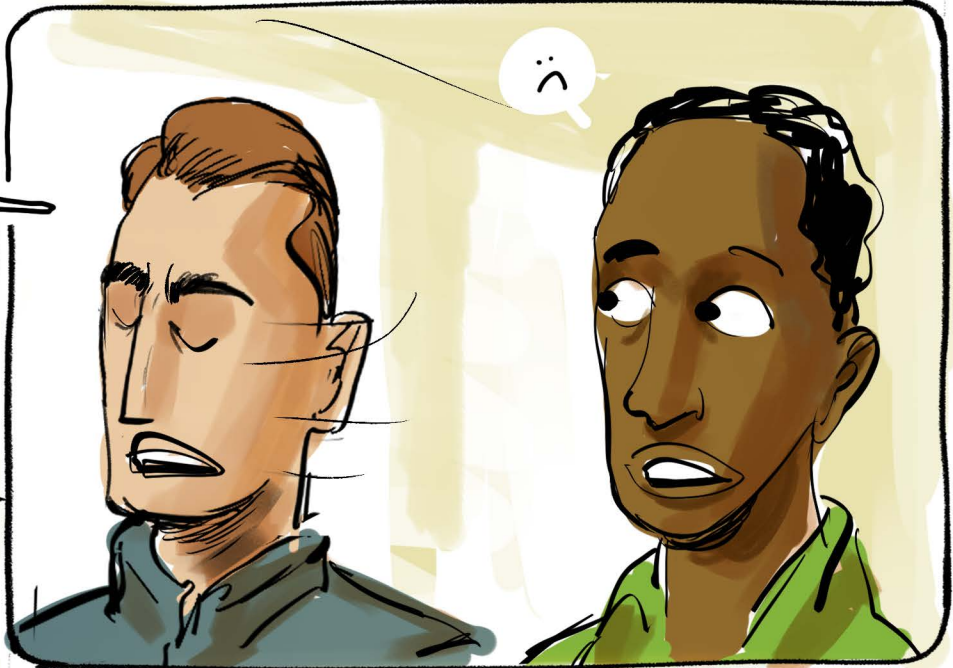


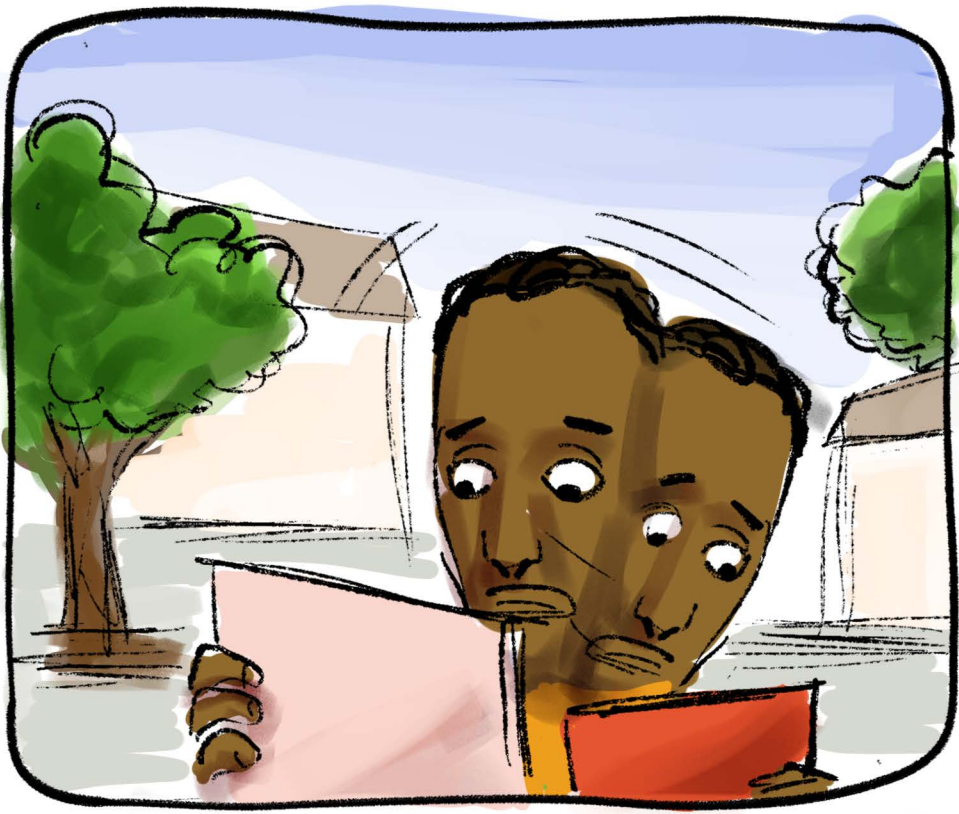
Trinkwasser
 Gesundheitsamt
 Landkreises Gießen
 im Trinkwasser
 Kolibakterien
 nachgewiesen





Das versteht doch niemand.
Lern erstmal richtig Deutsch bevor du mich anquatschst....

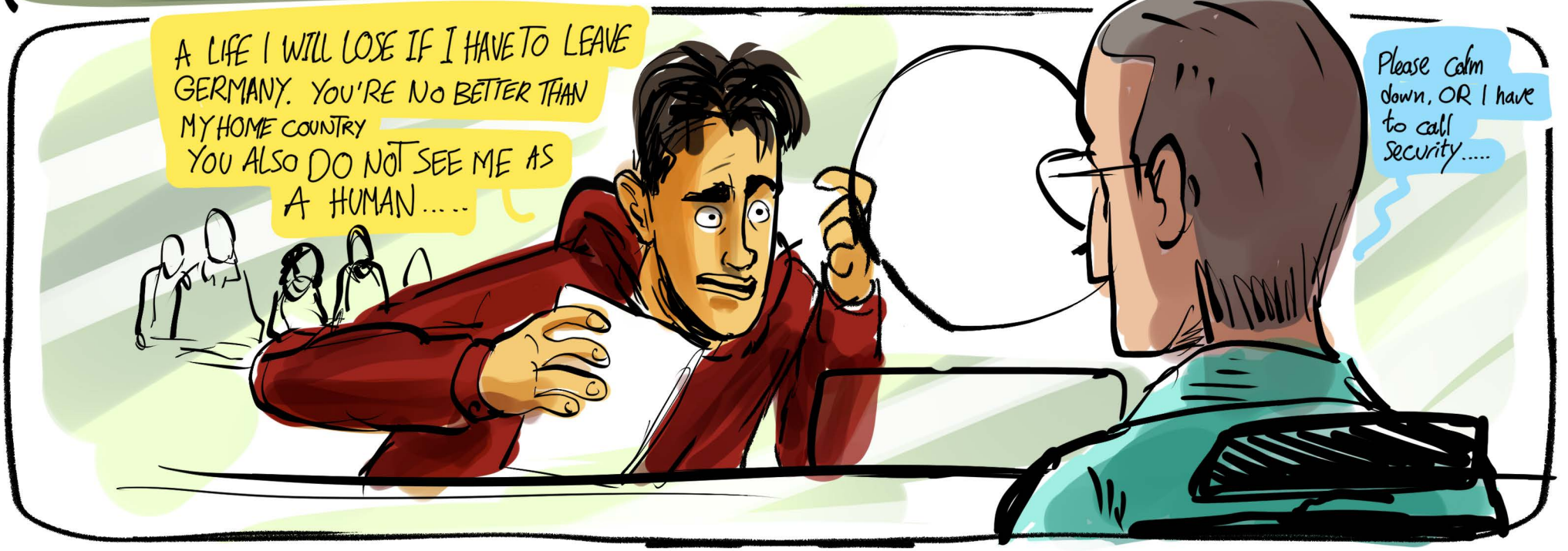
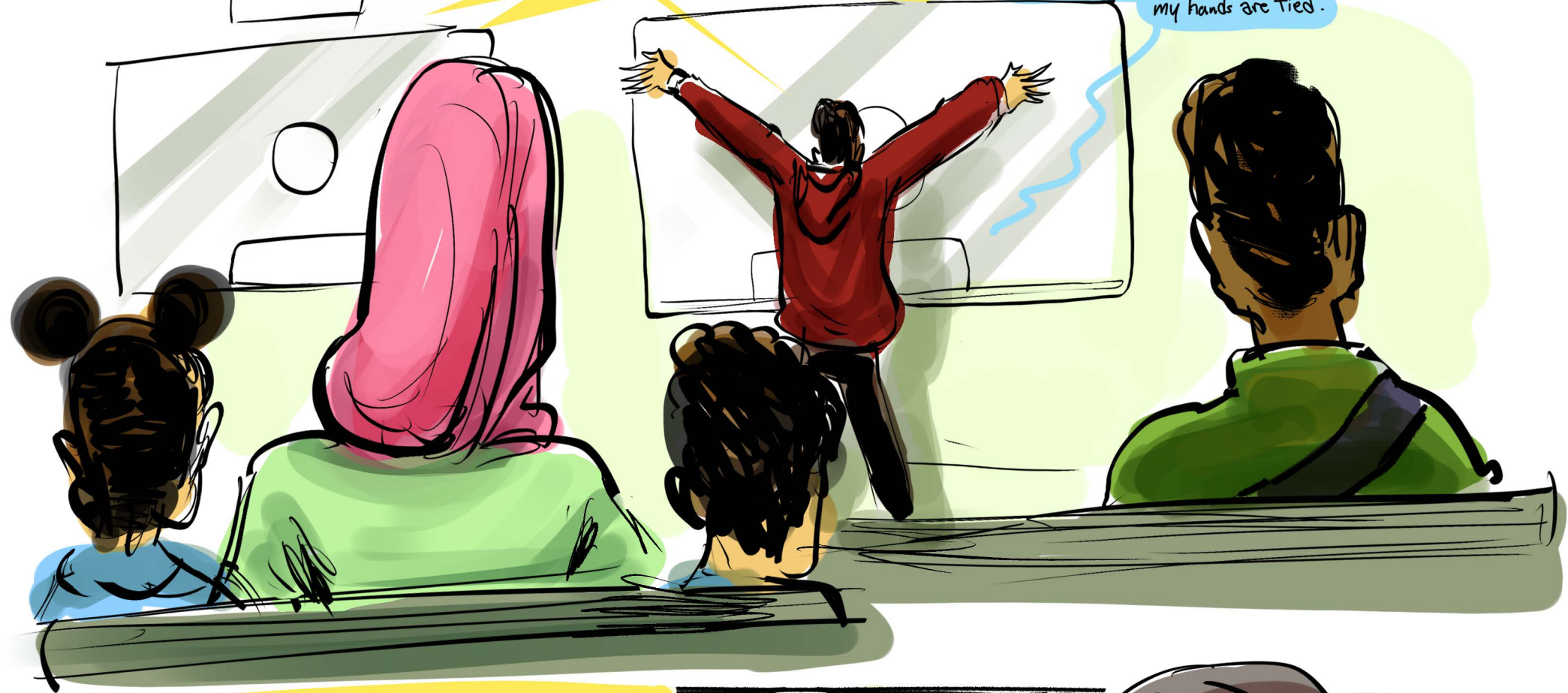






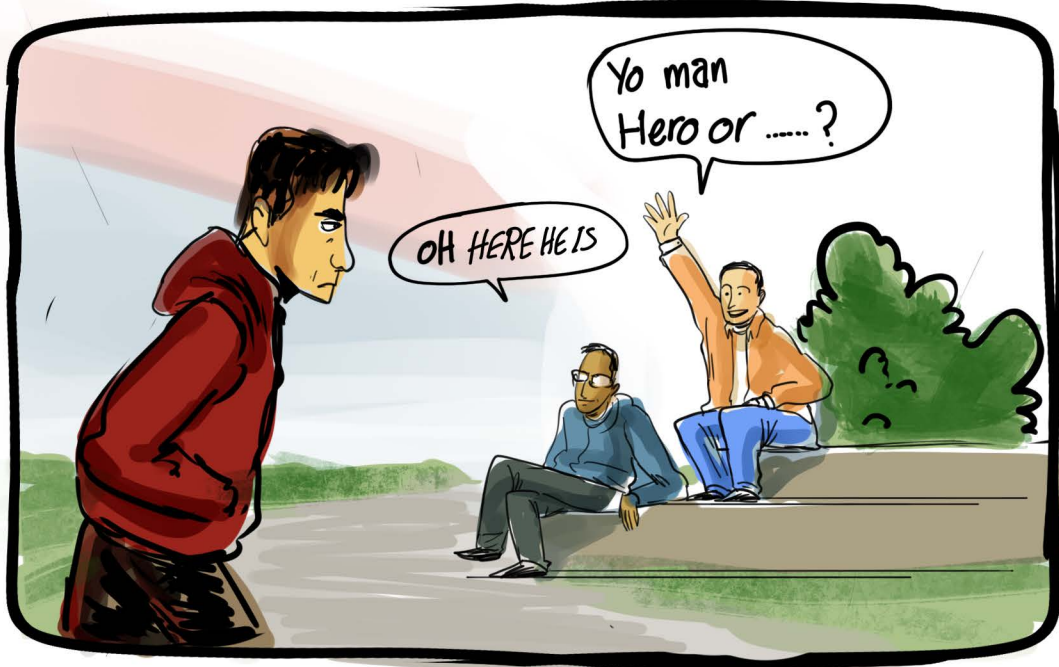
WHAT DO YOU MEAN?
THIS IS MY LIFE!!

I understand that this is a difficult situation
But the LAW is the law.
my hands are tied.

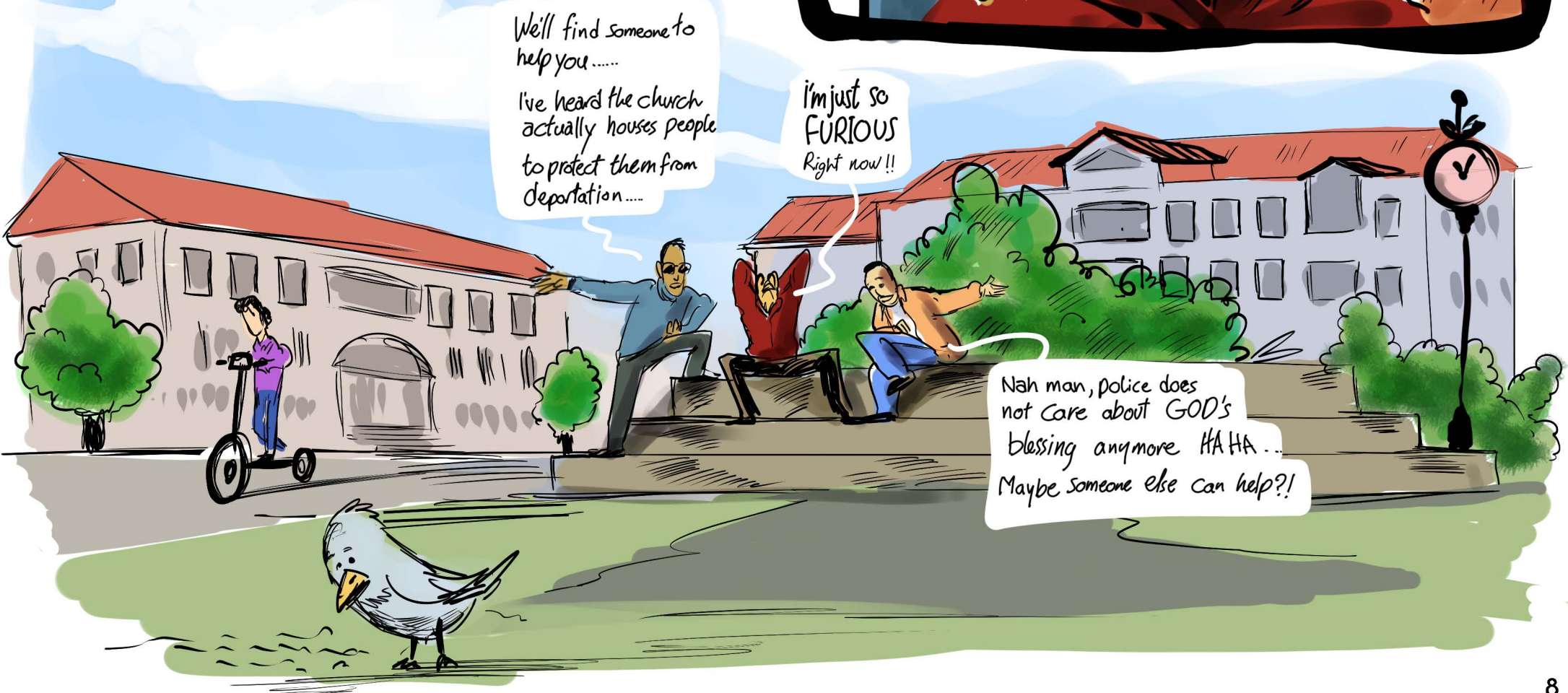


A LIFE I WILL LOSE IF I HAVE TO LEAVE GERMANY. YOU'RE NO BETTER THAN MY HOME COUNTRY YOU ALSO DO NOT SEE ME AS A HUMAN.....

Please calm down, OR I have to call security.....

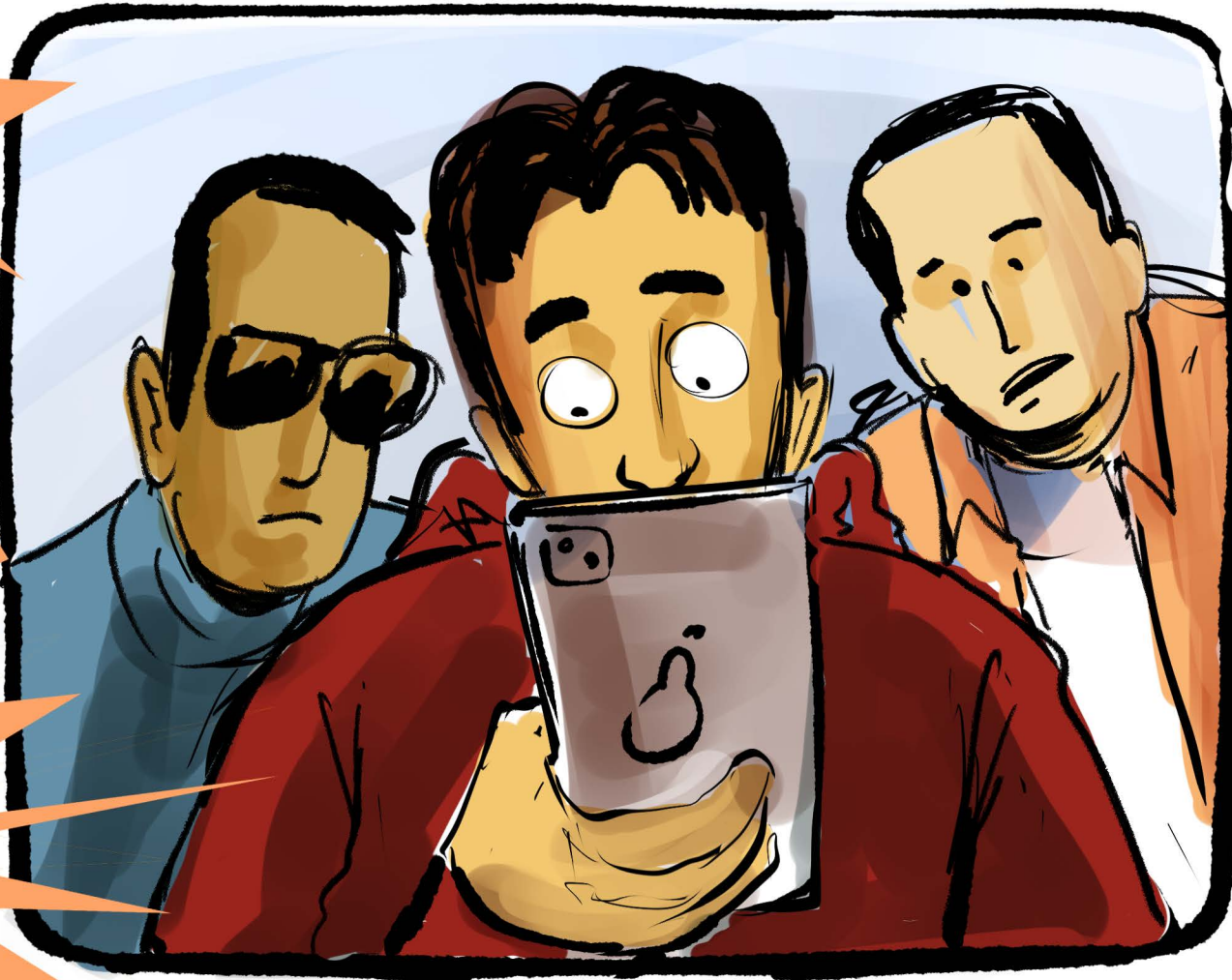


After a short while
not so far from "Auslanderbehörde"

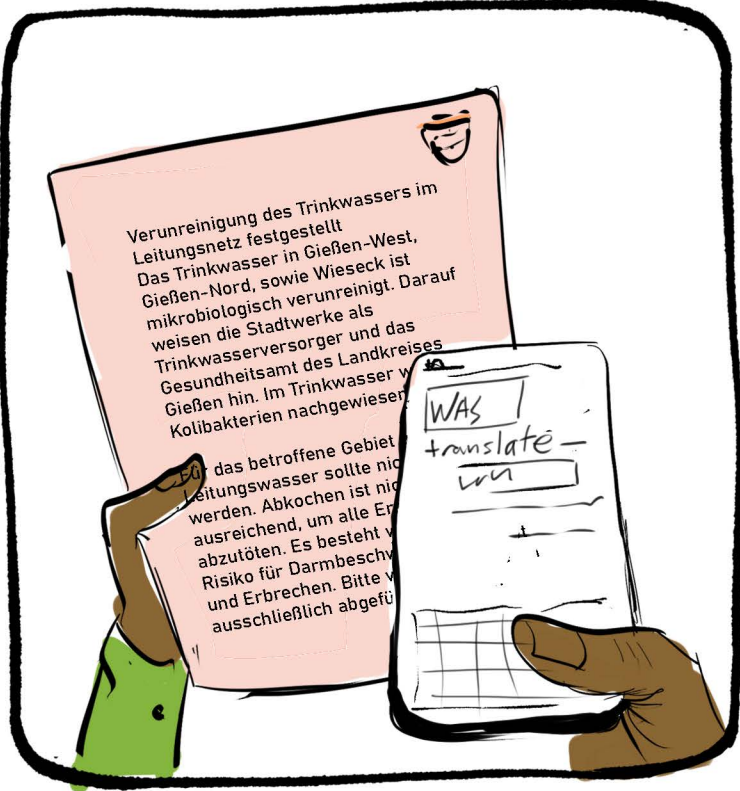




... UND ICH FREUE MICH, DASS SO VIELE HEUTE HIER EIN ZEICHEN FÜR DEMOKRATIE, FÜR MENSCHENRECHTE UND FÜR VIELFALT SETZEN. EIN ZEICHEN GEGEN RECHTSEXTREMISMUS UND MENSCHENFEINDLICHKEIT ZU SETZEN, BEDEUTET ABER AUCH, DIE HERAUSFORDERUNGEN VON DIVERSEN GESELLSCHAFTEN KLAR ZU BENENNEN. WIR DÜRFEN NICHT DIE AUGEN SCHLIESSEN, WENN UNSERE STÄDTE IHRE INTEGRATIONSKAPAZITÄT ERREICHT HABEN... WENN SICH UNSERE TÖCHTER NICHT MEHR SICHER FÜHLEN...



After a while . not so far away .

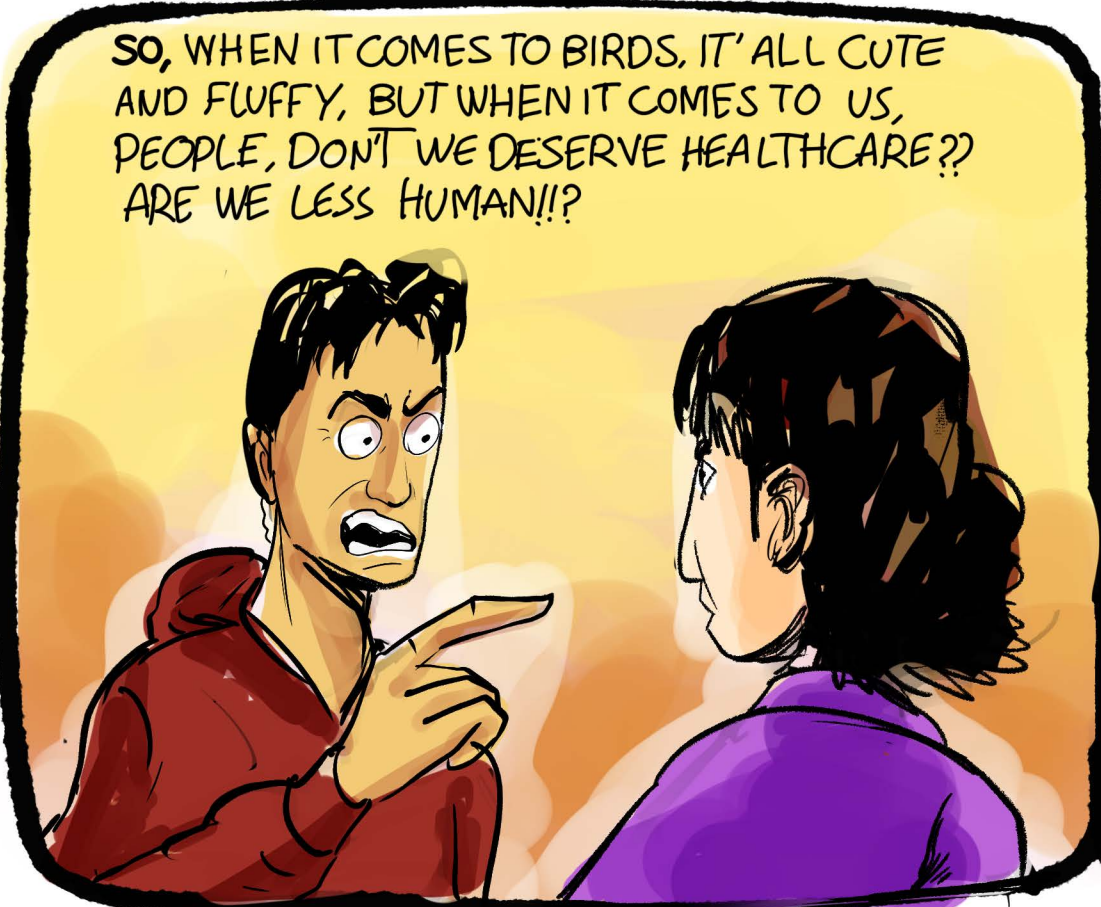




DISGUSTING...

OUR GOVERNMENT HAS FAILED...THESE IMMIGRANTS, THEY FLOOD OUR COUNTRY, DON'T SPEAK THE LANGUAGE AND NOW ALSO CLOG OUR HEALTH CARE SYSTEMS WITH THEIR DISEASES !

WHAT!!



SO, WHEN IT COMES TO BIRDS, IT'S ALL CUTE AND FLUFFY, BUT WHEN IT COMES TO US, PEOPLE, DON'T WE DESERVE HEALTHCARE?? ARE WE LESS HUMAN!!?



WELL GUESS WHAT!
I'M ONE OF THOSE DISEASE-RIDDEN IMMIGRANTS

....YOU THINK BECAUSE YOUR FATHER LAID SOME BRICKS, YOU OWN THE SKY? I DIDN'T COME HERE TO "TAKE" ANYTHING FROM YOU, I CAME HERE BECAUSE THIS IS WHERE THE LIFE IS. I'M WORKING, I PAY RENT, I CONTRIBUTE TO THIS CITY JUST LIKE YOU DO.....

....YOU'RE AN INVADER, YOU DON'T BELONG HERE... NEVER HAVE AND NEVER WILL, YOU JUST TAKE, TAKE, AND TAKE FROM MY COUNTRY, AND HAVE NOTHING TO OFFER. YOU'RE ERODING EVERYTHING WE BUILT AND THINK THAT YOU REPLACE OUR NATIONAL IDENTITY WITH SOMETHING YOU BROUGHT IN YOUR SUITCASE



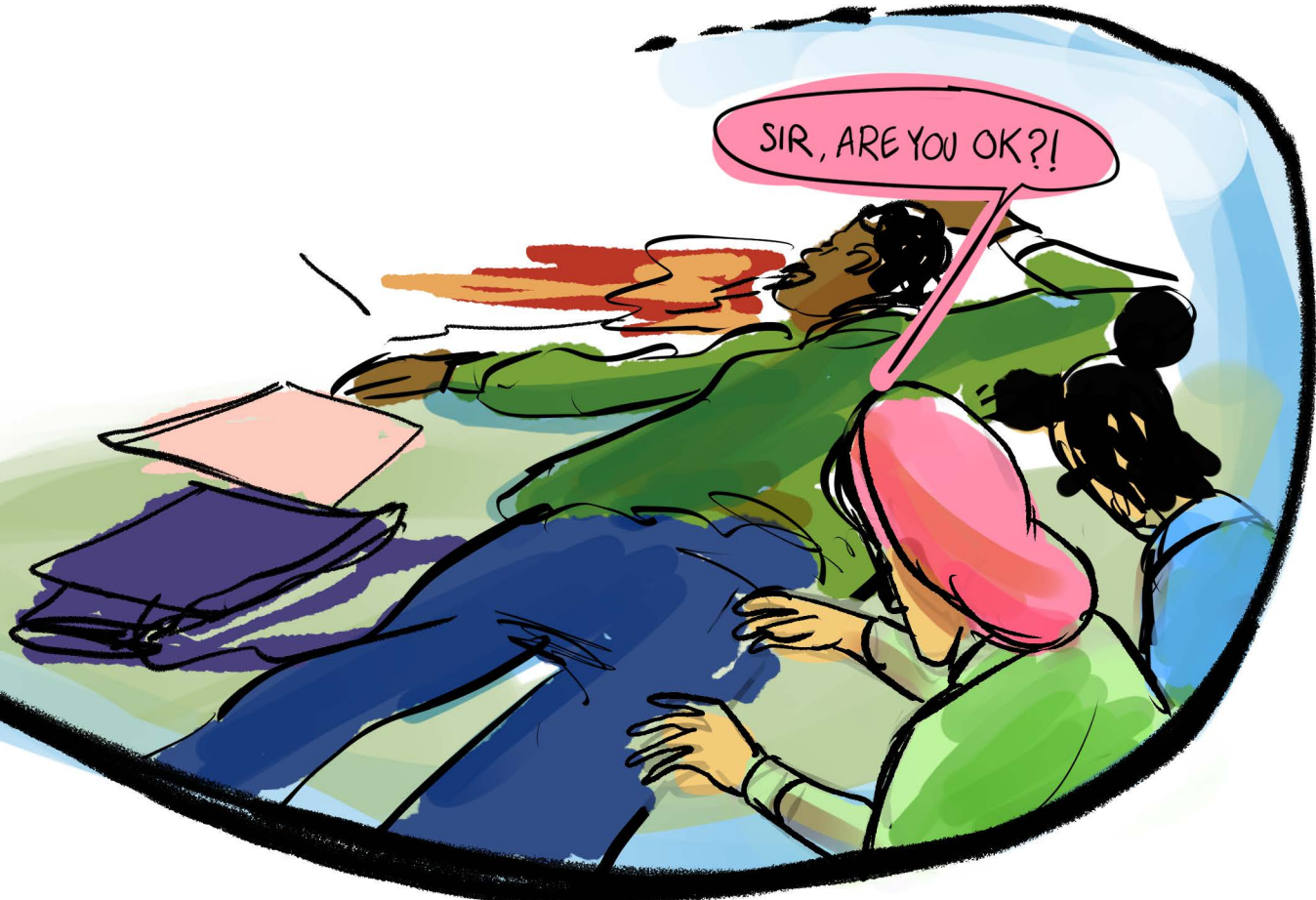
HILFE!!



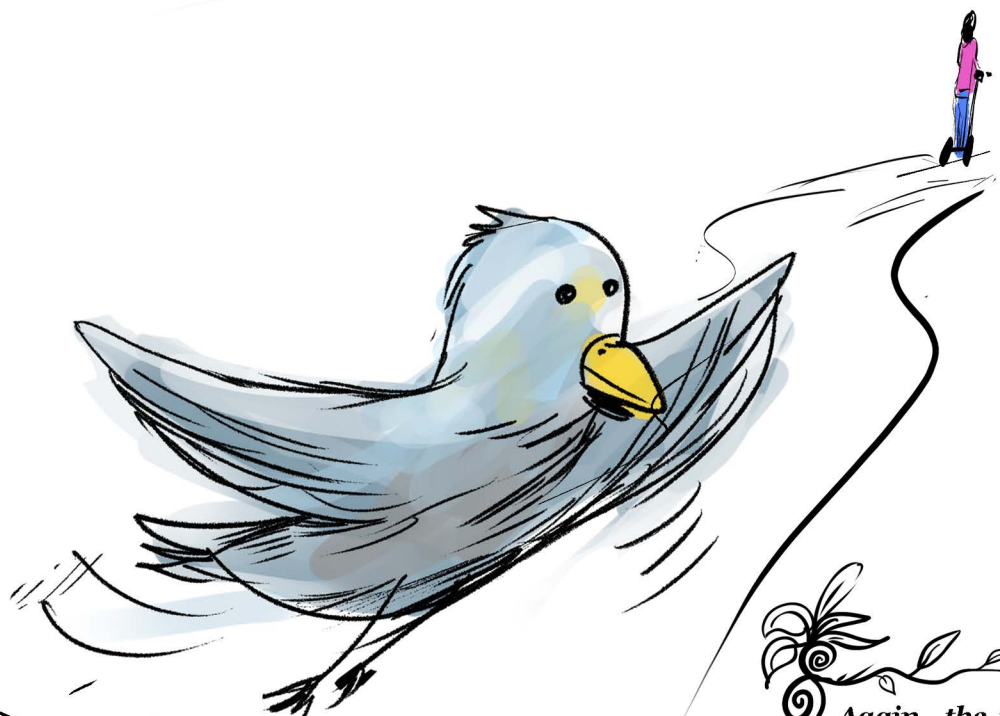
Between the fear of leaving
and the fear of staying,
we pack our lives into suitcases
that never quite close.
War, or something that feels like it,
presses from behind.
Ahead, a country whose name
still tastes foreign on the tongue
offers papers, warmth,
and a silence we do not yet trust.

THIS MAN IS PUKING
BLOOD, HE NEEDS
MEDICAL EMERGENCY
NOW

SIR, ARE YOU OK?!



We learn to live in this pause:
eyes on the news from elsewhere,
ears on the language of here,
hearts split across borders
that do not appear on any map.
Then comes the question of return—
after regimes fall,
after streets are renamed,
after others swear
it is finally safe.



Again the weighing
begins:
to go back to a place
that may no longer
know us,
or to remain in a
place
that has not finished
learning our names.
We stand in this
narrow corridor
between departures
and arrivals,
between the fear to
travel
and the fear to stay,
the fear to go back
and the fear of
belonging nowhere
at all.